

## Festina Lente

(Season four of London's Night Stalkers)

### Chapter 24 – The Myrmidons

**“The supernatural creature who had been and still was, at least partly Jack, stepped into the real world. It was a cold crisp day in Pitmedden in the Parish of Udny, though he didn't feel the cold.”**

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Niña had no real idea about the changes in physical laws in the realm of dreams. She was doing it by trial and error, flying by the seat of her pants, as aviators called it. In Florence she'd had no ability to move heavy object by some form a telekinesis, but she did in Jack's world. She could run fast too, faster than she'd ever dreamed of moving. Not exactly leaping tall buildings with a single bound, but she was sure she'd beat a thoroughbred racehorse from a standing start.

She was there quickly, the part of the forest that was burning. For now it was just a small fire, but the flames were spreading. Karkengara still had Q'uq'umatz by the throat, but he was losing the fight. The dragon deity had three or four bleeding wounds, for every one he'd managed to inflict on the great feathered serpent.

“Some of the forest will burn, but it will recover.” Said Jack. “The forest always recovers, always.”

Niña hadn't seen Jack arrive, he could move unseen and unheard. Although he refused to take part in the battle, he had provided them with a place were in theory; they could defeat the Ancient God. “They're both deities, the serpent and the dragon Karkengara.” Said Niña. “Why aren't they healing themselves ?”

“They have some powers here, though they will both be surprised at how few.” Said Jack. “This is my realm, not theirs. Just by altering the flow of time, I can.....You will see, the myrmidons are arriving.” Probably just in time to save Karkengara, though only just ahead of the spreading inferno. The dragon's immortal army, his myrmidons, came out of the forest. Not just a few, thousands of them poured out of the trees, perhaps tens of thousands. Laura had said they were the remnants of an army Karkengara had once commanded. If the fierce looking horde were the remnants, the original army must have been truly impressive.

“Can you slow down the fire ?” Asked Niña. “Otherwise it will destroy friend and foe.”

“What I could do, has been done.” Said Jack. “The myrmidons will do more damage than the serpent believes, it is their destiny. Then Laura.....Her fate is still unclear to me. If she can use the sword at the right moment, Q'uq'umatz will cease to exist.”

The dragon's army swarmed past their wounded deity and as they did so, Karkengara released the hold his jaws had on the great serpent. The myrmidons attacked Q'uq'umatz with spears, axes and short swords. If the most ancient of the Ancient Gods expected to be invulnerable to their weapons, he was mistaken. It was Jack's realm, not his and the rules were different. Despite dying in large numbers, they were hurting the God, weakening him. Even dying wasn't the problem it might have been for Karkengara's warriors. Jack had mentioned altering the flow of time; the myrmidons were being revived, mere seconds after dying. The flames too were strange. The inferno appeared to be growing, but coming no closer.

“Can I heal the dragon, Jack ?” She asked. “I feel I can, though I don't know how.”

Niña turned and Jack was gone. He could move more silently than a cat who'd just stolen a meal.

“Well....I have to try.” She muttered.

The bringer of fire was dying, that much was obvious. Too many grievous wound, without being able to use godlike powers to heal them. Karkengara actually whimpered, as she touched his snout. Niña was determined to try her best. She placed both her hands on his bloody face and concentrated.

“Please.....Please don’t die.” She said.

It might have been her imagination, but as the dragon opened one of its eyes, it looked to be healing. Niña had no idea why she had the ability to heal, but she was confident it was working, albeit very slowly.

“Stay where you are....Together we can save him.”

It was so weird, seeing Liz begin to change into the creature of chaos, the guardian of the last gate to the underworld. Niña had been told quite a bit and learned much, from what were fairly fleeting conversations. Often throw away comments, had been her only information about important things. Niña knew that even when she fully became the guardian, Liz was still on their side. Maybe not totally harmless, but definitely part of team Laura.

“What do I do ?” Asked Niña.

“Keep your hands on him....I will use your energy and my own. Be thankful this place seems to be on our side. If the laws of time were respected here, we’d probably both be dead.”

