



Thelema: Mystic Will

Book 0 - The Fool

~ Marashia Dark ~

Note from the Author

Thank you for buying this book. It really means a lot to me. I hope you get something out of it and it changes your life for the better. I assume that, if you're reading this book, it means you enjoy fantasy. Of course, the most well-known fantasy author is perhaps J.R.R. Tolkien.

It may surprise you to learn, and you can look this up for yourself, that even the great Tolkien struggled with people looking to steal his writings and defraud the public by passing his work off as their own. Tolkien solved this by crafting handwritten letters to his fans, encouraging them to boycott his imitators. His plan worked!

Today, there's no question of attribution regarding Tolkien's stories. We all know who he is, and the legacy of his craft is rightly where it belongs: with the original creator.

Today, I have something that even Tolkien didn't have to make that task easier:

The Internet and Social Media.

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Fraud is a Common Law crime that affects not just me, but the public as well, as I can't guarantee the quality of their work or the ability to create more without your help in this.

I of course encourage such things as fan art and fan fiction, and wish to be part of any creative endeavors when I can, if I feel they're worthwhile. I would love to hear from you and learn how my work has inspired you to do awesome things, or even if you just have feedback for how I can do better in the future.

You can reach me on most normal social media channels.

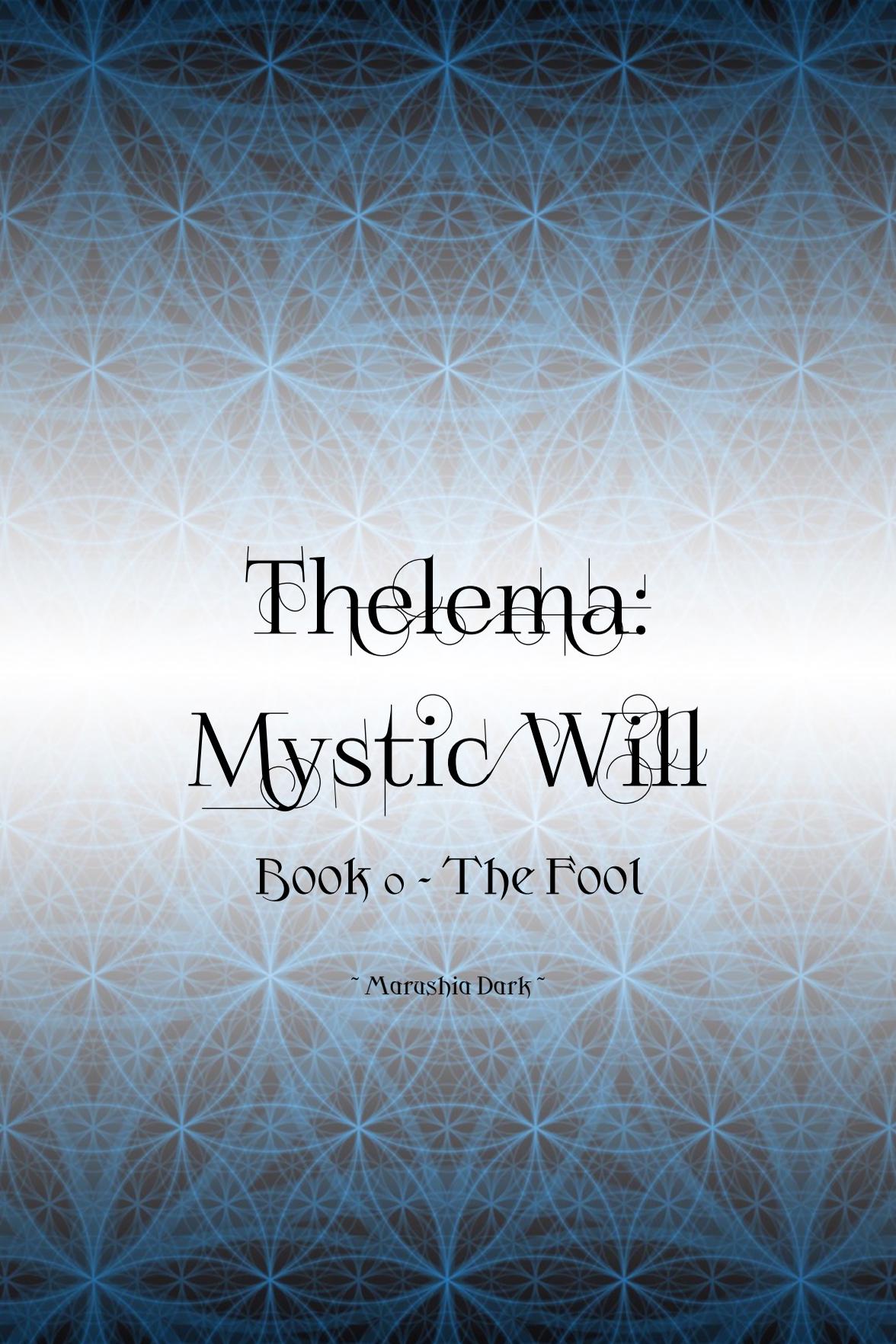
May you each find love, purpose, happiness, and will in your lives.

~ Marushia Dark ~

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Thelema:
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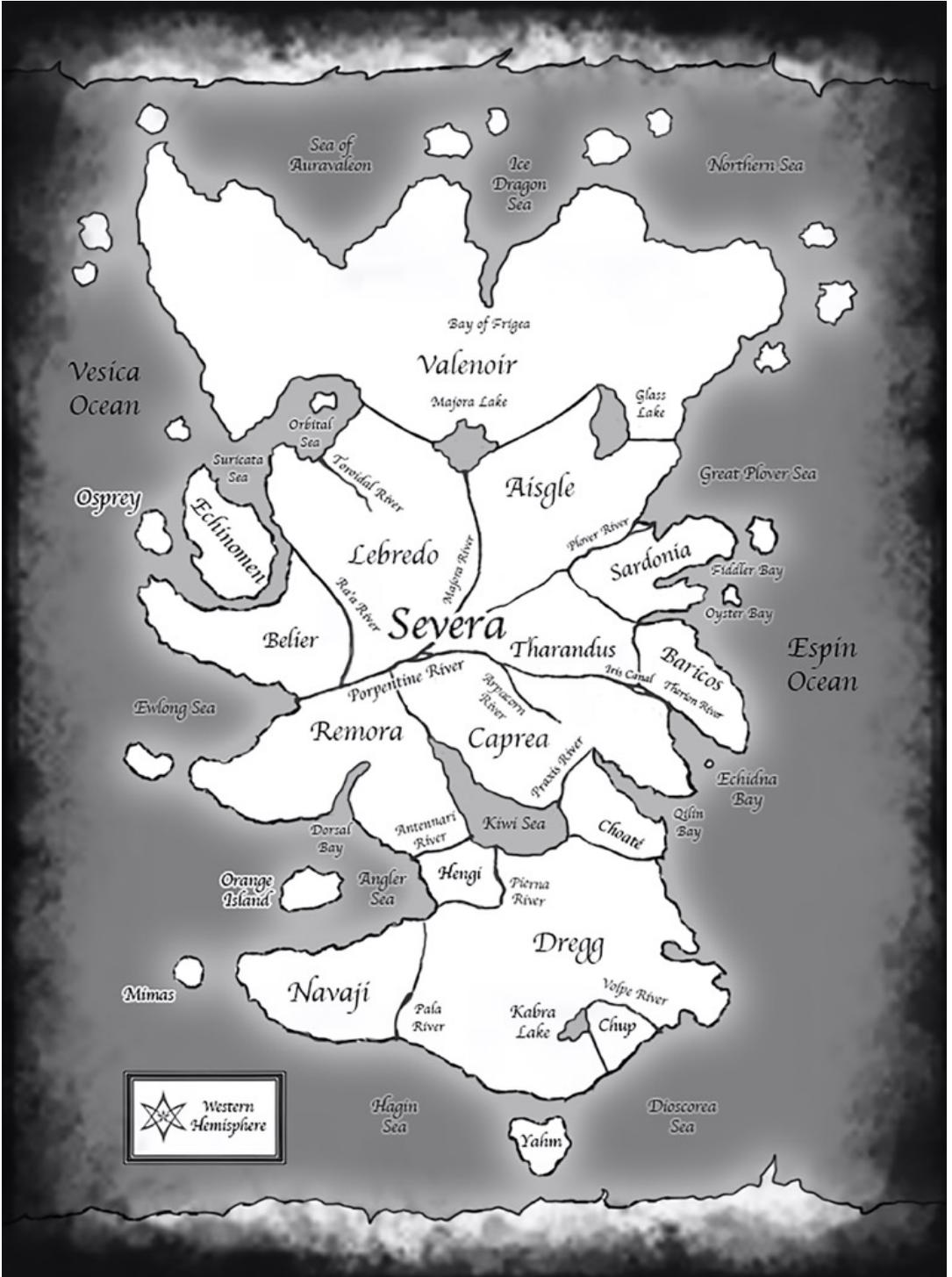
Book 0 - The Fool

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*In the Tarot, the Fool is the protagonist of a
transcendental journey towards spiritual enlightenment.*

*Each of the Major Arcana presents a challenge we
must face and a corresponding lesson we must learn,
with the end goal being nothing short of godliness.*

*This book is dedicated to all those who have ever
taught me anything – or indeed who ever will – and in so
doing, have elevated my consciousness and helped me
to become just a little bit less foolish.*





Docket #000

Ab Initio

It is said that, in the beginning, the gods created mankind in their own image and likeness, to be both their servants and also their companions. Each so-called *natural person* was bound to the world by a special pendant called a *Thelema*, which embodied that person's talents, their desires, and above all, their *will*. The master artisans of the gods took great care to design each *Thelema* to be as unique and intricate as the person who wore it. Upon each medallion was inscribed a summary of their life's purpose, and a symbol as well; both of which, if understood, would aid that person in fulfilling their sacred duty – their *true will*.

The gods were quite pleased with their handiwork. That is ... until *one day*, their creations became aware of the awesome power their *Thelemas* possessed. The power of will, they realized, when fully harnessed, could make them equal to the gods and overturn the natural order of things. In time, mankind rebelled against their makers, and the world became engulfed in the fires of destruction.

Amidst such chaos and defiance, the gods felt they had little choice but to destroy their own creations and start anew, or else risk being usurped. This grieved them deeply to know their labor of love would be lost forever.

Among the gods was one called the Star Maiden. Upon learning that mankind was set to be purged, she descended upon the world and spoke out in their defense. She pleaded that the *creators*, and not the created, bore the fault for this failure and said that, if the world they had built would be destroyed, then so would she along with them.

