

THE SKY-GOD'S LOVER OUTLINE

Synopsis

After her mother's death, 19-year-old YEINE DARR is summoned to meet her estranged grandfather, DEKARTA ARAMERI -- head of the family which rules the world. She travels to the Arameri's marvelous palace in the clouds, called Sky, where she is shocked to be named one of three potential heirs to Dekarta's absolute power. Yeine has no desire for this power, but to survive, she must join the contest in earnest.

Yet Yeine has other concerns. She suspects her grandfather of orchestrating her mother's murder. Worse, she has attracted the interest of Sky's nonhuman denizens: the Enefadeh, a quartet of hobbled gods who are the Arameri's slaves. The Enefadeh can obliterate armies, level mountains, and conjure plagues at will, yet they have been humiliated and tormented for centuries by their human masters. Led by NAHADOTH, the enigmatic Lord of Night, the Enefadeh make it clear to Yeine that they want their freedom, and they intend to use her to get it.

What follows for Yeine is a descent into despair, from which there appears to be no escape. To defeat her rival heirs, she must become as cruel as they are. To solve the mystery of her mother's death, she must uncover the gods'

darkest secrets. To thwart her grandfather's plans, she must risk a dangerous alliance with the Enefadeh, and court an even deadlier seduction by the Nightlord. And to free the world from Arameri tyranny once and for all, she must face down the Lord of the Sky himself.

Style

THE SKY-GOD'S LOVER unfolds as a series of first-person reminiscences related by Yeine from an unspecified future point. There are hints that she is suffering some terrible fate as she tells the tale, which makes her mind and memories unstable. Thus the story is nonlinear at certain points, and occasionally interrupted by Yeine's struggle to remember who and what she really is.

Theme

"You never really know a person." Dekarta does not truly know his daughter. Yeine does not truly know her parents, and or even herself. Even the gods deceive and betray one another. To resolve the mystery at the core of THE SKY-GOD'S LOVER, Yeine must discover all of these secrets.

Characters (Human)

YEINE DARR, the protagonist, is the young chieftess of a tiny, backwater nation. Although Yeine is herself the daughter of an Arameri heiress, she resists identifying with her maternal relatives, considering herself Darre first and foremost. She rarely reveals her emotions to others, but inwardly she is less confident than she seems, and fiercely angry about her mother's murder.

DEKARTA ARAMERI is Yeine's maternal grandfather. As the head of the Arameri clan, he is effectively the king of the world, though out of a false humility the Arameri use no official titles. Dekarta is cold, bitter, and secretive, yet all signs suggest he truly loved his daughter (Yeine's mother).

SCIMINA ARAMERI is Yeine's cousin, and one of the three contestants for Dekarta's "throne". Beautiful and ruthless, she divides her time between playing sadistic games with the denizens of Sky, and consolidating her power.

RELAD ARAMERI is Yeine's other cousin and Scimina's younger brother. Relad has managed to survive most of Scimina's schemes, though not unscathed. He is crude, mean-spirited, and bitter, a degenerate alcoholic.

T'VRIL is also an Arameri cousin of Yeine, though a less favored one; unlike Relad and Scimina he is little

better than a high-ranking servant. He helps Yeine out of duty first, then later out of friendship.

VIRAINÉ is the palace scrivener -- a kind of alchemist/physician/scholar of godly lore -- and Dekarta's chief advisor. He was adopted into the Central Family despite being only a distant relative. He too helps Yeine, though his motives are more enigmatic.

KINNETH ARAMERI was Yeine's mother and Dekarta's daughter, recently deceased, although her presence is felt everywhere in the story. Kinneth once stood to literally inherit the world as Dekarta's (then-)sole, and worthy, heir. It was Kinneth's scandalous decision to abandon her position and marry Yeine's father which set the plot in motion.

Characters (Gods)

ITEMPAS, also called the Skyfather, is the only member of "the Three" still in power throughout the tale. He does not appear until the end of the story; his motives are only gradually revealed. His "aspect" is light/order.

NAHADOTH once reigned alongside Itempas as darkness to his light, chaos to his order, the second lord of the sky. After Enefa's murder he fought Itempas and lost, whereupon Itempas forced him to become a slave of the Arameri family.

