

DEMONS 101

Chapter 101:

"Now, I don't mean ta contradict ya Thyme, but, that looks like dry dirt to me" said Jack

"Yes Jack, well, if I'm honest, it probably is dry. I clearly didn't think about these rules properly" said Thyme

"What do you mean" asked Dusk

"Well, being as powerful as I am, along with being, well essentially a really fancy tree, I can sense small amounts of water. Now, as fancy a tree as I may be, that doesn't help anyone else when it comes to spotting this" said Thyme as it pulled out a magnifying glass.

Holding it up to the spot and angling it so that Jack could see through it "See, even with this magnifying glass I doubt you can see what I'm talking about"

"Nope. Looks normal to me" said Jack

"Yeah, and if I can be Frank for a moment" said Thyme as it transformed into a 6 foot tall bodybuilder with overalls and tattoos on his right arm. "Ok now that I'm Frank, this is ridiculous. It's truly is such an inconsequential amount of water that I bet when I the timer changes and the orb reconstruct itself there won't be anything missing because that tiny bit of missing water will probably be grabbed from the surroundings"

"And...?" asked Jack already thoroughly confused

"Well" Nixilei shouted from her booth "What Thyme, err, Frank? Both? Anyway, what is being explained is that the rules state that the orb can't touch the ground at all. Your orb has touched the ground, but it has done so in such a small portion as to not matter to the orb. The only reason it was even noticed is because Thyme is much more powerful then as, and likely more powerful than your average examiner. If we had anyone else officiating the match it wouldn't count"

"Exactly" said Thyme as they transformed back to normal "I'm pretty sure I know a good few people stronger than me who'd miss that speck of water, and some of them were water mages"

"I'm fine with just ignoring it and letting him stay in" said Kat. *And I mean, does it really matter? A drop of water seems like an awful way to loose, and I don't really want to win using that tactic either.*

"You might be fine with it because your team is so far ahead, but I'm not sure I can agree" said Dusk.

"Why not? Today has been fairly interesting already, no need to get super competitive over it" said Kat

Dusk made a chocking sound. A short coughing fit later he was facing Kat with a mask over his face.

Ooh, I bet he looks so confused, or perhaps angry under that mask. "Why not? How can you ask such an inane question? Do you even know how valuable the rewards put on offer for this tournament are? Do you have any concept of the prestige? Do you even care at all?"

Nope "Not really, I'm here for a job, similar to many others. The company has been nice, and the job has been interesting. I know nothing about the tournament as a greater whole but I don't see why that should matter. If you are so concerned over whether or not a droplet of water constitutes a loss perhaps you should reconsider what matters in your life" said Kat

Dusk let out a long breath that sounded like a hiss, though Kat couldn't decide if that was the intent or the fault of the mask "Look, ok, I understand where you are coming from. And you are right, perhaps I am being a bit petty about this but it really does matter"

"I say we keep it going" yelled Skye from the booth

"Skye, you aren't the one competing in this event, I will deal with this myself" said Dusk

"How about I give you a cookie?" asked Skye

"You can't bribe me with food Skye, your cooking is terrible" said Dusk

"How about a sandwich? I don't have to cook that?" said Skye

"Why are you suddenly bribing me with food? Do you even care if we win or not?" asked Dusk

Skye took a moment. Letting the air calm between them and looked Dusk dead in the eyes "As rude as this might be, Jack is not our main competition right now. Even if he was, I'd likely still advocate for leniency here, but he isn't so we won't worry about that. Right now, what is important is stopping The Unfortunate Four from getting more points. I didn't think I'd have to explain that to you, but perhaps you aren't quite as intelligent as you like to think"

Woah, that is a bit rude, to both Jack and Dusk. Though from a more objective standpoint she is correct, Green did amazingly well and won us two points, and I've managed this challenge really well because the effects just don't bother me. Kat glanced at her still burning fingers stuck a distorted orb of ice. Ok, this one at least affects me but it isn't so bad. At least I don't feel cold... or is that a sign of hypothermia? **nOVELnExt.com**

Kat tried to flex her fingers and found them unmoving. *Ok can I hardly feel my fingers because I encased them in ice or because they are freezing. This is actually important information now*

While Kat was trying to identify if she actually had a problem on her hands Dusk was standing there taking in everything Skye had said. She was right, for the most part. "Fine, if you insist, but no that I am against this plan. Thyme I advocate for allowing him to stay"

"Well, that's two out of four Lynn, Jack what are your thoughts" asked Thyme

Looking up to the group of elves Kat saw Lynn happily enjoying her meal with the rest quietly sitting around.

"Well, I'm out so I don't really care" said Lynn and the rest of her group nodded along

All eyes turned to Jack who stood leisurely with his cup in hand. "Well, I think I should probably be eliminated"

"Wait what?" said Dusk confused

"Well, if dems the rules, dems the rules. We just came to have a bit of fun like Kat said, and we are participating because our neighbourhood encouraged it. If ya think I'm out I can tap out" said Jack.

"Huh" murmured Dusk

"Well, I appreciate the humility shown by all contestants" said Thyme in a sombre voice "Too bad I get to do what I want then hey?" Thyme returned to the announcer voice "I'm going to say that Jack is still in the competition until the orb reconstructions. If a problem occurs then he's out, and if everything is fine, he's in"

Kat let out a breath she didn't realise she was holding. *Nice, I'm ok with this. I'm glad Dusk let Jack stay in even though he was against it. I wonder if Thyme really would have done whatever he wanted despite saying so.*

Five minutes passed with nothing happening until Dusk spoke up "So, I know you decided Jack can stay in how long are these things going to stay waterlogged? It's honestly a bit irritating to keep a hold on it"

"Oh? Trying to squeeze some information out of me? Use some dastardly daring distractions to completely comodulate this masterful maestro of wordplay and finesse" asked Thyme.

Dusk groaned. "Forget I asked" and returned to concentrating fully on keeping his water orb afloat. Now that he'd committed to using summoned water to hold the orb's water he couldn't just dismiss some of it to save mana unless he wanted to risk losing a bit. Having no idea how much the water had mixed or what was going to happen when it returned to orb form, he thought it best to just keep going despite the mana drain.

Kat on the other hand was trying to work her fingers out of their trap. *Ok, so I probably don't have hypothermia, or something similar because my skin is the same colour it always is... unless that's a demon thing... come to think of it my blood isn't still red is it? Wait then can I see me veins? No Kat focus get your fingers out of here somehow.*

Kat's frozen orb could was still on fire and keeping itself well below the freezing threshold without any extra assistance from her. Ok, let's think. Demonic energy makes things better... and I can't just put into my muscles. I can probably break this apart anyway but I don't want bits of ice to go everywhere... hmm my skin is pretty smooth, can I make it smoother by applying demonic energy perhaps?

Kat gently pushed the energy towards her fingers and found the fine control necessary to be rather difficult. The energy kept trying to dip into her muscles situated within her hands rather than just the thin layer of skin. Kat applied a bit more upwards force and the fire immediately made contact with the ice re igniting the slightly dwindled fire once again

Chapter 102: Serious Ethical Consideration... and Googly Eyes

As the minutes past Kat kept her fire burning by supplying it with a bit of energy every now and again. It wasn't draining in the slightest, but she was unsure how to balance it exactly. Too much and the area around her started to freeze, and that was a clear waste, but she was also scared of falling in the other direction and risking the orb unfreezing. Never did it get close at all to unfreezing though, not even a slight crack in the orb.

Even the few times that Kat tried to wrench her hand free she seemed more liable to break it from force than slip her hands out cleanly, but the ice held, perhaps a bit too well. The others were also doing fine. Dusk had fixed his water into a short orbit pulling the water around him. Despite the transition this seemed to ease the strain on the man if the lessened shaking in his fingers was proof of anything. Jack meanwhile just stood around calmly with his cup. There was a small sigil on the side that lit up occasionally, but it was clearly no issue for the man.

After further minutes had passed the orbs all reconstituted themselves. Dusk's broke free of his control and reformed above his hand hovering in place for a whole five seconds before it dropped. Kat's simply slid upwards around her hands and remoulded itself. Now granted, it was still on fire, but there was no issue holding it.

Then came the moment of truth for Jack. To the surprise of the onlookers his cup exploded, shards of rock flying everywhere as water sprayed out like it had finally escaped a pressurised contain. Kat tuned her vision to the max to watch it all unfolding but just before the water fell halfway to the ground it froze in mid-air and travelled back up to hover in front of Jack's hand

He was however only given a split second before the orb dropped. Jack scrambled to catch it in time, and while he succeeded a pained look crossed his face as the shards from cup were pressed into his hands by the weight of the orb.

Jack grit his teeth and moved it against his chest pressing hard with his left hand. Quickly wiping down his right he then switched hands and did the same with his left revealing a few cuts and stretches that didn't look serious but couldn't have been comfortable in the slightest.