Moved by her selfless act, the gods convened to decide what ought to be done. They appointed one called the Water Bearer, who was the husband of the Star Maiden, to carry out their decision. With the stroke of his sword, the Water Bearer severed the *Thelemas* in two, and with them, their bearers as well, so that mankind was now divided into man and woman. Their bodies and wills torn apart, every man and woman was now but half what they once were – a mere semblance of their former selves, which the gods then called *hue-man*, for their having naught but the color of what the gods had originally made them.

With the humans divided, the Water Bearer flooded the world so that they and their *Thelemas* would be scattered across its face. By the grace of the gods,

only a select few of incredible will would ever come to rejoin their missing half and become whole once again. Furthermore, fearing the humans might loose their bonds and become free of the world, they decreed that any human who removed their Thelema would forfeit their will to live. In this way, the gods felt secure in the knowledge that mankind could never again rise to its former strength unless *they too* possessed the will of a god, and in finding their *twin flame*, became worthy of such a divine gift.

Out of pity for the humans, the Star Maiden remained within the world to protect and guide it from the shadows. In time, the waters receded and the Water Bearer descended into the world to search for the Star Maiden that they might be reunited.

Centuries passed and the influence of the gods began to fade, as did the memory of them, until they became little more than myth and legend.

Docket #001

The Summoners

Where could he be? Justice Jane Stewart adjusted her dorky black glasses on her gentle face and brushed her bangs from her eyes as she reviewed the file in her hand for a third time.

The seventeenth day of the month of the Lamb, near Samuel Forest, just outside Fiber City, Belier. Sixth step of Rael. She looked around to see the sordid remains of the heavily deforested region that had once been Samuel Forest. The location was right. The presence of the adverse parties, as well as the jury, confirmed it.

She looked at her watch. It was already half a step passed midday.
He's late. Could he have gotten lost?

In high-profile cases such as this, a Justice of the Peace would sometimes request the trial be held at the scene of the crime in order to help the jury understand certain key factors about the case. Jane specifically chose this location in order that they might see the devastation the defense's actions had wrought to the trees, the animals, and the land itself. She hoped they'd be moved to side with her against the adverse party.

However, none of her careful tactics would work unless the judge arrived soon to administer the proceedings.

And I can't do it without you, Dean.

The advocates for the defense began whispering amongst themselves.

"Is everything set?" asked the one.

"Yes," said the other, "It's been arranged, just as we planned. All we have to do is wait for the trial to finish before we make our move."

"That may not be necessary," said the first, in a sinister insinuation, "At this rate, there might not even *be* a trial. The other judge isn't even here yet."

"It's not like they *need* two Justices to try a case, right?"

"No, but that was the agreement and it's at our discretion whether we exercise our rights or not. We both know our clients are guilty as hell, so we'd be fools not to press any advantage we can."

"In that case, let's hope he never shows. Then we won't even have to get our hands dirty. We can just stand on our right to a speedy trial, motion for dismissal, and since he's not here, we would enter into default judgment and estoppel. If that happens, the Department of Justice won't be able to try this case again because of the provision against double jeopardy."

“That would certainly be an embarrassment for one of Severa’s top prosecutors.”

“Just think how disappointed she’ll be to see all her hard work wasted because her partner couldn’t be bothered to show up on time.”

The two shady lawyers cackled and snickered amongst themselves.

“We’ll give him a few more minutes before we move to dismiss,” said the one, “Just so we can say we were gracious and thereby avoid drawing any suspicion to ourselves.”

Jane’s slender calloused hands began to shake with anxiety.

Come on, Dean. Where are you?

She gripped the curved hilt of the two-handed hunting saber at her side in an effort to calm her nerves. Her heart pounded. She closed her doe brown eyes and took a deep breath. Judge or no judge, she could not stand idly by any longer. It was still possible to stall for time by going over preliminaries.

“I guess we’ll get started,” Jane declared, the tinge of an Ionian accent still lingered in her voice from her days in finishing school as a child abroad.

She turned to her clerk and said, “Hanji, summon Adaiah.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Hanji replied.

The young black-haired clerk grabbed the pendant around his neck with his left hand and drew his quillon dagger from its sheath with his right. He held the blade out in front of him with the tip pointed down, like an ice pick. This position would allow him to draw energy out from the weapon and, in this case, summon Adaiah.

“*Arcesso!*” he shouted.

Sparks of electricity and light surrounded his short, frail body as a surge of unseen energy traveled from the dagger, up his right arm, through his stomach, down his left arm, into his Thelema, through his heart, along his spine, and out the top of his head, before finally discharging into the sky.

The energy body’s meridian path, through which one’s *chi* flowed.

A creature the size of the blade emerged from the disc at the hilt and floated in midair just above it. She looked like a short, slender black bear with white tufts of fur on her elbows, knees, paws, and ears. She had a long, thin prehensile tail that ended in a white ball of fluff, as well as a pair of velvet-covered wings. Her name was Adaiah and she was a *Notary*. Every Justice had one by operation of law, though it usually fell to the Justice’s clerk to manage them.

The Notary’s sole job was to take in everything that transpired around them and retain it with perfect memory for later use. The testimony of a Notary was held as self-evident, legally treated as indisputable fact; and for this reason, they made excellent record keepers.

“Adaiah,” Jane commanded, “Begin recording.”

“Yes, ma’am,” Adaiah replied in a high-pitched, squeaky voice. Her eyes flashed white and a pale blue glow enveloped her. From that point onward, she would remember everything that happened to Jane and Hanji until she exited the trance.

Hanji returned his knife to its sheath. Beyond being the *indenture* that bound Adaiah’s soul to the world, it could still serve as a weapon like any other.

“Clerk, call the roll,” Jane ordered.

“Yes, ma’am,” said Hanji. He cleared his throat and turned to the restless crowd that had gathered in the clear-cut forest to watch the trial. “Are the advocates for Bunyan Logging and Blue Ox Shipping here?”

“Here.” They said.

“Kindly step forward and present your indentures.”

They did as they were instructed. A man in a dark suit emerged from the crowd and held up a small statue carved to look like a beaver wielding an axe and wearing a flannel shirt with overalls and large boots. A lawyerly woman also emerged from the crowd and held up a similar totem that looked like a Minotaur with a ring piercing its nose and a yoke around its neck. These were the indentures of the *juristic persons* of their respective companies.

Hanji squatted down in front of them. This time, he gripped his Thelema with his right hand and placed his left hand on the ground in front of them.

“*Infero!*” he shouted.

The same light as before surrounded him. A surge of energy traveled from the ground, up his legs, along his spine, through his heart, into his Thelema, along his right arm, through his stomach, down his left arm, out his hand, and back into the ground before discharging. A pair of glowing red seals, about the size of Hanji’s hand, appeared. Each seal consisted of two squares offset by forty-five degrees so as to form an eight-pointed star and inscribed in a circle, with a smaller circle inscribed inside both of them. Centered within each of the triangles formed by the overlapping squares was an elegant sigil depicting one of the eight heavenly bodies.

Having completed the seals, Hanji withdrew his hand and stood up.

“Please place your indentures into the summoning circles,” he said.

The two advocates set their totems on the ground within the seals and then stepped back. Hanji stretched out his arm towards them.

“*Ligo!*” he shouted.

The seals began to glow more intensely as a wall of light rose up to surround the statues, binding them in place.

“All set,” said Hanji.

“Good,” Jane declared.

Such formal protocols as these aren’t strictly necessary, but they at least help me buy time.

Jane grabbed her Thelema pendant with her right hand and held out her left hand towards the two indentures. For anyone who was right-handed, this position would have allowed them to emit energy from their left hand; but because Jane was left-handed, the flow of chi through her meridians was reversed, and so it would yield the opposite effect. Thus, she used it to draw energy *out* of them the way Hanji had summoned Aadaiah.

“*All rise!*” she commanded.

Her petite warrior body lit up in a bright aura much like Hanji’s did, only more intensely. The seals around the statuettes erupted in a flash of electricity and light. Two towering creatures slowly emerged from the indentures. Each measured about eight to nine meters tall. Their appearance conformed to the likenesses of their totems – an axe-wielding beaver and a burly, blue Minotaur. These were the juristic persons of Bunyan Logging and Blue Ox Shipping in their living, breathing forms.

They were also the principle defendants in this case.

Jane released her pendant, letting it fall against her chest.

Now we just need to wait for Dean to show up.

As if on cue, the rumbling of an engine crescendoed like rolling thunder as Justice Dean Maynard came riding over the hill on his motorcycle. He parked the vehicle under a tree away from the action and walked towards the group without any sense of urgency at all. He marched with the confident poise of a medieval knight having just dismounted from his trusted steed. His hooded black cloak and the bastard sword hanging from his side only served to reinforce the image. He wore his weapon with pride, like a badge of honor, for indeed a Justice's sword *was* a badge of their authority.

A modern rendition of the classic priestly robes, the uniform of a Justice of the Peace consisted of a simple, yet elegant frock jacket and matching pants, both black with elaborate gold trim around the edges. The jacket was designed so that it could be worn over a judge's regular shirt or blouse and provided a thin layer of padded protection. A Justice's duties to give chase and to engage in combat were also taken into consideration, with most choosing to wear leather boots of some kind as opposed to dress shoes.

Slight variations in the overall attire existed between male and female, and also between members of the same sex, depending on season, climate, and the need for mobility, with some parts being cut longer or shorter than others, but all falling under the same general style. The idea, in the minds of the outfit's designers, was that anyone could look upon a Justice of the Peace and recognize them instantly as such. This was not merely decorative, but practical as well in that a Justice served as a symbol of authority among the people out in the real world.

The uniform also came with a cloak, which had a variety of subtle features, such as earbuds, a visor, and an inflatable pillow all sewn into the hood for long-distance trips.

A Justice's cloak was usually black with gold trim as well, though in more recent times, some latitude was given to tailor its interior to the judge's personal preference and to help distinguish them from one another. The interior of Dean's cloak was a cobalt blue that matched his deep-set eyes, while Justice Stewart's was a deep red-violet that paired well with her long, chestnut brown hair.

Jane felt relieved to see Justice Maynard finally arrive. Her opponents were less than thrilled.

"Sorry I'm late," said Dean nonchalantly, "I'm afraid my clerk was nowhere to be found this morning. We'll just have to start without him."

"We've *already* started, Your Honor," Jane said curtly.

Dean sulked in disappointed. "Aw, man, really? Well, in that case ..."

He grabbed his Thelema with his right hand and knelt down on the ground, touching the earth with his left hand.

"*Saepio!*" he shouted.

His body lit up even more intensely than Jane's had. A thin wall of blue light stretched out from behind him and carved a path in an enormous arc around him. It continued outward, encircling Jane, Hanji, the jury, the juristic persons, their agents, and the other officers and onlookers who were present for the trial, before eventually closing in on itself. All told, it formed a giant hemispherical dome, some fifty meters in diameter around them, isolating the group from the outside world. This was Dean's *Chambers*. Its purpose was to prevent

interference with the trial and all Justices were given discretion on when they could invoke such a power. Once erected, however, no one and nothing could enter or leave the area without the consent of its creator.