Like the night, Nahadoth has many faces: a lover; a confidante; a psychopath. He is reviled as "the Nightlord", this world's Satan.

ENEFA, once the goddess of twilight and dawn, earth to her brothers' sky, was killed by Itempas long before the beginning of the story. She is remembered by humankind only as "the Betrayer"; few remember that she created all life.

Though SIEH appears to be a child of eight or nine, he is in fact the oldest of Nahadoth's children -- several billion years old, give or take an aeon. He is a trickster, unpredictable and playful, often dangerous. He takes an immediate -- though inexplicable -- liking to Yeine.

ZHAKKARN is a large, quiet woman whose apparent gentleness belies her true nature as a goddess of battle. Her feelings toward Yeine remain enigmatic, but her soldier-like loyalty to Nahadoth is absolute. She behaves like a protective big sister toward Sieh (though in fact she is much younger).

KURUE THE WISE is the tacit leader of the Enefadeh. Most level-headed and practical of the group, she sometimes clashes with Nahadoth over the best course of action in their bid for freedom. She does not like Yeine, primarily

because of Nahadoth's reaction to her.

Detailed Outline

The story begins with a star-crossed romance. Kinneth Arameri, once heir to the family that rules the world, inexplicably abdicates in order to marry a nobleman of much lower status. Twenty years later, Kinneth's daughter Yeine has become the ruler of Darr, her father's kingdom. Both her parents are dead -- her mother recently and suspiciously. Darr is struggling financially thanks to a twenty-year trade embargo, political fallout from her parents' scandalous affair. When Yeine receives an invitation from her estranged grandfather to visit Sky, the fabled seat of the Arameri family, it at first appears to be good news. Her advisors hope she might reestablish ties with her maternal family and in the process restore her land to good favor. Though Yeine is still in mourning for her mother, she undertakes the three-month journey to Sky.

When she reaches Sky, she presents herself to Dekarta Arameri, the family head. Dekarta shocks the whole court by naming Yeine heir to his power. However, there are two other heirs: Yeine's first cousins Relad and Scimina. When Yeine points out that this makes two heirs too many, Dekarta replies, "One of you will actually manage to

succeed me. The other two will doubtless kill each other, or be killed by the victor."

Thus Yeine begins the contest. T'vril, the palace steward and a less-favored cousin of Yeine's, attempts to instruct her in life among the Arameri. Yeine learns that only family are permitted to dwell in Sky, and all those family members must be "marked" by means of a magical symbol -- called a blood sigil -- on the forehead.

But before T'vril can take Yeine to be marked, they encounter Yeine's cousin Scimina, accompanied by a strange black-haired man. As sunset falls, the black-haired man undergoes a terrifying transformation; he is actually the Nightlord Nahadoth, most powerful and feared of the Arameri's four captive gods. Any unmarked person in Sky after nightfall is fair game for these gods, so Yeine flees through Sky's labyrinthine corridors with the mad, monstrous Nightlord on her heels.

Halfway through the chase, a strange child named Sieh pulls Yeine into the dead spaces -- chambers within Sky's hollow walls which are accessible only by magic. Yeine's suspicions are confirmed when Sieh reveals that he too is one of the Arameri's godly "weapons".

Despite Sieh's help, Nahadoth catches up to them and attacks Sieh. To save him, Yeine stabs Nahadoth in the

heart. This causes him to regain some lucidity. He whispers to Yeine, "I have waited so long for you," kisses her, and collapses.

As Yeine recovers, a third god appears: Zhakkarn, the goddess of battle. Nahadoth revives, fully healed. Before Yeine can grasp what's going on, Zhakkarn marks her brow with invisible magic intended to counteract the Arameri blood sigil. Nahadoth orders her not to tell anyone what they've done, and then Sieh whisks her off to see the palace scrivener, Viraine.

Viraine points out that what happened to Yeine is simply the unfortunate consequence of sharing a home with four angry gods. These gods -- who call themselves "Enefadeh", in tribute to a goddess who died in the Gods' War -- are by no means humbled, devoted servants. In fact, they spend much of their idle time trying to kill everyone in Sky.

