

Asher Galla – Sacred Heart

The Mask of One-Thousand Eyes

Journal of Dr. Cesare Benezio, 1893

June 13, Sicily. After a long and arduous crossing of the Tyrrhenian, I have finally reached my destination. For many months I have pored over an extensive amount of historical records, searching for any possible sign of discovery, and I believe said search is soon to conclude. One thing I had noticed throughout my studies was an intriguing pattern of paganism on the northern shores of Sicily during Roman rule. This information has led me to a location within the region in which I presume I will uncover remnants of ancient pagan culture. Despite my experience in archeology only spanning four years, I feel a breakthrough would result in recognition in my field of research. I am quite elated, however, I must reserve my energy for tomorrow, when the project is undertaken, and thus, I will retreat to my lodgings for the night.

June 14, Sicily. This morning, I arrived at the site, and, to my surprise, it was quite a gorgeous view. The location is within a cave right off the northern coast. The sand in this area is an alluring white that reflects the lights of the sun, perfectly contrasted by the clear blue waters. The cave fits neatly in the coast wall, like a keyhole to a door. The contrast between the pleasant beach and cave interior was substantial. Inside, where I had met with my assistant and crew, the air was oppressive. All was dark unless shone upon by our lanterns. Stagnant pools of water were littered across the floor of the cave. We had also come across many carvings along the cave walls which all held uncanny imagery such as fangs emerging from destroyed walls, that of smoke or a miasma, and, most fascinating to me, various types of eyes. These murals, of sorts, were chilling, yet validated my motive for coming here. Once we had explored deep enough into the cave, we had prepared for the following weeks of grueling excavation. When we had finished setting up for our work, we parted ways to rest. As I write this, I sit drowsily at my inn bedside with the

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weight of slumber upon my eyelids. I do not expect to record any more entries in this journal until I make a further discovery.

June 20, Sicily. I have done it! I have found a piece of history! Since we had dug up the artifact, I could not contain my impatience in wanting to return here! I must compose myself, for feverish writing could get details confused. The past week was spent by my crew and me, toiling away in the torturous atmosphere of the cave. It was not until around noon today when I had struck the ground with all of the force left in my body. As I drew my breath, I caught a glimpse of the unnatural shape the artifact possesses. As if it had never left, all of the energy I had expelled seemed to re-enter my body as I struck the cave floor until my discovery had been freed from the layers of stone that clutched it. As I took my respite, I saw the artifact was a mask. The moment we had all seen it, we packed our instruments and traveled to the nearest town for a brief celebration. After this, I had returned to my room to organize my affairs for returning to Napoli and to examine the mask further. It seemed as if, the longer I studied the mask, the more incomprehensible it became. Even now, I find it difficult to describe, for the mask has relatively inconspicuous proportions, yet it is somewhat twisted in design. The upper half is enveloped in eyes, which I found eerily familiar until I recalled the carving I had seen earlier this week. The lower half of the mask has a set of bars, similar to teeth, with contorted, curved ridges and curves lying underneath. It is quite the ghastly sight, yet enthralling nonetheless. For now, I must prepare for the return to my hometown.

July 8, Napoli. I have settled back into my congested apartment after a quite haunting experience at sea. At launch, the crossing was quite orthodox. Eventually, I started to notice subtle paranoia and growing tension between other passengers. I could not discern if it was due

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to the countenance of others, but I too began to feel a heavy sense of dread upon my back. It was not until we could see the harbor of Napoli that I heard a brawl had ignited between two engineers on the lower decks of the ship. From what information I have been allotted, one of the engineers had noticed an unusual silence in his partner. After poor attempts to strike a conversation, the disquieted engineer faced his partner only to see cold, dilated, and hostile eyes staring blankly into the distance as if he had seen the full measure of the cosmos. The fight had begun when the conscious engineer was struck with a debilitating blow to the windpipe. As I heard this story, I was quite distressed for my safety and could not find the courage to sleep that night. The next morning I felt surprisingly refreshed and entered my apartment in a benevolent mood, momentarily forgetting the events of the previous day as I unpacked my belongings. Afterward, I felt the need to record these events before further inspection of the mask, which is what I will begin soon enough.

July 8, Napoli. I have made extensive progress in discerning more details of the mask. I have determined that the material it was formed with is a mixture of clay and purple dye. I would have expected the artifact to grow brittle with time, but, despite its feathery weight and diaphanous texture, it remains durable. I have also attempted to cross-reference historical documents, but that remains inconclusive. An undeniably peculiar characteristic of the mask is that it was cold to the touch, in the middle of an intense Italian summer. At the moment I feel quite lethargic as if I could fall out of consciousness in the chair of my study, so I must return to my bed before I do.