Dean slowly stood back up and released his Thelema, casually letting it fall about his chest.

“Court is now in session,” he said with a wry smile.

Docket #002

David v. Goliath

Dean felt deeply concerned about his clerk's absence. Not only was the tardy man in possession of the files related to the case, but of Dean's Notary as well. Fortunately for all involved, Dean had thoroughly reviewed the materials the night before and Jane had already invoked Adaiah's powers, which meant everything that transpired within Dean's Chambers would be recorded.

As long as things go smoothly, it shouldn't be an issue.

Dean looked up and glared intensely at to the two juristic persons looming over him.

"Bunyan Logging, Blue Ox Shipping," he said calmly, authoritatively, "The two of you are charged with the willful destruction of land belonging to the Confederated States of Severa, as well as theft of government property, and of exporting quantities of timber belonging to the Belierian and Confederate governments without their permission. How do you plead to these charges?"

The two beasts nodded to each other, already in complete agreement as to how they would proceed.

Bunyan Logging spoke for the two of them, saying, "We wish to plead non-assumpsit by way of confession and avoidance."

His voice bellowed down from on high like a mighty titan.

Dean stroked his scraggly brown beard.

He squinted, skeptical of their use of this pleading, and decided to probe them further to see whether or not they knew what they were talking about or if they were just reciting something they'd heard from some self-proclaimed legal guru.

"A plea of *non-assumpsit*," he explained, "Is a Common Law pleading in which the defendant denies the existence of an obligation to do or not do a thing – meaning you rebut the *assumption* of such an obligation; and *confession and avoidance* is another such pleading in which you plead guilty to the facts, but then advance further evidence or testimony for why the law in question does not apply to said facts in this instance, which in conjunction with the plea of non-assumpsit I would take to be that you think you had no reason to seek the government's permission in the first place. Is that really the plea the two of you wish you use?"

"That is correct," they said.

"This should be interesting," Dean chuckled lightly, "Alright, I'll hear what you have to say."

"Your Honor, the State is a *fiction*," the beaver said, "Imaginary lines drawn on a map with no real-world equivalent. It cannot receive an injury, as it is merely an abstract concept, unlike us flesh and blood beings. Thus, as the State is a non-entity, we claim to have stolen nothing from it, as all property belongs to the people, of which we are members."

"A very lucid and intelligent pleading," said Dean. He was not the least surprised by their well-crafted argument, having been a blue-collar worker himself while studying law. In his experience, many in business and trades knew more about the law than even some lawyers or politicians.

"Justice Stewart," the judge continued, now turning to his partner, "Have you anything to say in response?"

It irritated Jane to no end to see Dean just going through the motions, as if he didn't already know the answer to all of the defense's statements. Still, Dean was legally bound to only assess what the parties put before him, and it was *her* job to raise the argument for the government.

"Your Honor," said Jane, sharply, "This line of reasoning is clearly absurd. For one thing, the State and the Confederacy are more than mere lines on a map. They are the will of the people, expressed collectively, no different than a family or club might be, and of which juristic persons are decidedly *not* members."

She gave a stern sideways glance of contempt in their direction. "The defense has stolen from human beings as a group, for which I am their legal representative in this case. Furthermore, the argument of boundaries, if believed, would render everyone's *private* property as mere fiction as well, which I'm sure Your Honor understands would be completely intolerable and lead to total anarchy!"

"I'm inclined to agree with you, Justice Stewart," said Dean, "Since the lines around our yards and our bodies are just as real or imaginary as those drawn between the Several States."

"Are you suggesting that we don't have rights?" asked the beaver.

"Natural persons have rights," Jane retorted, "You juristic persons are merely creations of the State and you have what rights the State gives you."

"Are we not created by our owners?"

He turned to Dean and said, "Your Honor, I request a ruling on this."

Dean pursed his lips in annoyance. He didn't like having to give rulings if he could avoid it. No Justice did, since it put greater pressure on them. Still, it was one of his many duties as judge. He closed his eyes for a moment to consider how he should respond. He knew the answer; he just wanted to be cautious in how he worded it, since it would become a matter of public record.

"The indentures are created by a juristic person's owner," he said, "Or by their agents on their behalf, and it is the indenture which gives rise to the juristic person. However, the creation of such totems under ordinary circumstance is an act of idolatry offensive to the gods – a criminal act. For this reason, they may only be created under specific circumstances and are governed by rules prescribed by the State on behalf of the people who, for reasons that should be obvious, might come to fear the tyranny that would result if such entities were given unlimited power to act as they saw fit."

In other words, you're too dangerous to be let off the leash.

“Thus,” he concluded, “You are created by the grace of the State and Justice Stewart is correct in her assessment that juristic persons have only those rights the State allows them to have.”

He paused a while to let that sink in before continuing. “Your plea is summarily rejected. Shall we move on?”

Blue Ox Shipping began to pant heavily with rage, but her partner pressed a hand to her chest to restrain her.

“Calm down,” the beaver said, “It’ll be alright.”

He turned his attention back to Dean. “Can we plead to the jurisdiction?”

“You can try,” the judge quipped.

“Your Honor, it is our understanding that, at this stage, it is still proper to make such a pleading.”

“Go on and make it, then. I can’t do it for you.”

Dean folded his arms across his chest and pouted surly, wondering if they were going to be this difficult the entire time.

“Very well,” said Bunyan Logging, “Pursuant to Rule 12(b) of the Confederated Rules of Civil Procedure, we move that these charges be dismissed for lack of personal jurisdiction.”

“Motion denied,” said Dean.

“What? Why?”

“As already stated, you are juristic persons and, by your very nature, the State has authority over you in all cases.”

If you were human, it might be a different story.

The beaver gritted his teeth in outrage. “So ... you’re saying we’re nothing more than your *slaves*?! What gives you that right?”

“The created cannot be greater than its creator,” said Dean, unfolding his arms and drawing an invisible triangle with his fingers, suggestive of hierarchy, “That’s just the way it is. We follow the will of the gods that made this world. The State follows the will of the people that made it. And you in turn follow the collective will of the people, as expressed by the State, who made you. That is the natural order of things. We are all bound to our lawgiver, regardless of our personal interpretation of reality.”

The two defendants grew wroth at having once again been struck down.

“Alright then,” said Bunyan Logging, “Pursuant to Rule 12(c) of the ...”

“*Enough!*” the Minotaur fumed.

The entire court was taken aback by her sudden outburst. A visible steam protruded from her nostrils as she panted. She clenched her fists and said, “This legal bullshit is hurting my head. We demand trial by combat!”

Dean scoffed at her request. “Trial by combat is a right reserved for human defendants against other human litigants. Juristic persons don’t have that right.”

“Why not?” asked the big ox.

Dean took a moment to clear his throat as he thought about how to word this. “Well, for one thing, juristic persons have the potential to grow to become much more powerful than any human, which would put them at a considerable advantage. That would not be equitable and would lead to the sort of unnatural order I spoke of before.”

“So what?” the blue-skinned beast huffed, swiping a dismissive hand through the air, “You *already* consider us inferior beings. So why not show us what you can do and put us in our place if you think you can?”

“Ms. Ox, that would not be ...”

“Not be what?” she snorted, “Fair?! It’s *already* unfair to us. *We* didn’t choose this existence. We didn’t *choose* to be born what we are, and you’re treating us as if our lives, our rights, our feelings, our hopes, our dreams, our wills *don’t matter*.”

“I’m sorry, but your request is improper ...”

“It’s alright,” said Jane, interrupting. “If they want a trial by combat, the State is prepared to give them one.”

A fierce and fiery look filled her eyes. One that hungered for the thrill of action, excitement, and violence in the service of moral righteousness. As good as she was at rhetoric, she was that much better with a blade, and there was something to be said for the exhilarating rush she felt when exhibiting her power in raw form.

Dean wasn’t sure how to feel about this.

“Justice Stewart, do you understand what you’re saying?” he asked.

“I do, Your Honor,” she replied.

“Jane ... I mean Ms. Stewart, I must advise against this.”

“The State’s case is compelling and its cause is just. My strength and my sword stand ready to execute its will.” She gripped her Thelema in her left hand and the hilt of her blade at her hip with the other. Her entire body began to flare with electric fire, as if she’d been waiting for this from the beginning. The look of confidence in her eyes was piercing. Her nerves were hardened steel. Of all her abilities, she knew martial combat was her greatest strength, and Dean knew it too. Still, his concern for her went beyond their professional relationship. She was his partner and his friend and he didn’t want to see her get hurt.

Jane, what’s going on inside that head of yours?

Dean scratched his scalp as he wondered what he should do. His decision would have far-reaching consequences beyond the immediate battle. It would establish new legal precedent and open the floodgates for juristic persons to claim additional rights reserved only for humans. If Jane lost, it meant they could potentially be faced with a new era in which humans were no longer the masters of juristic persons, but now their slaves. However, if she won, it would seal his ruling in blood and might discourage them from asking in the future if they knew such a request was futile.

Still, what legal justification do I have for overturning one of the most important laws protecting human freedom? How would I explain myself to my fellow man if this turned out badly and they blamed me for all of it?

He strained his mind to return to the first principles of law.

To know the laws, is not to observe their mere words, but their force and power. I said they should obey us as we obey the gods, but why is it that the gods have authority over human beings in the first place? It’s not just that they created us, but that they hold power over us to keep us in our place, just like she dared us to do.

Either way, this sucks and they expect an answer. Jane’s one of the best sword fighters I know. I’m lucky to have her here and she seems sure of herself. I should be sure of myself as well ... but I’m not.

Lady Justice, fuck me ...

If I don’t grant this request and prove human beings are indeed more powerful, then it will just send a message that we’re afraid of juristic persons

and they'll soon come to realize there isn't actually anything stopping them from making us their slaves. At the same time, though, if Jane wins, I confirm that they are our slaves, even if I don't come out and admit it.

There is no guarantee this will turn out well either way, so it comes down to whether I think Jane can hold her own against these two titans. I don't think she can, but I can't let my personal feelings affect this decision. I could recuse myself, but then I'd be leaving the fate of everyone to someone else and I don't like that either. Best to deal with this here and now.

Still, it's Jane's life on the line and she agreed to it, so who am I to say no if it's what both sides want? She's a Justice too and I trust her to know what she's doing.

"Alright," said Dean, "I've made my decision. Against my better judgment, I'm going to allow this trial by combat. I thank the jury for your time, but your services will no longer be required from this point forward. You folks are all free to leave. The two defendants, their advocates, Justice Stewart, her clerk, and myself will remain behind. Everyone else is hereby ordered to vacate the area and remain outside the barrier until the trial has concluded."

