

THE
BONESAW
CASE



Insight: The Bonesaw Case

by James Thomasos

If I had two eyes, I'd roll them.

"You lose Eye-Na. Take the shot!" cried the lieutenant, as he tossed back his glass, even though the squad had won the bet.

"Dammit! And don't call me that jack-ass!" I retorted before downing the rest of my glass and scrunching my face against the burn. I'm sure I'll pay for this later, "By all the Wind Gods united I can't stand corn whiskey." The investigative squad of the Shanae security force got a good laugh at my expense. The bet that I had lost involved the captain and I each drinking a bizarre concoction involving some light ale and a shot of rice liquor with a quail egg broken into it. I cannot fathom ever willingly drinking such a thing, but one of the boys said a chef he once knew swore by it. The first person to let the inevitable show on their face lost. If I won, then they had to lay off the eye-based puns. If I lost, I had to finish the drink and pin back the bangs that hid the majority of my face for the rest of the evening.

I plucked a couple of hair pins off of my vest lapel and secured my long bangs that normally hid the right side of my face. The others watched all of this in a sort of morbid fascination, I had long since gotten over it, but everyone else never seemed to get bored of it, "Yo Reina! What's it like when you... you know... eat one?" One of the newer additions to the squad rudely inquired. This sort of thing happened once every few months; I sighed and plugged my ears with my fingers, not because of the question, but for their Captain's inevitably loud reaction to it.

"Because—" I started half-heartedly.

"FIRST OF ALL - you walking, talking *badge number* - SHE doesn't consume anything... IT does. Second, how in Ourana's name would she even begin to explain that?"

Captain Nadine Kalamoto berated him with the usual succinct speech, which I was able to mouth along to even with my ears plugged at this point. Of all present, Nade and the bartender - Charlie - were the least fascinated by me; they've seen more than enough of it, "How's your other work going, I've heard rumors you've been up to some pretty odd shit lately." she asked, changing the subject and waving Charlie over to pour me some plum rice liquor that I actually enjoy.

The others got to speaking amongst themselves once their Captain took over the conversation, glancing over at me every once in a while and commenting on some aspect of my face, "Good I guess, I mean, I collected a bounty recently, which is usually pretty lucrative, but not really my thing... Oh! I caught a couple of people sleeping around on their partners! Honestly, I don't really understand why people bother with monogamy at all... also seems like a waste to hire me of all people for something that doesn't involve a corpse." I rambled on about my day as she sipped at her drink when she suddenly flinched; a Watcher must have contacted her. I'm always amazed that a precinct like this one can afford one of those - then again - they could also afford to pay myself for my particular services on occasion.

Her eyes sightlessly flickered back and forth as she processed the information that was unceremoniously dumped in her mind all at once. After about a minute, she blinked several times, placed a generous amount of money on the bar, stood and barked, "Alright gals and

gents, work time, we got ourselves something interesting, and YOU—" she whipped around to me pointing, "-come too. It's *your* kind of weird." Oh? I finished my drink, it warmed my stomach and galvanized me against the autumn chill as I threw on my overcoat and followed the I.S.S.F out of the bar.

We approached a back street near the harbor in the warehouse district and found that the first responders had already sectioned the area off. As we approached the border guards saluted the Captain and gawked at me. I had started to unpin my hair but Nadine admonished me, "A bet's a bet!" As a result, we had been jogging through the streets of Shanae with the right side of my face fully exposed. This announced to all we passed exactly who I was: Reina Tethas, the detective who had a Mouth instead of a right eye. Glossing over the boring details, it had been there for a couple decades at this point, and I was fairly used to the reaction it got from people. I shook my head and took out a handkerchief, figuring I'd need it soon. The S.F. parted before us as we approached a body that one could have mistaken for someone simply sleeping in the streets. This didn't look like the scene of a murder at all, and likely wasn't where it took place. There was no sign of struggle and zero blood on or around the body.

An ISSF member ran up with a small notebook and began their report, "Ma'am. Body found where it lays about 20 minutes ago, presumed body dump. Cause of death... is undetermined? There is evidence of the body being cut open, decapitated, and limbs detached. When and where each happened and in what order are still unknown. However, they have all been completely sewn back together. The mouth is intact, one eye is missing and the other has been quartered."

"Excuse me?" Nadine and I replied simultaneously.

"The eyes are present, but appear to have been removed, cut in half, cut in half again, and then placed back in the socket." What the hell? Nadine and I looked at each other.

"Seems like someone knows you're in town... Do... uh... sectioned eyes work?"

I shrugged, "To be honest, I've never really tried."

"Think they might be tainted? Will it hurt you if it's poisoned or something?"

"Historically? No. I never figured out where the eyes go after they're eaten, but it's not into regular digestion as far as I know."

"Well then. Do your thing." Nadine backed up a few steps to take in the sight. Not of what I was about to do, but how anyone new-ish would react. It was a favourite pastime of hers. I took a deep breath and let it out slowly, glancing at the observers around the sectioned area.

I walked over to the body, its eyelids were closed; I pried them open. Indeed, they had clearly been quartered... immediately the right side of my face felt wet; it was drooling. I wiped my face with a kerchief and grabbed a tong-like apparatus I'd fashioned long ago from a pair of spoons and some ingenuity for this exact purpose. The sections came out easily, as they had been previously removed, I heard someone nearby suck in a sharp breath. I flipped the hinge back over and brought the spoon up to the Mouth, I felt my head pulled forward by its hunger and it cleanly took the eye pieces off of the spoon. I felt it chewing and mixing the fibers and vitreous

fluid for a few moments before reality began to dissolve around me, I guess it DOESN'T have to be intact...

Why. Why-why-why-why-why? Why is this happening to me? I'm so scared. I've done nothing wrong.

These were the loudest, most persistent thoughts of this victim. They seemed to be strapped for a table, their head locked in place looking over their right shoulder, staring out the window. I recognized the yellow brickwork of the trade district, I could just barely make out the top of a squash stand across the street. Ballsy to pull something like this in such a crowded place. He continued to lay still for a while, fear echoing in all of his thoughts before suddenly turning to abject rage.

FUCK. Everything hurts, "WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU WANT YOU CRAZY BITCH?!"

He was shouting into the stillness of the room -a woman did this I guess- a few more moment passed, and then suddenly his head was released from its lock, and he whipped his head forward, looking down his body towards his feet, only to realize, with an incomprehensible cluster of thoughts, that his entire chest cavity had been peeled open... and he hadn't even noticed.

He screamed.

He kept on screaming.

"Hush now," he heard a feminine whisper from behind him, "I'm not showing my face in this one." A shadow was cast over him and-

I started suddenly from the eye-induced trance. What the fuuuuuuuuuuuuck?

