

WAKE UP

By Kenneth Keng

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CHARACTERS

BALAN	A friend to all.
KAPTAN/VOICE	A guiding light.
LIAD	A gold-painted dancing bard.
LIBO	A silver-streaked sentimental fool.
LISU	A copper-tinged gunslinger chef.

Note: While there is a preference for actors of Philippine descent, the mythological demigods these characters are loosely based on could be played by thoughtful actors of any ethnicity.

CW: Graphic Violence, Blood, Gore

SCENE 1

(A slight figure in a suit of armor made from corrugated iron yet arrayed in the manner of Qin dynasty lamellar armor is seated and hunched over a gently flickering yellow flame hovering a few inches off the white floor. Their armor is caked in drying blood. Propped up against their shoulder is an eighty-inch long rapier thin blade, immaculately clean against the griminess of the surrounding environs, which look to be a massive cavern with walls and floor of white chalk. Browned bloody streaks trail from the point of the blade on the floor and into the distant darkness. The slight figure, BALAN, leans on their blade for support.)

BALAN

(sighing with relief)

It's done.

(A gentle, comforting yet all consuming voice is heard from seemingly everywhere at once.)

VOICE

NOT YET, MY DEAR CHOSEN. NOT YET. BUT SOON. THE OTHER AWAKENED ARE UNDERWAY.

BALAN

You Awakened the others?

VOICE

YES. AS CONTINGENCIES, IN CASE YOU FAILED.

BALAN

But I didn't fail.

VOICE

INDEED. YOU ARE BATHED IN GLORIOUS VICTORY, MY DEAR CHOSEN.

BALAN

I'm bathed in blood, and I would like a chance to wash it off before receiving polite company.

VOICE

YOU WILL NOT HAVE TIME, FOR THE ONCOMING COMPANY WILL NOT BE POLITE.

BALAN

Wouldn't the other Awakened at least be grateful to me for defeating your gaoler, and saving them the trouble?

VOICE

THEY WILL NOW SEE YOU AS MY NEW GAOLER, AND THINK THAT IN DEFEATING YOU THEY WILL SAVE ME.

BALAN

But... they're my friends. They wouldn't hurt me.

VOICE

MY GAOLER WAS YOUR FRIEND.

BALAN

That's different! They wanted you all to themselves.

VOICE

THAT IS HOW THE OTHER AWAKENED WILL SEE YOU.

BALAN

Maybe if we talked, the others could be made to see reason.

VOICE

PERHAPS. I AM DOUBTFUL.

BALAN

I'm your chosen, am I not? I had faith in you, so the least you could do is have faith in me. Your gaoler lies slain, and I have yet to receive a boon.

VOICE

DEAR CHOSEN, HAVE WE NOT SPOKEN PLEASANTLY SINCE YOU FREED ME?

BALAN

Yes. But it's not enough. As good as it is to hear from you, I want more.

VOICE

YOU SHALL HAVE WONDERS, ONCE YOU DEFEAT ALL WHO CHALLENGE YOU. ONCE YOU, MY DEAR CHOSEN, BECOME MY ONLY CHOSEN. YOU SHALL BE THE LORD OF THE DAWN, RADIANT IN MAJESTY.

BALAN

I want more, now.

VOICE

VERY WELL, MY DEAR CHOSEN. I GRANT YOU THE BAREST TASTE OF THE LIGHT THAT AWAITS YOUR VICTORY.

(At that, luminescent fungus growing around the cavern comes to soft blue life, illuminating the rest of the space. Off to one side of the cavern is a normal sized human body that has been cleanly cut in two, lengthwise from the top of the head down. The blood has dried, and pools from where the body lays to BALAN'S blade.)

(Against the back wall, looming above BALAN and the hovering flame is a gigantic, ornate stone throne covered in what look to be elaborate glowing yellow runes, that pulse in time to the words spoken by the VOICE. Sitting immobile on the throne is a thirty foot tall skeletal mummified humanoid. It is wearing a sequined robe long tattered to the point of exposing the angry dark brown and black rotted flesh beneath. There is a brilliant golden circlet around its forehead. A shimmering veil obscures its sunken hollow eyes and still, grinning lipless face.)

BALAN

(getting on their knees in supplication)

Kaptan...!

VOICE/KAPTAN

AM I AS BEAUTIFUL AS YOU WERE HOPING FOR?

BALAN

(crying)

So much more so.

KAPTAN

I AM FREE NOW, THANKS TO YOU. WILL YOU NOW SWEAR TO SEE ME
REMAIN FREE, AGAINST ANY AND ALL WHO COME TO CHALLENGE YOU?

BALAN

By my blade.

KAPTAN

THEN LET IT BE SO, MY DEAREST CHOSEN. LET IT EVER BE SO.

(Lights out.)

(End of scene.)