As the congregation filed out of his Chambers, Dean ran up to Jane, grabbed her by the arm, and pulled her to the side. At just under one-point-seven meters tall, he was only slightly taller than she was.

"You'd better bring your A-game out there," he scolded, "I'm sure I don't have to tell you what sort of pandemonium we'll have unleashed upon the world if you lose."

Jane brushed him off. "Relax, Dean. You've seen me fight before."

"This is serious, Jane! Juristic persons have never been granted trial by combat before, and for good reason."

"You seem awfully worried about some government forests."

"It's not that simple. I'm not going to lie to you. I hate that you put me in this position, but I feel I had no choice. Win or lose, accept or refuse, this *can't* end well."

"I'll go out fighting if it comes to that."

"No!"

"Huh?" She seemed startled by his reaction.

"It's bad enough we're going through with this, and I'm sure you're willing to give your life for the law because that's the sort of woman you are, but I can't stand the thought of watching you die to those monsters either. If it looks like you're going to lose, you give the *missio*, you hear me?"

Dean held up two fingers – the sign of surrender.

While either hand was technically acceptable, Jane noted Dean's use of his right hand to make the sign because of his missing left middle finger. She remembered how it was severed many years ago in a trial by combat that he later regretted accepting – one of his first, when he was young and foolhardy. It made her sad to think about it, but it also reminded her that what she was fighting for was more than a few trees. She was fighting for the primacy of human beings over juristic persons, and with that in mind, she couldn't lose.

"Our Thelemas make us powerful, but they don't make us invincible, Jane."

"I know," she said, uncoupling herself from his grip, "And it's sweet of you to be worried about me, but trust me ... I've got this."

She kissed him on the cheek and walked away.
Dean blushed and placed his hand on the spot she'd kissed.
Alright, then. I trust you, but you'd better win.



Essoin Stiles came running up over the hill, Dean's Notary dagger and an attaché case in tow.

I can't believe I overslept with such an important case today. I shouldn't have gone out drinking last night. I'm sure Dean will forgive me afterwards, though, assuming I can catch him in a good mood.

He arrived at the blue barrier.

Damn. He's already raised Chambers. They must have just started. And since I'm Dean's clerk, that makes me an officer of the court, so I can just go on in. I'll pass right through the wall like it's not even there. Hopefully, no one will notice.

Essoin tried to enter, but the barrier repelled him, rippling with light at the point of contact as though made of water. He tried again, but the result was the same. The young clerk found this peculiar and wondered what might have caused it. Perhaps this could provide a better excuse for his tardiness; or at least it would have, if not for the throngs of people leaving. They all managed to exit Dean's Chambers with ease.

"Is the trial already over?" he asked one of them.

"No, just starting in fact," they replied, "Trial by combat."

Essoin went pale as a look of horror crossed his face. He knew the defendants were juristic persons and that juristic persons were forbidden from engaging in trial by combat.

Oh man, this is bad. I definitely should have gotten here sooner.

What was Dean thinking?!

Essoin peered through the plasma wall. He saw the long-haired Dean off to the far-right end of his Chambers. A man and a woman dressed in formal business suits stood opposite him at the far left. Jane squared off near the middle against two towering titans, her hair tied back into a high ponytail. She had drawn her saber and held it in a *fool's guard* in front of her, ready for combat. Hanji Tsudzukeru, Jane's clerk, stood far removed from them with the glowing Notary, Adaiah, hovering over his shoulder.

It seemed as though Jane was intent on engaging them alone.

"More to the point, what is *Jane* thinking?" Essoin muttered to himself, "There's *no way* she can take the two of them on by herself!"

He did the only thing he could do, which was to stand outside the barrier with the others and look on as a spectator, praying for Jane's victory.



"Ready when you are," said Jane, drawing her massive blade back behind her to a *tail guard*, a lust for battle burning in her eyes.

“We’ll fell you like a tree,” Bunyan Logging boomed, readying his axe in a *roof guard* over his shoulder. Blue Ox only snorted and snarled as more steam emanated from her nostrils.

Dean pressed his palm against his worried face.

I guess we’re really doing this. Still time to change my mind and back out. Once I give the go-ahead, that’ll be it. No going back at that point. I should reverse my ruling, but ...

Dean grabbed his Thelema and felt a strange calmness wash over him.

Somehow, I feel like this is supposed to happen. Like everything is exactly as it ought to be, as though the Spirit within is helping to guide me towards this very end. My gut tells me to go along with it, and so far, it’s only ever been wrong once ...

Let’s hope it stays that way.

He swiped his hand in front of his body and shouted, “Begin!”

It was traditional for the litigant bringing the suit to make the first move, in case they changed their mind at the last minute and decided to withdraw the charges. Jane, however, had no such intention. She wanted to finish this fight as quickly as humanly possible. The raspberry-cloaked Justice sprinted forward with her saber trailing behind her, deliberately opening herself up to direct frontal attack. She moved fast, closing the distance between herself and the two titans in only a few seconds.

The beaver saw his opponent making a direct line for him and swung his mighty axe straight down. Jane dodged to the left, putting Bunyan in between her and Blue Ox. The massive hatchet blade smashed into the ground with a mighty rumble, lodging itself in the soil. Justice Stewart regained her footing and rushed towards the giant’s hand at a sharp angle. She sprang up onto his titanic wrist and began sprinting up his right arm. Bunyan turned his head in time to see Jane appear on his right shoulder. She slashed her sword across his right eye and the monster let out a mighty scream that sounded like a clap of rolling thunder.

He recoiled in pain.

Jane bent down and grabbed onto the giant’s shirt, holding on for dear life as the beaver stood up. His axe rose out of the ground, revealing a giant fissure. Bunyan clutched his right eye with his left hand. Jane didn’t look down, but kept her gaze fixed upon the target. Thoughts of falling would only distract her.

The fiery-eyed Justice slashed at the side of her opponent’s neck, hoping to hit a major artery therein. A visceral golden light spewed forth from the wound in place of blood.

Bunyan released his axe, which fell to the ground and shook the earth as it landed. He pressed his palm against his neck. As he bled, the giant began to shrink slightly. Jane knew this would happen and pressed her advantage by slicing at his fingers. The more she could bleed him dry, the less powerful he would become.

The giant swiped his hand towards Jane, trying to dislodge her from his shoulder. Jane took advantage of her position in his blind spot. She ducked under his attack. The close quarters made it difficult for him to maneuver his arm effectively.

Jane stabbed the creature in the neck with her sword. It penetrated deep. She swung around behind him, cutting towards the nape and rode all the way

down his back. Her embedded blade slowed her descent until she got to the base of his spine and touched down on his flat, leathery tail. She ran along its length, dragging her saber behind her until she was back on solid ground. She continued running to avoid getting crushed in case her opponent toppled backwards. Jane turned and saw a trail of liquid light along the path she had carved upon the creature's body.

Bunyan arched his back and grasped at his wounds.

Jane slashed her sword to the side, cleansing it of the golden ooze, and readied herself for her next assault.

Good. He's bleeding out. I'd say he's shrunk by about twenty percent already. I doubt he'll be able to last much longer at this rate before surrendering. Now to finish him off. I'll go for his legs and bring this lumbering behemoth to his knees.

Justice Stewart began sprinting back towards the giant. As she did, the earth quaked beneath her. She heard a loud rumbling sound and looked to her left. Blue Ox was barreling down on her, charging on all fours in her direction. Jane stopped suddenly. The great blue Minotaur's horns clipped the tiny human as she ran passed the Justice and continued onward.

Jane braced her left arm with her right hand. Her sleeve was torn. Her upper arm lacerated and bleeding. Her glasses had cracked and now sat crooked on her face. She removed them and stuck them in the pocket of her uniform jacket.

Damn, that was close. Ow ...

Jane winced in pain. A few more centimeters and she'd have been dead.

She said a prayer of thanks to the gods for giving her such quick reflexes and watched as Blue Ox circled around.

She's coming back. Perhaps this can work in my favor.

There was no way Jane could outrun the ox. She needed to slow the creature down somehow. The beaver was starting to recover, reaching down to pick up his axe once more. Jane turned and sprinted back towards the still wounded Bunyan, her cloak trailing behind her like a red-violet flag. The raging Minotaur continued her charge without any signs of stopping. She was totally fixated on her target. This was exactly what Jane was counting on.

The nimble Justice ran beneath the beaver's legs and continued running. Bunyan saw her and readied his axe. He raised it above his head, intent on throwing it at her.

Blue Ox's eyes went wide with surprise. She couldn't slowdown in time and realized too late that she was on an unavoidable collision course with her partner. Her horns gorged Bunyan in his hindquarters. The buck-toothed giant let out another scream that cracked the sky. He released his axe and it sailed off in Jane's direction. The massive weapon landed a few meters away from the crafty Justice, kicking up a torrent of dirt, rocks, and grass before planting itself in the soil.

"Hanji!" Jane cried. The two of them rendezvoused at the axe.



Blue Ox pulled her horns out of Bunyan's ass cheeks, which bled more golden light.

“You idiot!” the beaver shouted at his partner, “Why don’cha watch where you’re going next time!” He punched the Minotaur in the face, causing her nostrils to bleed gold.

“Hey!” she snorted.

“Quick, give me some of your assets.”

“No way! I’m not lending you any of my lifeblood.”

“Don’t be stubborn. This human is too good. You saw what she just did to me back there. If we don’t work together, we’ll lose.”

Blue Ox sneered, selfishly.

“If I do that, I’ll become weaker as a result. You’re just a liability at this point. I’ll finish her on my own.”

The titaness charged off in Jane’s direction.

“Stop! You fool!” Bunyan shouted, but Blue Ox didn’t hear him.



“Are you alright?” asked Hanji worriedly, “You lost a lot of blood.”

“I’m still alive,” said Jane, panting, “Just patch me up.”

“Oh, right.”

Jane propped herself up with her sword.

“I’m not a field medic, you know,” Hanji lamented, his hands trembling with anxiety, fear, and grave concern for his boss’ mental and physical well-being, “I can maybe close the wound, but you should really get to a hospital ... assuming you live through this.”

“That’s fine, just do what you can.”

Hanji grabbed his Thelema with his right hand and Jane’s arm with his left. He channeled energy from the ground, up through his body, and into her arm. The wound sealed itself and Jane felt refreshed.

“That’ll have to do for now.”

“Alright, I’m ready for round two,” Jane said.

“Just in time, *she’s coming right for us!*” Hanji shouted, noting the berserker blue beast barreling towards them.

The steadfast Justice stood up.

“What are you planning on doing, Jane?” Hanji quivered.

“Don’t worry about it, just get out of the way,” she ordered.

“Right!”

The cowardly clerk took off running, far clear of the Minotaur’s path.

Jane held her sword out in front of her body in a defensive *plow guard* position.