I set down my spoon-tongs and drew my hand mirror, I felt my tongue lick around its socket as bits of the eye I had stuck in the Mouth leaked out; a bit of ichor followed an irregular trail down my cheek. I pulled out my red notebook and sat down on the street next to the poor bastard. I started writing what I saw, silent as I composed myself; the unsettling view of a peeled back rib cage still clear in my head . As one might imagine, my tolerance for gross is pretty high, but one also isn't SUPPOSED to see the inside of a chest cavity from that...angle. I began my verbal report to Nadine who had been standing next to me tapping her foot while I cleaned myself up.

"So, it seems he was tortured, cut open -as we suspected- kept alive and conscious throughout the ordeal by currently unknown means, and killed all on the second or third floor across the street from the squash stand in the trade district. Whoever did this was apparently a woman, over-powered him by unknown means and carried out this...brutality for unknown reasons. She spoke once, but it was a harsh whisper: 'Hush now, I'm not showing my face in this one.' That's the last thing I heard before his life suddenly ended." I ended my summary, writing out other small details that I had omitted from my analysis.

"Huh. Alright, you three," she pointed at two SF sword dancers and a sharpshooter -a standard first entry unit- and gestured them over, "You heard her, go with her to the trade district and secure the scene of the crime. I've gotta get this report over to a Watcher... I'll send some newbies to start questioning people around the block." She scratched her head in frustration, but I'm glad she trusted me to pursue this. This one was a bit too freaky to not act on right away.

As we walked briskly towards the trade district, I gave my report to the three of them verbatim. I figured any detail might help us avoid the same fate if this ended up being our suspect's base of operation. Still, her last words were echoing in my head, "I'm not showing my face in this one." In this one what? In this murder? In this...memory? In which case, was this targeted at me? She was so clean about everything else she did to the corpse, why only mutilate the eyes? Anyone living in this city long enough has heard of me, even if not everyone believes I'm real. Suddenly self-conscious, I unpinned my hair and let it fall in front of my face, we don't need extra attention during an investigation.

As the general brickwork transitioned from red to yellow, the sharpshooter -Vaughn? I think it was?- started lagging behind us into a more useful position, one sword dancer -Kairi, for sure- stuck by me while Alma went ahead of us. It was fairly crowded, as was typical for the early evening. We passed several stands with small crowds around them, bartering and buying and the likes, as well as a few busy Tafes, where people were recharging on coffee and booze alike. Odd for this season, but not unheard of, many people like people-watching. There were a few couples, chatting casually as they watched the crowds of people shopping and getting in some morning exercise; the standout being a cute redhead who was clearly doing all the talking and some large, muscular, pale man -even more pale than her- sitting across from each other.. As we approached the busy squash stand, I couldn't shake the feeling that we were being watched. Perhaps some people recognized me, perhaps not, but something seemed off. I stood at the back of the crowd in front of the squash stand and gestured behind me discreetly to Kairi, who veered off toward the building across from the stand.

After a few minutes of pretending to be an extremely discerning squash consumer, I winced as a sharp beam of reflected light tracked across my eye. I casually strolled towards the building across from the stand, glancing as I turned around at the various seated people; no one seemed to bat an eye at my movement. I entered the building and let the door shut loudly behind me. I was greeted with an ill-kept mailroom at the end of a hall full of doors and a dusty stairwell with a few sets of prints. One small set followed by a larger set -the woman and the victim, perhaps? I guess she got him to follow her up willingly before overpowering him- and one set of small half-moon prints; the telltale sign that a sword dancer had passed through. I tried my best to follow in their footsteps without touching anything else, and ended up clumsily toe-walking up the stairs; these girls were crazily graceful. As I passed the first bend, I looked up the stairs and saw Kairi peek her head around the corner.

"Hey. Alma's up ahead outside 205, we think that's the one. Zahn is in position across the street in another building." Zahn. Dammit, I was close on that one. Kaira continued her explanation as I passed her and she fell in step behind me, "This one seems largely abandoned. Can't seem to find the landlord, so the SF will end up seizing it... so go nuts I guess?" she ended cheekily. Can never get a read on how this one felt about me. As we approached 205, Alma opened the door and went in ahead of us. Yeeeep. This is definitely the place. I said as much to my

bodyguards, and they both nodded and drew one of their crescent blades. I reached across to my left hip holster, drawing my club-like flashtorch with my right hand and flicking it on to illuminate the floor in front of me in one motion. I left my pistol in its place; if two sword dancers couldn't react to a threat in this close of quarters, then my little gun certainly wasn't going to help. I'd be better off trying to flash and bludgeon someone with my light source... it IS pretty hefty.

I made my way over to the stone table that looked severely out of place, even in this empty apartment. For being in a relatively abandoned building, this room had been almost obsessively cleaned. Compared to the hallway just outside, there wasn't a speck of dust or even a stray spider web to be found; I reflexively glanced up and nodded solemnly before continuing my scan of the room. There HAD been blinds over the window, but they had been taken down, carefully folded, and placed on the stone table. I took a knee and tracked my light over the bottom of the table. There was a spiny, beveled curve to the interface between table and floor. I tapped the ground behind me with my flashlight, drawing a sharp glance from the two women in the room with me, then tapped the ground by the table. When they heard the difference in sound they both nodded, satisfied.

"So we're thinking she poured Psychic Energy into the ground to make herself a little dissection table? So an Elemental manipulator type?" Alma speculated.

"Eh, it COULD be PsyEn, but not necessarily. I don't have enough expertise to know how long this table has been here. Could have just been an illegal modification of the living space by the previous tenant. Or, it could have been magic. They would have the same structural effect if the person knew what they were doing." I explained to them, I heard Kairi scoff at this.

"Magic? What are the odds of our girl being a *caster* AND a surgeon. You said our guy was dissected... what was that creepy thing you said... 'rather effectively'?"

"Efficiently, and yeah that's pretty weird. Though it would explain a bit about why the guy hadn't noticed. Maybe she was using elemental magic to numb him too?" This drew a laugh out of Kairi, and a small chuckle out of Alma as well. Can't really blame them, elemental manipulation of stone, then putting out magic at a constant rate WHILE performing professional level surgery... Maybe a Fae could do that... but why would they even bother? And more to the point, why would a Fae give a shit about me? No, whatever was happening here was decidedly Human, which made it even more baffling, especially considering all of that on top of an as of yet unidentified PsyEn ability.

"Hey, I want to move the blinds that are laying here. One of you got an evidence bag?"

"Yeah, sec." Alma sheathed her blade and trotted over, pulling a folded bag out of her hip pouch and flicking it open. I put on a glove and carefully lifted it from the bottom, placing it in the bag. Underneath it, I found a message in the form There was a sheet of paper that seemed to have been torn out of a notebook, and very deliberately left for us to find, 'Hi!' it said in large, neat print, "Hey..." Alma turned around, and the tone of my voice drew Kairi over as well.