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July 9, Napoli. Oh, how perturbed I am by the events of last night! Just as I finished the logs of my observations, I had fallen into my torpor within my study, as I had predicted. Soon after, I experienced a horrifying dream. In this nightmare, I was fully aware of my surroundings but restricted in my movements, as if by some invisible chain. I was in a perplexing location, because, within this space, I felt confined, but could see for a seemingly infinite length in all directions. All was dark. Eventually, a purple vapor crept around my ankles, and I began to sense sharp pain in my neck. After what had felt like hours of mental and physical agony had passed, I awoke in a pool of my perspiration. It would most likely be best for me to take a reprieve from my plans for today.

July 9, Napoli. It seems as though my nightmares have infiltrated my waking hours, as well. I must have been so heavily shaken by the machinations of my subconscious mind that my depth perception becomes momentarily warped. Hopefully, this bane is only temporary. Even as I write I believe I am hallucinating! As I look at the entrance to my bedroom, I see the abhorrent smoke that seized me in my sleep! I was wrong to refrain from working, for it is the distraction I need.

July 10, Napoli. As of now, the clock tower of Piazza Dante Square has struck midnight. I have not slept since the night before, in fear of further torture. I must stay alert in the case of a threat. The hallucinations have become more severe, and incredibly realistic to the point where I question if they are hallucinations. I mustn't say such things, for that is the talk of the insane. This is merely an ailment I must weather. I must cut this entry short, for I have heard something outside of my study and I am compelled to investigate.

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July 10, Napoli. I fear deeply for my life tonight. While I perused my apartment, trying to remain silent, I tripped over a box of surveying instruments I had forgotten to reorganize, and then I felt it. I felt as if one hundred eyes were suddenly facing me, and the tremors followed. A combination of low, heavy thuds and sharp, swift trembles sent me into a state of shock amplified by the distant, painful noise of snapping tendons. The faster I ran, the more frequent the tremors became. Luckily I made the decision to arm myself with the American revolver I had purchased overseas, and as I composed myself I shot into the now endless void that had become my apartment hallway, but the clamor did not cease, so neither did I. Just as I arrived at the entrance to my study, I turned to close the door and set eyes upon my pursuer. Never have I seen anything so mind-breaking. Its body was stretched, contorted, and compressed into a form no person could achieve. It looked as if it was a vessel for an infinite number of eyes, contained all within a single organism. I must omit further details, for it was indescribably aberrant. I wish to erase its horrific figure from my memory. I have barricaded myself into my study and I hope to find solace in the rising of the sun, which is many hours from now. Until then, I must endure this lunacy. Now I must turn my attention to the door, for I see the vapor returning, *oh Dio Mio*.

Patient Records, *Nostra Signora Maria Mental Asylum*

Patient Name: Cesare Benezio

Birth Date: 17/5/1866

Notes: On July 10, sometime around dawn, a group of patrolling officers responded to screaming coming from a nearby apartment building. When the officers entered the apartment, the delirious Dr. Cesare Benezio was found rambling incoherently on the floor of his study. It was reported that at the time he was located he was donning an ancient mask constructed of clay and clutching

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in his left hand a journal, presumably his own. When the officers attending to Dr. Benezio attempted to remove the clay mask, he became aggressive and pulled the artifact from their grasp. Curiously enough, Benezio was entirely docile while being transported to his temporary cell here in the asylum, but he was to be restrained when we were to remove the mask. After procuring the mask, Benezio became excessively hostile towards the attendants who restrained him, even injuring one of the three. Shortly thereafter, A brief initial psychological examination was taken and the patient was then placed in a padded cell. Upon inspection, Benezio was the only person present in the apartment for the last twenty-four hours, and a bullet hole was discovered within the wall of the apartment hallway, assumed to originate from the Colt Navy found on the apartment desk. The asylum has confiscated and reviewed the journal of Dr. Cesare Benezio. The records of the journal, while quite unsettling, nonetheless prove he suffered visual and auditory hallucinations before a complete mental breakdown. The final entry of the patient's journal has been recorded here: "I've seen *it!* I have seen EVERYTHING! I revealed myself to the cosmos and it revealed itself to me! I know the truth! I have become part of the truth! I *am* the truth! The universe has splayed itself out in front of me and I know *all* of its secrets! I just needed to be *shown.*" Further research will be conducted on Benezio in the near future.