*Ouch, that's not going to be pleasant. Reminds me of the time I had gravel stuck in my hands... and the rest of me after that crash landing. Then again, this is hardly comparable, it was much easier for me to heal from that.**

"Well... that's... hmm" Thyme stumbled a little over his words before changing into mages robes and a big hat that covered his eyes.

"In my professional and highly informed opinion on the subject of magic artefacts spanning centuries of ground-breaking research I can tell you with absolute certainty... I have no idea how that happened" said Thyme from under his hat.

"Aren't ya supposed to know these things?" asked Jack

"Well... these orbs were mostly a prototype anyway; I'm testing out a few new enchantments with them. To be honest the whole changing it to water thing wasn't something I thought I could do so I'm glad this all worked" said Thyme

"Wait, you gave us untested magical artefacts? Do you even understand the dire consequences of using such advanced magic without proper understanding" said Dusk

Thyme turned to Dusk, hat covering its face and robes cover its hands "Does this look like the face of a man that doesn't understand what he's doing"

Well... when you put it that way "Yes, you do at the moment" said Kat

"Hmm" said Thyme

Thyme promptly lifted off its hat and cut off its head. Holding the head in its left hand. Thyme then put the hat back on the neck and rotated just the head to face Kat. "How about now? Do I look like someone who takes pointless risks?"

"Yes" said Kat

"Hmmm" said Thyme. Thyme returned the head to the proper place and took out a pair of googly eyes. Placing them on the front of the hat where Thyme's eyes would be, if the hat wasn't covering them, Thyme once again asked "How about now? Do I look like I'm taking this seriously?"

You know what? "Yes Thyme, you truly convey the sense that you have explored and understood the consequences of all your actions"

"So Thyme" said Dusk with a much deeper voice than usual "What was the worst that could happen with these" Dusk held his orb up high in just the one hand, though carefully keeping an eye on it just in case it was going to start it's next strange activity.

"Well, I mean no permanent damage. Perhaps the loss of a few limbs, maybe an eye or two, or three" said Thyme

"How could it make us lose three eyes?" asked Jack

"By making you grow a third then destroying the lot" said Thyme, googly eyes wobbling as the hat turned to face Jack.

"Thyme, how can you justify using something so dangerous?" asked Dusk

"Well Dusk, ma boy, that's simple. I'm confident I have enough mana to make an army of you with enough spare to also raise a town for the lot of them to live in afterwards. Such a minor injury like a missing arm is nothing to me" said Thyme

Wait what? The statement shocked Kat somewhat. *I knew he was powerful, but, just how much stronger really is Thyme? I saw him raise the maze, but I thought that was just hidden underground. And the obstacle course, that was all trees for the most part except the sawblades... Yet, if he really can raise a town from scratch or create an army of clones how far does that power really go...*

"Hey, Nixilei, how hard is it to make a copy of someone?" asked Kat

"How rude Kat, I could tell you myself if you wish to know" said Thyme twisting the hat to face Kat once again.

"Ah, sorry Thyme but I'm not sure your perspective will help me get this into context properly" said Kat

"Hmm, suppose that's true. Well then carry on" said Thyme.

Nixilei looked shaken at this and bit her lip as she stared down at Kat with a slightly off look in her eyes.

"Look, um Kat, can I maybe go over this another time..." said Nixilei looking shockingly put-off by the question *nOvelnExt.cOm*

"Ah, yeah sure, I mean it wasn't that important" said Kat. *Why does this of all things have her flustered? She's answered all my dumb questions before. What makes the difference? Is it because Thyme jumped in or something else?*

It was at that moment Kat heard a click and felt something around her wrists. Looking down the orb had stretched out shackles to bind her hands together. *Ok now what's the point of this? Isn't it hard to let go of it now?*

That was when the second change occurred, a blinding white sigil appeared on top of everyone's orb and started turning. I have a bad feeling. A loud crack like a whip sounded as air exploded from the sigil in question started Kat on a turn.

Kat's arms snapped to full length and the orb seemed angled to keep her spinning in place indefinitely... if she were human. Instead her wings and tail messed with this royally, her wings which used to be resting lazily behind her were now trailing awkwardly behind her. With her balance thrown off Kat wobbled uncontrollably, only her tails instinctual need to keep her balanced kept her from simply falling over immediately but it was a losing battle

Kat tried desperately to shut her wings and regain some form of stability but the awkward angle she found her left wing in made it much harder to close. To fully shut it she'd have to first extend it out catching the full brunt of the wing before bringing it in to keep it from dragging behind her.

Shit, and I can't use my hands to help pull it, my tail is doing it's best what the heck is the plan here. The speed didn't let up. Kat kept rotating at an impressive speed, and while her vision could keep up her legs were having a tough time.

Ok, um, shit Kat think. What's the solution to all my problems Kat tried pushing demonic energy into her wings and while she could feel them getting stronger this didn't help at all. In fact it only made things worse as she felt herself lifting slightly off the ground and losing what little stability she had.

Crap... New plan, NOW! Pushing her energy away from her wings and into her tail she instantly felt the change. Where before it was making tiny adjustments as her body fought to regain control now it made huge sweeping changes that edged her closer and closer to stability with each passing second

Chapter 103: You Spin me Right Round

To outsiders, the sight looked ridiculous. They could see Kat flailing about, wings trailing behind her and tail dancing around like made, twisting and contorting sometimes dragging along the ground or pulling her wings back in line at the last second to prevent things from getting worse, and while it looked like this couldn't possibly be helping Kat's orbit started to stabilise.

Is it sad my tail is better at this than I am? Kat thought as she struggled, or more accurately, she directed demonic energy so her tail could struggle, to solve this balance crisis. As the minutes kept passing by Kat continued to feed her tail more energy but things had stabilised... somewhat.

Is this really a good situation for me? Kat herself was still spinning with her body moving all over the place and the balance threatening to tip at any moment. Then again, five minutes of constant spinning and you kind of get used to it when the nausea doesn't set in. At least I don't feel like throwing up. I wonder how the others are going.

As Kat spun, she observed the other two, and it seemed like they'd both come up with better ideas, or at least more practical looking solutions. Jack had encased himself in stone leaving just his hands sticking out. He also had a wall that his hands were pressing against as the air continued to be expelled from the orb.

I'm surprised that's allowed if I'm honest. In this instance while Jack didn't have the orb touching the ground, it was rather close in so many ways. The stone wall that had been raised to hold his hands, and the stone box that encased his arms and helped prevent movement. *I guess Thyme meant it really literally when he said it's fine as long as it doesn't touch the ground. I wonder if I placed the orb on a picnic blanket or something if that would count.*

Then again, that wouldn't actually work long. Assuming it could withstand the heat the orb would have shot off instantly if it was just sitting on the ground when something like this happened. Kat then let her eyes drift over to Dusk, or more accurately focused on Dusk as her view kept rotating.

Dusk had taken a vastly different approach to Jack. Instead of making it harder for him to turn he'd instead made it easier. Dusk stood with his legs spread out, with ice encasing his shoes, or perhaps just on the bottom, it was hard for Kat to get a clear view with the robes in the way.

This technique allowed Dusk to stand 'in place' and get spun around with much less hassle than Kat had to deal with as she twisted left and right desperately keeping her balance and looking the fool.

Ok, maybe Dusk has the right idea, instead of fighting it I should go with it. Can I just hover in place? No likely not, I need to flap my wings for that... but perhaps I'm on the right track. Kat tried to move the orb in her hands while keeping her tail stocked with extra energy. Kat found it wasn't too difficult to change the direction of the orb, and thus the way she was pushed.

Ok, I think I can work with this. Kat pooled energy into her legs. Twisting she waited until balance required her to place both feet on the ground and jumped. Once in the air she brought the orb up to the side of her face so that the gust of air would push behind her.

Once in the air Kat now directed the energy back, letting it go to both her wings and tail. Now with forward motion Kat beat her wings as she carried on forwards, using her tail to adjust herself so that having her main source of propulsion off-centre.

"Hey Thyme" Kat shouted as she flew around the arena "Is there any rule against leaving the area?"

Thyme swapped it's outfit to a thick leather jacket, a scarf and some goggles "Well, I'm pretty sure this ain't restricted airspace, and I don't recall no rule that says you have to stay inside, but you can't get too close to the other two competitors. I'll add that you have to stay where I can see ya, but that ain't too hard"

And so Kat let the orb drag her around to the various booths to visit the spectators. Waving wasn't exactly an option on account of having her hands bound together but a nod and a smile did just as well. Skye was the only one who waved back in her booth, but the God Crushers all got in on it having a good laugh and waving as she passed by. *nOvEInext.com*

For her own team, Gareth returned the nod but kept watching Green for the most part. Green of course continued to sleep, unburdened by the cares of the world or at least the cares this round of the

tournament brings. Kress just huffed and made a point of not looking at her, while Nixilei... Well she waved but the smile she had on was closer to that of a scientist who was coming up with a ground-breaking idea rather than someone who was greeting a friend.

