

Which of the Gods?

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I'M NOT talking about this world. This is another thing. Off the planet.

Vargun was a samurai who wore electro-bonded armour and coup de grâcé his victims with a plasma-spitting sword. Ripped 'em to the bone. Stone dead.

Vargun was twenty-three years old. He had trained in the art of the assassin-warrior since he was knee-high to a knife wound. Slit. Now, sleek and lion-maned, with coiffured curls, he stood honoured and lethal in the ranks of the royal elite of samurai. Vargun killed to order. Slash. He'd signed a thirteen-year contract with the Baron of Kinto. Job security. Vargun's speciality: political assassination.

CUT TO:

Vargun's pad. Take a look around. Ankle-deep carpet. Poison cupboard. Proton-laser gun rack. Video screen. Knife board. Drug chest.

A scruffling sound outside. What's this? A death scroll slipped under the door. *Vargun, your time is short. You will die by my hand. With love, the Inkman.* The Inkman? Never heard of him.

Smith from the Clean-up Squad had the lowdown. 'Freelance assassin. Very nasty operator. Handiwork just like his name. Black and messy. Blot 'em out. The Inkman. Splat.'

Death threat. Vargun wasn't worried. He was the best. Cool. Cooler than a corpse.

This night Vargun went a-cruising. Out for what he could get. Sex. Hot to trot. Welcome relief. Number One nightspot in Vargun's neck of the woods was Statues. Fun City. Statues throbbed with flesh. Women ripe and juicy liked honeyed peaches. Boys fresh as mouthwash. Flesh. After it.

Statues is festooned with baroque ornamentation. Arabesques snaked across the walls. Sensuous tentacles. Greco-Roman statues in every alcove. Headless Venus. Javelin-wielding Jupiter. Ancient pagan gods from the dark eras loomed in the hallway. Face to stop a thousand clocks. Just statues. Here at Statues.

Vargun checks out the talent. Steel-nippled Amazon licks lips. Python Woman caresses mottled thigh. Eye-patch Fluoro-Queen runs iridescent fingers down feathery dress. Vargun keeps looking. No hurry. In walks a boy. Vargun stops dead solid. The boy, sure stepping like a panther. Hair short and black. Black as the depths of night. Eyes like a cat. Black cat. Body rippling with sinew. Lean. Lovely. Vargun licks lips. Welcome relief. Vargun eyes the boy. Lust across a crowded room. Vargun slips like a shark through the sea of bodies. At the bar, Vargun leans wolflike over his fizz drug drink. Next to the boy. Opening line.

VARGUN: Crowded tonight.

BOY: My, we are perceptive.

VARGUN: Vargun.

BOY: I am called Keats. How do you pass your time, Vargun?

VARGUN: I am a samurai.

BOY: A samurai, indeed. I've never known the pleasure of a samurai.

VARGUN: Would you like a demonstration?

Vargun runs fingers over glass and slices it in half. Scrrtch. Tinkle.

BOY: How did you...?

Vargun holds fingernails up to the light. Glimmer.

VARGUN: They're titanium plated. Impressed?

BOY: Ten out of ten. I'm not sure if I'd fancy those claws... against my naked skin.

VARGUN: I can remove them, of course.

BOY: Of course.

Laughter. Laughter stops. Silence.

BOY: Your place or mine?

VARGUN: Mine.

BOY: Let's get out of here.

Vargun leads the way. Fingertips touching, Keats and Vargun edge their way through the maze of bodies. Outside it's raining. Romantic.

BOY: Let's walk.

VARGUN: Sure. Tell me something about yourself, Keats.

BOY: I'm eighteen years old. I study genetic technology at Kinto University.

VARGUN: Genetic technology? Have you ever grown anything?

BOY: I've just grown a companion-slave for my second-year assessment. You know, to actually create life, with these two hands... it's godlike.

VARGUN: To take life is also godlike, Keats.

BOY: Then we are the two faces of God.

VARGUN: I've yet to see the other face of God.

BOY: There are many Gods, Vargun, and they look over us all.

VARGUN: I envy your faith, Keats.

BACK TO:

Vargun's pad. Home sweet home. Multi-combination magnetic locks. Top security. Keats checks it out.

BOY: So this is how a samurai lives? Like an eagle in a golden cage.

VARGUN: Would you like a drink? Drugs?

BOY: Got anything to mellow the neurons?

VARGUN: You name it. Look in the drug chest.

Keats lights up. Neon. Vargun flops out on the water sofa. Ripple.

VARGUN: Keats?

BOY: Hmm?

VARGUN: Come here, to me.

Keats purrs like a kitten. Arches his back. Slinks up to Vargun. Togetherness.

BOY: How long have you been a samurai?

VARGUN: I got my first contract when I was fifteen. I've trained since I was three.

BOY: Doesn't it bother you? Death?

VARGUN: No, not really. Hell. It's my job. I can't do anything else.

Keats is sympathetic. Gently strokes Vargun's hair, face, lips, neck, chest. Chest? Keats' fingers freeze on Vargun's chest. Tap. Tap.

BOY: The skin on your chest? It's...

VARGUN: My armour. It's electro-bonded to my skin. I'll cut the power and take it off.

BOY: It's as if you live two lives, Vargun.

Two lives. Death and sex. A quick one.

VARGUN: Keats, you are too perceptive.

Vargun slinks across the room. Wires up to the juicebox. Cuts the current on his armour suit.

BOY: Relax, Vargun. Don't we all live many lives within the one? You're not alone.

Not alone? Vargun peels off the armour. A deadly banana skin. Raw fleshy fruit beneath. Naked. Exposed. Naked.

VARGUN: Not alone? What do you mean by that, Keats?

BOY: Haven't you guessed yet, Vargun?

Guessed? Guessed? My God! It's... Vargun jerks like a skinned rabbit jabbed with a sharp stick. Raw fear.

VARGUN: The Inkman!

The Inkman, eyes alight with laughter, blasts a hot jolt of plasma at Vargun's ridiculous, naked body. Vargun squirms. Expert. Evasive action. Plasma misses. Vargun grabs axe-gun from rack. Quick as a cobra, Vargun shoots a double-headed death blow. Shwtt! Shwtt! The Inkman cops two axe-heads full in the chest. One each side. Matching pair. Spurt.

ACTION REPLAY:

Vargun squirms. Expert. Evasive action. Plasma misses. Vargun grabs super-virus dartgun from rack. Quick as a cobra, Vargun shoots a rapid fire round of viral-tipped darts. Thwip! Thwip! Thwip! Thwip! The Inkman cops a pincushionful of deadly, disease-carrying serum. In seconds he withers to death. Ultra-pathology. Germ warfare. Jab.

ACTION REPLAY:

Vargun squirms. Expert. Evasive action. Plasma misses. Vargun grabs...

Vargun, stomach quivering like blancmange, picks up the Inkman's severed head from the sticky red pool on the floor. Stomach, nerves, eyeballs quivering, sick to the soul, Vargun waves the ghoulish trophy in the air. Angry, crazy, bloodied, Vargun leers at the heavens. With the Inkman's lifeless head in his clawed hand, Vargun screams at the sky:

'So the gods look over us all? But which of the gods looks over me?'

Then, with a voice like a klieg light, a little bored yet salted with compassion, God replies:

‘Ah, but Vargun, which of the gods looks over anyone?’