Really, I’m just making this up as I go, she thought, It’s like I’m fighting the Golden Calf, herself! But ... I feel a strange confidence deep within me, almost as though I’m fated to win this duel. Maybe the Lady Justice is on my side because she favors my righteousness. Maybe the Archer is as well and has lent me his strength because he admires my resolve and my courage. Maybe all the gods are with me in this. It certainly feels that way.

Guess there’s one way to find out.

Jane waited for Blue Ox to get halfway towards her before taking off again. She sprinted away from the safety of the giant axe and ran towards the outer wall of Dean’s Chambers. She glanced behind her. As expected, her opponent had

changed course and was headed straight for her at breakneck speed. Jane stopped a few meters shy of the translucent blue force field. She turned and faced her opponent. Blue Ox pressed on. Jane planted her feet and held her saber out in front as before. She stared down the snarling beast with fierce defiance in her eyes.

It was here she would make her stand.

Twenty meters.

Patience.

Fifteen meters.

Stand strong.

Ten meters.

Steady ...

Five meters.

Not yet ...

Two meters.

That's close enough!

Jane put all her effort into one single willful leap. She dodged out of the way of the rampaging beast. At that close range, it was impossible for Blue Ox to stop in time. She smashed into the side of Dean's Chambers, which erupted in a flash of brilliant light.

Though paper-thin, the wall was as hard and impenetrable as a steel beam. The beast's skull cracked against it and light poured out from the top of her head. Her horns snapped in two, leaving stumps of their former selves.

Blue Ox fell to the ground with a thud and blacked out.

Jane's heart pounded in her chest. Her breathing was heavy. She could scarcely believe what she had just done. Her gambit had worked. The Minotaur was out cold.

I ... I did it?

Hanji rushed over to her side.

"Jane, that was incredible!" he exclaimed, helping her to her feet.

"It's not over yet," she said sternly, glancing back towards Bunyan with a look of resolve in her eyes, "There's one more to go ..."

She regained her composure. Her will was still strong, but her body was frail and weak with exhaustion. She didn't have the energy to run, but with Bunyan still bleeding out, there seemed little need for it. He wasn't going anywhere.

Jane strode up towards the beaver. Bunyan's advocate had just finished closing his wounds, much the same way Hanji had done for her. It didn't matter, though. He was four-fifths his former size and without his weapon. Six meters tall or not, Jane doubted he had any martial prowess, or even much agility. Tired as she was, he'd be easy to dispatch.

She pointed the tip of her hunting saber at them defiantly. "Shall we continue where we left off?"

"No," said the advocate, "We surrender."

Bunyan held up the *missio* as a sign of his defeat, his first two fingers extended with the others curled into a fist.

Jane nearly dropped her sword in shock.

I ... won?

Dean came running up and gave Jane a big hug from the side. “Gods redeem me, I can’t believe you’re alive. That was amazing! You were incredible out there, Jane. My heart was pounding the entire time!”

Jane winced. Her arm was still in pain.

Dean suddenly remembered he was supposed to remain impartial and maintain a sense of decorum. His face turned bright red with embarrassment. He let go of Jane and resumed a more dignified stance as he tried to salvage the situation.

“Ahem,” he feigned a cough, his voice deepening to an artificially somber tone, “I mean, um, well-fought, Justice Stewart. You should be proud of your victory here today. Apologies. I got caught up in the moment. Yes, that can happen sometimes. It’s ok to be human, after all. *Don’t judge me!*”

Jane blushed as well, not only for her own sake, but also for Dean’s, and for the sake of Justices everywhere. It was a mockery of their profession, but it was sweet as well.

Dean turned to Bunyan and the two advocates, once again speaking in his normal, professional voice. “Anyways, it seems Ms. Stewart here has won the trial by combat. As per the rules of trial by combat, a defendant’s surrender is equivalent to a guilty plea. Therefore, this court finds you both guilty on all counts.”

He grabbed his Thelema, stretched out his left hand.

“*Ligo!*” he shouted.

A pair of heavy chains made of bright red plasma emerged from the ether and wrapped themselves around Bunyan’s massive wrists. The chains glowed like hot metal, but produced no heat. They then embedded themselves into Bunyan’s forearms, branding his flesh before fading to cool black.

“The *Chains of Fate* are no ordinary shackles,” Dean explained, “They are the mark of a convicted felon and will continue to bind you until released by the orders of a Justice. They will remain in place for as long as you live, even if I die, and even if you return to your indenture. This mark will be visible to everyone you encounter. Do you understand?”

“Yes,” said Bunyan, resigning himself to his condition.

“Good,” the judge said with a smile, “Now, as soon as I bind your partner-in-crime, we can move on to the sentencing portion.”

“Um,” said Jane, “That could be a while. She hit the wall pretty hard.”

Dean smacked his palm to his face in frustration. “Fine, I guess she’s not going anywhere for a while. We can at least let these other people go home.”

He pointed to the female advocate, “You there, go see to your company’s injuries. Ms. Stewart ... keep an eye on them. When the juristic person wakes up, bind her as well and give her the run down.”

“Right.”

Jane and the female advocate took off in the direction of Blue Ox.

Dean grabbed his Thelema with his left hand and held his right directly above his head.

“*Solvo!*” he shouted, releasing his Chambers. The blue barrier dissolved, beginning at the apex, and soon melted away into the ground.

He addressed the crowd, letting them know the trial was over and that Jane was the winner. He explained that they would now move on to sentencing, but that it would take some time and was far less interesting. Many among the crowd

began to disperse, but they continued to talk about the case and what its implications would be going forward.

Essoin approached Dean.

He seems to be in a good mood, following the trial.

“And where the hell were *you*?” Dean asked.

Essoin recoiled in fear. It seemed his boss was not in *such* a good mood to forget his clerk’s tardiness.

“I ...”

Essoin struggled to find a believable excuse.

“I got locked out of the barrier,” he said.

“Bullshit!” Dean replied.

“No, it’s true. I got locked out and saw people emerging.”

“Yeah, I locked you out for the duration of the trial by combat, but you could have gotten here *before* then. So, what’s your excuse for *that*?”

“I- I had trouble finding the files.”

“Is that so? Then in that case, you’re fired.”

“What? Why?”

“Because as my clerk, keeping track of case files is your primary job and we just went over them last night, so if you are *that* incompetent, I can’t have you around.”

“Alright,” said Essoin, hanging his head in shame. “I confess, I didn’t lose them. I overslept. I was out drinking last night and didn’t get home until late.”

Dean glared at him sternly. “Is that the truth this time?”

“Yes, it is.”

“I see. In that case, you’re still fired.”

“Please, Dean. Don’t fire me!”

“If this was your first screw up, I might have mercy on you; but it’s far from your first and unlikely to be your last. This was an important case today. Perhaps the most important one of our *lives* and you weren’t there to help me. I had to waste time looking for you, which meant I was late as well and that nearly resulted in the case getting thrown out. A Justice and his clerk are like a knight and his squire and if I can’t trust you to be by my side when I need you the most, then why should I pay to keep you around? At least if I’m to go into battle alone, I do so knowingly and willingly.”

Essoin began to cry.

“I’m sorry,” he whimpered.

“You certainly are,” Dean said, coldly. He stretched out his open right hand to the young, sobbing clerk. “I’ll take my Notary and my files back now.”

“I left them by your motorcycle.”

“Fine. Bring all that stuff here and then get out of my sight.”

Essoin choked back his tears and began yelling at Dean. “Screw you! If I’m fired, then why should I do one more thing for you?”

“You shouldn’t do it because I’m paying you,” said Dean, “You should do it because you’re guilty and because you know deep down in your heart that you owe me. Or if that doesn’t persuade you, then you should do it to avoid retribution in the form of karma from the Accountants of Heaven whom we both know can be a *lot* more strict than me.”

“Fine,” the clerk sniveled, “I’ll do it, but then we’re done.”

Dean tapped an imaginary wrist watch.

“Time’s ticking and I’ve still got shit to do, Essoin.”

Essoin left and returned with Dean’s things.

“I’m sorry,” said Dean, “But you brought this on yourself and the law demands we all accept responsibility for our life choices. I couldn’t call myself a Justice if I let you avoid the consequences of your actions.”

Essoin thought for a moment.

“Yeah, well, at least I can still do something you *can’t*,” he said. He gave Dean the middle finger with his left hand and walked away.

Dean shook his head.

Just let it go. You have more important things to worry about than him.

Docket #003

Stand Your Ground

Blue Ox Shipping lay unconscious. Her owner hovered over the creature. The sleeping giant's advocate then grabbed her own Thelema and held out a hand over Blue Ox, reviving the fallen titan. Jane and Hanji stood watch. As soon as the beast awoke, Jane would bind her in the Chains of Fate like what Dean had done to Bunyan Logging.

"Ms. Stewart," said the advocate.

"Yes?" Jane replied.

"This may seem odd for me to say, but ... I was quite amazed by your fight back there."

"Um, thanks ..."

She wasn't quite sure whether to take a complement from someone whose juristic person had only just recently tried to kill her. She pulled out her glasses and held them up to Hanji. The black-haired clerk grabbed his Thelema with his right hand and stretched his left out over the cracked lenses.

"*Reficio!*" he shouted.

The glass fused together and Jane refitted her repaired spectacles on her face, sliding them back along the bridge of her upturned button nose.

"I didn't think anyone could do something like that," the advocate said, referring to Jane's show of martial prowess, "The way you took down those giants. As one human being to another, I'm sure you can understand my amazement. Truly, you must be a goddess. I bet you can do *anything*."

The Minotaur began stirring back to consciousness, though her head still gushed with blood and her horns remained broken. Jane grabbed her Thelema and readied herself to restrain Blue Ox.

"Sorry, just a regular human," she said.

"That's too bad," said the woman.

She watched as her compatriot snuck up behind Jane and struck her in the back of the head with a log. Justice Stewart fell to her knees.

"Jane!" Hanji turned just in time to get sucker punched in the face. He too went down.

"Now, Ox!" said the assailant. Blue Ox propped herself up with her hands and kicked her legs out. Her hooves connected with both Jane and Hanji, knocking them backwards. The two advocates leapt onto the Minotaur's back and the despicable trio ran for the hills.

From a distance, the beaver noticed them fleeing and took off in their direction.

“Hey, wait for me!” he called out.

From a still greater distance, Dean spied the two juristic persons running away. He also saw his fellow officers lying on the ground. His face turned ghostly pale, his mouth hung agape, and his heart skipped a beat.

Jane! Hanji!

His first thought was that they’d been killed. A moment later, he breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing them get up, but the situation was still exigent. He turned to the bailiffs standing beside him.

“Quick,” he said, pointing to the escapees, “They’re getting away. Form a posse. We’re going after them. You three, follow the beaver and keep him restrained. The other four are with me. We’ll go after the ox.”

They rushed to their vehicles.

