

## Concealed By The Cloud

“Well,” nervously explained the magician, “I can tell you what’s going on, but you’re not going to like it.”

“I’ll be the judge of that, if you don’t mind,” I responded. Maybe I was a bit snappish. I don’t like being told what I like or don’t like.

The magician took another long pull from her beer. “Fine,” she said. “I’ll tell you, then. It’s all for our own damned good. Literally.”

I groaned. “Abuse of the word ‘literally’ is possibly this century’s greatest linguistic sin...”

“No, it’s legitimate in this case! Look, you know that there’s a Hell, right?” I nodded. “And places *worse* than Hell?” I nodded again, more reluctantly. “And you know how some of the things in those places **noticed** us, a while back?” When I didn’t respond, the magician looked at me through slitted, and half-drunken, eyes. “Don’t pretend. You *know*.”

I sighed. “Yes, I know.”

“Yeah. You know, I know, anybody that knows magic knows that. And You-Know-Who knows. That’s why he created the site! It’s using basic sympathetic warding magic. Create an imitation of yourself, get cursed, the curse hits the imitation. Straightforward, right?”

“Yes,” I admitted. “But it’s only ‘straightforward’ if you know how to do it. The spells required are far beyond the ability for anybody not trained in magic to properly invoke.” And then my mouth involuntarily opened, in sudden realization.

The magician nodded. “Exactly. Creating the conceptual / metaphysical framework for an anti-curse template is an intricate and tedious exercise. Just like everything *e/se* that we have computers do. But if you can use a computer to create the framework, all you have to do then is put in your own personal information. The more you put in, the more useful your imitation becomes. And the best part is, you’re updating all of this yourself. Or your friends are doing it for you. Every forward, every share, every tagged photo or DM makes you just a little bit safer.”

“But what about the rest of it?” I asked. “What happens to the people that aren’t signed up, for one thing? And why was You-Know-Who” -- I wasn’t going to use his name

now, either. If he was **that** powerful a magician, I would be insane to -- “selling our information to other people?”

“The people who aren’t signed up?” she asked, rhetorically. “If everything goes squid-shaped, they’re absolutely screwed. But better six billion people sublimed straight into another dimension than eight, right? At least we’d still have a breeding population afterwards. As for selling our data...” the magician shrugged. “A lot of companies wanted to buy it. You-Know-Who may be trying to keep the human race alive, but he’s still a greedy asshole.”

I thought about this for a moment, and realized that the magician was right. I *didn't* like it. And I couldn't really do anything about it, either.

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