The blood sigils provide some protection by denoting each Arameri's relationship to Dekarta. Those in Dekarta's immediate family are called the Central Family; they are the highest-ranking of the Arameri, able to command the Enefadeh to almost the same degree as Dekarta himself. More distant relations have different blood sigils and less power; the most distant relatives become servants in Sky.

Yeine has been adopted into the Central Family. As Viraine applies the blood sigil, however, Yeine reveals that she has come to Sky for her own reason: to solve the mystery of her mother's death.

In one of her first acts as an Arameri heir, Yeine orders the lifting of the trade embargo against Darr. Her initial attempt to meet with her other cousin Relad -- in hopes of allying with him against Scimina -- fails when Relad rebuffs her request for a meeting.

But others are interested in an alliance: the Enefadeh. Through Sieh, who has taken a liking to Yeine, they offer to help her achieve her goals, if she will help them with something in return. An unspoken expectation of this partnership is that Yeine will never use her Arameri power to command the Enefadeh.

While Yeine considers this offer, she awakens one night to find Nahadoth in her room. He behaves strangely, alternately cold and solicitous, and ultimately Yeine is more confused than comforted by the encounter.

In the meantime, Yeine has also been plagued by odd hallucinations and dreams of events which may have occurred in the distant past. She says nothing about these experiences to anyone, but she is troubled that they seem to center around the Nightlord.

Yeine decides to visit Relad in spite of his refusal. But when she meets him -- a dissolute, alcoholic narcissist -- she realizes she might just be better off on her own. Relad does give her one piece of advice: "My sister's greatest weapon is love. If you love anyone, anything, then I guarantee she'll use it against you." Yeine takes this to mean Darr may be in danger. Further hints increase her suspicions, as she meets in secret with another High North noble and learns that Scimina has secretly sponsored a war petition -- legally winning permission to annihilate one of the world's kingdoms.

Yeine is distracted from the effort to protect Darr, however, by strange revelations about her mother. After she witnesses the cruel magical execution of a heretic, Dekarta shocks her by saying, "Your mother wouldn't have shown any mercy at all." Disturbed by the apparent dichotomy between the mother she remembers and the "Arameri Kinneth", Yeine visits her mother's old room in the palace. In a hidden compartment she finds love-letters and mementoes exchanged between her parents, including a necklace with an odd pendant shaped like a silver apricotstone.

Nahadoth appears and informs Yeine that the silver apricotstone was the symbol of the goddess Enefa, who was

long ago murdered by Itempas. Yeine realizes that her father may have been a heretic.

Then Nahadoth stuns Yeine by explaining that the Gods' War was entirely different from what history records. She has been taught that Enefa and Nahadoth tried to stage a coup against the ruling Itempas. In truth, Nahadoth explains, the Three were equal co-rulers -- and lovers, until Itempas used poison to murder Enefa. When Yeine asks why, Nahadoth smiles sadly and says, "They fought over me."

Thoroughly shaken, Yeine continues her quest. Viraine tells her of Kinneth's last night in Sky, twenty years before. Shortly after Kinneth's marriage, Yeine's father was afflicted with a magical disease -- most likely on Dekarta's orders. Kinneth came to Sky to plead for her husband's life, and was refused by Dekarta. However, Yeine's father survived the disease. Yeine realizes this could only have happened with aid from the Enefadeh.

Before she can confront her prospective allies, Yeine is summoned to an early-morning meeting with Scimina. Scimina hints to Yeine that rival nations surrounding Darr are arming themselves to attack. Scimina makes it clear that this is her doing, though Yeine has no idea why.

After this, Yeine feels inexplicably drawn to Sky's enormous library. Here she meets Kurue, the last of the

Enefadeh. She also finds a hidden trio of murals depicting the Three. To her confusion and mounting horror, her face and Enefa's are exactly the same.

This so shocks Yeine that she drifts in and out of near-madness for several days. Upon her recovery, she demands the truth from Sieh -- commands it, in fact, using her power to control him for the first time. Sieh is hurt by this, but he tells her everything.