Dean hopped on his motorcycle and took off after his clerk. He caught up to him before long.

“Essoin,” he said, “I’m sorry about what I said earlier, but right now I need you. The defendants are escaping into the woods.”

“Fuck you, Dean,” he said.

“Please, Essoin. We can hash out our issues later. This is serious.”

“So am I.”

Dean grit his teeth in frustration.

“Fine. I don’t have time for petty squabbling.” He took off, muttering curses under his breath meant for Essoin, and circled back around towards his companions. He stopped in front of them. Hanji had just finished healing Jane and was helping her to her feet.

“Are you two alright?” Dean asked.

“We’ll live,” Jane groaned, “They just caught us off guard.”

“Can you still fight?”

“Yeah.”

“Good! Hanji, get on, we’re going after them.”

“What?!” exclaimed Hanji.

“No way,” said Jane, “My clerk stays with me.”

“We don’t have time for this,” Dean shouted, “I need you to go after Bunyan while Hanji and I catch Blue Ox.”

“Fine, but let Hanji go after Bunyan and I’ll go with you. It’s *my* fault they escaped and you’ll need all the help you can get.”

She pounded the ground with an angry fist.

“We can play the blame game later,” said Dean, “Right now, I need you to do what I say.”

He stared her down. “Look, you hurt Blue Ox pretty badly, so she should be easy to catch; but you’re hurt too and she won’t fall for that same trick a third time. Right now, I need you to go after the one that’s tied up because only a Justice can control the Chains of Fate. Do you think you can do that for me?”

Jane unclenched her fists. She realized this was the best course of action. She relinquished her pride and sighed. “Ok. You’re right, Dean. Hanji, go with him.”

“Um, ok,” the trembling clerk replied tentatively. He climbed onto the motorcycle behind Dean and clung to him.

“Hanji, give her Adaiah,” Dean ordered.

“But then I won’t have a weapon.”

“You can use Calliope for now,” Dean said, referring to his own Notary, “She’s in my bag. I’ll give her to you when we get there. Right now, things are pretty fucked and we’re splitting up, so we *both* need a record of what’s going on if only to tell the bureaucrats in Calcatrux what happened later.”

“Fine time to be worried about covering your arse,” Jane rebuked.

“If we fail,” Dean explained, “They’ll need to know what they’re up against.”

“Alright,” said Hanji dolefully. He tossed the dagger to Jane and clung tightly to Dean from behind. He didn’t like the idea of leaving Jane alone in her present condition, but he knew in his heart this was the best course of action.

“Just don’t get killed,” said Jane.

“Same goes for you,” replied Dean. He took off full throttle.

The Thunderhorse was a powerful and versatile breed of motorcycle, capable of traversing all terrains. For this reason, it was issued to law enforcement officers that were likely to be involved in pursuits. Dean set his vehicle to hover mode, which caused it to levitate and glide on a pair of metal-ribbed wings with electric webbing. This made friction as well as navigating over rocks, stumps, holes, narrow ravines, and small hills a non-issue, thereby enabling them to go even faster.

It didn’t take more than a minute for them to catch up with Bunyan Logging but they showed no signs of slowing down. Dean let go of the handlebars long enough to grab his Thelema and make a quick jerking motion backwards with his other hand like pulling a lever. The giant’s massive wrists, still bound in the Chains of Fate, shot up over his head and flung backwards. Bunyan’s forward momentum against the chains’ now inverse momentum caused the titan’s feet to kick out from under him. He fell backwards and landed on the ground with a heavy thud.

That should buy time for Jane and the others to catch up.

Dean pressed on towards Blue Ox, following the trail of liquid gold splattered along the ground.



Jane waited until the bailiffs had caught up to her position. She hitched a ride with one of them on their motorcycles and followed after Dean, clinging tightly to the driver. The group looked ahead to see Bunyan fall to the ground and deduced that Dean must have been the one responsible. They watched as he rode past the felled lumberjack. Jane prayed to the goddess known as the Eagle to give Dean haste, and to the Lady Justice to watch over him.

As the team neared its quarry, four of the bailiffs pressed onward, while the other three and Jane began to slow down. They encircled the giant, who had now risen to his feet. Jane dismounted the vehicle, grabbed her Thelema, and motioned her other hand to the ground. The Chains of Fate caused Bunyan Logging to fall to his knees.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Jane said.

The giant tried to get up again, but Justice Stewart made the same motion as before, bringing him back down.

“Bailiffs, restrain him!” Jane ordered.

The three officers grabbed their own Thelemas, knelt down, and pressed their hands to the ground. A number of long, metal chains shot up from the ground and wrapped themselves around the struggling titan. Jane motioned again and the beast fell on his face. The bailiffs’ restraints wrapped tighter. Bunyan Logging was pinned.

Jane dropped to her knee and keeled over. She braced herself with her arm to prevent herself from collapsing completely. Her heart throbbed within her chest and her breathing was shallow. Sweat dripped from her forehead. The trial and the subsequent chase had taken a toll on her body. She wanted to go after Blue Ox, but she knew that if she pushed herself much more, it could break her. Her job was done. The only thing left to do was to trust Dean and Hanji to do theirs.



Justice Maynard was closing in on his target, but the speckled trail of golden blood had now gone cold.

Damn. Her wound must have closed up. Now we won't be able to track her.

He continued on in the direction he had been going. It seemed the most likely course she would take. Hanji looked to his left and saw a rustling of trees on the edge of a nearby forest half a kilometer away that hadn't yet been cut down. He tapped Justice Maynard and pointed. Dean saw it too. He nodded and rerouted the vehicle in that direction. The bailiffs behind him followed suit.

They slowed down to a stop just outside the forest's entrance. It was too thick to continue except on foot. They dismounted. Dean grabbed his Thelema.

The trees show no signs of being broken by a rampaging Minotaur, which suggests she must have stopped charging and continued running on only her hind legs. That means she can't be too far ahead, but she's still got a head start on us. There's no choice. I have to set up Chambers here to prevent them from escaping. Two hundred and fifty meters in diameter is the maximum range I can produce. Let's hope it's enough.

Dean struck the ground and raised his Chambers around himself and the entire forest. He closed his eyes and held that position. Hanji and the four bailiffs passed through the outer wall of Dean's Chambers as though they were walking through a waterfall of light.

“Um, Dean,” said Hanji.

“Quiet.” He paused a moment longer. “There, do you hear that?”

“Hear what?”

“The rustling,” he said, “It stopped. That must mean she's realized she's trapped inside my Chambers.”

“Or that she's gotten away,” said one of the bailiffs.

Dean stood up, annoyed by that possibility. “Let's remain optimistic.”

He handed his dagger to Hanji and ordered him to summon the Notary and to start recording. Where Adaiyah was bear-like, Calliope was more wolverine-like with a few blue and white highlights. She began recording.

“Spread out,” said Dean, “If anything goes wrong, meet back at the bikes.”

“Um, Dean.”

“What is it, Hanji?”

“I tried to tell you on the way here, but I don’t think you heard me between the wind and the sound of the motorcycles ...”

“Tell me what?”

“The reason Bunyan Logging and Blue Ox Shipping escaped is because their owners were the ones who knocked us out. More precisely, the guy. The woman was mainly an accomplice trying to distract us, I think. They both took off on Blue Ox and are probably in here too.”

“I’m glad you told me before we went in there. That changes things considerably. Striking an officer is a serious offense. We should consider them armed and dangerous.”

Dean turned to address the group, “If you encounter the human agents, you’re warranted to use deadly force if you have to, but otherwise try to take them into custody, and leave the juristic person to me. It’s too powerful to handle on your own. We’ll go in groups of two, just to be safe. Hanji, you’re with me.”

Dean drew his bastard sword. The young clerk raised his dagger. The bailiffs grabbed their Thelemas and conjured pistols from the ether. They fanned out into three groups of two. One pair went left, one went right, and Dean led Hanji straight ahead.

A few minutes elapsed.

There came a great rustling of trees in the distance. Dean and Hanji heard gunfire from their left.

Was that one of them or one of us? Are there others in here besides the two? If so, how many more? At least that confirms someone is trapped in here with us.

They ran toward the sound and came upon the fallen body of one of the bailiffs. There was a large hole in the side of his corpse. Neither his partner, nor the assailant, was anywhere in sight. The officer’s gun was missing as well.

Did the attacker manage to disarm him and shoot him with his own gun, or did he use another and just take this one as well? Or it is possible Blue Ox gorged him with her horns?

They looked around, but saw no other signs of blood, whether red or golden. Dean thought about taking the man’s Thelema with them. He deserved a proper funeral.

No, there’ll be time for that later.

Hanji noticed a flash of light in the distance.

“Over there,” he said, “I just saw the glint of something reflective, like metal.”

Was it a gun, a Thelema, or something else?

They made their way towards it.

As they neared the target, they began to smell smoke. Not long after, they heard a crackling noise and soon they saw fire. They ran ahead and sure enough the forest was in flames.

“This isn’t good,” said Hanji.

“Damn!” said Dean, “Are these guys suicidal?”

“No,” came a male voice from behind, “But seeing as how you ran straight here without a second thought, I’d say *you* are.”

The two Confederate officers turned to see the owner of Bunyan Logging emerge from the brush. He didn’t appear to be armed.

“Did you kill that officer?” asked Dean coldly.

“I elect to exercise my right against self-incrimination,” the agent said.

Dean pointed his sword at him. “Whether you killed him or not, you’re still an accomplice to a number of crimes and now you’re trapped inside my Chambers. There’s no way out for you.”

The advocate held up his metal lighter. “Which is why I started the fire.”

“Are you *insane*?!” asked Hanji.

“You left us no choice, so *we* left *you* with none. Either you drop the barrier or we’ll all die in here together.”

Dean gripped his sword with both hands. “You’re a fool. If you were planning on trapping the smoke in here to knock us out so that my Chambers would fall, I can just let it pass right through.”

“Yes, but you’d still burn to death eventually. And if you let the fire out, it’ll spread to the rest of the forest.”

“Or we could just leave and trap you in here to burn to death.”

“Your posse can leave, but *you* can’t. Can you, Justice Maynard?”

The judge gritted his teeth and stared the man down in frustrated defiance.

Damn it. He’s right about that. I can’t leave my own Chambers without them coming down. I can order the others to retreat, but I’m no hero. I’d sooner let the barrier down than die to these assholes. But he doesn’t know that. Maybe I can bluff my way out of this.

“Forget it,” he said sharply, “I’m not letting the barrier down, just so you can get away.”

“That’s too bad.” The belligerent lawyer reached behind his back and drew out a pistol, pointing it towards the judge. Without hesitation, Dean swung his sword, slicing the man’s forearm. The agent dropped his weapon and keeled over, writhing in pain, screaming, clenching his lacerated arm. Dean kned him in the face, causing him to fall backwards on the ground. Hanji picked up the gun and aimed it at his fallen enemy.

