Under Falling Skies

1498 words

Mondrake shut and locked the door of his small dingy apartment and headed to city hall where he made a meager salary working as a security guard. Today he was on duty for the unveiling of the “Hall of Heroes,” a statue display that consisted of Altereds, who had saved the city at some point. A tremendous crash from the street made Mondrake look over in time to see a tall metal skeleton with 6 arms crumple to the ground. A moment later a tall striking Altered wearing an unnecessarily tight red latex suit and a gold helm sprang onto the fallen giant's back and dived into a ringing “hello good citizens” monologue. Mondrake sighed. Fifty years ago this would have been amazing but fifty years ago they had all lived in fear of the first Altereds who had used their powers to terrorize, steal, and murder. Only a few had dared to stand up to them. That was when heroes had been, well, heroes. Now it seemed like everyone had some small talent.

Eventually, there were so many Altereds that the government had to divide them into 5 classes. The first was blue. Most people, including Mondrake, fell into this class. It meant that you had some very minor power like being able to move small objects with your mind or teleport short distances. Then there was bronze, silver and gold. Most of the heroes and villains one saw fell into these classes. Finally there was the highest class, black. There had only ever been four black level Altereds. Two were considered heroes and two were the most powerful and evil Altereds to ever live.

The first of the heroes was called Orion. He basically was the government and ran the city from his spire in the center of the city. The second, Nighthawk, was rarely seen and his whereabouts were generally unknown. The first of the villains was Hogak. He had never been seen in Metropolis. The final and most powerful was called Black Shuck, named after the British legend of the massive black wolf who haunted churchyards and roads after dark. But that was not her true name of which no one knew. People didn't like to think about the frequent and strange massacres. Just last week on Easter Sunday a church full of people, all 145 of them, had been found dead in their pews and their bodies stuffed with black ash, their corpses burned from the inside out.

Mondrake walked past the scene without much interest and continued towards city hall. Climbing the sweeping white marble stairs he pushed open the heavy gilded front doors and stepped inside, stopping only to show his badge. He took up his post by the main lobby where the satin covered statues stood. He glanced up at the high dome covered in windows from which sunlight streamed. His eyes drifted down to the Mayor standing behind a golden podium, giving an unctuous speech to a throng of well dressed people and reporters. Mondrake yawned.

A flash of movement from the top of the dome caught his eye. He shrugged it off, probably just a bird. Again, he saw a flutter of movement. He peered up as the audience applauded. Floating gently down towards him was a long glossy purple-black feather. He reached out, bemused, and the feather alighted softly on his palm. As he brought it up to his eyes to get a closer look, it turned to ash in his hand. He looked down at the pile of cinders, his brows knitted uncomprehending. Then, as windows exploded and the golden dome began to fall, Mondrake’s mind came to a terrible conclusion. He knew what it meant as screams of hopeless terror mixed with a scream of hideous glee, he knew.

Mondrake dove out of the way as the dome crashed to the ground. He scrambled to his feet and saw a scene of utter mayhem all around him. People were running pel-mel trying desperately to find a way out of the collapsing building. Everywhere people were falling to the ground at the hands of a laughing shadow with gleaming eyes, their eyes wild and leaking black ash.

There was a soft sound from behind Mondrake. He spun around. A terrible shadow in the shape of a wolf standing on its hind legs smiled at him, her perfect white teeth glinting. She walked towards him, scraping the claws of one hand along the marble wall. Mondrake ran, scrambling over a pile of rubble. He did not get far before he felt a paw close around his forearm with hideous strength.

 “Now, now my little mouse, don't run from me,” said a low silky feminine voice. He screamed, partly from pain and partly from shock. She spun him around to face her, then with a light push, sent him sprawling across the floor.

“I love the smell of fear,” she hissed “how it excites me.” She said kicking him in the side with an iron clad paw. He grunted in pain.

 “It should be one's true calling in life to cull the bloodline. For when a tree has diseased branches you trim them away so the strong healthy ones can grow and thrive unhampered by the clinging grasp of the sick”. She was now fully formed, a terrible black wolf in dark armor inlaid with purple gemstones. Mondrake gasped for breath.

 “For is my name not Sodom? The black angel of vengeance? Shall I not do as I see fit?”

Mondrake slowly reached into his pocket for the small knife that he kept there while Sodom continued her rant. As she turned he thrust his arm out and stabbed at a small unarmored place on her ankle. As the blade made contact with her fur it exploded in his hand. Sodom looked down, faintly surprised.

 “Cute.” she said in an expressionless voice then kicked Mondrake in the face, sending him flying backward.

“I admire your bravery but that was very foolish.” She thrust a paw out to the side and a black scythe formed in her hand. The razor sharp blade was made of onyx. The long shaft was wrapped in black leather and held in place with gold studs. A blood red gem was set into the pummel stone. She ran a claw along the blade checking the sharpness. Seeming satisfied, she roughly grabbed Mondrakes hair, forcing his head back.

“Goodbye, mouse.” Mondrake closed his eyes, waiting for the slash that would end his life. Instead of the sound of howling death he heard the scream of metal on metal and a surprised intake of breath from Sodom. He opened his eyes and saw to his astonishment where before had been only his sweatshirt was now a shining breastplate made of gold, inlaid with rubies arranged like a gothic stained glass window.

He looked up to see Sodom, her eyes wide. She slashed at him again. He automatically brought his arm up to guard his face, instantly a golden shield sparked into being on his arm. The scythe rang against it.

“Why won't you submit?” Sodom screamed with fury.

Mondrake sprang to his feet with a sudden cat-like agility. Unaccustomed to this acrobatic prowess he was put off balance. He pinwheeled his arm out to the side trying to steady himself. Instantly a beautiful sword formed in his hand. It was long and silver with an intricate crossguard. He stared at it then he looked up at the roar of rage that issued from Sodoms maw.

 She screamed again and lunged at him. He shot to the side and slashed out with his weapon, miraculously finding an opening in her shoulder plate. She howled with rage and pain and turned to face him. Grabbing the armored collar of his breastplate with her uninjured paw, she hurled him backwards across the room. He had barely begun to get up before she was on him again. They rolled over and over in a deadly mockery of kittens at play, his sword flying from his hand. Sodom stopped and picked up the fallen weapon. Staggering towards him she raised his sword above her head “from ashes you came and to ashes you shall return” she chanted, plunging the sword downward. A white hot pain shot through Mondrake. Sodom wrenched the sword out of him and stood upright.

“I think I'll keep this little memento” she said then turned and walked away, her arm dangling at her side. The world grew dim for Mondrake, darkness overtook him, but only for a moment.

A light far away began growing nearer. But wait, there was something wrong, this was not the light of eternity. There was movement behind the light “...pupils responding…” “...no signs of internal bleeding…one lucky son of a…” the voices of the EMTs faded in and out like a poorly tuned radio. Mondrake remembered little of the ride to the hospital, one thought prevailed in his mind: She could bleed.