"Hmm, okay. That's creepy?" Kairi spoke aloud what we were all thinking, unfortunately, she had spoken too soon, as I flipped over the paper, and we read the list on the back:

Pre-Dissection Observations:

- Subject: Human male, 27 (Maybe lying?)
- Identifier: Davon Gaster (Probably true.)
- Description: Decent health, adventurer-type, Halisa-worshipper, close-quarters combat specialist, smokes sear bark [>_<]
- PEB: High control, High Manipulation, Low Speed. (What a waste!)

Post-Dissection Observations:

- Strong heart, lungs worked well even under imperfect pressurization (Whoops!)
- Upper and lower body gross musculature dense, but built more for grappling than twitch movement.
- Easily overpowered by 5% Tacos [=/]
- PEA: Tried to convert his pain into mine while I was taking notes [>=(]. Very standard Halisa-worshipper type of tactic.

Gathering of requisite PE was slow. [='](

Experimental Design:

- Previous Question: Is there a time limit on how long eye after death needs to be consumed for memory acquisition?
- Previous Answer: No, as long as eye is well-preserved, it seems final memory can be required.
- Next Question: Does eye need to be structurally intact for memory acquisition?
- Hypothesis: Eye needs to be structurally intact for memory acquisition.
- Therefore: If eyes cut into quarters, after body drop, no one will show up in T.D. - Block 3-1 - 205.
- CAVEAT!!!!: O_O WHAT IF THE MOUTH CAN RESTORE THE EYE TO BEING WHOLE AS LONG AS IT HAS ALL THE PIECES?! I SHOULD HAVE ONLY LEFT A QUARTER OF AN EYE! THIS IS A WASTED EXPERIMENT! WE'VE LEARNED NOTHING! I'M SO SORRY!

"..."

"..."

"..."

""What the actual fuck?"" Kairi and Alma.

I said nothing. I simply brought my free hand up to my mouth; due to the widening of my eye, the Mouth had opened, its tongue playing with my bangs. What can I possibly say? We were certain at this point that this murder was targeted at me. But why? And why leave...this? I felt my face flush with what I knew to be an irrational shame, I hate how much my feelings show on my face sometimes. Alma gingerly plucked the paper out of my shaking hand, and placed it in its own evidence bag. She got down on one knee beside me and put a hand on my shoulder.

"Yo so, I know you are probably thinking this is somehow your fault b-" she started.

"...Well-

"BUT!- We're all more rational than that. We can't control the bizarre obsessions of some Blaze-boned nut job doctor. Any uniqueness is going to invite attention. Being human means having strong Psychic Energy, and we all develop fairly unique Abilities... and weirdos always wanna test other people's P.E.A when they should just mind their own. It's not your fault, but if you decide you want to take some responsibility for this case, then I'd say you've got some late nights ahead of you." Alma comforted me aggressively, patting my head a bit as she did. Kairi stood a meter away, not saying anything, but looked on with concern.

I breathed out a long sigh, I wasn't upset due to the actions of a crazy person. I was upset because I don't necessarily think this person IS crazy. My father -a PsyEn Scholar- he scribbled notes on pretty much every piece of paper in the house, to the point where the only gifts my mother ever got him was paper. There were many experiments he had proposed, some of which he even performed. His notes were a lot like these -albeit his experiments significantly more ethical- not the product of an unhinged mind, but of a person who thinks and acts with extreme purpose.

"Hey y'all are cute and all. But we need to report this. Let's finish checking the place and get the fuck outta here." Kairi admonished us impatiently. Alma nodded and stood up, I took another breath and stood up, flicking back on the flashtorch and joining them in looking around. Alma was definitely right about one thing: I was definitely going to take responsibility for this and bring this monster to justice before she hurts anyone else.

I was over ambitious in thinking we could avoid any more casualties. Several more bodies showed up over the next two weeks. The first one, as telegraphed by the experimental report, only had a quarter of an eye in one of its sockets. Turns out that DOES work after all... After that two SF members were placed in my apartment to stay, while I was moved to some SF dormitories in one of the wealthier districts, Nadine worrying for my safety since all of this was clearly targeted at me. The latest one was... unsolved.

I knelt down next to the body and pried the eyelids open, as one does. The eye suddenly popped right out of its socket, having been cleanly and completely severed from its optic nerves. I quickly caught it before it landed on the woman's face and rolled onto the street, I looked up at Nadine, who was looking down quizzically. She felt the need to always stand next to me whenever I did this, something about me not having to bear the burden of death alone or something. Ever since the first victim in this harrowing series of murders, she had gotten a bit over-protective of me. She also had a bit more time on her hands, as since the second and third bodies appeared, people weren't going out at night so much, so there had been less general

problems. I cradled the eye in my right hand and pinned my hair back with my left, revealing the Mouth writhing and reaching towards my hand. I tossed the eye in the air and my head lunged forward of seemingly its own accord, the eye perfectly landing between its Teeth. As the Mouth closed around it and began to chew, I sat back and...

...

...

Nothing?

I whipped my head around and looked at Nadine, which startled her; not expecting me to move for another minute or two. I stared up at her in utter confusion, one eye wide, the other chewing, leaking slightly, the sight of which put a quickly masked sour look on her face.

"I- so-" she stammered at the imagined offense.

I didn't blame her, it IS very gross to look at, "It's fine, Nay, I should be apologizing to you. This has never happened before..." I trailed off, I really had no idea what to do.

"Is there something different about the...texture? Did she do something to the eye? Are you okay?"

"Yeah I'm fine but... it came out so easily, like it wasn't connected to any of the viscera or like- I clumsily tried to explain how it feels to pull an eye out of its socket, but trailed off. How do you even begin to explain the difference between consumed eyeballs? The Mouth itself seemed to be satisfied, but that was the least of my worries as I wiped away the incidental leftovers. Several ISSF members in the vicinity were looking at us -at me really- unsure of what to do. Nadine quickly took control of the situation and started directing them to carry out their investigative tasks and question people. What WAS the difference here? I couldn't help but be curious, which bothered me more than a little. I turned back towards the victim's body and steeled myself: this was about to get awkward. I pried open the other eye and again, it popped right out once I started to touch it. I reached into my hip pouch and pulled out a bottle of salt solution and plopped the eye inside.

I held the bottle up to the light and slowly rotated as I took in the details. It LOOKED normal enough, at least at a glance. There were normally two options whenever it consumed an eye: either the eye is from a corpse and I see their last moments, or it was pulled out of a living person and I gained some manner of...perspective. But never before had NOTHING happened. However, as I took in the eyeball from every angle, I noticed that the eyeball was *completely* clean. There wasn't a single bit of any connective tissue, optic nerves...it was even lacking retinal blood vessels... But none of that should matter, since we found out that the eye doesn't need to be structurally intact. So what could be different, then? Maybe... all of it was removed before the person was dead? Or... without removing the eye at all?