Liz’s voice had changed as she’d spoken. The creature now touching Karkengara’s face had the mind of Liz, but that body, that terrible, grotesque body.....That was something born out of fire and chaos. They were at risk; the feathered serpent was close to them, using its claws and jaws to fight the unstoppable horde of myrmidons. Niña forced herself to ignore the noise and dangers of battle. She kept her hands on Karkengara, as the creature that was Liz, pushed tentacles into the deity’s flesh.

“Don’t move, Niña. I need every drop of your energy.”

Said Liz, though the thing of darkness and tentacles, no longer even slightly resembled Liz Grant. Her thrashing tentacles began to appear under the skin of the bringer of fire. From his neck to the huge muscles of his legs, the tentacles were everywhere. Niña felt sorry for the dragon, as he writhed about in obvious pain.

“You’re hurting him.” Niña yelled.

“Nonsense, I’m the only chance he has.”

That voice, it sounded so alien, so dreadful. Eventually Liz withdrew the dozens of tentacles.

Karkengara was unconscious, but his breathing sounded stronger than it had. Niña was no expert on the health of dragons, but she knew he was healing. They weren’t finished though, no having a beer and resting up. She knew what was coming, before Liz said a word. Liz was still in the form of the guardian, while she looked at the ongoing fight between Q'ug'umatz and the myrmidons.

“I know you’re tired, but we need to join the fight.” Said Liz. “Be brave, be determined.....Just remember not to get killed.”

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Simon was still sweaty from sex with Clara, when the battle had begun. Both of them still a little drowsy in the afterglow, they’d had to pull on their clothes in a hurry and get moving. It all seemed so unfair, but after being alive for centuries, he knew that life tended to lean towards being unfair. Simon checked his weapons, but noticed Clara still seemed distracted.

“Get ready, we need to go.” He said. “Did you bring your Janbiya ?”

The Yemeni Janbiya had a strong curved blade and Clara was an expert in using it. Simon was sure she could hurt a God with the weapon, if she’d had a chance to bring it. Instead of answering him, Clara had her hand shoved down the back pocket of her trousers.

“Clara.....Wake up.” Said Simon. “Did you bring your Yemeni Janbiya ?”

“Yes, I was carrying it when I was brought here.”

The great love of his life she might be, but her lack of urgency was beginning to annoy him. Clara removed her hand from her pocket and opened up her fingers. She held what looked like the crushed or shattered carving of a child. Simon recognised jade when he saw it, though he'd never seen jade shattered like that. Some of it had become a green dust, which was running through Clara's fingers.

“Are you alright Clara ?” He asked. “Whatever that was, we need to move.”

“I know.....This...It may turn out to mean something wonderful, or the end of me.”

“What do you mean ?” He asked.

“We have a battle to fight.” Said Clara.

She threw the pieces of jade on the ground and left the hut they'd borrowed. Simon followed her and there was no wondering which way to go. Fire had taken hold of a large section of the forest, though there was no smell of burning in the air. Nothing seemed to be as it should be in the realm of dreams, even the villagers seemed unconcerned about the burning forest. Simon could feel Niña was somewhere near those flames and Laura. He looked at Clara and kissed her, a long hard, almost brutal kiss.

“There's a chance we may not win, not this time.” He said.

“I know.”

“It's been fun though, hasn't it ?”

“Yes, I wouldn't have changed a thing.” Said Clara. “Though.....Maybe we should have beaten Laura, when she was being so fucking awkward.”

They grinned at one another, before Clara ran towards the flames and smoke in the distance. Simon ran after her, still wondering why a broken carving of a child, had freaked Clara out.

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Brother Alberti had stopped trying to influence what the Eye of Solomon showed him. After concentrating on a mental image of Laura for several minutes, his view had been centred on Brendan of all people. Brendan was with Tim, yet another human who shouldn't really be there. Neither of them was likely to heroically save the day, they were just normal humans. Not that Alberti had anything against humans, he was one. Or rather he'd started out as human. There had been so many changes to his body though, so much magical energy had been poured into him. He had no idea what he was now, though he was sure he wasn't totally human anymore.

“Oh, and Akiva is trying to protect them both.” He muttered. “What a dreadful waste of his fighting skills.”