Yeine has two souls. One is her own. The other is that of the goddess Enefa, implanted in her by the Enefadeh before her birth. They chose Yeine as Enefa's vessel in part for vengeance against the Arameri, and in part because Kinneth willingly allowed it. This was the Enefadeh's price for curing Yeine's father of the Walking Death.

Sieh also explains how the Arameri succession works. When Itempas killed Enefa, he mutilated her body, taking one of her ovaries as a grisly prize. This relic is called the Stone of Earth, and it contains all of Enefa's power. Because Itempas cannot use the Stone himself -- only Enefa's children can wield her power, though it swiftly kills them -- he entrusted it to the Arameri family. Guarding this Stone, and using it on Itempas' behalf, is the Arameri's true purpose.

Traditionally a prospective heir must force a chosen

Arameri "sacrifice" to wield the Stone on his/her behalf. This, then, is why Dekarta summoned Yeine to Sky: she is to be the sacrifice for the next succession.

But Enefa's soul is in Yeine, which means that if she uses the Stone, she will gain the power to set the Enefadeh free. However, she will still die in the process.

Yeine has had enough. Used by gods and family, betrayed even by her mother, she makes a furious decision: she will ally with the Enefadeh, and help them gain their freedom, even though it will cost her her life. But she has no desire to die as a humbled, beaten pawn. In exchange for allying with the Enefadeh, she demands that they help her win the succession contest.

Then Dekarta summons Yeine for a private meeting to inform her that there will be a ball in her honor in seven days. Both Yeine and the Enefadeh realize what this really means: the succession ceremony is imminent. Yeine has only seven days before she must choose Dekarta's successor, set the Enefadeh free, and die.

Reluctantly the Enefadeh agree to Yeine's demands, and the alliance is forged.

Nahadoth takes Yeine to Darr, where she meets with her grandmother and confirms that Darr's neighboring kingdoms are indeed threatening war. Darr lacks the resources to

defend itself against such a large force; Yeine's people will be slaughtered.

Sobered, Yeine also asks her grandmother about the events of 20 years before. Her grandmother gives her another clue: "She was full of anger, your mother. She wanted to hurt someone, and being with my son allowed her to accomplish that." This confirms Yeine's fears that she is only a pawn -- not only to Dekarta and the Enefadeh, but to her mother as well.

Back in Sky, Yeine sinks into a despair. T'vril jogs her out of it by taking her to a servants' party. Afterward, Yeine sleeps with T'vril for comfort, though she finds it less than wholly satisfying. Later, alone, she whispers Nahadoth's name in a moment of recklessness. He appears and torments her with pure pleasure, leaving her shaken in the aftermath -- and powerfully tempted to ask for more.

The next day, Yeine decides on a risky plan to save her people. The leader of the alliance against Darr is a man named Gemd, of the kingdom of Menchey. Yeine hopes to bluff him with a threat to use the Enefadeh against his kingdom if he doesn't call off the attack on Darr.

To this end, Yeine seeks Viraine's help. However, she finds him in Sky's oubliette tending to a new prisoner --

another heretic, this one tortured and mutilated.

Horrified, Yeine summons Nahadoth and commands him for the first time, ordering him to heal or kill the heretic.

Nahadoth cannot, however, as the mutilation was ordered by Dekarta. Yeine can no longer bring herself to trust Viraine, and instead asks Nahadoth to take her to Menchey.

There she plays coldblooded Arameri to the hilt. When Gemd refuses to call off the attack on Darr, Nahadoth inflicts a horrific punishment two of Gemd's men -- which Yeine allows, knowing that her people's safety depends on her ruthlessness. It works; Gemd is so horrified that he agrees.

Back at Sky, realizing she has become as evil as any other Arameri, Yeine flirts with madness and suicide, even going so far as to ask Nahadoth if he would kill her. He does not answer, but he puts a hand around her throat. Yeine wavers, but cannot bring herself to command her own death, instead bursting into tears. Nahadoth holds her while she weeps.