...How?!...

I breathed a long sigh out as I stood up and pocketed the eye for later, because I knew the answer. The Surgeon was... impressive. Impossibly so. She must have severed any potential connection between the eye and the brain, while the victim was still alive, and more likely than not, conscious. This had to be the work of their PsyEn Ability. She must have developed a P.E.A

that helped her dissect or otherwise take apart a person. I thought back to the other tests she's run... Since I won't be showing up at wherever this last victim was murdered, she'll have determined the limit of the ability. Perhaps she will be satisfied with that. On one hand, I didn't want anyone else to have this horror visited on them... But if she just stops and leaves... we may never get another chance to catch her. I shook that thought out of my head. Definitely better if this never happens again.

Why is this happening to me? I didn't do anything wrong!

Ah. This had become an all too familiar thought lately. As usual, the victim was strapped down to a table, but this time, they were staring straight up at the ceiling, their head locked into position.

Oh Flames she's coming!

The woman She had captured and presumably dissected struggled briefly, before going completely still as the footsteps came to a halt just out of her field of view. Her mouth was stuffed, but she screamed nonetheless as she felt someone climb on the table; on top of her. The victim fruitlessly thrashed in her bondage, and everything went dark as she squeezed her eyes shut in terror.

"Open your eyes!" Not a whisper this time, it was an extremely warm, almost sing-song, distinctly feminine voice.

I don't want to die!

The Surgeon sighed melodramatically, and all of a sudden there was a burning sensation over almost the entire body, followed by a pain in her legs so extreme I nearly lost my hold on the memory. She began to scream anew, but froze as a hand suddenly and gently cupped her jaw.

"Open your eyes. Or you're going to have to keep feeling our experiment at 100 percent." Her eyes snapped open, the pain subsided, and I finally took in the countenance of the monster we had been tracking. Pale, freckled skin and hair like fire both in its colour and unruliness. It traced and cracked her face into sections, hanging mere centimeters away from the victim's face. Her features were unexpectedly soft, her smile was large and bright; genuine and terrifying. Her eyes were an unsettling golden colour; I wish I could say they were empty, devoid of life or soul... that would have made things so much easier. No, they were excited, eager, and absolutely sure that not a single thing was wrong with her current situation.

"Alright! Good! Is this thing on? Hehehe! Sorry that was a bad joke... So... Hey! Reina! It's Me! I hope that this project has been insightful for you! I've sure learned a lot! I wanted to apologize for the earlier, less well-controlled experiments; I should really be better than to make those kinds of mistakes at this point. We wasted your share of the samples those times. But don't worry! I still learned a lot of other unrelated things!" she rambled in a bubbly tone of voice.

"But the pace of our research" - Wind I wish she'd stop calling it 'ours' - "Has been much too slow. Much much too slow. I think we can do better. So I'll tell you what! Wait, what's today? Oh, right! So on the 8th, let's say... late evening-ish? I'm gonna grab another sample, and I'm going to wait for you in the space underneath storage house 3C in the harbor district! If you come

alone, I can even guarantee that I only take one eye and let them go! I hope that sounds good! I'll see you soon! I can't wait to finally talk to you!" She raised one hand up and the victim's vision wavered, their eyes overflowing with tears.

"Buh-bye!" she sang before snapping her hand down, then everything went black.

"Absolutely not." Nadine snapped at me for about the 50th time in the last week.

"This is my fault! I should be there to see this through!" I spat heatedly, these fights had gotten more and more frequent as the 8th approached, and here we were the morning of, shouting at each other in the barracks.

"First, again, No it's not your wind-carved fault. Second you are *literally* our SERIAL BUTCHER'S final target. So no, I'm not fucking putting you in harm's way. You can read the damn report later." The room was vibrating with nervous energy. I wouldn't say anyone was scared, but not a single person had any illusions that this would be easy. This person had done too much damage at this point; they would try to capture as best they could, but Ourana-willing someone would end up having to take her down. The plan in brief was to send in a sword-dancer disguised as me first, having a strike force nearby. As soon as visual and the presence of any spells or traps were confirmed, the precinct would collapse on *Her* with overwhelming force.

Nice and Simple.

So why do I feel so uneasy still?

"You would do just the same if I were in your position... Look... Why don't you go to Charlie's, grab yourself a couple drinks, and *chill*? When this is over, I'll come right on over and I can make it up to you. I just want you to be safe. Don't give me that look; please just let me do my job. We've spent too much time on this." She tried her best to comfort me and of course I knew I was being ridiculous. They're all professionals, many of whom were far more powerful than myself. I blew out a long, melodramatic sigh.

"You're buying?"

"Sure."

"I'm going to drink you unto poverty."

"Then wear something nice and make it worth it for me." I snickered despite myself, I guess that wouldn't be so bad.

"Now then get going, next time I see you we'll have locked up this monster and thrown away the key."

I dropped by my apartment in the early evening, where the bodyguard at my door saluted my escort and I. Upon entering the guard inside waved casually from my window sill, a notebook

and pen in hand. Presumably they were taking notes on foot traffic; I mentioned to them that I was just here to change into something nice for later.

"With the Captain?" they winked at me knowingly, rumors were infectious I suppose.

"Shaddup!" I blew by them into my bedroom, closing the door only partially and opening my closet. I only really hang the nice stuff, as such, it's not a particularly large closet. I swiped through the few outfits I had an-

"The Captain likes purple!~" A teasing voice called from my main room.

"PISS! OFF!" I screamed back out the door, hearing only laughter in response. I felt the Mouth slightly distend, as if mimicking my own; I guess it's awake. I grabbed a towelette from the small table by my door and looked in the mirror. If I wanted to dress up my face at all, I would have to feed it. I walked back over to my closet and kneeled down to open the small cold-box tucked away in the back. I grabbed a small glass bottle from the left side; a living eye. I didn't exactly feel like watching someone die tonight, and I could deal with a small shift in perspective. I popped it open and popped the eye into the Mouth, continuing to put together my outfit as it chewed. My vision sharpened somewhat -a nice little side effect- and donned some black slacks and a dark purple, sleeveless wrap-blouse before sitting down in front of a mirror by my window and doing my makeup. I glanced up at the sky, nodding to myself that all was well after consuming the eye.

After I finished with my face, I exited the room, rolling my eye at the grin and lascivious wink the sharpshooter sitting on my windowsill gave me, just as I reached the door, called out, "Oi! You got a weapon on you?"

"I wasn't planning on it. Aren't one of you coming with me? Should I be worried?"

"Well yeah you're not going there alone, but I think you should still have SOMETHING... you know, to be safe? I mean we are responsible for your safety. Until we confirm *Her* behind bars...better safe than sorry, you know?" It was actually kind of touching, their concern I mean. I thought it over, and threw a look over my shoulder at the mirror hanging from my door, trying to determine if I could carry a piece stylishly. I sighed and grabbed a black leg holster; at least the whole getup wouldn't stand out too much. I nodded at my apartment's guards and made my way outside, my escort walking casually by my side.