The elves showed a mix of reactions, Grace, Ryo and Estelle all seemed surprised, a little interesting, and a lot confused by Kat's performance. *Perhaps they didn't think I could actually fly.* Though Rakhor seemed completely unphased and just ignored Kat.

Finally Lynn just mouthed out "Stupid demon powers"

So Kat decided to correct her a little bit. As she flew around the arena Kat managed just a few words per lap, but she hoped to get the point across

"Think though"

"If I didn't have"

"Wings at all"

"This would"

"Have been so"

"Much easier"

"Yeah? Says the girl who can fly!" yelled back Lynn

"Look, this"

"Isn't ideal"

"For me either"

"And I'll"

"Admit my other"

"Powers are kind"

"Of dumb but"

"This one doesn't count"

Lynn let Kat make a few more laps after finishing her point before replying "Ok, but it's still dumb you can fly already"

Kat nodded *I can accept that. My powers do seem really strong, if a bit specific but flight is certainly one of my best so its probably fair to complain about that one.*

Kat continued her loop around the arena for a few minutes with nothing happening. You could only nod at people so many times before it just became routine. *I know this is an endurance test but how long are we going to be stuck like this?*

Then Kat heard a crack. Following the sound Kat's eyes landed on Jack. The wall he had been sustaining was starting to break apart. Cracks started spiderwebbing out centred around his hand.

She saw Jack glance towards the cracks and close his eyes. Moments passed as he made no move, and the cracks just kept getting bigger. Jack slowly opened his eyes and let out a deep breath.

Three sigils lit up around him. The wall and the box that had been encasing Jack quickly melded back into the ground. With that the first sigil vanished. Next a ring was sliced around Jack in the dirt, creating a clear divide between the section he was standing on and the rest of the ground as the second sigil vanished.

The third sigil burned brighter as Jack dropped to just passed his knees into the ground. This all happened in an instant, and as Jack fell into place he started spinning... along with the ground around him.

Huh, that's actually pretty cool. Dusk moves around the ground; Jack moves with the ground and I said screw the ground! Kat chuckled a little as she watched the scene play out it was somewhat funny watching the contrast between a calm Jack, magic sigils around him and the current Jack wedged halfway into the ground.

I mean sure he still looks pretty calm but it's so much easier to forget he's a wizard when he looks like a carrot half out of the ground.

Shortly after Jack's display however Kat felt the tugging on her arms weakening. Quickly slowing with her wings and swapping to hover in place Kat brought her hands together in front of her with the orb sitting still comfortably above her hands.

Dusk noticed Kat's movement and pulled his legs together and fixed his arms into a similar position. Jack was... not really paying attention, swirls in his eyes as he struggled to keep his balance. As he slowed down however it became quite clear he'd kept hold of the orb properly in a more normal position and despite his inattention when a moment later the clasps around their hands were released none of the contestants dropped their orbs.

Kat let herself drift back to her starting position. She kept afloat just off the ground not quite ready to commit to standing again but more than ready for whatever the next challenge the orb might have.

Chapter 104: Run Dusk Run!

What have you got in store for us now Thyme. Kat pondered as she carefully scanned the arena. After the most recent challenge Kat wasn't sure what to expect. The food part was already weird, but it didn't directly involve the orb, it almost felt like a separate thing.

But with the spinning she had to endure Kat felt more and more like anything was on the table. I guess I should have been more prepared. *When I think about it only the obstacle course was even remotely normal. The maze had a bunch of weird stuff in it and certainly wasn't just a normal maze it had all sorts of weird stuff in it. Like that mystery room or the shark tank.*

Kat let out a long breath as she banished her thoughts and returned her focus to the arena. Pondering on what weird thing might happen wouldn't help her if she wasn't actually paying attention to what was actually happening.

Of course this was easier said than done. Kat's mind may have been improved by her transformation but even a demon was prone to distraction. As she hovered waiting for anything at all to happen it was easier to just enjoy the beat of her wings, or appreciate the strange and novel architecture Thyme had provided for each of the teams.

When Kat's eyes drifted over to the wall she noticed that the wooden ring actually had a number of really tiny carvings in them. Enhancing her eyes to get a better look Kat found a shocking sight, the walls actually depicted the events that had already passed. The section she was looking at contained pictures of Lynn doing each of the challenges until her eventual collapse at the start of the water section.

Letting her eyes roam she found that each individual had a carving section dedicated to themselves. Kat found her own section on the wall behind her but sadly her section was mostly made up of her standing awkwardly until the orb started throwing her around. *Such a shame my section of the wall is so boring, if only I had a way to liven up my section, I'd consider pointing it out to everyone.*

As Kat's eyes wandered over to the blank part next to her depictions the wall exploded outward. Pulling the orb behind her and narrowing her eyes with the other hand out Kat got ready to block whatever might come from the large hole in the wall.

Kat poured energy into her eyes hoping to see any trace of whatever had damaged it but saw nothing. *Perhaps it's just a spell? Thyme wouldn't let any monster into the area and maybe this was just a trick to scare us.*

As Kat turned around to face the centre but was shocked at what she saw. Jack was pulling large amounts of dirt to cover himself. A veritable wave of stone poured over him as it piled higher and higher until a stone dome covered him as he crouched down. The earth had been piled to about two metres in height and seemed to contain all the stone from a ten-metre radius.

Dusk was doing something funny, he was dashing left and right, occasionally shooting blasts of water behind him at nothing as they harmlessly splashed onto the ground after traveling a ways. Dusk held his orb close to his chest, in a pose similar to a rugby player as he shot spells behind with the other hand.

Does he need his hands for that? Everyone else seemed to just cast wherever. Then a sigil on the back of Dusk's robes blazed into existence as a massive torrent of water exploded out behind him coating the arena behind him in a wave of water that hit the wall and slowly started filling the arena.

Kat looked back towards her teammates for some clue as to what was going on but she only got more confused. Gareth had a look of horror on it, while Kress was frozen in shock. *What is there problem?*

Nixilei had the only reasonable reaction which was confusion, one Kat could emphasise with, but her eyes were glowing with a fierce light that Kat was uncomfortable looking at. *Wait why can't I look at it?*

Now it was Kat's turn to be confused, nothing had caused her eyes practically any amount of discomfort, especially not charged with energy like they currently were. *Ok what is going on.*

Kat flapped her wings and spun herself around taking in the expressions of the other groups. Jack and Dusk's groups both had the same look of horror that Gareth did while the elves seemed more scared than horrified, though Kat was shocked she could even see the difference.

Finally she let her eyes rest on Thyme, still thoroughly confused by this whole thing. When their eyes met Thyme's went wide, so he nodded a bit and tapped his shoulder. At the same time Kat felt a tap on her own, and when she turned she found a tiny Thyme with wings a suit made out of leaves.

"True Sight? Really?" asked the fairy Thyme.

Kat nodded her head in response.

"But that doesn't make any sense, you were able to watch my playback of the maze and the obstacle course just fine right?" asked Thyme

Kat nodded again

Both Thyme's let their mouths hang open as they stared at Kat.

"You know, Lynn's right. Your powers are dumb. Why the hell do you even have something like that at your age" said Thyme from Kat's shoulder

Keeping her voice quiet Kat whispered "I don't know, I just do? Why is this so weird?"

The fairy Thyme let out a sigh while the large one went back to looking at the other contestants. "Your other powers aren't that strange, your flying ability, and resistance to heat are both fairly common among demons, but True Sight is not something that anything should have at such a low level of power, no offence"

"None taken" said Kat *Honestly, it's served me well so far, but I don't quite understand why this is so important.* *nOvelnExt.cOm*

"I see you don't quite understand, just know that True Sight is something not even I have with all my power. Granted most illusions would still fail against me, but whatever you have is much stronger than it should be. It's likely your most important ability, nurture it well" said Thyme before disappearing from her shoulder

Is it really? What about my calming aura? I haven't used that yet so I bet Thyme doesn't know about it. Then again, they are making a big deal about this whole true sight thing so maybe it is a big deal?

Kat turned her attention back to the arena. Dusk seemed to be on his last legs. The arena already had water up to his knees and his breath was coming in ragged bursts. Despite this he was still sprinting around with reckless abandon, but he was coming up on Jack's dome.

Seeing the structure in front of him Dusk tried to sidestep it as he wasn't prepared for a hill to suddenly be in his way. Jumping to the left his foot slipped and Dusk started to fall to the side. Instinctively he dropped the orb and flung his hand down to block the fall.

