

#1 NEW YORK TIMES-BESTSELLING AUTHOR

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CHILDREN
OF
ANGUISH
AND
ANARCHY

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*To The Most High,
Thank you for the mountaintops and the valleys,
and the incredible journey in between.*

THE MAJI CLANS

IKÚ CLAN
MAJI OF LIFE AND DEATH
MAJI TITLE: REAPER
DEITY: OYA

ÈMÍ CLAN
MAJI OF MIND, SPIRIT, AND DREAMS
MAJI TITLE: CONNECTOR
DEITY: ORÍ

OMI CLAN
MAJI OF WATER
MAJI TITLE: TIDER
DEITY: YEMOJA

INÁ CLAN
MAJI OF FIRE
MAJI TITLE: BURNER
DEITY: SÀNGÓ

AFÉFÉ CLAN

MAJI OF AIR

MAJI TITLE: WINDER

DEITY: AYAO

AIYE CLAN

MAJI OF IRON AND EARTH

MAJI TITLE: GROUNDER + WELDER

DEITY: ÒGÚN

ÌMÓLÈ CLAN

MAJI OF DARKNESS AND LIGHT

MAJI TITLE: LIGHTER

DEITY: OCHUMARE

ÌWÒSÀN CLAN

MAJI OF HEALTH AND DISEASE

MAJI TITLE: HEALER + CANCER

DEITY: BABALÚAYÉ

ARÍRAN CLAN

MAJI OF TIME

MAJI TITLE: SEER

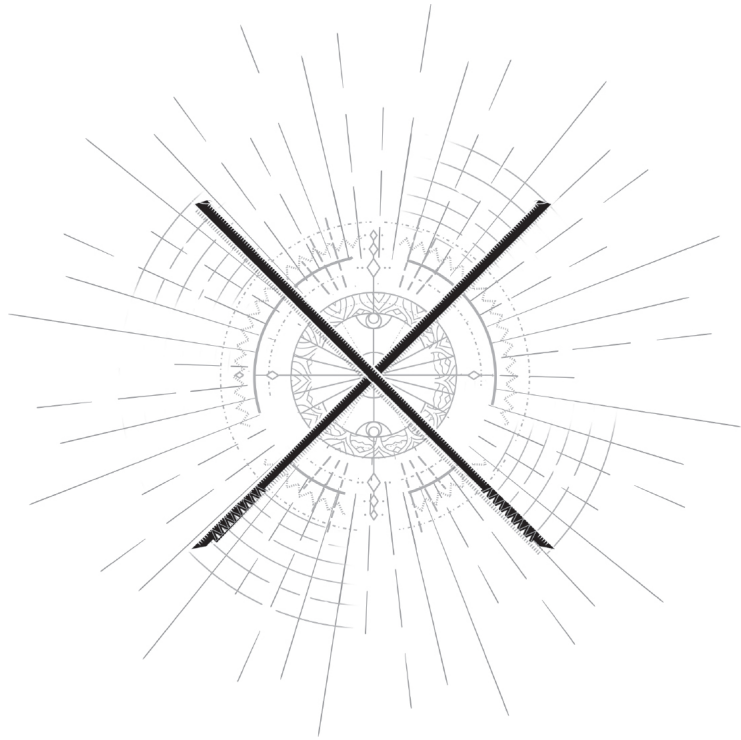
DEITY: ORÚNMILA

ẸRANKO CLAN

MAJI OF ANIMALS

MAJI TITLE: TAMER

DEITY: OXOSI



*I keep thinking about before ...
before it all began.
Before the scroll,
and the stone,
and the promise of magic.
Before our war against the monarchy
broke out across the lands.
I think of the divine storm the Iyika brought to Lagos's gates.
The way the palace windows shattered like glittering rain.
I think of Mama and Baba,
of my brother, Tzain.
I think of Mâzeli and my Reapers,
of how we were supposed to reign....
That was before the Skulls threw us onto their ships.
Before they stripped us of all we had.
Before they dragged me away from those I loved,
held me down, and shaved my head.
Before I looked into the eyes of my abductors
and could only see the blood runes carved into their masks.
I think of all the maji who were stolen from their lands.
All the maji who will never feel
Orisha
again.*

PART I

CHAPTER ONE

ZÉLIE

HELP ME.

The quiet prayer waits on my lips—afraid to be spoken aloud, somehow knowing if I reach for help, only silence will follow. Heat hangs like the shackles around my neck. The air churns with the stench of the dead. A thick layer of dirt and grime coats every section of my skin. My bones ache from within.