Since I had woken up, time had passed without mercy. Crawling by with what felt like spiteful indolence since my argument with Nadine. At least, the time for the operation was approaching, I hustled through the steadily livening streets to ensure that I got a decent table. I was to meet her at the usual spot -Charlie's- a place where the drinks were cold, expertly crafted, and for whatever reason they made extremely good noodles. Best of all, it was only a couple of blocks away in the same district as my home. Consequently, we had a tendency to end up there fairly often.

I turned the corner and Charlie's came into sight. Warm firelight spilled out from the crack underneath the door, and the large, brightly illuminated dining room in the front of the establishment showed clearly through the windows on either side of the door. I turned around to nod my appreciation to my escort, but she was nowhere to be seen. She must have hung back to get a better angle on the bar itself. It was impressive really, I didn't even feel her disengage;

her presence just suddenly vanished. I pushed through the door and let the scents and familiar, comforting sights wash over me. I adjusted the bangs in front of the Mouth briefly before making a B-line for the bar. After a minute or two, Charlie noticed my quiet presence in the middle of the bar and beamed brightly, walking over.

"Reina! How're ya doin'? What can I get ya?" It wasn't super busy, but it wasn't particularly quiet in here either. Seemed like he was working the bar and the kitchen again; poor guy. He wasn't old enough to wield an old man's grit, but not young enough to brute force his way through a daily grind. The salt and pepper had really started to settle in his blonde hair and goatee. He really needed to hire some extra hands and take it easy.

"I'm good Charlie, I'll start with an apricot sour, and otherwise I'm just waiting for now!"

"Wait-? Oh! Your friend already reserved you two a table, didn't she tell you? Over there, the corner window table in the back! I'll have that ale right over to you, go ahead and sit down!" Not the usual, but I suppose this is a special occasion.

"Oh? Well look at her planning ahead for a change! Thanks Charlie!" I gave a small wave as I turned away. I checked my reflection in the mirror behind the liquor as I approached the table, all seemed well. This woman is going to get me *drunk* tonight; I was looking forward to it. For a brief moment, that background unease I had been feeling lifted. I sat down at the table Charlie had pointed to and perused the menu on the table for little reason other than to keep my hands busy, waiting on my beer. In my peripheral vision I saw a small shadow pass by, then stop directly in front of me. I set my menu down and looked up to receive my beer and-

I flew to my feet, grabbing my gun, releasing the safety, and brought it to bear on *Her* head as I stood, all in one fluid motion before my menu had even hit the table.

"Reina Tethas! So good to finally meet you! Gods this is so exciting I've really been looking forward to this I'm going to sit down!" I strengthened my *coating* with an abundance of PsyEn as she moved to seat herself across from me. She couldn't have been much more than 150 centimeters. Short, unkempt, fire-red hair sat on her head, a small curl fell down in between a blue and a yellow eye. Her features were shockingly soft, seeing them with my own eye for the first time. I may have called her pretty under any other circumstances, however, with The Surgeon herself now sitting across from me, all I saw was the monster underneath.

"Wow I felt you reinforce your *coating* from over here that's so funny you have nothing to worry about! Oh! I'm Evelyn Vandree! Feel free to call me Evelyn but don't call me eve I like to be present-minded! Hehehehehe!" she released a high pitch giggle that no one nearby seemed to react to before offering her hand to me as a greeting. I just stared. First at the hand, then at her.

"Hands down! Put them behind your back!" I put some urgency into my voice and projected it as I stood up. But no one in the room seemed to react.

She tilted her head to the side, her face scrunching in confusion, "You... haven't you...?" she trailed off as she gazed up from her seat, looking first surprised, then disappointed, "Do...you not realize what kind of situation this is? Why haven't you Third Eye'd yet? What even was your compulsory PsyEn education? Oh wait was that insensitive? Should I call it a Second Eye? Hmm..."

Her words dripped like cold water down the back of my blouse. I hadn't done that. I thought just because I had consumed a living eye that I would notice anything amiss... I looked at her, and brought some of my PsyEn to focus in my eye, *reinforcing* my vision and began scanning for anything amiss. The world gently shimmered around me, as if some sort of miasma had settled over just this restaurant. Everyone went about their business, eating and chatting as usual; not a single person noticing any problems. There was no direct illusory magic or psionic interference affecting my own head - not that it could - but one hand was glowing faintly; abstract, fractal shapes oozing out of it and dissipating into the air. The other hand was clearly the source of the shimmering cloud that had permeated the room, but with my vision *reinforced*, there were now two creatures in the room that were wrapped in a subtle veneer of unimportance.

One was simply standing in the middle of the room, even as people milled about it, they seemed not to notice, and stepped around it without registering the action. It was extremely tall - it had to be at least two and a half meters - and wearing a long black robe and matching, oversized, pointy hat. It stood with perfect stillness, unperturbed as folk milled about; its hands hung almost limply in front of it as it hunched to avoid touching its hat to the ceiling. Its face, although slightly obscured by its headwear, was unmistakably that of the undead. It stood and stared impassively, and sightlessly gazing towards our table with empty eye sockets.

The other creature came up to roughly up to the first one's waist, and appeared to be made entirely of peeled flesh. Shaped into a rough simulacrum of a small human, I first made eye contact with it around its elbow. It had no face, but at least a dozen eyes scattered across its arms and upper torso. I felt the Mouth twitch, and a pang of hunger in my stomach despite myself. It too simply stood there, gently swinging its arms and torso back and forth, looking everywhere it could.

I returned my undivided attention to her, and despite the nature of the hidden abominations... *She* managed to be the most disturbing thing in the room. Whenever one opens their Third eye to take in extra sensory information, one will be treated to the dance of other people's PsyEn *coating*. The way their mind races, the way they feel, and the tone of the room all contribute to the sometimes lazy, sometimes frantic flow of Psychic Energy surrounding an organism...

But looking at her was just... *wrong*. Ignoring the multiple magics she was conducting so effortlessly, there was no dance, not an errant twitch of coating, no evidence of an idle thought, no indication that she wasn't completely in control of both herself and the entire room. Her *coating*, pulled within a millimeter of her skin, was perfectly still, and visibly **dense**, as if she were covered in a layer of glass. I had heard stories growing up about the warrior priests of the Great Divide who could reach such a state of mental clarity as to be utterly imperceptible to a Third eye in their stillness. But here *She* was... fully conscious, speaking, smiling, and obviously thinking...and yet... nothing.