In all fairness, Brendan had found a weapon somewhere, or been given one. A large pike style weapon and he had the strength to use it. Brendan had already killed several of the large spider creatures. Even Tim had managed to do well against the creatures, though he was using speed rather than strength. Not natural speed, it looked as though Laura had given him an enchanted blade. She had half of the weapons of the fallen, given to her by Horus. It seemed Tim was using a long sword which gave him preternatural speed.

“Leave them Akiva, they'll be fine.” Alberti muttered. “Go and help Laura, the serpent must die.”

Not that the Eye had shown him Laura for quite a while, but she was out there somewhere. Akiva was hurtling around, trying to deal with any of the large spiders who looked to be getting the better of the two humans. Akiva had several wounds and Alberti was worried that he might be killed, before having a chance to join in the fight against Q'uq'umatz.

“This is why Tim and Brendan should have been left behind.” He mumbled.

The creatures were new and nothing naturally found in the forest. The great serpent had no godlike powers in the realm of dreams, but its blood could still spawn evil. Alberti had seen the spiders come out of the ground, wherever there was a significant pool of the serpent's blood. Three or four of the spiders for every pool of blood and Q'uq'umatz had been bleeding for quite a while. About three feet across, though some were larger. He'd briefly been shown Simon and Clara fighting the arachnids, before the Eye was moved his view again. The spider creatures didn't look too difficult to kill, but there were a lot of them and their numbers were growing.

"Where is Laura.....I need to see her." Alberti muttered. "Not this pair, who should be sat at home in their own world."

No use moaning of course, the Eye had a mind of its own. Alberti was stuck with watching the three of them, with Akiva killing two of the spiders, for every one destroyed by the other two. They were doing well, though Brendan had a few bloodstains on his trousers, probably his own blood. The fighting was so ordinary, so routine, that Alberti's mind started wandering. He might have even dozed off for a second or two, or maybe longer. When he looked again, Akiva was looking at Brendan, who was lying on the ground. Tim was just a back of a head and shoulders, almost out of the tableau the Eye was showing him.

"Is he hurt ? Come on Eye, show me something closer." Alberti muttered.

It was as if the Eye was punishing him, for all the sarcastic comments and lack of appreciation. The view changed again, to show him Giovanni, who seemed to be teamed up with Daniel. Two strong vampires, just the sort of fight Alberti had been hoping to see. All he could think of though was Brendan and the effect on Liz if he'd been killed.

"I've heard she has genuine feelings for him." He mumbled.

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Giovanni had been to some strange places and he'd fought some bizarre and dangerous creatures. His life had been full of the extraordinary, since he'd become a vampire. The realm of dreams though.....It felt as though the Gods were trying to show him he'd not seen anything worth mentioning in his life so far. Daniel was a stranger, though Simon had said he could be trusted. A huge man with the looks of a fool, yet he was obviously an academic of some kind. Just by the one conversation they'd had, Giovanni knew Daniel could teach him so many things. The origin of all vampires, where they fitted in the world and if they had a purpose. It was amazing, meeting another vampire who could answer so many of the questions which had been troubling him, for decades. After being in awe of Daniel, the realm of dreams topped it.

"Oh, the size of that thing." Giovanni had said. "I'll fight it, that seems to be the plan.....But as for killing it....."

"We can only do our best." Said Daniel.

The great feathered serpent according to Simon and Niña. Q'uq'umatz the first of the ancients Gods. The serpent had created their world and intended to destroy it. Giovanni quite liked stories of creation like that; they gave a clear start point for everything, plus a potential end. Such stories offered order and certainty, in a world of what often seemed to be chaos. Q'uq'umatz, a name he was still trying to pronounce, wanted to devour a vampire called Laura. If he succeeded the world might not end for a few more centuries, though its days would be numbered. As if that wasn't enough to deal with, the spiders had started to come up out of the ground.

Giovanni was currently looking at fierce warriors who seemed immortal, attacking a severely injured serpent deity. If that wasn't enough to make him question his sanity, a woman called Liz was using

healing spells on an unconscious dragon. It was a day of wonders and Giovanni just hoped he'd survive it. Not that he'd be able to dine out on the tales; no one would ever believe him.

