

## DEMONS 1211

### [Chapter 1211 1211 Exhibit B \(And A Little Dash Of C\)](#)

Kress chapter

Judges: Ulf/'Steve' Auctifer, Oditr, Titania, Mint

Criteria: Looks, Not-sand features, Structurally Sound, Creativity, Looks

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Kress was somewhat surprised to see a box full of sand as their next destination. This time, Thyme provided three copies so that not everyone was crowded around the same little bit of sand. Though there was arguably more to look at here. Kress looked the whole thing over and... wasn't entirely sure what to think.

The box was obviously full of sand. That was the first thing that stood out was just how much extra sand there was. After that you started to see little bits and pieces of sand buildings dotted around the place. The building in the middle was the most obvious, but only because the hole for it was such large. The building itself was mostly covered with only the towers surviving.

There were a few other things around, once Kress started to look. There was a dried-out oasis with a few dead trees. Clearly, they didn't think to ask Timmy to make ones with leaves on them. Or go looking for them. There was also what Kress was guessing had to be a guard post, and a few other little buildings that might've been houses? Hard to say really.

Kress could see one of the copies shaking violently and assumed that was a Oditr's destruction test. With a shrug, Kress kept examining everything for a few more moments unsure of his own overall thoughts.

\*There seem to be some good ideas here. The buildings that are present happen to be a bit small but the detail on them isn't bad... the biggest issue is that I can't tell if there was originally more to the buildings or if they were built that way intentionally.

If it's the former, then I respect the guts it takes to build such small fractions of buildings but don't agree with the decision at all. If it's the latter, then it's probably just an unfortunate accident for the builders of this one. I wonder who it is? Borgick and Marigold almost certainly worked on the cannon, but I don't know who is so fond of deserts.\*

"So Blue, what do you think?" asked Kress to his companion. Kress was a little surprised that Stan and Gareth weren't nearby. They were at the middle copy. Or perhaps the one in the middle was the original? Kress didn't know or care.

"I think it's an acceptable idea with middling execution," said Blue, a touch coldly in Kress' opinion.

"That's a bit harsh. I feel like they tried here. It's a cool idea that probably lead to them making mistakes when climbing out of the holes they dug themselves into. Literally," responded Kress.

"True but it IS such an obvious problem they really should've seen coming. I mean, they had to have known they'd burry more of the structure as they were climbing out correct?" offered Blue.

Kress nodded and said, "While yes, from here that's easy to see. I suspect they just had what they thought was a unique idea and then got started working on things. Built up that main building in the big hole... and then realised the problem as they were climbing out. By then it might've been too late to fix, or perhaps it's gotten worse over time? Either is possible,"

Blue just shrugged again, "It's not like they built a whole buried town though. Just a few random buildings. It's not even a proper set of ruins if that's what they were aiming for. I'd give it a six at most,"

Kress nodded, "I can't say I disagree with the final score... even if I'd be a lot nicer about how I handed it out,"

Soon after Kress and Blue finished their own discussion Thyme pulled everyone out and asked the judges, once again, for their initial thoughts. Oditr went first this time, "I'm not sure what to give them honestly. Parts of it stayed really stable throughout, but other things were covered in sand quickly... which I guess technically isn't being destroyed... but is it fair to say the sand hiding the sculptures is part of the sculptures? Anyway, I'm thinking of giving them two threes, for a total of six at the moment,"

\*I didn't get a good look at the destroyed test so I can't really say if that's an accurate score or not.\*

Mint spoke next, "I thought it was a cool idea... but it didn't really resonate with me. It was just hiding the stuff I really wanted to see. I'm going to have to give whoever made this a five,"

\*Blue and I were thinking of giving them a six so... not too far off what we were thinking. Perhaps a more fair score, we might've been going easy.\*I think you should take a look at [pandasnovel.com](http://pandasnovel.com)

Steve spoke next, "Unlike Mint I DO quite like how this one turned out. I think it paints a really cool landscape as it stands... but it is a little lacking in features so I'm thinking of handing out a six,"

\*Or perhaps we weren't going easy. Steve seems to agree with us, and Blue and I are using his judgement.\*

Auctifer shrugged and said, "There just wasn't much use of things that weren't sand, even if the sand was used in a unique way. I'm giving them a one or a two. We'll see how the others shake out,"

\*True. Still not something I'd expect in a sandcastle contest. But he isn't wrong exactly.\*

Once again, everyone turned to Titania. "Before I give more score. I feel the need to ask, how did all the extra sand end up in this one?" Thyme instantly blurred the faces of everyone in the room except the judges.