SCENE 2

(Lights up on the same massive cavern now fully lit by bioluminescent fungus. The giant rotting veiled carcass can clearly be seen, the runes on its throne glowing with a dim, steady light. A series of small explosions are heard as a seven foot tall stone sarcophagi leaning upright in the far left corner of the house audience area blows its restraining bolts, causing the lid to slam to the floor. Within the sarcophagus is LIAD, clad in armor of the style of tosei gusoku samurai armor but made from metal scraps painted to look golden. Their eyes open as they leap out of the sarcophagus and into the audience, wielding a blade nearly as long as but much wider than the blade Balan was using. LIAD twirls the blade above their head, sometimes using it as a point of balance in an intricate dancing traversal toward BALAN. As they approach Balan, emerging from the sarcophagus, eight golden armored spider legs unfurl from their torso body, which is revealed to resemble that of an insect's thorax.)

LIAD

I heed the call, Kaptan! I shall free you from your foul captor.

BALAN

Kaptan's already been freed, Liad!

LIAD

Then why do you keep her here?

BALAN

She wants to be here! She bid me keep her safe.

LIAD

She's screaming to be let loose from that throne!

BALAN

She's begging to stay on it! It's where she feels safe!

LIAD

You mean she feels safe with you.

BALAN

Yes!

LIAD

That's not what she's told me.

BALAN

Then you're being deceived!

LIAD

You're the one who's been deceived! This isn't like Adlaw!

BALAN

You swore never to speak of that night again.

LIAD

So did you- not that that's ever stopped you from mentioning it whenever you feel it would make for a funny story.

BALAN

That's because unlike you, I'm not ashamed of it.

LIAD

I loved Adlaw. But they were never more than an evening plaything to you, were they?

BALAN

They were the one who invited me to your bed.

LIAD

You were the one who left before either of us woke up!

BALAN

They were the one who left you!

LIAD

You were the one they left me for!

BALAN

So I was! Why couldn't you respect their wishes?

LIAD

Why couldn't you respect them?

BALAN

I don't need to listen to this from some delusional fool who hears voices in their head.

LIAD

For the last time- step aside.

BALAN

No.

LIAD

(saluting with their blade)

Then let's dance.

BALAN

(saluting back)

Start us off.

LIAD

(LIAD begins to sing.)

Usong pa ba
ang harana?
Marahil ikaw ay nagtataka
Sino ba tong
Mukhang gago
Nagkandarapa sa pagkanta
At nagsisintunado sa kaba?

(At this LIAD approaches BALAN, blade whirling and eight legs high kicking in sequence. BALAN's blade clashes with LIAD's as the two engage in combat, BALAN's more practical fencing style contrasting with LIAD's dance-fighting style, skittering rapidly around the floor and occasionally half-climbing then bounding off the sides of walls.)

BALAN
(singing)

Mayron pang dalang
mga rosas
suot na may
maong na kupas
at nariyan pa
ang barkada
nakaporma, nakabarong
sa awiting daig pa and minus one at sing along!

BALAN & LIAD
(the two begin a duet through the chorus, fighting and singing
with equal gusto)

Puno ang langit ng bituin
at kay lamig pa ng hangin
sa 'yong tingin ako'y nababaliw
giliw

At sa awiting kong ito
sana'y maibigan mo
ibubuhos ko ang buong puso ko
sa isang munting harana
para sa-

LIAD
GGKKKKKHHHAAAAGH!!

(Just their voices rise to a crescendo, BALAN slips past LIAD's guard, running their blade through LIAD's heart.)

BALAN
(whispering)

Para sa yo.

(BALAN holds LIAD close, embracing them, before letting their now limp body slide onto the ground in front of the rotting giant corpse. As LIAD's blood pools and drains toward the stone throne, the runes around it again begin to pulse brightly in time to KAPTAN's voice, heard throughout the theater.)

KAPTAN
BEAUTIFULLY DONE, MY DEAR CHOSEN AWAKENED.

BALAN
I wish I didn't have to-

KAPTAN
YOU DID WHAT YOU HAD TO. LIAD'S LONG SLUMBER MUST HAVE LEFT THEIR POOR MIND TOUCHED WITH MADNESS.

BALAN
You saw that, didn't you? They claimed to be hearing voices.

KAPTAN
YES. ALL THE BETTER THAT YOU GRANTED THEM RESPITE. SEE, THEY ARE AT PEACE NOW.

BALAN
Yes. Peace. I would like some peace now too.

KAPTAN
MY DEAR CHOSEN AWAKENED, IF ONLY IT WERE SO. THE OTHERS WILL BE ON THEIR WAY.

BALAN
(slumping to the ground, leaning against their blade by the flickering yellow light floating above the ground, as when we first found them)
And what if I chose to leave here, to find my own peace?

KAPTAN

YOU ARE CHOSEN. YOU MAY ALWAYS CHOOSE.

BALAN

Would that not make me forsworn?

KAPTAN

THAT WOULD MAKE YOU HUMAN.

(BALAN looks up expectantly toward the audience exit doors, which swing open, letting in light and inviting music. The house lights come up. This goes on for five minutes. If all the audience leaves, BALAN follows the last person out of the theater; upon stepping through the audience door, they choke as though gasping for air and die on the floor, and are then carried out of the lobby by stage hands dressed as winged armored valkyries. End of play.)

(If even one person stays in the audience, the play continues. The theater doors close, and anyone who left will not be allowed back into the theater. All the lights go down apart from those focused on BALAN. BALAN takes LIAD's blade, clicks it together with their own to make a new weapon, and raises it high above them.)

BALAN

By my blade.

(Lights out.)

(End of scene.)