"There.....Up there, that's Laura." Said Daniel.

It seemed the female vampire called Laura, could fly. That was it; he'd never be able to tell anyone about the realm of dreams. Not unless he wanted to be locked up in an asylum for the chronically disturbed. Giovanni watched Laura hurtle across the sky, towards Q'uq'umatz.

"How do you pronounce Q'uq'umatz?" Asked Giovanni.

"Any way you like, Giovanni." Said Daniel. "Any damned way you want to."

The spiders stopped any further talk, there seemed to be a never ending stream of them, as though the realm of dreams was infested with the brutes. They bit and spun silk, though it was unclear what the sticky silk was intended to do. After one deep bite, Giovanni felt a little fatigued, though not for long. He had vampire physiology; a human would have probably been put to sleep.

"There's no end to these things." Yelled Daniel.

They hacked and slashed at the creatures, though it often seemed like killing one or two out of thousands. By the time they reached the injured God, Giovanni wanted to rest, or sleep, ideally for days. His sword arm actually ached, something he couldn't remember happening before. The huge underbelly of the serpent was there, open to them and undefended.

"It's so huge; can our weapons even hurt it?" Asked Daniel.

"Only one way to find out." Said Giovanni.

It felt like hacking at a whale with a sewing needle and his arms felt so tired. With Daniel beside him, Giovanni kept hacking at the skin of the feathered serpent, until there was blood on his blade, fresh blood. Through the skin and he was cutting into the pale flesh of the serpent. Perhaps it was wishful thinking, but he was sure the huge serpent tried to move away from his blows.

"We're hurting it, Daniel." Yelled Giovanni. "Keep going, we're hurting it."

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Mabina had been the conduit to the Gods from another world. An essential part of the plan to defeat Q'uq'umatz, though she was feeling guilty for not being there, helping the others in the realm of dreams. Easy enough to ask the agency to send a replacement, but Mabina had several of her ladies and gentlemen to look after and she saw no reason not to do her job. Mainly the elderly who needed her nursing skills, but also one or two younger people with mobility problems. Kristy was in her mid-twenties, but a traffic accident had left her in a wheelchair for the rest of her life.

"I was expecting someone else today." Said Kristy.

"There was a family crisis.....I did what I could to help." Said Mabina.

"Well.....The replacements are alright, but I'm glad it's you today."

Kristy had almost no feeling below the waist, which meant quite a few health and hygiene issues. Never easy to have someone change an adult diaper and wash your private bits, but Mabina had developed a bit of chemistry with Kristy. If Kristy had a family, she never mentioned them and Mabina never asked.

Strange for a vampire to care whether a human lived or died, yet Mabina did worry about some of those she looked after. She was changing; her feelings were becoming slightly more human. After centuries of being a vampire, the changes were surprising and sometimes quite scary. Being a vampire who didn't give a crap most of the time, was easy. Human feelings on the other hand, all that fretting and worrying, often about strangers....But Mabina blamed her association with the vampires from the house in Hornsey. Vampires living together as friends, Mabina had known no

good would come of it. Then there had been the Gods from another world and their influence on her. No wonder she was developing a little...Humanity.

"Did Mark call?" Asked Mabina.

"Yes, we talked for ages."

Mark was a young guy she'd met during a clinic appointment. Their relationship might well end up being nothing more than a romantic fantasy, but sometimes.....A fantasy is better than nothing. All of those she looked after liked routine, even the young ones. Food was the next step, though it wasn't on Mabina's official list of duties. Several different organisations had delivered food to Kristy in the past. They'd all meant well, but Mabina wouldn't have eaten any of it. Four days a week the poor woman ate the food in plastic trays, the gunk with a weird aftertaste. Three lunches a week, were something cooked, by Mabina.

"Lunch next.....Anything you particularly fancy today?" Asked Mabina.

"I'd love ravioli on toast."

"Alright.....Then I want to hear all about your chat with Mark."

"Oh no, not all of it."

"Wow, he must be hot, Kristy."

