

Part 1: Hyperion

Chapter 6

If I wanted to survive long after escaping Koru, I had to make sure that Mallens didn't figure out I'd tried to have him killed. This was the nexus of all my problems. I'd hired an artificer Hasso to make copies of All Things Ending, the scepter of Death, the assassins had carried into battle. The assassins had died in the attempt, but Hasso hadn't.

Soon someone would look for the remains of the killers. Mallens had stomped them, so I didn't think the murderers would be found too quickly. Still, they would be found. So too would be found the weapons, those would be traced, and I would be found. I would have died protecting my secrets before, but now I'd finger Koru in a heartbeat. Koru had merely caused what he feared.

However, Mallens would want me tortured for eternity. I didn't know if he even could torture a mortal for eternity, but I didn't want to find out. I needed to find and destroy those weapons.

I'm Kog, like cog in the machine or cognitive dissonance, the duality of knowing I'm an idiot and thinking I'm smarter than everyone else. I wanted to witness things, see the decisions get made, and be a voice in the conversations that decide them. When someone said, 'Kog did that' I wanted that to mean something. I wanted school-children a hundred years from now to curse my name, because when they saw Kog on a test, I wanted them to struggle with all the facts they had to memorize and wonder which of them they needed to recall now. I wanted to matter.

But I got into politics to impress a girl. That's what I thought about running. I thought of Seraphine. The last time I'd seen her, we hadn't even talked, but she had known I was there.

Seraphine had long legs and round thighs. The curve of her hips to butt mesmerized me. She wore her red hair long and little skirts: not micro skirts or the ones that are basically hot-pants, just short, pleated skirts with a bit of skin between them and tight white shirts. When she'd invited me to join a little treason, she'd added high white stockings. Mistakes had been made.

I thought of Seraphine, her eyes, her lips, the little bits of skin her shirt revealed on her shoulders, waist, and back. I thought of the way she moved close to people when she spoke with them. I thought of how she found me, a mortal, and brought me home among gods. With

Seraphine, I'd entered the rooms where the decisions had been made, I'd made the decisions, and I'd seen them carried out to victory or death.

My thoughts tripped and fell, because right now, things were moving faster to death than victory.

My problem was I was an idiot.

I got into the Northshore Academy of Sacred Geometry but failed out of a sorcery major. My advisor had sent me frankly insulting letters about job opportunities in window washing. Flailing about for a new major, I'd taken Unarmed Combat: Striking and UC: Grappling and pulled twos out of fives. The dean of the school had recruited me himself. I switched majors to martial arts.

That got me two internships at Fate. Pulling an internship at Fate isn't hard. The pay is bad, the work stressful, there's almost no promotion potential, but if you show up sober to an interview, you can get one. For a summer I got paid very little money and two bits of luck.

Pulling two internships, the second recommended and a direct hire, is as unlikely as a promotion. Neither I nor anyone else quite believed me when I got the second job offer. It brought a little, very little, more money and two more bits of luck. In the second week of Thermidor, after returning to school for my final year, Mos Eir, my boss at Fate, had asked me if I'd like to be considered for a full-time job.

She hedged, of course. Everyone at Fate hedged everything. She couldn't promise anything. Maybe something at Fate might happen, she might have said. Possibly a full-time job. Was I interested?

Yes, obviously. I was going to graduate, needed a job, etc. But as I thought about it, not obviously, because the pay was bad, the work stressful, and promotion potential low. Mos Eir said she would take nearly a year to see if a job existed and wouldn't feel insulted if I pursued other options. She even offered to write a letter of recommendation if I applied somewhere else.

I finished my program in unarmed combat with a bladed-weapons minor, filed to graduate, and got told that I needed to finish all that general education I'd skipped. I'd just sort-of ignored it for three years. The Registrar had not. Whatever. I finished half that fall semester, signed up for the other half for spring, and over Year's End break met Seraphine.

Who was just stupefyingly, brain-stops-working, try-not-to-drool hot.

Who knew some guys who had a short term job.

Really short term.

A little dangerous.

Did I know any brave men who were interested?

The annoying thing about being a man is how quickly your brain turns off when you meet someone attractive. Women never have this problem. They don't get stupid when pretty men show up.

The mountain air soothed my lungs and made me want to run. Angel's Crest was a high pass north of Shang Du with many higher mountains between here and there. Even from the Hakan no sharp-eyed observer would spot me, and the path was far too high for rats. I jogged east, toward Hyperion.

The twists of the high road made me feel hidden and protected. Sometimes I saw Tsme worms. They dug great round valleys, but shed stones and rocks like snake-skin. The Clockwork Gods had made them in the first days, perhaps before the making of the Sun, and the worms created. They wiggled side to side, folding rock into mountains. They moved slowly and the mountains grew slowly, but so long as they lived, the peaks reached further toward the sky.

The lowlands don't have the hold the mountains do on my heart. I could run faster and further when I left the foothills, but that's the best I can say. The ground turned sandy; the pine trees grew thick. Rocky hills broke some of the ground, and sequioas and redwoods sprouted among the lesser firs and pine. The air smelled of menthol.

Every evening I put out my manna plate, and in the morning ate brown cakes that had appeared there overnight. They were dense and filling, and with care, could last a whole day. By the power of the roads, I came to Hyperion in two days time, slept outside, and woke to a dark, overcast day. Thick clouds hid the Sun, and I wouldn't see it again for a while.