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NEW YORK *TIMES* BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

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UNCROWNED

CRADLE : VOLUME SEVEN

Uncrowned

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There was a subtle flicker of power from the Heart Sage, and she held up a silver-and-purple scale. “It’s gentle and stable,” she said, “but it is still an Archlord’s power. Be careful.”

Dross snapped up the scale and faded back into Lindon’s spirit.

Lindon bowed. “Gratitude. Will he be all right?”

“It should absorb the scales essence over a week or two, during which it will not be conscious or able to serve you. After that time, you should find its efficiency greatly increased.”

Stay quiet, Lindon urged him. *I don’t want to be killed and have my Remnant dissected.*

[We can trust Charity,] Dross said. [I have a good feeling about her.]

Charity clapped once. “All right, then, follow me.”

"Where are we going?"

"Oh, I sensed that your mind-spirit was still awake. I'm going to kill you and have your Remnant dissected."

[I'm updating my assessment,] Dross said. [I no longer have a good feeling about her.]

Mercy stood in front of the crowd perfectly at ease, smiling broadly with black-gloved hands resting in front of her. The clan had given her powders and paints for her face, so her skin was pale white, her lips scarlet, and the area around her eyes a soft blue.

Lindon didn't know much about makeup, but he thought they had used a little too much, even before you considered the big, red, round nose.

He looked down at his own outfit, which was similar to hers, from the polka dots to the big, floppy shoes. "This is a traditional uniform, you say?"

"All part of the show," Mercy said, adjusting her rainbow wig. "Now honk your nose and throw a pie at my face."

[Easy enough,] Dross said. [Just fire at the base of the dome. Give it a quick lick of dragon's breath, and we'll be on our way.]

I'd like to avoid showing too much, Lindon said silently to Dross.

The audience is watching us, and we want to give our opponents as little information as possible.

[Don't you think we should try our hardest to win?]

There's no point in winning this round if we lose the next. It's all part of the strategy.

An hour later, Lindon was ejected from the illusory realm.

"And in last place," the Ninecloud Soul cried, *"Wei Shi Lindon of the Blackflame Empire! Maybe he should have tried a little harder!"*

The crowd jeered and hurled insults at him.

[At least we lost with dignity!] Dross said.

A rotten tomato hit Lindon and exploded.

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