Into the kitchen and into the cupboard where Kristy kept the tins. Bread was in the fridge, which made it last longer. Two slices of seeded bread into the toaster, while Mabina took a plate out of the rack and gave it a quick polish with a dish cloth. The glow told her she wasn't alone.

"We have to leave now. So much done that wasn't ours to do." Said Monazin-Nerish.

He had clothing that showed a bulge where male genitalia could be expected to be. To be honest though, the voice sounded a little female. They were all Gods of course; their appearance and voices may well have been nothing but illusions. Out of all of them, Monazin-Nerish had spoken to her the most.

"Has the great serpent been defeated?" Asked Mabina.

"That is still uncertain, but we've done all we can do.....And we've already exceeded what was appropriate. The wanderers are beginning to wander again, which is a good sign. They must think that Q'uq'umatz will be killed by Laura."

"Can you show me the wanderers?" She asked.

"Briefly.....We have to leave your world."

"Will you return? I have so many questions." Said Mabina.

"No, returning is improbable."

Monazin-Nerish waved in the direction of the sink and a window appeared. It was one of the ancient temples high in the mountains of Bolivia. Mabina recognised the few remaining intact walls, though she wasn't sure if she'd ever known its name. The wanderers, the Gods who Laura accused of taking on Hakuna Matata as their purpose in life, were no longer chanting and walking around the ruined temple.

"This is happening all over your world." Said Monazin-Nerish. "Nothing is certain, but this is definitely a good sign."

The God from another world vanished, without even saying farewell. When he went, the window showing the temple, vanished too. It was a good sign he's said, but nothing was certain. Mabina heated up a tin of ravioli and spread it over the toast. There was that God effect on time again. The kitchen clock showed that it was the exact same time, as when she'd entered the kitchen. Mabina took Kristy her lunch, with a wholemeal roll to eat with it.

"Here you go, fresh ravioli on toast.....Well, it's fresh out of the tin."

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Brother Alberti had sent one of his men to the kitchens and was eating quite a nice lunch, with a carafe of decent red wine. He'd given up on the Eye, which was showing him warriors from the village near the great tree. They were quite skilful in killing the spiders. It was repetitive though and definitely not what he'd been hoping to see. Simon had mentioned future technology being a curse, but it couldn't be worse than the cussedness on enchanted artefacts.

"At least this wine isn't a disappointment." He muttered.

Wine and a chicken dish, the same as the guards ate, though they were given cheaper wine. Drefan watched the villagers pile up hundreds of dead spiders, before setting them ablaze. His view of the village and the great tree, became hidden by smoke.

"Wonderful.....No wonder Huh loaned the Eye to me, it's uncontrollable." He mumbled.

Maybe the damned thing had run out of things to show him, or far more likely, his luck had changed. The window flashed through various images of the battle, before settling on Laura.

"At last.....Finally." He muttered.

Laura was no longer flying, or hovering, or whatever she was doing to keep in the air. She was now walking along the back of the feathered serpent, occasionally digging a spear deep into its flesh. No using the massive sword, that was strapped across her back. Q'uq'umatz was a bloody mess; the oldest of the Ancient Gods looked finished. Not that the myrmidons were showing any mercy. Thousands of them were still hacking and cutting at the feathered serpent. Laura knew not to accept the way things looked; she'd probably made that mistake before.

"Oh, clever girl.....But you need to try for a kill, before night arrives in the forest." He muttered.

Was there going to be a night near the great tree ? Jack seemed to have a unique relationship with time in his realm. It was there though; the darkening of the sky that signals dusk isn't far off. The serpent had looked finished, but had spun its head around the instant Laura was within range of its jaws. It looked to Alberti as though she'd come close to dying then and there, chewed up and swallowed by Q'uq'umatz. Laura had leapt to one side though, as if she'd been deliberately playing with the Ancient God.

"Don't tease him too often, Laura." Alberti muttered.

