



The Shadow of Astra Nox

Secret Use



The Mehra estate dining hall is a cold cathedral of power, dominated by a massive obsidian table polished to a mirror shine. At the head sits the Patriarch, a man whose shadow stretches long across the room under the flickering light of a crystal chandelier.



Across the table, the Mother watches her plate with the stillness of a predator, while her two daughters sit in stark contrast. One daughter radiates a forced, perfect grace, while the other stares silently at the storm lashing against the tall windows.



High above the gilded molding, a single black wasp clings to the velvet shadows of the heavy curtains. It remains perfectly still, an invisible observer watching the powerful family gather below in the oppressive silence.



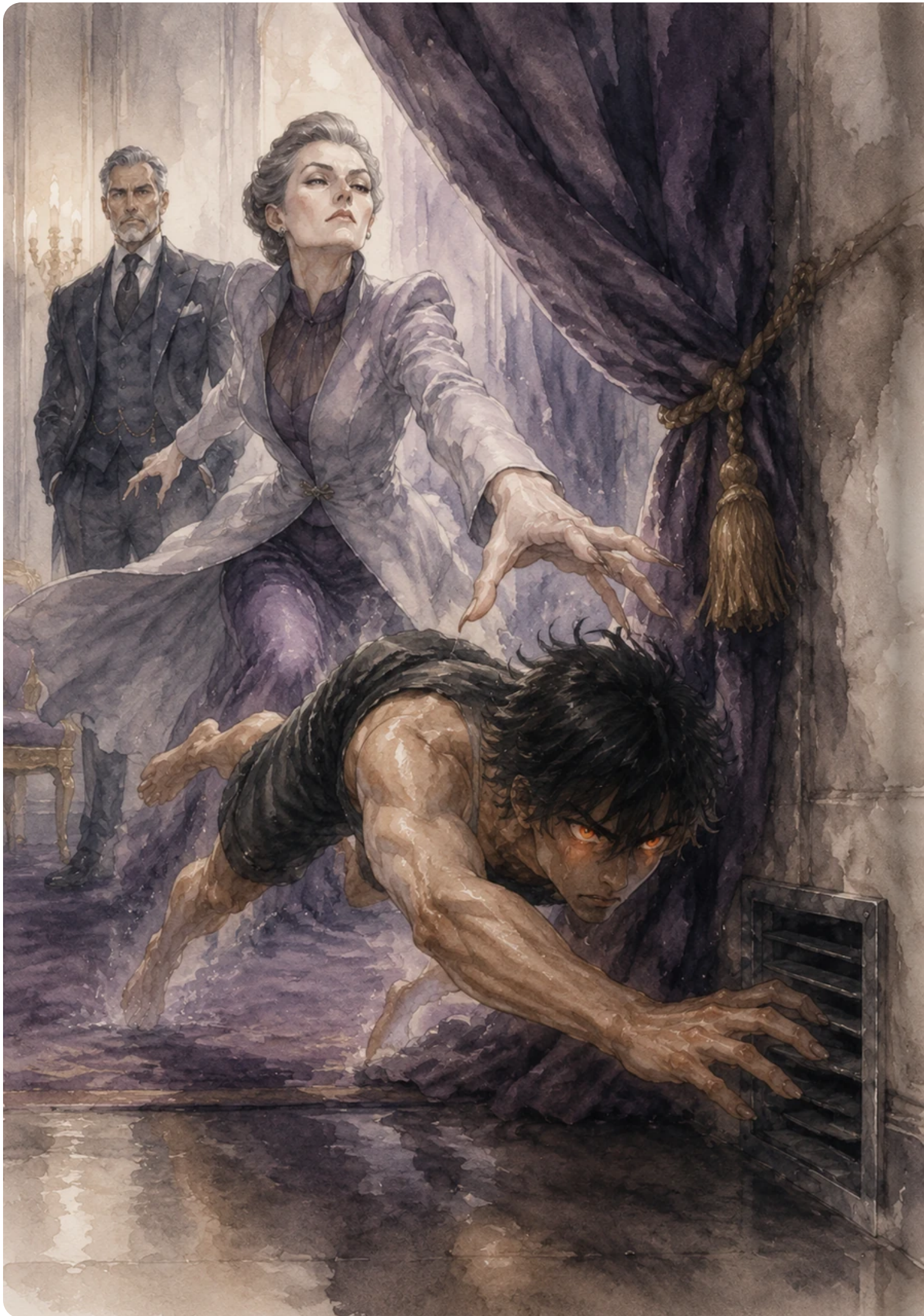
Inside the wasp, Kaelen's human consciousness struggles to stay anchored as his vision shifts into a complex grid of heat and vibration. He feels the thrum of the house's dark energy, his tiny heart racing against the constraints of his insect form.



The Patriarch's voice vibrates through the room like a low growl, demanding the recovery of the Astra Nox before the new moon. Silver cutlery gleams like teeth on the dark table as he declares that anyone protecting the fragment must bleed.



Suddenly, the Mother snaps her head upward, her unnervingly sharp eyes scanning the ceiling with predatory instinct. She cannot see the wasp yet, but the air grows heavy with a dark static that makes Kaelen's antennae curl in sudden, sharp pain.



Sensing discovery, Kaelen dives from the curtain toward a small ventilation duct near the floor. Behind him, the perfect daughter moves with supernatural speed, her fingers missing his tiny thorax by a mere fraction of a millimeter.



The wasp disappears into the cold, dark metal of the vent just as the Patriarch's roar for security echoes through the hall. Kaelen spirals through the narrow shaft, the sounds of the pursuit fading into the rhythmic drumming of the rain outside.



In a dark, rain-slicked alleyway a mile away, the air begins to warp and shimmer with a sickening sound of shifting bone. Kaelen collapses onto the wet pavement as his human form returns, his skin steaming in the freezing night air.



Gasping for breath and clutching his chest, Kaelen looks back toward the distant estate with eyes burning with newfound purpose. He has heard the name of their prize, and he knows the secret war for the Astra Nox has finally begun.