As he fell Kat could see his hand desperately try to turn around as it went for the orb now slowly falling into the water beside him. As Dusk made contact with the water it splashed up obscuring the vision a little but Kat's enhanced sight pierced the cloud easily.

Kat watched as Dusk grasped the edge of the orb, only for it to slip out of his hands. Still though he didn't give up. As Dusk fell face first into the water he froze the area around the orb.

The ice was perfectly placed, the orb fell directly into the centre of the ice platform created just for this purpose. It was a shame then that it wasn't up to the task, the moment the orb came into contact with the ice it cracked and let the orb straight through.

Dusk and the orb made contact with the ground and nearly the same time, landing with a large thud in Dusks case. The mand didn't halt though, quickly pushing himself up her turned to face behind himself clearly looking for something but finding nothing there.

Thyme walked over to Dusk and offered him a hand as Dusk looked around with confusion. "I'm afraid you have been eliminated Dusk" said Thyme

"But..." said Dusk "Where... where is the wraith? It was chasing me for such a long time and my spells dealt practically no damage to it" said Dusk in between ragged breaths.

"I'm afraid this test was that of illusions. The other two have passed, with unorthodox methods both" said Thyme looking down at Dusk with an understanding expression.

Chapter 105: Through The Fire and Heat

Dusk stood up and let the water fall from his robes, it sliding surprisingly easily onto the ground. *Huh he must have the same water repelling properties I do.* Dusk had a look around and saw the pile of dirt properly for the first time and understanding that Jack had chosen to erect a suitable defence.

Turning his mask towards Kat though he just found her hovering in the air, in exactly the same place she was before the challenge started. Kat waved back at Dusk with a wry smile and he just kept his mask directed at her.

What is he thinking? Is he staring at me? Is he looking for an answer? Eventually Dusk turned to Thyme and asked "Can you enlighten me as to how the others completed this challenge?"

"Hmmm" said Thyme "I suppose I am capable of that, but it doesn't seem very sporting of me. That's information you could potentially have if you payed more attention in that round" *nOvEI*next.com

"Jack hid!" yelled out Skye

Dusk turned around and looked up at his team leader "What?"

"I said, Jack hid, the thing was an illusion so when he erected a stone barrier it couldn't break through because it isn't actually real" said Skye

"Why does it matter if a wraith can break down a wall or not?" said Dusk

"Well... ah, clearly his wasn't a wraith then. I mean who would really be so silly to use stone to block out a wraith" said Skye flashing nervous looks a Thyme looking for confirmation.

Thyme turned away from Skye to face the God Crushers box and just wiggled his eyebrows at them.

The God Crushers all burst out laughing, slapping their hands on their knees, Jim and John slapped each other on the back and Skye at them with a pout.

"Isn't that giving us the answer?" asked Dusk

"No, I gave the God Crushers a hint at the answer and they took action on that. What they did or did not do with that information once it reached them is none of my concern" said Thyme looking away from Dusk and sipping on a cup of tea.

"Ah" said Dusk "That reminds me, can I also have some cake?"

"Do you deserve cake?" asked Thyme

Dusk didn't say anything apparently stunned by the question. "Um? No?"

"Then why should I give you any?" asked Thyme

"You like to share?" asked Dusk

"Is that a question or an answer?" said Thyme

"Answer?" said Dusk still clearly asking a question.

Thyme just sighed and handed Dusk a cookie jar. "Here you go. A reward and punishment both"

"How is this a punishment?" asked Dusk

"One of them is super spicy" said Thyme

"Ok then..." said Dusk shaking his head and walking towards his groups seating area.

Thyme then proceeded to walk over to Jack's dome and knock on it a few times. "Hey Jack" more knocking "Rounds over" more knocking "You can come out now" knocking intensifies.

"JACK!" said Thyme. Kat had to cover her ears; the sound was unbearably loud to her. Demon energy rushed to her ear drums to try and protect them from the sound, which while succeeding in protection also further amplified her hearing ability preventing it from actually being efficient.

The dome around Jack crumbled as the man himself pushed through it. "What whas zat?" said Jack as he shook dust out of his ears.

"The monster is gone Jack, the next round will start soon" said Thyme

"Cool, thanks" said Jack who stood up casually and yawned.

As this was happening Dusk got to his group and whispered to Skye "So how did Kat get through the round, I didn't want to ask that one in front of everyone else, I'm not sure how a demon would react to my prying"

"Well" said Skye "I honestly don't know. She just stood there looking confused the whole time until a small figure appeared on her shoulder and then she seemed to calm down a lot. I have a guess but I don't really want to say"

"Why is that" asked Dusk

Skye just nudged him in Kat's direction where upon looking up met her eyes. Kat waved back and said "My hearings pretty good. I don't mind that you asked, but the whispering wasn't helping you"

"Clive why the hell didn't you put up a wind barrier or something" said Dusk

"You didn't ask kid" said Clive

"We're the same age!" said Dusk

Clive just shrugged at him and went back to watching the contest. *Huh, they really don't act the same way. Wait hang on, that makes the most sense anyway, Gareth said this was a contest for the younger generation, if they can refer to themselves as such, pretty sure Gareth's older than I am.*

Then again maybe he just seems kind of mature? But no, no way, Nixilei is probably older as well... wait am I the youngest? Aren't Green and Nixilei like the same age? Or am I crazy... Am I misremembering

While Kat was trying to figure out everyone's age Jack was busying himself with getting rid of the dust that had accumulated on his clothes, though he wasn't trying that hard, only removing it from his hair for the most part.

Five minutes passed, the groups in the stands conversed, Thyme sipped his tea, Kat hovered around, and Jack stood around yawning. That was until he quickly reconstructed his stone gloves.

Kat noticed this and perked up glancing down at her orb but finding seemingly nothing had changed. At first nothing seemed different. *I guess it's another round of heat, or maybe cold this time.*

That is until Jack's glove started sizzling. As the burning sound continued Jack summoned several additional circles and built up the gloves, making it look more like he was carrying two chunks of stone around rather than stone gloves.

But still they continued to burn, molten slag rolling off the sides and sizzling as Jack piled the stone higher and higher. Waves of heat radiated from the orb in his hands, soon Jack even widened the structure and curved it.

This let the molten rock fall further away from him as it sizzled on the ground. While this was going on several sigils on his robes lit up covering his body in a layer of rock that grew by the second.

As it travelled down Jack's legs Thyme interrupted. "I feel I should warn you, that if your armour connects your hands and feet the ground will be touching the orb. I do think it is a little unfair regarding your element but I'm giving you one extra warning so it's fair game.

Jack pulled a strained face behind his armoured mask as he quickly added an extra sigil near his feet that prevented additional rock from forming past a certain point, his arms quivered as they supported the weight of the stone, but it wasn't too much... not yet.

But as the stone continued to heat up, more slag fell, and the temperature in the immediate area rose. His body surrounded in its cocoon of stone was starting to let the heat seep in. His stone form seemed to have no gaps in the armour but still the heat prevailed.

Sweat poured out of Jack as he heavily contemplated just giving up, saying the challenge didn't matter that much, saying he had tried his best. Though he knew these things were lies. This was his chance to prove he could protect his friends from anything, his chance to prove that just because he was the mage didn't mean he was weak. That he was a real adventurer, and that low paying handyman work didn't mean he was weak.

Of course this was in stark contrast to Kat. As the temperature on the orb started to tick higher and higher Kat was finally able to notice it. However rather than the intense heat and burning that Jack was fighting off Kat felt it much closer to a warm bath on a cold night, or a sharing your lap with a family pet.

Kat shivered a bit as she held the warmth close and let it flow through her. It wasn't that she had ever been called since becoming a full demon, far from it, but she hadn't found anything quite so comfortable as this. *Well, this is almost as good as hugging Sylvie or Lily, and I guess I can add Vivian to that list now. But ah how I've missed this feeling and I didn't even notice.*

Once again though the contestants in the stands just looked at the smiling Kat hugging the fiery death ball that could melt through half a metre of solid stone almost as fast as Jack could conjure and hugging it close a hand warmer on a cold winter's day.

"Your powers are DUMB!" yelled Lynn as everyone else nodded their heads along. Perhaps in the past they might have ignored her, but seeing Kat treat rock melting heat so casually even the rest of Kat's team was willing to agree on this one.

Chapter 106: A Real High Class Bout

"Ok, I'll accept that criticism" said Kat turning to face Lynn "but this is really nice and comfy. It's really hard to feel that comfortable warmth, like um, hot baths or blankets when you have resistance to heat" said Kat

Lynn wasn't interested in responding and just huffed in Kat's direction while turning away. *Surely, it's not that bad right? I mean Lynn has fire powers, surely she'd be able to handle it.*

Kat took a quick glance at the melting stone in Jack's hands. *Ok, maybe this is a little excessive*

Thyme snapped his fingers and the orbs stopped glowing, well Kat's did, Jack's was still surrounded by burning liquid stone and managed to keep its glow for the moment.