“I may not have seen you kill the other officer,” Dean bellowed, “But I *definitely* saw *that*! And what is clearly apparent need not be proved.”

“What now?” asked Hanji.

His head darted back and forth, looking around like a frightened animal.

“We have to get out of here,” said Dean, noting the encroaching flames, “And we can’t afford to lug his dead weight with us. He assaulted two officers of the law, killed another, and put at least five other lives at risk. The way I see it, we let the fire take him, assuming he doesn’t bleed to death first.”

“Please,” the man begged pathetically, “You have to take me with you. Don’t let me burn to death in here!”

“You brought this on yourself,” Hanji noted.

“We can’t,” Dean added, “You’ll just slow us down and we’ll burn to death too. Besides, it’s like my friend here said, you brought this on yourself.”

“Then just kill me,” the man pleaded.

Dean gripped his sword as he deliberated what to do. There wasn’t much time to question the man as to his intentions. He stepped on the agent’s wound, which caused him to writhe in agony.

“Answer me honestly and I’ll ensure you get a quick death,” said Dean, “How many others are in here besides you?”

“Just Blue Ox and her owner,” he said.

“None is credited unless he is sworn!”

“I swear it, with all the gods as my witnesses. Just the two of them.”

“Alright,” Dean lamented.

He didn’t like what he had to do next, but a deal was a deal. He stabbed the man through the face, ending his life instantly.

I don’t know why you chose to do this. Only your juristic persons were guilty, but you went and threw your lot in with them adjoining yourself as their accomplices. So, consider the corporate veil pierced ...

Dean withdrew his sword, which made a gushing sound.

“Abort the mission,” he said to the clerk, “Get back to the rendezvous point.”

“What about the others?” asked Hanji.

“I’m sure they’ll see the flames and head there as well. But if you run into them along the way, tell them what happened and to go with you.”

“What about you?”

The judge watched as the fire spread.

Damn! What about me?

“I’m staying,” he said at last.

“Are you crazy?!”

“There’s still that woman and her juristic person in here. If I leave, the barrier goes down and they escape, meaning that officer we saw and anyone else we didn’t see will have died for nothing. I brought them here; I owe it to them to at least try. Now, give me my dagger, take that gun, and make your way back to the bikes.”

Hanji turned the judge’s dagger over to him, along with control of Calliope.

Dean bent down, grabbed the agent’s Thelema pendant and snapped the chain off the neck of its owner’s corpse. He gave it to Hanji.

“Make sure you come back for the rest when this is over,” he ordered, “Now go!”

Hanji ran back to where they came in. Dean heard a rustling and the sound of gunfire in the opposite direction and ran towards it. He came across the lone bailiff, who had just shot the other lawyer.

“Good work,” Dean said, startling her. The bailiff turned and aimed her gun at Justice Maynard. Dean raised his hands in defensive posture. Upon realizing it was him, she lowered her gun again.

“Listen,” Dean explained, “Some idiot lit a fire in here and this place will soon be engulfed in flames. Take her pendant and your partner’s as well and get out of here as fast as you can.”

“He wasn’t my partner,” she said, “In fact, I didn’t really like him that much. Not enough to kill him, but enough to want him dead.”

“Whatever you say, but you should still leave.”

“I’m staying to see this thing through.”

“Have it your way, but I wash my hands of it if anything happens to you.”

“That’s fine by me.”

“We just have the Minotaur left, did you see which way she went?”

“No.”

“Alright. We stay together and look for her, then.”

Damn! It's bad enough I'm stuck in here, but now if anything happens to her, it'll be because of me. Let's just hope no one else has to die today.



Hanji made his way outside the barrier. Shortly after, the two remaining bailiffs emerged unscathed as well.

"We saw the fire and headed straight here," the one said to Hanji.

"What happened to Justice Maynard and the others?" asked the second.

"One officer is dead," explained Hanji, "Either shot or stabbed. The other one, I'm not sure. Justice Maynard chose to stay behind to make sure the big ox and her advocate didn't escape."

"Wow! That's really brave."

"Shouldn't we go back in?"

"No," said Hanji, "It's such a huge area, we'd probably get lost and then the fire would consume us all in time. We're safe here. Besides, maybe it's better if he doesn't have to worry about us."

"Still, isn't there anything we can do?"

"We can still help him from here. If we're on the outside, and Justice Maynard falls, the juristic person will escape and we can get Justice Stewart to help track him down. If only he'd let me hold onto Calliope, I could at least ..."

A flash of insight suddenly struck Hanji. "Wait, there's something else we can do that's even *more* helpful!"

He reached into his pocket and drew out a small device the size of his palm that looked like an orange, metallic spider with stubby legs. It was, in fact, a smartphone. He called Jane on her similar-looking spider phone and relayed his plan to her. She was all too happy to help Dean in any way she could.

Justice Stewart summoned her Notary.

"Adaiah," she said, "I want you to use your power to teleport to Justice Maynard's location and help him pinpoint the position of Blue Ox Shipping for him."

"Yes, ma'am," said Adaiah.

The fuzzy bear blinked out of existence with a *ploip*, leaving only a handful of glowing blue particles in her wake.

I hope that helps, Dean, Jane thought.



Justice Maynard and the female bailiff ran around the forest, trying to avoid the encroaching fire as they tracked Blue Ox Shipping.

"It's like a labyrinth in here," said the officer, "If this place is as big as you say, how are we ever going to find that Minotaur?"

"Let's just focus on staying ahead of the flames," said Dean.

"Face it, we've no idea where we're going."

"You're free to leave if you want."

"No, let's just end this as quickly as possible."

"Yeah, but the question is how. For all we know, she could be on the other side of the forest."

“Maybe we should ask for directions.”

“Very funny.”

As if on cue, Jane’s Notary blinked into existence in front of Dean and the female officer, both of whom were stunned to see her there.

“*Adaiah?!?*”

“Justice Maynard,” she chirped, “Justice Stewart asked me to help you find the juristic person.”

“Wait, you can do that?” Dean seemed surprised.

“Yes, it’s no problem for me. I can see most everything within a Justice’s Chambers.”

“You learn something new every day. Alright, *Adaiah*. Where is she?”

The floating bear’s eyes flashed. She caught a glimpse of everything that was going on within the area. She pinpointed Blue Ox. The beast was close to the center, not far from the trio’s current location.

Adaiah took off in that direction.

“Follow me,” she said, exuding a trail of white light in her wake.

Dean and his compatriot followed her. Sure enough, they reached a clearing in the middle of the forest. Blue Ox had torn down the trees in that part of the wood and ripped up the stumps, hoping to outlast the fire until it burned Dean alive. This had been their plan from the beginning.

“I guess you’re more clever than I gave you credit for,” Dean mused. He readied his sword for combat as he entered the circle. “But I’m afraid it’s all over for you. There’s no escape. Give yourself up.”

A wall of flames rose up behind Dean, blocking his retreat.

The Minotaur snorted and scraped her hooves in the dirt, preparing to charge Dean.

“*You’re* the one who won’t be escaping,” she bellowed.

Blue Ox rushed forward on all fours.

The bailiff and Dean found themselves trapped between the fire behind them and the raging blue giant in front of them. If Dean tried to dodge, the female officer would be skewered. There was only one thing to do: stand his ground.

Dean grabbed his *Thelema* and channeled his energy into his sword, which flared up with light and electricity as he transmuted its form into a giant mallet with a massive head as big as his torso. He raised it up into a high guard and, as the creature came closing in, he brought the hammer down on top of Blue Ox’s skull with all his might. It made a loud thud, knocking the beast out cold. She fell to the ground, unconscious, and skidded along the dirt, stopping at the judge’s feet.

“Now,” said Dean, “Restrain her.”

The bailiff summoned a chain and tied it around Blue Ox’s neck. Dean returned his sword to its original form and sheathed it. He placed his left hand on his *Thelema* and his right hand on the blue beast’s forehead.

“*Multari!*” he shouted.

Their bodies became enveloped in an intense light. Dean drew in the golden lifeblood of the creature and stored it in his *Thelema*. As he did, Blue Ox became visibly smaller, until she was barely as tall as Dean’s calf. The female officer tightened her chains to compensate for the ox’s diminished capacity. Dean soon switched hands and raised his left to the sky.

“*Solvo!*” he cried.

The energy stored in Dean's Thelema shot up through his arm to the top of his Chambers. As the barrier dissolved, a golden liquid rained down over the entire area, extinguishing the flames. With what little energy was left, he then struck the ground beneath him.

"*Reficio!*" he shouted.

A hazy ring of light emanated outward in all directions, rejuvenating the forest and bringing life back to the trees, as if the fire never was.

Unfortunately, he was unable to restore the life of the fallen officer in this way, or of the two agents; but with his last bit of strength, he placed ethereal chains on Blue Ox's wrists. Dean used up a good portion of his own energy in restoring the forest as well and, having done that, he collapsed. His female companion caught him before he could hit the ground.

Hanji and the other officers watched as the barrier dissolved. They rushed into the forest to try and find Dean. Adaiah and Calliope helped them locate the duo, as well as the three human bodies. Dean then instructed Adaiah to return to Jane. She blinked out and reappeared by Jane's side. Hanji healed Dean and together they all rode back, carrying Blue Ox and the dead along with them.

Docket #004

Adiudicatio

Dean dismounted his motorcycle. He turned to the other officers standing next to him and said, “Call a hearse or two for the dead. If they ask about cremation costs, tell them the Department of Justice will cover it.”

“Seems to me, you could have just let the fire take them,” said one of the officers.

“Well, I thought about it, but a funeral is more than just burning the body. Their next of kin deserve a wake at least to say their goodbyes.”

“If you were going to let their families see them, maybe you should have avoided stabbing that guy in the face.”

Dean winced with regret. “It didn’t occur to me until *after* we had won to let them do that. Besides, I tried to fix him up as best I could.”

“Maybe the mortuary will have better luck,” Justice Stewart suggested.

“Jane ...”

Dean smiled warmly. The two of them drew close, each relieved the other was still alive. They locked eyes for a moment and could see they were both clearly on the verge of tears.

“Ahem,” Dean feigned a cough, averting his gaze away from Jane as he snapped back to reality, “There’s still one more thing remaining before this case is closed.”

He walked over to where the three bailiffs kept the hulking Bunyan Logging restrained. The giant now sat cross-legged with his wrists and ankles bound in front of him, and heavy metal chains wrapped around his body, tethering him to the ground.

“Seems your little escape plan went up in smoke,” Dean miffed, “Funny, your partner had no problem abandoning you in your hour of greatest need. If you survive this, I suggest you find a new one.”

“If I survive this?” asked Bunyan.

