

One singular perfect night in a lifetime

Story by Xenos, illustration by Odinboy

An impossibly large hunter moon had begun to rise lazily over the eastern mountains that overlooked the castle. The residual heat of the day still had the air roiling and churning causing the pale and slightly reddish disk to appear distorted and wobbly, as if it was dancing to a cosmic tune all of its own while it ascended. Tartarus sat comfortably in the bench, relaxed, and took in the sight of the moonrise. He knew well enough that soon the disk of the moon would begin to lose its faint reddish tone, and gradually become its normal pure silvery white. The night air, dry, clean, and cloudless would allow the moonlight to cast its phantasmagorical shadows on the land. Tartarus loved to see his dominions lighted this way; it pleased him that everywhere one looked there were only hues of grey to be seen. It was the perfect setting to let one's imagination free, and envision all kinds of shapes and motions around them.

Tartarus placed the long and thin stem of his pipe on his mouth and sucked lightly on it, causing the tobacco to glow briefly with each suck. The aromatic smoke filled his lungs and soothed his mind. Tartarus felt perfectly content, it was such a lovely night. Summer was well on its way out, but the chill of fall had so far eluded the land. The nights had already grown to be about as long as the days. Tartarus smiled, even for a Vampire lord secure high up on his castle, it was rare to have a moment of peace like this.

The slight smile on his lips intensified when he heard the soft and barely audible footsteps of his son Damian approach. What a delight, he thought, to spend such a perfect evening with his son. Tartarus had not summoned him, but the child had come to him anyways. Damian loved him after all, and Tartarus had finally admitted to himself that he too loved his son. It was no surprise to Tartarus that his heart shuddered slightly with a surge of pride and joy. What father worth the title could avoid such a reaction? Damian was a worthy son. Obedient almost to a flaw, charming to the extreme, smart as a whip, and more handsome than any child Tartarus had ever laid eyes on.

Tartarus tilted his head imperceptibly to one side, and caught a glimpse of his son. His blond locks of hair flawless, his face perfectly proportioned his body symmetric and strong. Tartarus extended his arm, and welcomed his son. Damian's face broke into a big smile, lurched forward taking only a few steps before he leaped forth, and landed on the lap of his father. Damian was so agile, so light of foot that Tartarus hardly felt him land on his lap. His son's arms quickly wrapped in a warm and loving embrace around his chest.

It was indeed a lovely night. Tartarus enveloped his son with his free arm, and drew him closer to him, an action that spoke louder than words could. Father and son, thus embraced, sat quietly together enjoying each other's company, watching the moonrise together. Their stillness was only broken when Tartarus occasionally took another puff from his pipe.

Looking at the moon gradually rise higher, gave Tartarus an idea. Looking down at the face of his son, he smiled, and spoke with a warm and loving voice, "Son, have I ever told you the tale of Yahel?" His son, energetic by nature, and normally amped by youth, looked with glee at his father. No words were needed, any tale his father told him would please him to no end. Damian adjusted his position to be even closer to his father, and hang on for every word.

"Well," Tartarus started the tale, "Yahel, was one of the great seraphim's of heaven. He was a great and powerful angel. He was, even before the time of the dark gods begun. He was among the first of his kind, and could rightly call Shemuel his brother. When the creator of all things sent them all forth unto the universe to stake a claim on a realm, All the angels rushed out into the cosmos trying to lay claim to the fairest realm, to rule it, to guide it, and in so doing, demonstrate to their creator their worthiness. Before setting forth in his own quest for a realm, Yahel paused, thought for a few moments, and then rushed himself to claim the moon as his realm." Damian, who was listening intently, opened his mouth in surprise. Tartarus could hear the faint voice of his son's throat, "the moon?" Tartarus smiled again, and continued the tale, "Yael's choice puzzled many of his fellow angels, for his choice for a realm was a barren one. The moon was then, and still is now, devoid of life and riches. Gaiel, who in deference to Yahel's high status had waited for him to make a choice took over the earth, and become Gaia, mother earth. Shemuel chose Venus, and so he came to be known as Lucifer, the morning star."

Damian looked wide-eyed up to his father, listening intently to every word that came out of his father's mouth. He was totally immersed in the tale, hanging onto every word. Tartarus took another puff of his pipe, and continued.

"Every time the seraphim's were summoned to the altar of the creator, they would tease Yahel for his choice. He, among the most powerful of all the angels could have chosen anything he wanted. Why then did he choose such lowly realm?" Damian could not contain his youthful inquisitiveness, and chimed in, "oh papa, tell me, tell me, why did he? Why did he?" Tartarus chuckled a bit to himself as he took another puff of his pipe, and looked right at his son.

