

Malachi, vampires, cheupe, najd, immortals. They lived as long as there was blood to drink and ground to lie down in and sleep, like the corpses they were. When they became very old, one of three things came to pass. They could become an Ancient, doing the bidding of the young, helping with rituals, signing the documents that would pave the way for future generations. They were the ones who remained behind to see that their children behaved and prospered. Living-dead, tired of blood and tired of the hunt. Not many let it get that far but just enough to keep the balance. Others died in their own way, many burying themselves deep within the ground to sleep forever. This was the respectable way to go. *Quietly*. When you'd had your fill and walked the Worlds a thousand times over. No one lived forever. Eternity would break your heart before the end. Sleep was a malachi's death if he survived long enough to embrace it. Large ceremonies were held in honor of the old ones when they decided to go down and once buried and gone, there was no returning. The Ancients made sure of that.

But some malachi were too strong, their hearts were too cold, they wanted everything but needed nothing. These were the dangerous ones, the ones who lived forever, the Daemons. Frightening creatures banished from the Worlds for not wanting to rest when their time came. The Ancients had become good at spotting them. They became torrents of power, all the centuries of bloodlust feeding the parasite within until it mutated into something...*else*. Something not meant for this realm. Insatiable appetites, unstoppable powers. They were banished to some sanctum carved out of space and time for them alone. Who knew what went on there, what pain and suffering at the hands of the merciless and ever hungry?

They could be summoned, these Daemons, by skilled weavers of malachi magic. Many usually banded together to share the burden although only three souls were essentially needed; one to protect, one to summon and one to channel. Walking with a Daemon was a task not to be taken lightly. Many had died trying. The Daemon was simply too strong, too eager to be back in this realm that it fed off your own body to such an extent that by the time it left you, you were already dead. The caller was no better off. The Daemon's soul could never truly leave its own sanctum and while the greater part of it was focused in the one who was channeling, the void it left was like an open doorway for others to come out too. They fought and ripped at the mind to get through and some had been driven mad by them. The protector must obviously provide shelter for the soul who was summoning but also, try to help him keep the other Daemons at bay. It was quite an effort, like fighting a small battle of body and mind all by yourself, and one that had been raging for six days now. A feat such as this had never been undertaken. It would later be condemned by Ancients as ill-advised and impossible. Nevertheless, Damek, Kaleo, Tariq and Blain battled on.

Damek's mind had become a whirlpool of madness. He felt like a drunken man being kept alive and conscious by some unseen force, hell-bent on his punishment. Dehydration and thirst plagued him no matter how much he drank, and he drained entire kuvuta armies dry to the bone. There was constant dizziness as if this place held lines and angles he could not understand. If it were not for Arial's essence, Kaleo's constant reassuring voice, he would have been lost to the Daemon inside.

The monster was thrilled with being alive again and Damek had to use every ounce of his energy on directing his feet to the enemy and the enemy alone. That was almost all he had to do, that - and respond to Kaleo - to prove that he was still there. His shared mind was almost at breaking point and he could hardly wait for the cool and calm of solitude. Perhaps he would sleep for a long time after this. He needed to rest. The Daemon drowned out his thoughts of sleep with its current needs. It said,

*'Do not be selfish Damek'*

Damek laughed at himself and the Daemon pushed his feet on. There was a kuvuta army nearby. Damek had the Daemon trained well enough, kept threatening to kill himself if

the Daemon took anything else. It had roared with mirth inside his head for what felt like hours but had conceded to this nagging vessel like a madman in a prison cell fed steak, medium rare, when he would in fact have liked it any way at all.

Damek's flushed mind swung in the direction of the five-thousand souls who would feed his Daemon today. He moved in erratic, frenzied movements, as if he had never eaten before or would never again. He tried to close his eyes, but the Daemon snapped them open, focusing on the seething horizon of fresh meat, coiling around his tired mind like a great serpent that could be felt but not seen.

One foot in front of the next, Damek thought wearily, his eyes rolling back into his head as the Daemon shot him a bemused glare.