Thunder rumbles like the pounding of canvased drums, stirring me from my haze. It draws me from my dark corner up to the curved iron bars that create my hanging cage. The metal shackles around my ankles clank together as I press my face as far into the bars as it will go. Fresh rain and sea spray break through the shaft above my cell.

I close my eyes and inhale.

Oya ...

The name of my goddess fills me. It moves something in my soul. Her brewing storm calls out to me like a song. It holds the promise to make me whole.

For a few moments, the slanted rain washes away my pain. The distant thunder carries me back to better days. The whistling winds take me to the snowcapped mountains of Ibadan, the village I lived in before the Raid. I used to shake in my cot when the thunder roared.

It was Mama who taught me not to fear the rain.

“You must not be afraid, my love.” Even after all these years, the memory of Mama’s voice wraps around my heart. I feel the warmth of her

soft fingers against my cheek. The gentle cadence she used to speak.

“Oya doesn’t just visit us in death,” Mama whispered into my ear. *“We can feel her presence in the storms and the racing winds.”*

I remember the way Mama coaxed me out of bed, past Baba and Tzain, fast asleep in their hanging cots. It wasn’t the first night she brought me to the mountaintop, but it was the first time she brought me to meet the storm.

She took my hand and led me up a winding trail. I could hardly see beyond the tangle the winds made of my white hair. Our bare feet slid along the gravel-lined path. Every time I tried to turn back, Mama forced me to go on.

By the time we reached the flattened mountain peak, the huts of our sleeping village looked like anthills hundreds of meters below. Jagged silhouettes flickered around us every time a lightning bolt lit up the sky. I felt like I could reach over the peak’s edge and touch the clouds.

“Feel her, Zélie.”

My tiny frame shivered in the pounding rain, but the violent downpour only made Mama feel more alive. She stretched her long arms wide and raised her head to the chaos above.

When the lightning crackled around her, she looked like a god.

“That’s it, little Zél.” Mama nodded. I closed my eyes and lifted my hands to the raging skies. *“Oya’s storms don’t just bring the rain. They’re our harbinger of her sacred change.”*

I hold on to the memory of Mama’s words until my eyes begin to sting. Every time I think I can’t lose anything else, I lose everything.

I’ve lost count of how many times over the past moon I’ve called out to my gods. How many times nothing but sorrow has answered in return. I cannot bear to hope anymore.

The more I hope, the further I fall.

“No! No, please!”

Sharp screams break through the wooden floorboards above. I wince as the girl’s shrieks grow. I don’t know what hurts more—the sound of the maji’s screams, or the haunting silence that follows when they stop.

There have always been enemies to fight. Always those who wished the maji harm. I knew our battles might never end. But I never thought those

battles would stretch beyond Orïsha's borders.

It's been almost a full moon since the Skulls descended upon Orïsha's shores. A full moon since my fellow maji and I were ripped away from our home. After we awoke on the ship, they separated the boys from the girls.

That was the last time I saw my brother, Tzain.

At first, I had the other female elders—the captured members of the resurrected maji clans. But for the past half-moon, I've been locked in this hold alone, left to face the Skulls' torture on my own.

I still don't know why they've taken us. I don't know to where we sail. All I know is that before the Skulls abducted us, the maji were closer to victory than we'd ever been before.

We were moments away from winning the war....

"Attack!"

Tattoos ignite along my skin, covering my body in a twisting light.

Gravel and dirt float around our feet.

Bark splits in the surrounding trees.

The legion of tîtans run forward in droves, all glimmering in their golden armor. When I raise my hand, every tîtân freezes in place.

They seize as I close my fist....

When I shut my eyes, I can still see it—the battle for Lagos runs through my mind. When we brought magic back to Orïsha, it didn't just return to the maji. The sacred ritual gave birth to the tîtans, granting Queen Nehanda and her military followers devastating power.

Before our final attack, Mama Agba sacrificed her life, allowing me to connect my heart to the hearts of the other nine maji elders. Together, we created a force the tîtans couldn't withstand. As a united front, the maji elders commanded the earth and raised the winds.

That night was supposed to be the end of the monarchy's reign. The night the maji joined together to rule our kingdom again. After centuries of oppression, our fight was at an end.

We had retribution for all of our pain.

But now ...