All the hairs on my skin stood up; it was revolting. *She* seemed not to notice my reaction and continued speaking, "The tall one is Takos! It comes with me everywhere...except when it doesn't; it does the heavy lifting. An old project, but a good project. The little one is a newer project that I started a little bit after I found out about you! I'm not sure if it works or not, so it doesn't have a name... But there is enough raw material in here for me to finish it in a snap if you'd like; we could even do it together! We should play a question game; we have so much to learn from each other!" She explained it all so casually. With my enhanced awareness, I could

tell that Takos was both exceedingly dangerous and poised to strike everyone in its immediate vicinity. Unfinished... clearly, she was planning on taking more eyes. Despite myself, I glanced over at Charlie who was hard at work behind the bar, completely unaware of the situation at hand... I suddenly had a chilling thought.

"...What happened to Na-the Captain...?"

"Wow. That's kind of a lame way to start the game and plus, I haven't even explained the rules yet! So for each question you ask me, I will continue to obscure the store front; no one else will be able to enter! And for each question you honestly answer from me, I'll let a table leave this establishment! Pretty good, right? The longer the game goes, the more intimate our conversation, and the more we can both relax!"

I felt my eye twitch slightly, "You'll let everyone leave?"

"Absolutely! Now put that away and have something to eat." as she said this, a waitress walked over - seemingly oblivious to me standing and pointing a gun at the woman I shared a table with - and brought us food I never ordered along with the sour I had originally ordered for both of us. I eyed the meal suspiciously and looked at her, she smiled and gestured to my seat. I continued to point my gun for a moment, then realizing that the waitress truly wasn't perceiving me as I was, I slowly sat down, and set the weapon down next to my plate, never taking my eyes off of her.

"Perfect! Oh I'm just so excited, Reina! So excited, in fact, that I brought you a present!" I tensed up as put on hand under the table, and she pulled up a small, light blue cloth bag with a bright pink bow on it. She pushed it between us and I looked down at it, back at her, then shook my head. Her face scrunched into a pout briefly before pulling it back and opening it herself, revealing a bowl of eyes.

A bowl of eyes.

At least a dozen. Both the Mouth and my eye began to water.

She took a sip of the beer that had been placed in front of her, and her eyes sparkled, "Mmm, you have good tastes... I figured, since we were going to be eating together, that it would be unfair if we didn't feed both of your mouths! So please! Based on our prior results, these shouldn't entrance you, so eat as much as you want. I really want us to have a good time here!" I continued to eye both the meal and the eyes with extreme caution; there's no tel-

"Reina. Why would you undervalue yourself so much?! Do you have any idea what you are?" Her voice suddenly dropped from bubbly to dismayed,

"...What."

"Ugh I can't believe this. I can tell! You think I'm going to hurt you!"

"...Yes...?"

"But how could I do that!? You're the most valuable thing that could possibly exist in the world!"

"And what is that?"

"The *unknown*! In all my studies, I've never encountered another being like you! So maybe, just maybe, you're the very first of your kind. AND! Perhaps, even the last! So please! Eat! Drink! Keep your strength up! You are a treasure, and I can absolutely guarantee your safety." she concluded her speech theatrically, gesticulating with unhinged excitement as she described me from her perspective. A guarantee of *my* safety. Not Charlie or anyone else present. *Mine*. I blew out a long breath, and decided.

"Fine. I'll play your game." Still looking at her, I first reached for an eye from *her* bowl so I could actually gauge how hungry I was. Even if I had fed it earlier, having a pile of eyes just sitting there untouched was going to drive it, and thus me, to distraction. She watched in fascination as I drew back my hair and brought the eye up to the Mouth; and let out a small, delighted gasp when I popped it in. True to her word, no vision occurred; she continued to sit, smiling at me as the Mouth chewed. I sighed at the sudden squelching of both hunger and pressure in my head, wiped the Mouth with a napkin, then moved on to my own food and drink.

After a few moments, she broke the silence, "I'll go first then! What happens if you don't eat an eye for one week? Two? Four?"

"You never answered my question. What happened to the Captain?"

"Oh. That was seriously your first question." She said flatly, "They're probably fine. Both myself and Takos are here, they'll run into a few Failures I'm sure they can handle, and I assume when they realize they've been set up, she'll come rushing here. Now, my question then?"

Only slightly relieved, I took a long drink of my beer before answering, "After a week, unending hunger and piercing headaches. After two, the compulsion to start taking eyes from others, I don't know about four, but by three Taking my other eye becomes an extremely attractive idea."

"Wowww! Truly fascinating, so you don't control it so much as it controls you?"

"Table." I said curtly, gesturing my head towards the rest of the restaurant.

"Mmm...right. There you go," she waved her right hand dismissively, trailing three different coloured patterns. Seriously, how have her limbs not melted or malformed yet? As she did, there was a brief flash of shape and colour and a group at a nearby table suddenly startled, as if they had all simultaneously remembered something, set down seemingly random amounts of cash, and exited the bar. It was such a pinpoint warping of reality that someone in the know could have easily mistaken the phenomenon for being Fae in origin.

Unreal.

"Hehe! You really are a professional, keeping your head on straight even now. So does-"

"I believe it's my turn, Evelynn," she narrowed her eyes and smiled ever so slightly, but nodded her head at me to continue, "Good. How does your PsyEn Ability work?" Time for some Intel.

"Hmmm? My P.E.A? A bit rude, that, don't you think? Oh well, I must follow the rules... I call it Dissection, It's a natural extension of my *coating*, which I'm sure you've gotten a good look at. It allows me to utilize my PsyEn as surgical tools finer than a scalpel or coarser than a bonesaw to open things up, to tear them apart, and to put them back together. Satisfactory?"

So she's been tearing people with her bare hands, "Yeah. Satisfactory."

"Excellent. This might seem off topic, but I'm just dying to know... Your family name is no coincidence, right? You really are Lyra Tethas' daughter! You look similar."

I felt both mine and the Mouth's teeth clench somewhat, "...Why. You planning to go after my family next you~"

"Oh absolutely not. Jeez... I'm very confident, sure, but please don't assume I'm *stupid*. It's just fascinating, is all, you know? I often wonder if 'uniqueness' runs in the blood... I wonder if you'll wield such absurd and frightful power someday..."

"Don't screw with me! I don't want to hear about 'frightful power' from **you**... The way you are so flagrantly throwing around magic... how are you not...contaminated? Are you a Witch or so~" My indignation seized up in my throat as the jovial mask of excitement She had been wearing flattened in an instant into a cold visage of unmitigated contempt.

"I know we've only just met, but I would thank you to not lump me in with *those*. My magic comes from understanding and perspective; not eating something else's power and grafting it's soul to mine. Never. Ever. Imply that I took a single shortcut to get here, Reina" I dryly swallowed passed the lump in my throat. If I'm careful, I can use this; but if she's not beyond emotion, then the few people left in the restaurant aren't safe, even if I **am** answering her questions.