The next day disaster strikes, as Scimina learns of Yeine's efforts to thwart the attack on Darr. In Sky's arena, before a crowd of spectators, Yeine faces her enemy with the Enefadeh's pain as weapons: Scimina has tortured Sieh. When Yeine refuses to tell Scimina how she dissuaded

Gemd, Scimina torments Nahadoth too, with Viraine's assistance. Yeine finally confesses her actions in Menchey, but does not betray the Enefadeh's plot to get free. She steels herself and leaves Nahadoth in agony, as she knows she must.

Viraine later visits Yeine, not to apologize for his role in Nahadoth's torture, but to make a confession of his own: twenty years before, he was Kinneth's lover. Sieh later confirms that this was part of Kinneth's own quest for vengeance -- because forty years before, Kinneth's mother was the sacrifice in the last succession ceremony. Dekarta murdered his own wife in order to become the family head.

Yeine goes to Nahadoth, who is recuperating from his torture. He confirms: a young Kinneth discovered what her father had done and vowed vengeance. Like Yeine, she sought help from the Enefadeh -- and also from a young Darren heretic. The fairytale romance of Yeine's parents was anything but; Yeine was born from an alliance of hate.

Yeine spends the next day contemplating this, her death, and her mother's choices. That evening, she makes her own choice to die as she pleases, rather than as a pawn of her relatives or gods. She offers herself to Nahadoth. Though she does not expect to survive the blistering sexual

and metaphysical experience, she does. As an unexpected result, Yeine feels a new resolve to face her end and carry out both her own and her mother's revenge.

An eleventh-hour maneuver by Relad provides an opportunity: though the attack on Darr has already begun, Relad can give Yeine's people a fighting chance. Given a real choice at last between him and Scimina, Yeine chooses Relad.

But as the succession ceremony begins, Viraine quite literally stabs Yeine in the back. He then manifests his true form -- that of the god Itempas, who has been hidden inside Viraine all along. At his feet, Yeine also dies.

As the Arameri and the Enefadeh look on, stunned, Itempas reveals the truth. A younger Viraine, brokenhearted after Kinneth's seduction, first tried to kill Kinneth's husband (by means of the magical plague) to get her back. When this failed, Viraine prayed to Itempas for aid, offering anything if his god could somehow win him Kinneth's love. This was impossible because Enefa created humans with free will -- yet Itempas took advantage of the opportunity and laid claim to Viraine's body anyhow, which allowed him to be near Nahadoth, his old lover, unseen.

Meanwhile, Itempas sought to undermine Nahadoth's other support. He enticed Kurue to betray her fellow

Enefadeh, promising her freedom if she could prove her loyalty. To this end, Kurue killed Yeine's mother, deliberately setting in motion the events that would bring Yeine to Sky.

Now, with Yeine dead, Itempas is triumphant because Nahadoth's last hope has been destroyed. "She has bought your freedom with her life," Itempas says, extending his hand to Nahadoth. "Will you not come take your reward?" In answer, Nahadoth attacks Itempas, Sieh and Zhakkarn attack Kurue, and Scimina attacks Relad.

Yet while chaos consumes Sky, on another plane of existence, Yeine's two souls reach an understanding. All the while, Enefa has sought to consume Yeine, so that she might be reborn when her soul and the remnant of her flesh -- the Stone of Earth -- come together. But Yeine's soul has fought hard to retain itself, and finally Enefa concedes the battle. "My essence, all that I am, is necessary for this world to continue," she tells Yeine. "If I am not to be the one who restores that essence, then it must be you."

The Stone of Earth merges with Yeine's body, and she becomes the new goddess of twilight and dawn.

In her first act of godhood, Yeine transforms Sky, replacing the thin unnatural column that supports it with a

massive tree. She also frees the Enefadeh -- and immediately kills Kurue, her mother's murderer.

Then, while Itempas seethes, Yeine and Nahadoth lay down new rules. Itempas is to suffer the same incarceration he imposed on Nahadoth: he will be trapped in human form and forced to wander the earth. The Arameri may continue to rule -- if they can hold onto their power. Yeine names T'vril as Dekarta's new heir.

With this, Yeine, Nahadoth, and the other Enefadeh withdraw from the mortal world to let humanity find its own path.