"The final challenge approaches" said Thyme, as it transformed into multiple copies of themselves in tabards. Half had horns as their sigil and the other half a stone surrounded by smaller orbiting rocks, and all carried bugle in their right hands.

Music rang out the horns as the centremost Thyme with a split tabard containing half of each symbol spoke "We have only two remaining contestants, and one remaining challenge"

The walls started to twist and close in on the two. The floor shuffled around so that the space Kat was originally standing was now directly opposite Jack, with the arena shrinking to roughly half the size with the bugle Thyme lining the sides.

Of course, Kat had yet to stop hovering so upon shuffling the arena she was slightly up and to the left instead across from Jack. "Um, fair Lady Kat, please take your place across from Jack"

Um? Is there a reason to? Kat looked at her orb and then back at the crowd and shrugged. *Guess there's no reason not to at least. I can just fly up again.*

Flying to her position and leaving it so just the ends of her toes barely grazed the ground Kat hovered across from Jack and struck a much more imposing scene. Kat was already slightly taller than Jack, now with the extra height provided by not standing fully on the ground made her loom over the man.

Kat's figure was much slimmer than the surprisingly well built wizard and yet still he looked small as her wings spread out behind her further increasing her silhouette. Her kimono fluttered slightly moving to an unseen wind, truthfully moving from the slight unconscious touch of Kat's demonic energy.

Her presence filled the field and everyone in the stands took a deep breath. Kat was unconsciously letting out waves of her aura, but instead of calming the others it made Kat radiate a calm imposing dignity she didn't quite feel.

Of course, Kat herself was oblivious to most of this, she was just trying to look a bit cool for what Thyme said was the final challenge, but her instincts were handling the rest. *The last challenge hey? I wonder it could possibly be.*

"This final challenge is a test of skill, of cunning, of understanding, of might, and many other things that I'm forgetting at the moment" said The central Thyme.

"But nonetheless, this is a grand battle between Kat, and Jack, may the best sentient win" said Thyme

A final note rang from the horns as the Thyme's retracted back into one and then vanished into the ground. Jack took a fighting stance, holding the orb in front of him like he was holding a sceptre. Sigils blazed to life around him as he glared towards Kat.

"Now wait just a minute here" said Kat as more and more sigils appeared around the man. "I think you are forgetting something"

"Ay, you may be a demon, and I might loose, but I ain't going to fail to try" said Jack, sweating now from exhaustion rather than heat, already spent from the previous round but forcing more mana into his spells.

"No wait Jack, your making a big mistake" said Kat

"I will not have you mislead me at this final juncture. Prepare your spells, or are you spent" said Jack raising his left hand, the one without the orb above his hand.

Jack seriously this is a trap don't do it. "I'm not threatening you Jack, you a misunderstanding what's going on" said Kat as she started to fly into the air.

The moment Kat started to gain altitude Jack dropped his hand and unleashed a hail of rocks. Each of the many sigils fired several small rocks, zipping towards Kat at breakneck speed, though with somewhat poor accuracy.

Kat let her eyes burn and her mind speed up. Slowing everything down Kat slid in between the projectiles as she gained in height while she said. "I am simply dodging these for fun, I am not being interfered with in the-" Kat got stuck on the words she was trying to say

"I'm not being interfered with in any significant way" tried Kat again.

"What foul tricks do you think you can play with me" said Jack as a huge boulder started to form behind him.

"Now Jack, I want you to remember the rules very carefully" said Kat as she watched the rock forming before her stopping the ascent to be in line with it instead.

"I've heard them. This is a battle and I plan to at least try to win. Put up a fight, for while I be no knight, I would hope you'd do me the honour of fighting back" said Jack.

"No seriously Jack, I'm not just going to give you the answer here" said Kat. *Do I just win then? I'm trying to give you some help here Jack.*

"I expected nothing less" said Jack who released the boulder collapsing to his knees as he did so. "This is my last shot, dodge it if you can"

Jack balancing on three limbs but keeping the orb off the ground watched with wide eyes for what was coming next.

The rock fell towards Kat. Even to the unenhanced eye the speed was slow, but it was large, towering over Kat as it slowly bore down upon her.

Sigh, let's see if I'm correct in my assumption then. Kat stared at the boulder as it approached ever closer not moving an inch. Kat let it fall towards her unimpeded. It reached the front of her nose, just barely grazing it with the slightest touch before stopping.

The boulder instantly disintegrated and fell to dust in front of Kat.

Jack let out a long breath and lowered his head knowing that he had lost. Clapping was heard from behind him, but he had not the energy to look. "It seems you have lost Jack" said Thyme

"Not just yet, I haven't dropped the orb just yet" said Jack

"No I'm afraid you interfered with a competitor" said Thyme ~~noVELn&Ext.c0m~~

"Wait what?" said Jack and the rest of the stadium bare Nixilei who nodded along and Green who continued to sleep.

"Clearly you were not thoroughly paying attention. What was the rule I laid out for this battle?" asked Thyme pushing glasses further onto his face that Kat had missed him summoning.

"No interference" said Nixilei "They were not to interfere with other competitors"

"Correct, twenty three points to the unfortunate four" said Thyme with a laugh. "But no seriously, that's correct."

"Haha" laughed Jack exhausted as he let himself collapse onto the ground.

"Sorry Jack, I did try to give you a hint there" said Kat as she lowered herself to the ground. "I wasn't totally sure if I was even allowed to block your projectile so I just dodged them all, that was until you summoned that massive boulder and thought, if you are going so far I'd let you throw it at me. I mean that was pretty cool if I'm honest"

Jack groaned in response, too tired to speak. Thyme looked down at Jack and said "Well, I suppose I should do this now"

Thyme pushed a Green orb into Jack's back and the moment it made contact he shivered and tried to stand up. He was a little wobbly on his feet, but already his face looked significantly less haggard than it did just a moment ago.

"And so" said Thyme voice booming "It is with great pleasure, that I announce the winner of the third competition. Kat... I don't know your lastname the DEMON!"

As soon as Thyme had finished talking the God Crushers all jumped from their seats, taking the stairs two at a time to get to their friend faster. Surrounding him on they all grabbed his limb and carried him into the air throwing him up with cheer.

Kat smiled at the scene. *He really did try hard. And my powers are kind of dumb. Though I suppose I won because I still remembered the rules... Then again, I was much more well rested, so I hardly had to put up with anything that might make me forget.*

As Kat was thinking this she felt thin arms wrap around her back. As she craned her neck to see, she noticed it was Green giving her a big smile

Chapter 107: T.T.Q.S

"You did it Kat, you won like me" said Green trying to awkwardly hug Kat around her wings. Kat laughed and wrapped her tail around in response.

"You've still done twice as well as I" said Kat

Green realising what she'd done looked around for a Gareth to hide behind but found that she was in the empty arena and bound tightly by Kat's tail so instead settle from shrinking into her outfit.

Kat laughed at Green's antics and pulled her along back to the group that was currently being lowered as the viewing boxes sunk back into the earth. As soon as they got within a metre of Gareth, Kat felt Green trying to escape her tail but decided against letting her go just yet.

Green pouted at this and tried to use her phasing ability to escape Kat's tail but found a great resistance when she tried. As Green was debating whether to force it or not Kat noticed the uncomfortable expression on her face and let, he go. Before Kat could blink Green was instantly behind Gareth, poking her head out just enough to keep an eye on everyone.

"Great Job Kat, bringing back a win is more than we asked for" said Gareth.

"It was no big deal" said Kat

"Yeah, with powers as strong as yours who even needs to try. Hell I bet I could have done just as good as you without all the crazy powers" said Kress

"I highly doubt as much. Even if you were disciplined enough to reject the offering of food, which you aren't, you would have failed to hold the water, burned your hands on even the first fire, possess no way to see through the illusions and I bet you would have instantly struck out at Jack in the finals. You had no chance" said Nixilei from the side, looking down at Kress looking over her glasses at him.

Kress clicked his tongue "I have plenty of enchantments on my armour, I can withstand the heat"

"Doubtful, that Jack managed to summon around 200kg of stone, which is rather impressive at his age. This was after summoning that defensive wall, and while it was clear he was using the stone in the surroundings it is not a feat a magical cripple like yourself could achieve" said Nixilei

"You want to say that to my face?" said Kress bringing out his sword.

"I just did" said Nixilei sigils flaring over her shoulders.