She breathed out a long breath, took a drag from her glass, and put back on her previous face, "Anyhow! It's simple really, as long as you're matching the density of your coating to the complexity of the magic you're conducting, then the fallout really can't touch you." She summarized her mechanism of casting with some excitement, while she seemed happy to be sharing any of this with someone, her voice was still infected with a sharp edge from her earlier outburst.

"...I see... wel~"

"Ah!" Evelyn suddenly let out a gasp.

"What?"

"You got me to answer two questions in a row!" she brought her hands up to her mouth as she giggled, "You didn't NEED to be both unique AND clever! That's just not fair! Maybe I'm in love now!" She was making exaggerated moony eyes at me, I glanced off to the side briefly, gagging in my mouth. As I felt another pang, I reached for the bowl and tossed another eye into the Mouth, hoping to move conversation to a less creepy place.

It seemed to work, one she saw the Mouth again, she abandoned the bit she was doing and continued with her game, "So what triggered the appearance of that mouth?" Having finished her plate and pushed it off to the side, she propped her chin up on her hands as she started at the right half of my face.

"If I knew that, we could have done something about it. It just appeared one morning when I was seven."

"Huh. How curious..."

"What does... THAT do?" I gestured at the fleshy pile containing what I figured were the missing eyes from the various corpses we found around town.

"Hey! Now you're asking fun questions! It doesn't do anything yet, but it's the first step in creating something that will allow me to see what you see!" She grinned like a child showing off a brand new toy to her jealous friends.

"See what I see?"

"Yes! It's a vehicle to expand my Insight! I think that, when I've given it a number of eyes asymptotically approaching the number you've consumed, that it will show me something interesting! Which leads me to my next question. We know what happens when you consume the eye of a dead human, but you eat eyes taken from those who are still alive as well. Given that this Mouth that 'just appeared one day', you don't have complete control over, and is able to send signals through your brain to cause you discomfort... Then SOMETHING is happening, right? If it's a mutualistic relationship, you MUST be receiving some benefit from the living eyes too, right?" With each statement, she leaned forward further and further out of her seat and across the table, her voice suddenly shifted serious, "Reina... there's something *up* there, isn't there?"

My back was drenched with sweat, and I barely kept my hands from shaking to the frequency of my breath during her slow explanation. Her logic was... odd. When had I started seeing *them*, how many years? How many eyes? I don't know what had her convinced that there was definitely something hovering beyond her perception. How many people would she kill to find out? A dumb question - of course - the answer was **all** of them.

I hesitated and weighed my options. I didn't know why, but I felt like I shouldn't tell her the truth on this one. At the same time, outright lying may very well get all of us killed. After a few moments, I responded with, "I...am not really sure if I should tell you..."

She frowned, "Explain."

"You're right. There is something up there... But what if what I've been seeing isn't true?" I was dodging the question, but if I learned anything from my father grow up, it's that appealing to the researcher in a person can sometimes be easier than appealing to their humanity, "What if by telling you what's just beyond the fold, you see something different from what you would have seen if you had made it there yourself?"

She stared at me quietly with narrowed, darkened eyes, digesting my breaking of the rules as I tried to keep my breathing even. This wasn't an entirely dishonest gambit, but would she see it that way? I mean, would she even believe me if I told the truth?

"...Hmm. So you're worried about infecting me with your personal bias." She suddenly and dramatically swung her hand out to the side like a knife. I tensed up as I *reinforced* my vision just in time to see a large spherical pulse of magic discharge from her hand. "Could I remain so impartial that I wouldn't use your knowledge to confirm my own results?" she was more or less muttering to herself at this point, "That would be problematic -yes, yes it would be. What if just by telling me, it changed the result? Then I wouldn't be learning ANY truth at all." She clenched

her outstretched hand into a fist before suddenly relaxing it, and the last few tables, the wait staff, as well as Charlie, suddenly looked as if they had remembered something important and just... walked out of the front door."

And just like that, it was only our table and the two constructs standing in the center of the room. After a few more precious seconds, the light returned to her eyes and her face softened once more.

"You know what, Reina? I think you're correct on this one. What good **would** it do me to simply hear the Truth from you? No. I need to find this answer for myself... ESPECIALLY if you're the only other one who has seen it, we will need some proper controls to confirm anything." her voice bounced along with her hair as she bobbed from side to side in her chair, having excited herself all over again.

"...That would be wise, I think." I gave the carefully neutral reply I thought she wanted to hear. We were finally on something approaching even footing. In her arrogance, she had gotten rid of the only reason I had not to blow her fucking face off. Even with a *coating* as dense as the one covering her, it would do nothing against a full clip unloaded in a couple of seconds at nearly point blank range. She was too dangerous to let roam free; all I need is the slightest distraction.

"Indeed! When that day comes, I'll get a hold of you again! We can compare notes! Oh! That reminds me! I brought one more present for you just in case you impressed me!" She bent over slightly to grab something from a bag beneath the table.

Chance!

With all bystanders out of immediate harm's way, my hand flashed down to the side, picking up my gun, and not even bringing it to a full stance before pulling the trigger.

"Stop." She snapped.

Click.

Click. ClickClickClickClickClick

Nothing.

Why?!

"Reina. I cut that down the middle the moment you pointed it at me. You've not been armed this entire time." I relaxed my grip slightly, and sure enough, the left half of the gun began to slide down. Somehow, she had cut around my hand and fingers. I dropped the pieces of the gun on the table.

"...Why even...?" I began weakly.

"I wasn't talking to you." My heart pounded to a halt. I pulled my eyes from her and looked across the room, and saw only the flesh golem standing there. Holding my breath, I slowly turned my head to the left; there stood Takos, its outstretched hand hovering over and completely encompassing my head, ready to make a single fist and crush my skull. I hadn't

seen, felt, or heard it move. It was just there. I returned my gaze to *Her* and slouched back down into my chair, utterly defeated.

She returned to her full seated position with a folder in hand, "I am a bit perturbed... that **that** was the extent of your plan. Shoot me? After everything I've shown you tonight?" she let out an exaggerated sigh while dramatically shrugging, "Anyhow, I made a copy of my notes for this experiment we've been running! There's a bit of speculation, but I think even you will find it enlightening! It should also make the paperwork that you'll have to do far easier!" She slid the folder across the table towards me and opened it, revealing a small stack of papers that had been carefully bound together.

"This has been both fun and enlightening, Reina. But I think this experiment has reached a conclusion for now. I've already discussed my future directions for the project with you and - as I was saying before - once I've finished and named that one over there, I'd love to compare notes on what we can see. In a little bit everyone will be able to find this place again and you won't have to drink alone! That is my last gift to you today: a perfect evening!" She stood up as she finished her speech, grabbing a small bag from beneath her chair and tossing it into Takos' still open hand hovering just half a meter over my head.

"You...can't-" I tried to raise a hand in protest, but all the fight had gone out of my body.