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Laura knew, she'd been told the sword was intended for a specific purpose. Who had told her was still a foggy memory, but they'd been clear about it. When Q'uq'umatz was as close to death as a God could get, the sword would reset the serpent and remove him from creation. Laura was awkward though, she knew that without Clara telling her so often. If she was told not to do something, she was almost certain to do it. Besides, she was carrying the heavy sword everywhere, so why not see if it hurt the feathered serpent ? She tried stabbing one of its shoulders and yes, the serpent definitely hadn't liked it. The sword created wounds that made Q'uq'umatz bleed. Perfect, she'd carried on using it as her main weapon. Not that she was under any illusion that her prods with the sword were going to bring the Ancient God close to death. The myrmidons would do that, the tens of thousands of them. So many that Laura sometimes bumped into them, as they swarmed over Q'uq'umatz. They reminded her of documentaries, which showed ants swarming over carrion, before dragging it, bit by bit, back to their nest.

"Do the heavy lifting guys, while I act as an irritant." Laura muttered.

Somewhere deep down, Laura considered she was playing a key role in softening up the serpent, even if the reality was different. Many times, she had to dodge the deadly jaws of the feathered serpent. She carried on clambering over it though, constantly jabbing at it with the huge sword.

There came a point though, when she had a bad feeling as the sword drew more of Q'uq'umatz's blood. A kind of dread filled her, an existential angst about something she couldn't quite grasp. There was a memory just out of sight, but there in her mind, as if her eyes could focus on it.

"No more Laura, use the sword only for its given purpose."

A booming voice that Laura knew was inside her head. The sword could be over used, she realised that now. Keep prodding at the Ancient God and she'd deplete the sword until it was useless. She held the sword up and looked at it, as if trying to know if she'd used up its abilities. Q'uq'umatz was hurt but a long way from being finished. Laura's attention wasn't on the serpent, almost as though she'd forgotten she was walking over his body. Q'uq'umatz was alert though and took the opportunity to turn his jaws towards her, at speed. Laura moved, but too slow to totally avoid the rows of sharp teeth. Pain as her left arm lost a long layer of skin and some of the deeper flesh. She did the only thing she could. Laura leapt backwards and twisted, trying to mimic a feline, by landing on her feet. It almost worked.

"Damn, I'm supposed to be wearing the serpent down, not the other way round." Laura muttered. There was blood on the ground, her blood. She'd live, but even a vampire can't quickly heal large areas stripped of skin. She took off her jacket and ripped her shirt apart, using it as a temporary bandage. Not a brilliant dressing, but her blood clotted quickly. Down on her knees, she concentrated on the pain and tried to remove it from her mind. It worked, to a point. In a way the pain might be useful, it would stop her mind from drifting. She could have taken to the air of course, if her focus hadn't been on other things.

"Damn, I can't die now.....I'd feel so stupid."

Laura laughed at her own terrible joke, until she saw the spear. A long spear with a hard metal tip that could penetrate the toughest of armour. A myrmidon spear, though it was unknown to see one of them abandoned by its owner. After coming back to life, Karkengara's fighters recovered their weapons and carried on using them. There was a bow near the spear and a complete set of myrmidon armour. Armour consisting of metal plates held in place by strong straps, Laura was already thinking of a use for the straps.

"Why abandon their weapons?" She mumbled.

The body was quite close, once she'd looked for it. A dead myrmidon with a crushed skull, who was showing no sign of being brought back from the dead. Once she was looking for dead warriors, she saw quite a few myrmidons, all looking very and permanently, dead. It had to be something to do with Karkengara still being very weak.

"They rely on his powers to be revived." She muttered.

Not that the numbers of myrmidons swarming over Q'uq'umatz seemed any less, but eventually they'd be fewer in number. Plus, although she thought Jack could stop it happening, dusk seemed to be arriving in the realm of dreams.

"Fuck." She mumbled.

There was now some urgency, fighting an Ancient God in the darkness would be suicide, even a badly injured God. Plus Wiremi had hinted about the forest being home to nocturnal creatures who could be very dangerous. Night hunters who fed on flesh, if they could get it. It was the main reason the villagers kept close to the great tree and the camp fire that was never allowed to go out.

"First, I'm strapping this sword to my back." Laura muttered.