Gareth stepped in between them and gestured for them to calm down. "Now now, your both being unprofessional"

Nixilei immediately straightened up and inclined her head in Gareth's direction and dismissed her sigils to signal understanding, but Kress just pulled out his other sword and said "Our host clearly doesn't care for ceremony, and he loves a good show, why not give him one"

Kat could see Nixilei's eye twitching and if she looked closely could see sigils glowing on her robes unmoving in the face of Kress' continued provocation. Green took this as her cue to hide behind Kat, because Gareth was in the middle of the fight and she was unwilling to stand her ground.

"You don't mind if I hide behind you right?" asked Green who suddenly appeared behind Kat.

"Sure go for it" said Kat who proceeded to wrap Green in her tail once again and use the end to pat Green's head.

"Now Kress, I do hate to pick sides, but Nixilei's just correct here ya know? This was a challenge, for mages, of which you are not. Is it really such a big deal to say that our swordsman couldn't complete a mages challenge? Do you think Kat can wield a sword?" asked Gareth

"Well she can't use magic either, so how would I know?" said Kress

"You of all people should considering you lost in that spar" said Nixilei

Kress swung his blades aiming past Gareth at Nixilei threatening to cut her straight down the middle. Of course, Gareth wasn't the team's defender for nothing. Raising up he shield and empowering it with mana he expertly caught both blades and deflected them with minimal effort

"Don't let it get to you Kress, it was an unofficial spar, you held back in, it didn't matter. We are teammates" said Gareth emphasising the word team "Fighting amongst ourselves is doing us no favours"

Kress grimaced at this but left his swords resting in the dirt where they had ended up but didn't let them go, and was keeping them ready and his muscles tensed

"He's lying you know" whispered Green even quieter than normal, confident Kat could hear her after the earlier display with Skye and Dusk "Gareth likely knows, but is ignoring it and Nixilei certainly knows, but he was more than trying to beat you in that fight and it wasn't even close"

Kress felt his nose itching for some reason and decided to put his left sword away to scratch it but still held the right at the ready "Still, I am an honourable gentleman and I cannot allow my pride to be dismantled like this"

"Ah yes" said Nixilei "The pride of attacking a healer. One that's been caring for you for years"

"If this is what you call care, I'd hate to see your enemies" spat Kress readying his other sword again.

Just as the argument looked to explode once more a booming voice sounded out "Might I have everyone's attention? It is time to spin the wheel once again"

Thyme gestured to the wheel that had sprung up beside him, though this time it had an additional question mark symbol on it "I've added one more option, that will have some crazy effects for our second last game. Though I'll tell you all about it if we actually land there"

Thyme yanked hard on the wheel it started to spin wildly. Thyme split into five and which each took out drums and started to roll dramatically, speeding up as the wheel slowed down.

About a minute into the spinning the wheel had slowed down a fair amount but was still nowhere close to being fully finished if the past events were anything to go by. Nevertheless the Kress took a step forward away from the group.

"Kress what are you-" Gareth was cut off as Kress reached into his boot and pulled out a knife, and in one swift motion threw it towards the target.

Kat watched the knife sail through the air in a perfect arc, using a bit of her demonic power she could see that it would be perfectly on target. Thyme also saw this and rapidly increased the speed and volume of the drums until...

The dagger impacted the board impaling the wheel and stopping it in it's tracks splinters of wood. Bits of wood flew everywhere as the dagger stopped the wheel on the picture of crossed swords. Kat narrowed her eyes at this though. *I doubt Kress is really strong enough to break anything that Thyme made.*

"Well, it seems somebody has taken it upon themselves to volunteer their role for the next round" said Thyme seemingly angry

Kat enhanced her eyes and saw her that wherever the splinters might have come from it wasn't the dagger. The wheel itself had opened a small gap to allow it to pass through and pin itself to the backboard supporting structure. *Thyme certainly planned this he isn't angry at all.*

Though it seemed a lot of the others missed this as the God Crushers all paled, along with Skye's team. Grace seemed to have noticed but didn't warn the rest and while Green seemed to have noticed that didn't stop her remaining in her hiding place behind Kat.

"The rules just say where the wheel stops. You never said anything about interference" said Kress

"Well then, think your clever I suppose" said Thyme... letting literal venom drip from his mouth and burn away some of the grass at his feet. ~~no~~**VENExt.cOm**

A tense moment pass before Thyme's smile brightened "Because you are exactly right. I'm so glad someone managed to take advantage of that"

"Because of you ingenuity and courage I'll be doing a special challenge for you all" said Thyme.

The wheel sunk into the ground swiftly as the Thyme's merged back together. Once together they all stretched up and kept increasing in size as a podium formed in front of Thyme. A wall formed behind Thyme. It was made of the same stone-like wood the maze was, but adorned with four black boxes.

Thyme reached into its pocket and pulled out a large black bomb. The contestants only had a moment to stare before Thyme lit the fuse and through it straight up into the air.

As it left Thyme's hand it sailed for only a few moments until it reached the top of the wall. Exploding in a shower of confetti and streamers the smoke formed into four massive words.

THYME'S

TOURNAMENT

QUIZ SHOW

Chapter 108: Dress to Impress

Kat turned her head away and tried to stifle the laughter threatening to bubble up within her. As she turned, she could see Green was in a similar situation. Flicking her eyes around Nixilei had a real smile on her face for once but Gareth seemed somewhat concerned but with some laughter in his eyes.

"What! Why in the name of the old ones do melee fighters need to participate in a quiz show" said Kress

"Well, I mean why not? This is all about the tournament, and last I checked you are in fact in the tournament" said Thyme

Kress struggled for an answer swapping between confusion and rage, though just before he was going to shout at Thyme a strange calm seemed to come over him as he remembers who he was talking to. "I guess that's fine then" said Kress through gritted teeth.

"Excellent, are there any further concerns about the game type?" said Thyme.

"Yes Thyme," said Skye "How will Eva fully participate in this quiz show"

Eva just shrugged as everyone turned to face her. "Well" said Thyme "I see two options. One, I provide her a board to write on, and she can provide answers with that, or secondly someone can participate in her place for I understand this is an atypical challenge"

"Eva what do you prefer" said Skye. Eva just shrugged in response. Looking at one hand then the other and shrugging again.

"I see" said Eva "In that case I'll participate in her stead"

"Sure thing" said Thyme

Kress looked between Thyme and Skye debating if he should speak up "Hey, why does she get to opt out?"

"Well Kress" said Thyme showing big pointy teeth "As talking is not a requirement for the tournament and I'm the one who added such a strange event, I decided it was only fair to allow for a talking member to participate"

"Why not just fix Eva's voice" asked Kat

Everyone turned to face Kat and her bold statement with a look of shock and horror on their faces. They were understandably concerned that Kat would question someone as powerful as Thyme but she thought she had a valid point.

"Well Kat, firstly, fixing someone voice is harder than you'd think, especially depending on how recent a development it is. Secondly, just fixing her voice doesn't mean she can magically talk, she'd still need practice. I mean, I'm not a miracle worker you know, I keep that to once a month on Sundays" said Thyme

You know, now that I think about it for an extra half second he makes a really good point. If I never had an arm and suddenly, boom left hand, I bet I'd struggle to get used to it. Kat's thoughts rung strange for a moment though and reconsidered. *Wait a minute though... Isn't that exactly what happened to me? And I got used to it real quick.*

"Well, is that all?" asked Thyme

Seeing the nods Thyme waved his hands. Firstly four podiums popped up beside Thyme's own sprouting from the ground with intricate designs. The first featured a cloudy sky with intricately detailed clouds shaped to look like various things from trees to sheep, with a central cloud looking a bit like a person. The second one was filled with trees. The leaves were expertly carved and the little forest critters could be seen in the background and under roots.

On the other side of time was to very different podiums. The first depicted Jim, and the rest of the God Crushers huddled by a fire with smiles on their faces and drinks in hand all huddled together with friendship and warmth. The final one was the strangest of them all. It had dark red blood carvings that looked like they were dripping from the sides, with a single broken sword in the centre.

With a snap of Thyme's fingers the contestants disappeared and reappeared behind their respective podiums, Skye, and Ryo on the left with Jim and Kress on the right. However that wasn't all that happened, each contestant now had a new, more fitting garment to match their podiums...

noVEInExt.cOm

Skye had a blue and white dress that went all the way down to her feet. She had a yellow sunhat and the clouds on the dress moved around the dress slowly as she stood still. Ryo also had a dress on though hers made her look like a flower of the forest. With red around the bottoms ending in sharp points that transitioned into a soft green. Her hat was made up of a collection of flowers all a deep blue to contrast with the rest of the dress, Each seemed to be a different type but all the same shade.

And well, for the boys... Thyme seemed to have taken the same liberties. Jim wore a thick dress like those belonging to serving girls. It was a dark brown with dusty white coverings. The top had long sleeves and even provided gloves. Jim even seemed to keep his original spiked top hat, but now it had a bow on the side as well. And Kress, well he had a blood red evening gown that seemed to shimmer as it moved. He two had gloves, but where Jim had sturdy looking work gloves, Kress had silk thin evening attire with holes over the palms. He was also the only one without a hat.

