



AN IMPROPER BALANCE

Book I of III

A Novel By

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This is a story about an elf named Vallayek,

It's about who he is, what he did, and why.



OVERTURE

At the beginning of all things is the Net. Not a place or thing, but a presence, a force, an Is, the Net is sustained by a collective singularity known as Maintainers. Together, they form the very fabric of Reality.

As the Net's keeper Time passed, the fabric became a tapestry of stars, planets, galaxies, universes, multiverses, dimensions. Eventually, the miraculous spark of life flared into being. Microbes formed. Plants grew. Animals evolved. Sentience and reason manifested, giving rise to humans, elves, gnomes, dwarves, and others. Some members of these races, collectively known as mortals, attained a level of power far beyond their brethren and became known as demigods.

The Maintainers cared not. Indeed, they were barely aware of anything beyond their sole, sacred task. They had their function and they kept to it without pause or question. They never noticed when mortals and demigods, chaotic and curious, touched on the possibility of their existence. The knowledge that these lesser forces called them *Truegods* meant nothing to them. They were incapable of concern, incognizant of possibility. They had no idea how much could go wrong, and would...



SYMPHONY

CHAPTER I: Events in Motion

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Destrik woke to a new day and decided it was time, simple as that. Sliding out of bed, he padded naked down the hall of his spacious, largely empty house. His slender, sensual frame and casual body language had misled more than one common street thug into thinking him an easy mark. Such encounters never ended well for them.

He walked through the open door of his laboratory, oblivious to the beauty of the morning sun sparkling through the glistening panes of an enormous skylight in the ceiling. Such things meant nothing to Destrik outside of how they served his needs. The room had sufficient lighting. That was all.

Workshops such as his were generally lined with metal shielding and had other security measures to contain lethal magical energies generated by experiments gone wrong but Destrik never bothered with such precautions. He could handle any problem that occurred. Safety protocols reflected a lack of confidence in one's abilities.

Pacing across the room, Destrik went to a massive bookcase filled with haphazardly shelved volumes. Despite the disorder, he knew every title and where to find them. Most were quite old but more recent publications stood beside their elders, the new leather of their bindings gleaming in the sunlight. In his early days, he had bought them as finances allowed. Later, he did away with the finance part and took what he wanted. Much more efficient.

The bookcase's contents constituted an impressive magical reference library and Destrik had learned their lessons well. Over the course of his nearly two centuries of life, he'd trained

himself to become a formidable wizard as well as physical combatant.

Long tables stretched along the left and right walls cluttered with papers, books, gadgets, and containers. Destrik bored easily, frequently abandoning minor projects to start new ones. His new undertaking, however, would hold his full attention indefinitely.

Tugging two thick tomes from different shelves, he slid into a straight-backed chair behind a simple wooden desk beside the bookcase. Like the rest of the house, the desk was purely functional, empty of adornment or personality.

Flipping the pages of the first book until he found the section he wanted, Destrik began to read. His stillness as he began this process was so absolute, his body looked like it had shut down all other activities to divert more energy to his brain. With his sleek, angular features and ink-black skin and hair, he could easily have been mistaken for a priceless, life-size statue sculpted by some sinister shaper of stone.

But of course he wasn't, and soon, everyone would know it.

He had read this particular section many times and was very familiar with it but he would never see the book again after today and needed to be sure he had all the nuances committed to memory. The section dealt with the legendary Truegods; specifically, how to reach them. The key, the author surmised, lay in vibrational frequency. The Truegods, being a different sort of life form, lived on their own plane of existence. This plane occupied the same physical space as the world he perceived but the molecules of all things vibrated at rates slightly faster or slower than they did in his. The problem of course, was how to get one's own molecules to match those of the Truegods' dimension. Destrik believed he had a solution to that problem, and the road to that solution began with a massive, crimson crystal.

Caught by this thought, he pushed the book onto the floor and opened the second volume.

This book, much older than the first, had clearly been a personal reference book not intended for a library or any other sort of public use. It was a loosely bound collection of handwritten documents of different sizes and parchment types. Paging swiftly toward the end, he tore loose one of the final pages: a map.

Abandoning the lab, he strode back down the hall, and entered a much smaller room that was empty save for two items. The first was a lifesize replica of Destrik's lean frame from the neck down. It stood upright in the center of the room like a headless sentry awaiting orders.

The ebony sorcerer walked right into the odd uniform, which flowed around him like sentient tar. As it neared his fingertips, which held his map, he parted, then pressed them together, catching the document before it fell to the floor.

Though the garment wasn't much thicker than heavy cloth, it was virtually impenetrable and also provided impressive protection from the elements and just about anything else.

Beside the armor was a metal stand holding a purplish-black sword in a black leather sword-belt.

Several decades ago, when Destrik had encountered the wearer of the armor, and later on, the wielder of the sword, the same thought had run through his head: *"I must have this."* As with his library books, buying or bartering for the armor and sword were a waste of his time, so he killed the owners and took what he wanted.

Buckling the blade around his hips, he left the room, heading for the front of the house. The soles of the strange black armor made no more sound than his bare feet had moments before. He did not pause at the sight of the two dozen barrels of oil grouped in the center of the large and empty central living room. Why should he? He'd put them there himself a few weeks ago.

With their rough-hewn construction, they looked out of place in the sparse but expensive

furnishings but Destrik didn't mind. Everything had served its purpose. Atop the casks sat several open boxes of ash-gray blow powder with long fuses leading into the casks.

As he exited through the front door, the black wizard plucked a leather cloak from a coat-hook and wrapped it around him, slipping his map into a pocket. Walking out to the street, he turned and fired a burst of brilliant green energy from his hand through the open front door.

The spell-bolt set off the blow powder, which exploded the oil barrels, annihilating the entire house in a spectacular explosion that would have killed a normal man standing as close to the disaster as its perpetrator.

Destrik gazed impassively at the wreckage, then turned from the smoking ruins and began the walk to meet his destiny.

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