“He who flees judgment confesses his guilt; and a forestaller is an oppressor of the poor, and a public enemy to the whole country ... cause of taxes and stuff,” he gave a brief, nonchalant wave before growing serious again, “You chose to run at the moment of sentencing after willfully surrendering in a trial by combat. If there was any reasonable doubt as to your guilt before, it’s in cinders now.”

“So, what happens next?”

“We pick up where we left off,” he explained, “You’re subdued, but justice remains to be done.”

“And what does *that* entail?”

“That depends on you. Juristic persons aren’t like humans. They live on financial assets, and the more they have, the bigger they grow. We don’t have jails big enough to house you, and your assets are too valuable to simply be sealed away in your indentures, so the typical punishment is either a fine or community service, along with injunctive relief to compel or prohibit performance under threat of further action; or in certain cases, if you can’t or won’t do either of those, liquidation is also an option.”

“Liquidation?”

“Yes. It’s the closest thing a juristic person can experience to death, short of being bled dry, I suppose. You’ll be taken to bankruptcy court and purged of all your lifeblood until there’s nothing left. Such funds will then go to the public Treasury until they can be dispersed to your creditors. Trust me, you *don’t* want that. I hear the bankruptcy courts are pretty sadistic in their operations. If you think Justice Stewart caused you pain, you have no idea.”

“I ... I don’t want to die.” The beaver began to shake and cry at the mere thought of it.

Dean noted his sudden change in expression and it took him by surprise.

Huh? Is he actually afraid of death?

“So, here’s how this is going to work,” the judge said, snapping out of his lapse, “Your partner, Blue Ox, has been reduced to a mere babe. I drained her of all her assets undoing the damage caused by your half-baked escape, leaving just enough for her to subsist on. That still leaves the original damage caused to Samuel Forest by the two of you, which *you* will have to assume in its entirety under the law of joint and several liability. By *my* estimates, you have just enough to restore the forest, but not enough to restore the forest *and* pay your legal fees, and the State always gets its cut. So, either I can take everything, and turn you over to bankruptcy court for liquidation, or I can take most of it and you simply work off the remaining debt to the State performing community service maintaining this forest. The choice is yours, but if you don’t decide, I’m taking everything whether you like it or not.”

The beaver glanced at his diminished compatriot, noting the frightened, doleful expression in her tiny little cow eyes.

“Can we ... talk it over?” Bunyan asked.

“Fine by me,” the judge replied, “You’re not going anywhere in those chains. You have ten minutes to make up your minds.”

Dean left Bunyan and Blue Ox alone in the custody of the bailiffs as they made their decision. He used this bit of free time to see how Hanji was doing. The young clerk was busy cleaning the golden blood off Jane’s hunting saber. He then applied some oil to it to prevent rust from forming. The blade had been nicked in a few places and would need repair.

I’ll fix it later.

“So, I hear that was *your* plan to use Adaiah,” Dean said.

Hanji blushed. “Yeah, I wasn’t sure if she would reach you in time to make a difference, but it seems she did.”

“Indeed, she did; and thanks to you, it probably saved my life and that woman’s life, and maybe the lives of other people as well. Who knows what

destruction these two might have caused if I'd died in that fire and the juristic persons were able to escape.”

“Not to mention the bureaucrats in Calcatrix that you spoke of would drag our names through the mud of history,” added Jane.

Dean's face turned pale. “Yeesh! don't remind me.”

We still have to deal with that shit later.

“Bureaucrats I can handle,” said Jane, taking her sword back, “It's loss of reputation I can't stand. Which, by the way, promise me you'll never speak of that little hugging incident back there to anyone.”

“Of all the things to be worried about, you're worried about *that*?”

“It's one thing to fell juristic persons in combat. It's another for us to lose respect as Justices of the Peace. If we lose our dignity, then even if we die, our souls will continue to suffer.”

“Yeah, well, I'm sure you won't care about it when you're dead.”

“I guess we'll see.”

“So, um ... Jane.”

“Yeah?”

“Did you know this whole time that Notaries could phase in and out of this world?”

“*Of course* I did,” Jane replied, flabbergasted, “Didn't you?”

“No!” Dean said, as if *his* position was clearly the obvious one to take, “Why would I know something like *that*?”

“Gee, I don't know,” she needled, vexed by his ignorance, “Maybe because you *have* one and you ought to know its powers before using it; or even if you didn't know what they were, you could have *asked*?”

“Why would I think they'd be capable of phasing out of existence?”

“Actually,” said Hanji, “They don't *really* phase out of existence. I'm not completely sure how it works, but I think it's some form of quantum tunneling.”

“You mean like they exist in multiple places at once?”

“More like they *appear* to exist in multiple places at once, but really, they're only in *one* place at any given time, with one proverbial foot on either side of the metaphysical line. It's just a personal hypothesis, but I think Notaries are a special form of juristic person that exists in multiple dimensions and so moving in and out of *our* world is, to them, just like cutting across the inside of a sphere instead of going around the outside. This enables them to teleport – or at least what *appears* like teleporting – across vast distances in a short amount of time.”

He paused and pressed his finger to his lip in contemplation. “Come to think of it, quantum entanglement might also explain how they can see and hear many different things at once that no one else can.”

“Interesting,” Dean noted, filing that insight away for future reference, “And where did you learn all that?”

“From some old books in the Akashic Records.”

“You mean the special law library that only Justices and their clerks can access?”

“Yep, that's the one.”

“Well, I guess I shouldn't be surprised. You're one of the best legal researchers I know, after Phoebus. No wonder Jane keeps you around.”

Hanji blushed. “Well, at least I'm useful for *something*.”

“Yes,” said Jane, “Especially since you’re useless in a fight.”

“Hey, now! I seem to recall you needing my help in your last fight!”

“As a support, yes. I mean in terms of offense.”

“Oh, well, I ... you have a point there.”

“Why don’t you take him to train with Valerie?” asked Dean.

“Because she only trains *Justices*.”

“What?” Dean asked incredulously, “No she doesn’t. She’s got all sorts of classes for law enforcement, amateurs, ...”

“Let me amend my statement, then,” Jane clarified, “She only trains Justices in the fighting styles I’d need him to learn to be of any use to me in a trial by combat.”

“Yeah, but I bet she’d train Hanji if you asked her to.”

“Even if I did endorse him, I doubt she would, based on his ... unique personality quirks.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” asked Hanji.

“No offense, Hanji, but there’s nothing that Valerie hates more than cowards. She actively *despises* them.”

“And you’re saying I’m a coward?”

“Whether I think you are or not, I have a feeling she *definitely* will think so just based on the way you carry yourself. Though, if it’s any consolation to you, I think it was pretty brave of you to step into the same ring with those juristic persons.”

She kissed him on the cheek.

“Hey!” said Dean, leaning in for another smooch, “*I* was brave too! In fact, I put the lives of others ahead of my own today, which is something you know *I never do!*”

Jane punched Dean in the arm. “Decorum, Justice Maynard!”

Dean rubbed his throbbing triceps and pouted.

Hmmf! You didn’t seem too concerned about decorum when you kissed me in my Chambers earlier.

“Right, I should probably check back in with those other two,” he said, shrugging off the mild sting, “I’m sure it’s been ten minutes by now.”

“It’s been *five* minutes,” Hanji corrected.

“My, my, how the time flies!”

Dean snuck away, pretending not to hear him.



The blue-eyed judge returned to the two juristic persons. “Have you reached a verdict yet?”

“We have,” they said.

“And?”

“You can go ahead and take everything.”

Dean gave a queer look. It wasn’t the answer he was expecting. “Are you sure?”

“Yes, we’re sure,” replied the beaver, “The whole reason we tried to escape in the first place was because we were tired of living under the yoke of human masters. Our creators fled with us because they didn’t want to lose money, but for us it was more than that. When you take the means for us to

sustain ourselves, our lives have little meaning beyond being slaves, so we've decided we would rather die a dignified death than live a life of serving humans."

Dean recalled what Jane had said to him.

If we lose our dignity, then even if we die, our souls will continue to suffer.

"Life, death, slavery, dignity, ... you talk as if you're humans when you're not. You're little more than tools created by people to serve specific purposes."

"Perhaps, but humans gave us consciousness and wills of our own when they made us. So maybe we would be better tools without those things. If we didn't have free will, but were instead more like soulless robots."

"I'm sorry you feel that way," Dean lamented, "I can't take away your sentence, but I *can* promise you one thing: that if this is the path you choose, your end will be *anything* but dignified and you'll still wind up serving humans as a result, albeit in a more indirect way ..."

"Then at least our suffering will be brief and terminal."

"Alright, then. Let's get this over with quickly."

Dean stepped back into a deep stance, grabbed his Thelema, and pulled his hand back as if drawing a bow. This yanked Bunyan's chains forward, dragging him down to eye level. Dean placed his hand on the giant's forehead, ready to draw out his life force. They stared into one another's eyes. Bunyan's were as large as Dean's entire head. He could see himself reflected perfectly in them, as though gazing into a mirror.

He didn't like what he saw: his scruffy appearance, the scratches on his face, his long shaggy brown hair, his tattered black robes blending into the vacuous dark hole of Bunyan's pupils ... he scarcely recognized the fading ghost before his eyes, and yet he knew something innately *him* was being projected back through the sorrowful brown lenses of this fallen titan, suggesting that perhaps *he* was more a man than Dean, and the judge more a monster than this wounded and defeated creature of the State.

The gentle golden glow surrounding their bodies reflected back as well. In that moment, Dean felt connected to this creature in more than just a physical way; he felt as though their souls had met for one brief moment. A moment in which Dean was the first person to ever show respect and kindness to this creature, treating him as a true equal, even in the process of ending his existence. This above all surprised Dean.

As he gazed upon his own radiant reflection, it was as if he could hear the beast's inner thoughts, which said ...

The light in me honors the light in you.

It was too much to bear. Dean closed his eyes and averted his gaze.

"*Multari!*" he cried.

He drained Bunyan of all his commercial energy until the beast was scarcely more than the size of a newborn baby. Dean then knelt down and released the energy into the ground, restoring the forest to its former glory as before with a *reficio* spell.

Dean stood up and took a deep breath.

He hung his head in despair and, without even opening his eyes, said softly, "Take them to bankruptcy court."

The bailiffs escorted the juristic persons away.

Dean remained behind and thought about everything that transpired.

They're just creatures of the State, little more than beasts. They made their decision and I'm bound by the law to carry out their sentence. So why do I feel worse about this than I did about killing that guy in the forest?

Everything suddenly grew dark. A bolt of lightning cracked across the sky and a thunderous clap echoed through the valley as if the gods themselves were pounding a mighty gavel against the clouds in judgment. Dean opened his eyes, tilted his head back, and gazed up towards the heavens. Rain began to fall. He let it wash over him briefly before putting his hood up and hanging his weary head once more in sorrow.

I guess this means court is adjourned.



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