"What the hell is wrong with you!" yelled Kress his facing turning red like his dress

"Ah yes, I deeply apologise" said Thyme "Let me rectify this issue"

With a snap of Thyme's fingers a silver tiara with a blood red gem in the centre appeared on Kress' head.
"How the hell is this any better?"

"Well, I assumed you were complaining about the lack of headwear. Everyone else has a hat and you don't, so I sought to rectify this issue" said Thyme

"Really? Really? You think this is a joke?" asked Kress

At this point Kat and Green weren't even trying to hold back their laughter, they were just going for it.

"Well of course not. I've provided you with only the finest dress available. Perhaps you'd prefer a different shade of red? It really brings out the eyes" said Thyme.

"Why. Am. I. In. A. Dress." Said Kress

"Well, I thought it only fair to provide everyone with a special garment for the occasion. A quiz show is a chance for everyone to dress up" said Thyme.

Kress put his head in his hands and took a deep breath. In and out. In and out. "Can I request something different" said Kress

"Well sure" said Thyme. Twirling around Thyme transformed. They'd double the length of their hair which swiftly tied itself in a bun. Thyme's outfit changed into a short formal dress, and they gained glasses and a clipboard, along with a measuring tape. "I can provide you any dress you desire"

Throwing their hand out a long line of clothes sprung out from Thyme's sleeve. Dresses by the dozens continued to flow out unabated for a full thirty seconds before stopping.

Kress groaned. "Maybe, something that isn't a dress?"

"I have this" said Thyme picking out a skirt and top combo that was daringly short.

Kress grit his teeth and smiled "You know what, I think I'll pass" he then turned on Jim. "Why do you not seem alarmed by this?"

"Well, I mean, this is really fine cloth. The workmanship is fantastic and it's some of the most comfortable clothes I've ever worn. The piece may look simple, but I can feel the quality, and I doubt even prolonged adventuring use would tarnish it. Why, there was this one time-" Jim continued until he was cut off

"You know what, I don't care" said Kress

"Boo, I wanted to hear what he was going to say. He seems to know a thing or two about tailoring, and I wish I was half as confident" said Skye

Kress put his hands together and let out a breathe, then shakily lowered them to his sides. "Is it perhaps possible, to get my old clothes back?"

"Nope" said Thyme

"Why the hell not!" shouted Kress

"I make the rules, and I say rule number 1 you participate in my quiz show with a dress or not at all" said Thyme.

Everyone else on the contestants stands just nodded like this was the most reasonable request in the world. "What is wrong with you people?" asked Kress

I dunno, it's pretty nice stuff Thyme has here, what's the problem? Of course, despite Kat's thoughts she was still laughing with Green and struggling to maintain a standing position. Even Nixilei's mouth was starting to twitch with unrestrained laughter, and Gareth had put on his helmet to hide his face.

Man, we haven't even started and I already love this quiz. Thyme you have the best ideas.

Kress slammed his head into the podium in front of him. "Can we just get started? Please? Anything to be done with this faster"

Chapter 109: This is tuna with bacon...Let's rock!

In response Thyme split into three and started speaking rapidly. Kat threw some energy towards her mind and let her perception of time slow down to try and work it out, but even with that, the overlapping words of the three times was hard to understand. Putting even more energy into her ears in a hopes that would help her hear, but quickly found that Thyme was still talking to fast.

How can he even talk so fast? What is he saying? What's the point? I can hear just well enough to know his is speaking real words, probably but I guess this is my limit.

All of sudden the Thyme's merged together and said "So, was that fast enough for you?"

"Don't let him bother you Thyme, he's just upset that he has to wear high heels and can't stand properly" said Skye

"Ah yes, I hadn't considered that" said Thyme who with a flick of the hand summoned a chair that swept Kress off his feet. "There we go problem solved"

Kress just slumped into the chair with defeat. At this point it seemed anything he was going to say would only make it worse so he kept his mouth shut.

Thyme looked at the defeated Kress with a smile "Well then, this quiz will have different rules for each round, but the main ones you need to remember for all of them is this.

"First, stay behind your podium and no attacking the other contestants. Second, the person with the most points at the end wins. Easy right?"

Thyme was met with a round of nods and a groan from Kress who kept his head firmly planted in the podium. "Good, so we are going to start off slow... some easy questions and I'll be addressing each person individually. If they get a question wrong, they won't lose points just yet, and if they get it correct, they gain points. Each question is worth 1 point. Oh and there's a timer to make sure you don't take too long

"Everyone ready then?" said Thyme waving their hands towards the backboard that lit up and now featured each contestants name alongside the number 0.

Everyone except Kress nodded who just kept up his sleeping beauty impression. Thyme glared in Kress' general direction and watched him shiver. Thyme just kept staring with his eyes getting slightly large every second that past until Kress finally looked up.

It had taken a good thirty seconds so Thyme now had two comically large eyes staring Kress down.

"Fine, fine I'm ready I'm ready" said Kress

"Good. Question one for Skye. How many orbs did a contestant need to find in the maze"

"Five" said Skye

"Perfect, Ryo next question what was the first obstacle in the obstacle course" said Thyme

"Um, it was a series of angled platforms you had to jump across" said Ryo

"Correct, next, Jim. In the maze what did John need to do for his first orb" Thyme

Jim paused for a moment "Can I ask for clarification?"

Thyme thought for a moment putting his measuring instruments away and changing out of the dress and into a robe. "Hmm, I guess so, this is supposed to be an easy set of questions"

"Right, so did you mean the first orbs that were basically free or the first orb John did the challenge for?" asked Jim

"Ah yes right. I meant the first challenge orb" said Thyme nodding in understanding.

John looked thoughtful for a moment trying to bring back the memory and then shivered once it came to him "Nope, nope, nope, I remember why I blacked that out. It was the spiders wasn't it?"

"Is that a question or your final answer" asked Thyme

"The- the spiders is my final answer" said John trying to regain his composure

"That is correct" said Thyme turning to face Kress "Now for the final easy question, what was depicted on the bag Green took into the maze"

"It was a picture of Gareth" said Kress with a smug attitude. *Don't get too smug there Kress, these were the easy questions. Why do you look so impressed with yourself.*

"Well done, though I suppose none of you deserve too much credit just yet. These were just the opening salvo. We are going to one more standard round, same rules as last time but the points are tripled. Everyone will get two questions and they will all be harder, are you ready?!"

Ryo and Jim nodded but Skye shouted out "Yes!"

"Why are you so enthusiastic about a dumb quiz?" asked Kress looking in Skye's direction.

"Why are you so upset about wearing a dress" Skye shot back

Just as Kress was about to jump in again Thyme spoke up "OK then, first question, starting with Skye again"

"In the Maze contest, who did Green pass to get to her final orb" asked Thyme

"Ooh, um, it wasn't Clive, that was earlier, and she didn't have her orbs yet... it was Grace... wait wait" said Skye holding up her hands. "It was actually everyone, she passed Clive and John fighting and Grace just before the final doorway"

"Nice Job Skye, you got it completely correct, three points. Next Ryo, in Grace's second challenge there was a number of branching paths, how many branches was there in the third room?"

Ryo instantly responded "There was three, the two in the front and the choice to go backwards"

"Ooh, so close Ryo. Though Grace never took it there was also the open vent in between the two doors, no points"

The elf pouted a little but nodded. Ah I remember that, I'd say it was a trick question except that in the 8th room Grace had to crawl through that same vent *novelNExt.coM*

"Now, Jim, in the obstacle course Grace nearly fell off at one point. Which obstacle was it, and what was the cause of the accident" asked Thyme

Oh, I remember that, it was when Clive cut the vine. "Um, it was the vines, and it was when the vine Grace was holding snapped" said Jim

"Ooh, once again so close. The vine didn't snap it was broken by a wind blast Clive launched. No points for you I'm afraid" said Thyme "Next question, Kress, during the orb challenge involving the wizards, who was able to use a spell to dispel the heat on the orb"

Kress looked around nervously then back at Thyme "Um, the elf girl?"

"I'm going to need a name Kress, I'm afraid there are quite a few, as you put it, elf girls in this competition"

"Um, dammit the one with the robes, and the hair on the side" said Kress

"I'm afraid there is still two of them" said Thyme.

Kat resisted the urge to shout, *Lynn, dammit, the name is Lynn.* Kress clicked his tongue. "Am I really loosing a point because I don't know the exact name?"