I stare at my shackled hands. At my bare brown skin. The tattoos that used to glow are gone. My white mane has been ripped away. The magic I

fought so hard to restore is dead. My Orisha is farther away than it's ever been.

I don't know how to carry on.

I don't know how to hold on to the will to live.

"Oya, please..." I whisper the words, risking the heartbreak of another unanswered call. But thunder still rumbles through the ventilation shaft. I have to believe that even this far from Orisha's shores, the thunder means Oya is here at last.

"Please." I think of all the times she's answered me before. The glimpses I've caught of her hurricane spirit, raging like the storms. "Please free us from these Skulls. Please bring your people back home—"

"Bindið hendr honum!" a shout rings out.

My stomach drops at the harsh, guttural sound of the Skulls' tongue. Heavy boots thunder over the floorboards above, and lines of sawdust rain into my eyes. Feeling drains from my fingertips as I prepare for the Skull's cold grip. My neck burns in anticipation of the thick needle they'll jam into my throat, the venomous majacite they'll pump into my blood. Every night, the Skulls return like clockwork, injecting the poison into my body to keep me numb.

"Oya, please!"

I reach for the magic my goddess once granted me—the power to raise the spirits of those who have passed. I can't bear another night of the Skulls' beastly palms holding me down. Of pain so great, I can hardly make a sound.

There were days when entire armies of animations fought at my command, days when my spirit soldiers ripped through my enemies like the wind. If I could raise just one, I could hold the Skulls back.

With one animation, I would have a fighting chance.

"Please!" I beg. But no matter how hard I push, no power comes forth. I'm left staring at my open palms. I haven't felt the touch of my magic since we sailed from Orisha's shores—

The wooden door to my hold shudders open. I scramble to the farthest corner of my cage. Fear slams my mouth shut. The Skulls beat us whenever they hear my tongue.

Torchlight dances into the hold as the first Skull enters. Flames light the same mask they all wear—skeleton heads smelted together in bronze and blood. The crushed bones come together in jagged pieces, creating one large, tarnished skull.

Braids run through the Skull's auburn curls. Unruly scars cover his bare chest. Bloodstains coat his beastly hands and his wool pants. A crimson axe hangs from his animal-skin belt.

I brace myself against the bars of my cage as the Skull leers at me, an animal closing in. His snarl is apparent despite the bronze mask fixed over the bridge of his nose and hooked underneath his chin.

In his eyes, I see the gaze of every enemy I've had to face. Every opponent who's ever stood in my way. The way the Skull stares at me now ...

I ball my fists.

King Saran's beady eyes held the same hate.

Do your worst. I meet his stare. I won't cower. I won't show fear. But more boots follow overhead. Instead of opening my cage, the Skull uses his ring of brass keys to unlock another.

"Let me go!"

I crane my neck as the familiar sound of Orïshan travels down the stairs. Two Skulls enter with a struggling prisoner between their burly arms. A canvas bag covers the boy's head. Fresh blood is splattered across his bruised chest.

The boy thrashes as the Skulls throw him into the second cage. The men struggle to shackle the prisoner's wrists. With a sudden wrench, the boy slips free and kicks, sending a hard heel into a Skull's nose.

"Náðu hann!" the injured Skull calls.

I watch in awe as the boy puts up a valiant fight. He drives his other foot into the second Skull's chest. He throws a wild punch, colliding with another Skull's mask. Though blinded, he strikes in all directions, doing everything he can to attack.

"Pú lítill skítr!" the third Skull shouts. His ferocity makes me curl. He seizes the boy's hand and holds it in the cage's doorframe. I turn away as the bronze Skull slams the door shut.

“*Agh!*” The crack of breaking bones echoes through the cell. The boy writhes on the floor. Phantom pain shoots through my own fingers. I hold them as they shake.

New shackles clamp shut around the boy’s wrists. The Skulls lock him inside and retreat. A padlock clicks behind the hold’s door. I don’t dare speak until the thundering boots fade.

“Are you alright?” I lean forward. I don’t know what to do. What to say. A string of curses flies from the boy’s lips. Blood leaks from his broken hand.

His chest heaves with shuddering breaths. But after a long moment, he pulls the canvas bag off his head.

It can’t be....

My mouth falls open. My heart sinks into my chest. The damp walls around me close in. My cage starts to spin.

“Inan?” Rage grips me as I dare to whisper the name.

The boy shifts, and a thin ray of moonlight illuminates the amber eyes I know far too well.