It would give her two hands to use the spear. Laura used the straps from the armour, to strap the sword across her shoulders. Not ideal, there was a chance of it becoming jammed in narrow places. Once the straps were tight, it felt comfortable.

“Alright.....I have a spear, but is it any use ?”

No large trees near her, though there was one about eighteen inches thick. Laura walked towards the tree, before thrusting forward with the myrmidon spear. It went right through the tree and out of the other side. Pieces of broken wood flew out of the hole on the other side of the tree.

“Oh, that will do.” She muttered. “That will do very nicely.”

It was as if the serpent resented being ignored. It didn't try to crush her with one of its feet; it simply used one of its rear feet as a massive shovel. Q'ug'umatz shoved hundreds of tons of soil and rubble in her direction. Laura saw it coming and hurtled upwards. As she turned she saw the long dragon face of Q'ug'umatz. Really a dragon, despite being known as a feathered serpent. Laura could see its eyes and there was a lot of pain in them, plus an ocean of hate.

“I'm coming for you !” Laura yelled.

Spear held up, she hurtled towards Q'ug'umatz like a missile.

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Jack wasn't really just Jack anymore; he was something more than that, something different. Gwen was in trouble though and whatever else might have changed, Gwen was still his mother. He accepted that it was probably a way of luring him away from the realm of dreams; it might even be a trap.

“But.....My mother is in trouble.” He said.

Time would begin to move again, if he left his realm, though not enough to cause any serious problems. Time was still linear in the great forest, so a few minutes either way, even a few hours.....

“They'll be fine.” He muttered.

The supernatural creature who had been and still was, at least partly Jack, stepped into the real world. It was a cold crisp day in Pitmedden in the Parish of Udney, though he didn't feel the cold. Jack could smell the blood, as he approached the small holding. It was the pigs; of course they'd gone after the pigs. He loved the pigs, as did his mother. If the servants of that foul serpent had wanted to disturb his concentration, it really had to be an attack on his beloved pigs.

“Not all of them.....Please, not all of them.” He mumbled.

Gwen was alive, though she was seriously upset and disturbed. Jack could feel her emotions, like a burning flare just outside the shed where the expectant sows were kept.

“Kill it Laura....Kill the serpent for me.” He muttered.

There was no need for his mother to say anything; he knew the worst before he found her. Crouched down in the cold mud, Gwen was crying. He knelt beside her and put his arms around her.

“Let's get you into the house.” He said. “It's cold out here and night isn't far off.”

“They're all dead, Jack. They killed them all, cut them to pieces.”

All of the pigs, they'd cut up all of his pigs. Jack felt life in the hen house, the chickens still lived. The pigs though.....There wasn't one left alive.

“Who did it, mother ? What creatures did this ?” He asked.

“Like men, but taller.....They used claws to do this.....long sharp claws.”

Servants of Q'ug'umatz, hidden away somewhere, waiting to be of use to their master. They'd probably been waiting many thousands of years, for an opportunity to serve the great feathered serpent. The problem was, they might be back to hurt Gwen.

“Come on.....I'll bury the pigs in the morning.” Said Jack. “For now, we'll get you cleaned up and into bed.”

“Thank you....Will you stay for a while ?”

“I will mother, of course I will.”

It was what they wanted, probably the reason Gwen wasn't as dead as the pigs. They wanted him away from the realm of dreams. There was no option though, Gwen was and always would be, his mother. Night would arrive in the real world and the realm of dreams. Laura was close to the right moment though and she had a lot of help. Jack considered he'd done all he could.

"And the others.....Will Daniel be alright ?" Asked Gwen.

"They'll be fine.....Don't worry about that."

They'd be fine, or they wouldn't. By the time Jack could be back there, the battle would be over. Laura was either going to kill the serpent, or it would devour her. The dice had been thrown and there was nothing further Jack could do to help.