"Reina. It's okay, trust me. I'll find you again!" With that, she blew me a kiss, turned and walked away; leaving out of the front door like any other patron. After she broke line of sight. Takos pulled back the hand that had been hovering over my head like a guillotine, walked across the room, and grabbed the flesh golem by the head(?). It followed behind its master with nary a glance back at me. I continued to sit in my chair. Staring at the back door. Just like that, everything was quiet. I was alive.

So was everyone else who had been unknowingly part of this *game*. No one else died, so I...won? I looked down at the bisected handgun in front of me, metallic springs and bullets and other such parts scattered from their points of impact on the table, a once useful tool effortlessly reduced to scrap metal.

'*That was your plan?*'

I managed a single chuckle as I thought of my 'plan' here. What the hell was that going to accomplish? Shoot *Her*? With a normal fucking gun? Even if I got a shot off, then what? What about the two monstrosities she brought with her? What guarantee did I have that a gun this small would even touch something like Takos? I almost got the entire bar, maybe the entire *block* killed.

And to top it all off. *She* is the one who saved *me* from that...thing

'...*Understanding and perspective...*' Yeah. She has everything I'm lacking.

I looked down at the half empty bowl of eyes she had left me.

Fury suddenly bubbled up in me, lending me the strength to raise my hand and strike out at the bowl with the back of my hand.

Which stopped a millimeter from the bowl.

The slight trembling of my hand was the only physical evidence that I ever had any control over my own limb; my stomach screamed and vision swam as my defiant gesture was rewarded with a skull-splitting headache.. I gritted my teeth as I struggled for a few moments before finally relenting my efforts... and the symptoms disappeared along with my dignity.

I don't even have control of myself... I was *never* in control of this situation, from start to finish.

The front door suddenly crashed open, and a dozen town guards poured in, with Nadine in the cluster of them. I couldn't even summon up the energy to be startled by the commotion. Nadine ran up to me with two sword dancers and started shouting, tears were in her eyes. Are you okay? What happened? You suddenly disappeared! *Where is She?* The guards fanned out to secure the area, and I looked up at Nadine, who froze at the look on my face.

I had nothing left. So I cried instead.

HOMICIDE REPORT

Case Group: RT-0108: The Bonesaw Case

Case #: RT-0108-12

Name of Person Killed: Tajna Marius

Residence: Shanae, Trade District

Business: Tailor, Apprentice

Location of Homicide: Basement, Storage House 3C, Harbor District

Day, Month, Year Committed: 6th Day, 2nd Flame Month, Year 737, Unknown

By Whom Reported: Benson Feres

Address of Reporter: (REDACTED)

Date and Time Reported: 6th Day, 2nd Flame Month, 10:15 A.M.

Suspect Name: Evelyn Vandree (Confirmed)

-If Arrested-

When Arrested: N/A

Where Arrested: N/A

-If Not Arrested-

Suspect Danger Category: Extreme*

Suspect Whereabouts: Presumed to have left Shanae

Suspect Physical Description: See: RT-0108-01

Suspect PsyEn Ability: "Dissection: It allows *Her* to utilize my PsyEn as surgical tools finer than a scalpel or coarser than a bonesaw to open things up, to tear them apart, and to put them back together."**

Suspect PsyEn Basics: Excessively high control over basal PsyEn coating; very dense coating; functional output of PsyEn otherwise unknown.***

Suspect Other Abilities: Magic on a scale perhaps approaching a Fae. Capable of simultaneous multi-casting across a wide area****; Absolute control over unknown number of patchwork, artificial organisms (See: RT-0108A, RT-0108B).

Suspect Detailed Notes:

-See: RT-0108

*EXERCISE EXTREME CAUTION. DO NOT APPROACH. CANNOT OVERSTATE.

**Hand-to-hand combat inadvisable; Can cut around physical objects (hands)

***Ranged combat inadvisable

****Can most likely stop at least one bullet at close range

I set down my fountain pen on my borrowed desk in Nadine's sector precinct, resting my head in my hands and palming my own temples. There had been a LOT of paperwork, interviews, and interrogations since 7D2F, the day after the last murder of what we had taken to calling 'The Bonesaw Case'. The following weeks passed uneventfully. No one else died, and with this last report, my paper work was done. After a month, there were no longer guards posted around my apartment or stealthily tailing me home. A couple weeks after that, as the city calmed down, regular crimes started to pick up again, and more frivolous, but well-paying jobs landed in my lap. Lower stakes, but tiring; if nothing else it kept my mind off of things. Nadine had been relatively distant since then. Despite having left only a minute or two before the Force arrived, the trail went immediately cold. There was a palpable tension in the city; no one was convinced that Evelynn was gone. But true to her word, she was done with this place -with me, for now- and hadn't shown *Her* face again.

The sun had just finished a lazy descent over the horizon by the time I made it back to my street and shut the door to my building on the outside world. I let out an involuntary sigh. Despite the numerous jobs I had taken lately, I still felt restless.

'...*Understanding and perspective...*'

Those words echoed in my head continuously in the quiet moments, a punctuation mark at the end of each monotonous day; forcing me to reckon with my own weakness. I clicked open my apartment door and was greeted by familiar, long evening shadows of my furniture, extending sharply from my living room window. I recalled the sharpshooter that had kept watch from there... I'm glad none of them got hurt. I wouldn't be here much longer, thankfully; if I had

learned one thing from this experience, it's that I had become arrogant somewhere along the way. I had gotten it into my head that my experience with this anomalous entity squatting in my right eye socket had somehow made me more capable, better prepared, or to borrow *Her* wording... granted me *perspective*.

To that end, I had decided I would leave Shanae. Nadine protested - loudly - but there was no other option as far as I was concerned. We - as humans - are ever in need of ways to fight monsters, and no monster I had ever heard a single tale of even held a candle to the terror of *Her* and her pet. Our needs - as far as I was concerned - were two fold: we needed a way to accurately track Evelyn Vandree, and we needed a way to kill her; decisively, instantly, and mercilessly. A highly unlikely scenario, and definitely impossible to do alone; so it was time to head out on the road and start currying and calling in some favours.

I opened my cool box, and popped a living eye into the Mouth, and as my vision shimmered slightly, I started to walk towards my window to look up past the sky at what lie beyond as I always did, but I stopped myself. I am *human* - I reminded myself - and it was the duty of humans to defeat monsters, or so they say; so this was a human problem. Believing that there were any answers beyond humanity for human problems is what left me unprepared, incapable, and defeated. I sat down at my desk and began paging through notes, lists of contacts, services rendered and favours owed. I had returned to my records in the passing months with renewed vigor, leaving fresh notes and seeds of ideas that I hoped - in the full glare of my renewed determination - might have blossomed into fresh insight in the meantime. I think it *is* true; that humans must use human means to defeat their monsters.

Or perhaps that's just a matter of perspective.