Thyme tilted their head from one side to the other "Ok, if you can point them out to me I'll give you the points"

Kress turned his head to look at the elves and immediately his face fell. The elves all looked exactly the same, but at least they dressed differently to try and distinguish themselves. Except for two he needed to differentiate. They both had the same robes, the same staff and the everything except for their hair, which, was impossible to recall considering it was just a mirroring of each other.

"How the hell am I supposed to tell the two apart?" said Kress

"How am I supposed to give you points if you aren't clear with your answers?" asked Thyme

Kress mumbled to himself something about why it had to be the two that wore the same outfits and why these five elves in particular had to look so similar. "It ain't natural I tell ya, this doesn't happen"

It's the right one, the one with her hair off to the right... or is it the left? Depends who it is. Her left our right I suppose?

Kress eventually made up his mind and pointed to the one on the left "That one"

"Ooh I'm afraid that's wrong, that would be Estelle. Perhaps you'll want to remember that name for the future" said Thyme.

Kress slammed his hands into the table and grit his teeth. Angry but not willing to shout out at Thyme again, especially not now that points were being counted.

I wonder what Kress meant when he said it wasn't natural? Can't they just be sisters or something? I mean sure, it's a little weird that they look exactly identical but I mean, what would I know...

"Hey Green" Kat whispered "Is it normal for elves to look so similar, I kinda don't think that's normal"

"Ah, no, I don't think so" Green whispered back "Some people say elves look the same, but with my eyes I can tell, they don't just look the same, they are the same. They are perfect copies of each other"

Chapter 110: Let's Buzz

Well then. Let's just put that mystery into a box and stop thinking about it. Hardly worth prying into a lady's business, especially when it's actually five of them and they are all combat trained.

"Moving swiftly on to the second round's second round of questions" said Thyme. "Let's turn things around a bit and start with Kress this time" said Thyme

"I just answered one of your damn questions" spat Kress before instantly slamming his head back into the table after he realised he'd spoken out again

"Ignoring that comment. In Clive's second test he encountered three different kinds of golem. What where they and in what order did they appear" asked Thyme

"Ha, easy, granite, double stone, and half-iron golems.... In that order" said Kress smugly answering as fast as possible.

Thyme nodded "Indeed not bad, correct on both accounts. Jim what was the finishing order for the obstacle course"

"Um, uh Green was first" said Jim "Then Clive, followed by Grace and John"

"Correct" said Thyme as tufts of grass exploded behind him "Now onto Ryo. During the maze what was the building Green had to enter to receive her third orb"

"Um, shit... it was the uh Temple of something" said Ryo

"Is that your final answer?" asked Thyme

"Yes" said Ryo "Wait, wait no nono, I didn't mean that. Wait. Uh, um..."

Ryo trailed off into mumbles but with a little demonic energy Kat kept listening "Shit, I wasn't really paying attention because Grace was pretty deep into those weird branching paths. Um I know she had

to answer some riddles, was it really just temple of riddles though? Surely not... but I got nothing better to go with... no wait-

"Ten seconds remaining" said Thyme cutting of Ryo's train of thought

"Temple of Riddles" said Ryo shakily

"That is correct, congratulations Ryo" said Thyme, who now turned his full attention?to Skye. "The final question of the second round. What colour was the final orb that Green picked up during the maze challenge?"

"Well Thyme" said Skye "That's a somewhat tricky question. The orb itself did glow white, but that might be because it was lit by a white light in the centre of the room. The orb might be clear as well. I'm going to go with clear glass"

"That is entirely correct. Congratulations Skye who is now in the lead on points as we enter our third round. The rules have changed now"

As Thyme said that large buttons appeared before each of the contestants in the centre of their podiums "It will be a test of knowledge and reaction time. I will read the question and at any point during the reading you may buzz in and answer. Each question is worth five points, but an incorrect answer will make you loose two. First person to buzz in gets to answer"

"So then, is everybody ready" said Thyme throwing their hands into the air. Everyone nodded this time even Kress. "Then give your buzzers a good wack to show you know how they work"

Ryo and Jim slammed their hands down onto the button forcefully lighting it up while Kress punched it heavily trying to take out some of his frustration. Skye though took a different approach and tried to tap the button as lightly as she could while still activating it. Satisfied with her results she then also looked towards Thyme to start the round.

"First question. In the first event, obstacle course, the very first obstacle was a series of suspended wooden platforms at increasingly awkward angles. Please tell me the number of pl-"

Thyme was instantly cut off by Skye's buzzer "9"

"Correct next question in the second game, the maze, each contestant was tasked with collecting five orbs. In the end the winner was Green, but, the moment before Green touched the final orb and won the game how man-" Thyme was cut off by Kress pressing the buzzer

"15"

"Wrong" said Thyme. Kress got a shocked look on his face "as I was saying, the moment before Green touched the orb how many had yet to be claimed"

Skye buzzed in instantly "2"

"Correct, you even remembered to include that Green hadn't yet picked it up" said Thyme

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"Next question. During the third even The Orb, it displayed a number of different abilities. I want you to tell me the number of abilities displayed" said Thyme

Ryo pushed the button this time "5"

"I'm sorry that's wrong" said Thyme

"Wait what? How am I wrong" asked Ryo

Jim pressed the button while Ryo was asking the question "3, temperature control, turning in to water, and releasing air"

"Correct Jim. To answer your question Ryo, the illusions were not an ability of the orb and also the food round obviously isn't an ability. You may have also double counted the orb heating up which is simply one ability temperature control

"Following on. The next question. After the completion of the second challenge the maze I handed out gifts to the contestants, please tell me in detail what the gifts looked like and who received them" said Thyme

Skye once again got ready on the buzzer "You gave everyone their bags used in the challenge. They each had a different picture on them. Green had Gareth, Grace had, well, I'm not sure if it was just copies of her or their whole team, Clive had a picture of me on it and Jim's bag just had a bit of dirt on it and looked slightly more well worn then the others"

"Is that your final answer" said Thyme.

Skye was shocked by this and her eyes dashed around looking for something but not finding it. "Um yes?"

"Well, I'm afraid your wrong" said Thyme "Any-"

Thyme was cut off by Ryo jumping in on the buzzer "Everything Skye just said plus you gave that doll in a robe to the demon, ah Kat, I think is her name"

"Please give the full answer, if that is your final answer" said Thyme. Ryo went on to repeat the answer fully as Skye lightly slapped herself on the cheeks for forgetting about the gift for Kat.

"That's correct Ryo, five points. Next question. During the second challenge, the maze, Grace went through the cavern of branching paths. Each time she took the wrong path her progress was reset. How many paths did Grace walk down across all of her attempts"

All the contestants looked around worriedly. Kat could see that nobody seemed to recall the exact number of paths, or at least didn't have a solid guess for it. *Come to think of it how many was it...* Kat started to dig through her memories but found that she hadn't really been paying attention to Grace' monitor at the time. *Damn, even I don't know and I can recall things quite well now.*

"You all have thirty seconds to buzz in before I move on to the next question. At the one second mark if you buzz in and answer incorrectly you will lose no points but only if you can time it perfectly" said Thyme.

The timer continued to tick down. Kat watched and nobody seemed willing to even attempt it. Just as the clock reached 1 second however, Kress moved with a quick hand pressing the buzzer at the last moment.

"Might as well, guess if you aren't docking me points. Is it 123?" asked Kress

"Exactly correct congratulations Kress" said Thyme. Everyone gaped open mouthed at Kress. They couldn't believe he'd gotten the question right, and judging by the look on his face he couldn't either.

"Wait I'm right?" asked Kress

"Yes, that is what I said" supplied Thyme

"Ah, um right" said Kress still not fully comprehending what had just happened.

"You all seem rather stunned" said Thyme "Would you like to take a short break before the next question.

Ryo and Jim nodded solemnly trying to fully process the ridiculous guess that Kress had made. Kress to was nodding along, realising that he still had a chance in this game. Skye however had other ideas "Nah, we can still keep going"

The three contenders glared daggers at Skye "What, sometimes you get those hard questions right. It happens, why are you guys so shocked?" Skye said with a shrug towards the other contestants.

"Well, I suppose we'll cut the break short, but first I'll pass this out to everyone" said Thyme swapping into a butler's outfit and pulling a glass of water from nowhere. "Please keep hydrated, the stage lights are awfully bad if you want to avoid sweating"

"What lights?" asked Ryo

"It's a matter of professionalism" said Thyme as he handed her the glass "The world is a stage, and the sun it's stagelight"

"I think your loosing it Thyme" said Kress as he took his glass

"Perhaps" said Thyme as he split into five leaving one at the speaker podium while the other four went to the various groups to give them some water each. "But as the organiser of this tournament I am responsible for your safety, and while you are all quite capable, a bit of water goes a long way"

Kat took a sip of her offered water "Wait, then why does this taste like fruits?"

"Well, I said I was responsible, not effective" said Thyme.