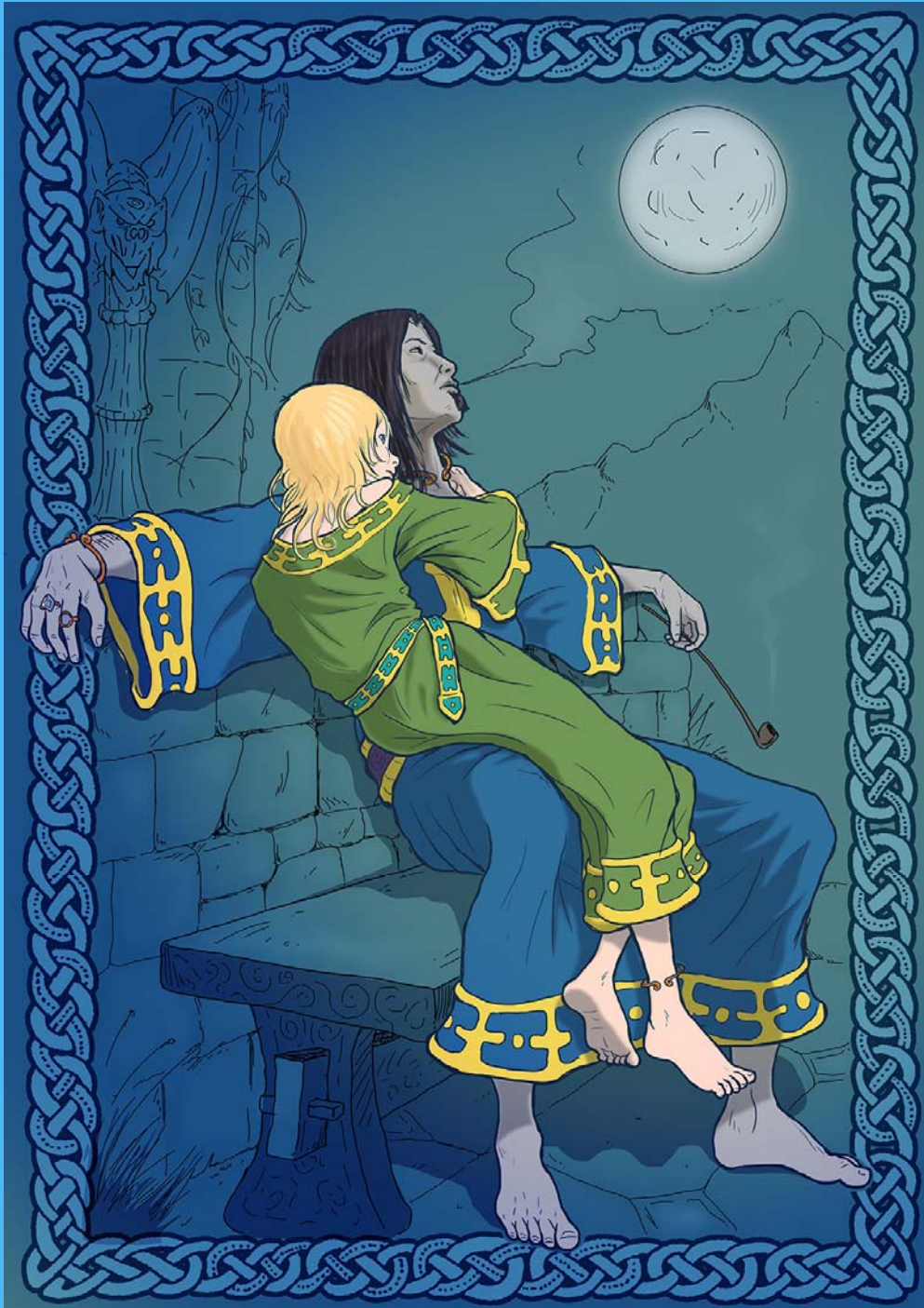
"Well, you see son, soon after the angels had made their stakes upon the realms, they began to quarrel amongst each other as to whose realm was the fairest. Zeuel, claimed his to be the best because it was the biggest planet of them all, with many subjugate moons, Ioel would them chime in that size was not what mattered, specially when his realm, the moon IO, had in it vast lakes of molten sulfur, and geysers that sprouted hundreds of kilometers up from its surface. Each summons of the seraphim's would quickly devolve into a bickering contest among the angels, who would wrangle amongst themselves endlessly, hoping to prove to the creator that theirs was their fairest of the realms. Yahel however, would sit back, and stand quietly as all the other angels made their case. Yahel's fellow angels remained puzzled by both his choice of realm, and his behavior, yet they were too busy extolling the virtues of their own realm to pay much attention to him"

Tartarus could feel his son rest his head on his chest, and gradually quiet down as he listened to the tale. He wondered if the boy might actually fall asleep on his lap. A part of him very much wanted his

son to do just that, it would be a perfect highlight of what was turning out to be a perfect evening. For his part, the boy had closed his eyes, and was listening to his father's words, feeling his warmth emanate through his clothing, helping him to fend off the gradual cooling of the night. The boy felt as if he was already in heaven.

"So finally one day, the creator, deciding that it was finally time to pass judgment as to which angel had the fairest realm of all, summoned his seraphim and asked them to tell him why it was they thought that theirs was the fairest realm. And so, one by one each seraphim prostrated in front of their creator, and humbly explained why they thought theirs deserved to be judged the fairest of the realms. Each angel made a strong argument in favor of their choice. The creator had after all given

each of his angels a keen intellect, and they used it well. Finally, all the angels were done except one; Yael. All the angels now listened intently, for they had never heard Yael claim his dominion to be the fairest. The great chamber housing the creator's throne, and all the seraphim hushed as they all intently listened. Finally, Yael spoke, breaking a silence that had by then lasted nearly an eon, 'my lord, ...'"



Tartarus felt the gentle snore of his son on his lap. He had after all fallen asleep in his lap. Tartarus smiled quietly, feeling his spirit enriched, and filled to the brim with happiness. He took his pipe, placed the stem in his lips, and took another big puff of the aromatic tobacco. He thought quietly of his brother Yael as he watched the moonrise higher over the horizon. It really was a perfect night; the only one Tartarus could remember ever having in his long, long life. He looked down at his son, and with a smile, he said quietly to the boy, "and now you my boy, you are my moon"