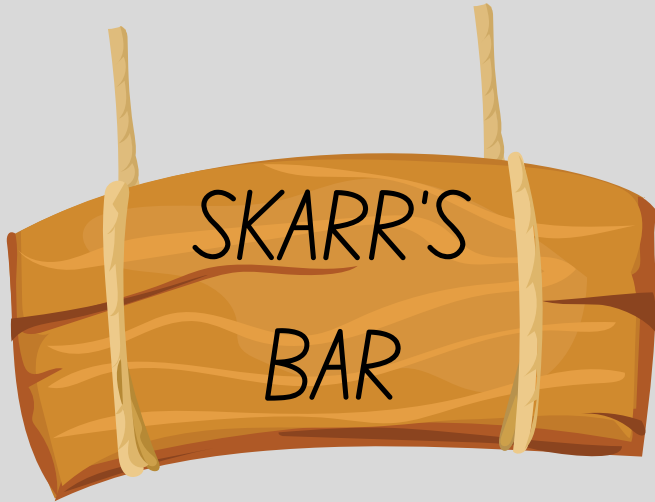




"Ah, I see," Sanasha says with a hum. "What has you curious about that old thing?"

Skarr takes a deep breath, partly to steel his nerves, but also to drown in the hellish aroma Sanasha carries with her from home. "An old friend is in town," Skarr says while motioning to the unconscious Ozymandias. "He says the Cage is breaking, and he has proof to support that claim."

Sanasha sidesteps the limp body, moving closer to Skarr. "Does he now? Well, I can help you put your mind at ease, Love. The Cage is no worse off than it has been for thousands of years. Sin City has its fair share of Portents with a... keen interest, so to speak, in its construction."

"So, the fact it is cracking isn't an issue?" Skarr would love to believe her, but he knows all too well what lies within. "How can you be so certain?"

"My dearest Skarr, how long have you been on Pangea, hmm? You weren't born here, yes?" Sanasha saunters around the room, occasionally running her clawed fingers over Skarr's skin.

Skarr shakes his head. "No, I wasn't. I was maybe ten or eleven when I got pulled toward the World Tree. By the time I found anything real, Jotunyr was nowhere to be seen. I'm just lucky I landed here instead of some random other world. Why?"

With a sultry chuckle, Sanasha answers. "The Cage has been around for quite some time, Love. Far longer than most things. Even I wasn't around when the Cage formed. To my knowledge, only the gods persist from that time, aside from the things inside the Cage itself."

Skarr's brow furrows. Trust is hard when so much of your life is spent locked in battle. "How old could it be? I can't say I've read too many books about it."

"Oh, that's quite alright, Dear." Sanasha snaps her fingers, producing a puff of red smoke. In her hand appears a burgundy leather tome, haphazardly stitched together in the shape of a distorted, screaming face. "The Cage was formed during the Second Age, the Age of Silence. At the time, the only mortals in this world were dragons and elves. I'll skip a few details, but your friendly little cursing Portent helped facilitate a war between them, which resulted in the Cage being made to gobble up the worst things Pangea had ever known. In your time here, have you seen the Rift?"

"In the Red Desert? Of course. The number of adventures that took me there were all bountiful. And dangerous." Skarr's mind is drawn to a younger version of himself, tangling with sand serpents of monstrous proportions. "What does the Rift have to do with the Cage?"



Sanasha flips a few pages in her infernal tome. "The Rift is the lasting scar where the war ended and everyone involved was swallowed whole, trapped forever in the Cage." She closes the book. "But, Dear. You have no need to fret. That was over five million years ago."

Skarr's mouth drops slightly. Of all the numbers he could have fathomed, the Cage being millions of years old never even occurred to him. The thought of anything being that old is beyond logic, aside from maybe a world itself. "That old? I would have guessed a few thousand maybe."

"Well, then I'm glad I could answer your questions. And for the record, Love, I myself am around five thousand years old. The Cage predates me by a wide margin, hmhm."

"So, we have nothing to fear. That is a relief." Skarr chuckles, a low rumble that escapes his throat. A rare occurrence for the grizzled old man that he is. "Quin will be happy to hear this."

Sanasha strokes Skarr's cheek, smiling up at him with flames in her eyes. "Tell the lovely little Quin I said hello, will you? Now, is there anything else I can do for you, Love? I could spare a bit more of my evening, if you don't have plans that is, hmhm."

Skarr smiles, even if it is faint. His mouth curls just enough for Sanasha to know what he wants.

"Ugh..." Groans Ozymandias from his pile on the floor. "You really pack a punch, old chap."

Skarr sighs, not wanting to move away from Sanasha just yet. But, alas, duty calls. "I've got to figure out what to do with this fool." Then, an idea occurs to Skarr. "Any chance you might have use for him, Sanasha?"

Sanasha smiles a devilish grin.