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Fighting the serpent was never going to be easy, even though the spear really seemed to hurt Q'uq'umatz. Realistically, her spear was just one out the thousands being wielded by the brave myrmidons. Laura needed to feel she was making a difference. There had already been a moment when she'd seen the inside of the great serpent's jaws. Getting close was the best way to damage the brute, but getting close brought risks. Q'uq'umatz could sometimes move his head with surprising speed. He'd had her; it could have been all over. Laura had seen the teeth from the inside, smelled the foetid breath of the serpent and lived to, hopefully, tell the tale. The serpent God had been slightly slow in biting down and Laura had escaped the jaws and survived. A few more cuts from those dreadful teeth, but they'd heal.

"Jack!" She yelled. "Night has come to your world, where are you ?"

Not the first time she'd called for him, she needed him to let her know the right moment, the one opportunity to drive the sword in deep. A weapon she might have already over used and she had no idea when to deliver the reset blow that would unmake the oldest of the Ancient Gods.

"You'll know when the moment arrives."

Jack had told her when she'd first arrived with the huge sword. No more than two days ago, yet sometimes, it felt as though she'd been in Jack's realm for weeks, maybe even months. You'll know was probably the worst instruction ever invented, it was meaningless. How would she know ? It wasn't as if the sword was going to talk to her.

"Patsy is right.....Why is nothing ever easy ?" Laura muttered.

Frustration made her angry and anger gave her strength, or at least it felt that way. Laura had been trying to use the spear on the eyes of the serpent, or its ears. Getting that close to its head though.....Brought her perilously close to those jaws. Trying to blind Q'uq'umatz had been the cause of her knowing what the inside of its jaws looked like. Darkness was almost complete though and the myrmidons needed daylight to fight. Laura was stood on the serpent, right between its shoulder blades. She dropped the spear and removed the sword from her back.

"Maybe the right moment is when there is no other option ?" She mumbled.

Its eyes, the best way to get the sword in deep, was through Q'uq'umatz's eyes. If she hurtled herself at his upper jaw and stabbed down at just the right moment.....It was crazy, but all Laura had left was an entire selection of crazy options. One of the myrmidons was walking towards her and he seemed to be walking with a purpose. A staggering number of fights against a variety of opponents had taught her when not to ignore someone.

"I don't have time for this." She yelled.

The myrmidon stabbed at her with his spear and yelled a battle cry at her. It seemed Q'uq'umatz was taking over some of Karkengara's fighters. Maybe that was a sign it was the right moment. The serpent was close to the end and desperate. No using the sword, its next blow had be the one that

really mattered. Laura dodged the spear and kicked the myrmidon hard in the chest. He fell sideways, rolled off the back of the serpent and hit the ground, a long way below.

“Damn you serpent, using our own fighters against me.” Laura muttered.

Not just that myrmidon, two more were walking towards her, one carrying a spear and the other getting an arrow ready to fire. It was now or never, there wasn't going to be another chance. The last few streak of light on the horizon would soon be gone, as full night arrived.

“Fuck!” Laura yelled.

Up slightly to get over the approaching myrmidons, then forward at a ridiculous speed. Laura grunted as she collided with the upper jaw of Q'uq'umatz. Gasping for breath and the sword seemed heavier, but she couldn't have chosen a better place. There it was in front of her, the huge left eye of the Ancient God. Easily three or four times as wide as she was tall. It saw her there, of course it did. As Laura felt its jaw muscles tense, she rammed the sword into its eye.

“Die.....Cease to exist.....This world has outgrown such dreadful Gods.” She yelled.

Into Q'uq'umatz's eye went the sword, with her still holding it and pushing. When the entire sword had entered the eye, Laura kept pushing, until her arms had followed the sword.

“Die.” She shouted.

The sword was suddenly gone; her hands had nothing to hold. Vampires are good at sensing if something was alive, which meant they were equally good at knowing if something was dead. Not a stopped heartbeat with Q'uq'umatz, he'd simply gone, his godlike essence was no longer there. As his body began to disintegrate, Laura rose into the air. By the time full night arrived, there was nothing left of the Ancient God, who'd created....Everything.

No sadness though, no sympathy for Q'uq'umatz. His intention had been to kill her and then destroy the world he'd created. Consequences, so many had warned her there had to be consequences from destroying the creator of their world. Even in her moment of triumph, Laura wondered what those consequences might be.

“And....Where the hell is Jack ?” She muttered.

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