"Sorry for this but I'm afraid I can't let them answer that question and reveal who made this before the judging is final. That being said I personally can ask them and then pass it on?" offered Thyme. *noVeLNext.cOm*

Titania shrugged and said, "Right well my main question is how the sand ended up there and how they decided on this as the final design,"

Thyme nodded and suddenly nobody could see or hear anything. Kress just rolled his eyes as this persisted for around a minute and then things went back to normal. Thyme walked up to Titania and... whispered the answer for some reason. Kress' eyes narrowed at them both. Knowing he should

probably still be able to hear them considering he wasn't far away. \*Probably Thyme using magic to prevent the sound escaping.\*

Titania chewed on her lips for a few seconds after Thyme stepped away. "Right, with that information I'm going to say this work here is particularly creative. I'm going to award them at least eight points, possibly more if the rest of the lineup is particularly disappointing,"

"Of course, in that case, let us move on to the third sculpture," said Thyme with a smile. One clap later and there were three new squares to walk around. Kress walked over from the side impressed with what he saw.

He was currently looking at Carl and Midnight's multiple castle idea. \*This is pretty neat actually. If we didn't have Timmy find all that coloured sand I might have done something similar to this. The details on the castle aren't really up to my standards, and the castle itself seems to have been built in pieces instead of carved out like mine... but honestly? This is something I could see myself building had things been different.\*

"This one is probably my favourite so far," said Kress to Blue.

"I agree with you. While I was somewhat hesitant on the previous one, and really not fond of the cannon, this stacking design is quite cool, if a little lacking in details in some places," said Blue.

Kress nodded as he glanced over the castles. "Yeah... they weren't particularly consistent with the details. The larger stuff? Perfectly done. The size scaling was probably in Thyme's hands as they upgraded the buckets, but the individual details are... good but not great," Kress pointed to a few windows as he spoke. "See those windows? Only on the largest, and second smallest castle. Then there's the fact that the brick lines don't exist on the main structure of the biggest or smallest castle and just... yeah the details are what's lacking here,"

Blue thought for a moment then asked, "It's gotta have been a time issue right? As in, they took too long getting started? Or perhaps they got everything 'good enough' and didn't have the time to fix up the details properly?"

Kress shrugged and said, "It's totally possible. I'm not sure if they'd notice while working on it. Things like that can be pretty easy to miss. Especially if they weren't doing all the details at the same time. Looking back and forth between all the various castles, it would be easy to get things wrong here and there,"

"So how would you say this happened?" asked Blue.

"I'd guess they were making a sandcastle... and it was one of the small ones. They finished in... perhaps an hour? Then they decided that one small castle wasn't enough. Perhaps they meant to build bigger originally, perhaps they just thought the original would take longer,"

[Chapter 1212 1212 Exhibits C&D](#)

Kress chapter

Judges: Ulf/'Steve' Auctifer, Oditr, Titania, Mint

Criteria: Looks, Not-sand features, Structurally Sound, Creativity, Looks

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Kress and Blue were back on the main platform once again and Thyme was asking for everyone's opinions on the stacked castles. Kress still thought it was an interesting concept but the details being off dragged things down a bit for him.

Titania actually went first for once. "It's creative idea, and I like it... but it's not quite as creative as the previous one. Still, it's a big step up from the cannon so I'm going to give them a tentative six for now. I'm open to bumping that up a few points though,"

\*That seems... a bit low for how much Titania seems to be smiling. Is she lying about what she plans to score it in the end? I'm confused.\*

"Well I'm giving them a big fat zero," said Auctifer. They pretty much only used sand. Ok no, that's not true. There are a few bits of shells as decoration but come on! That's basically nothing,"

\*Once again... he's not wrong but I find myself liking Auctifer's scoring system less and less as time goes on. I wish he'd have picked something different. Even if we'll probably do quite well in the category it leaves a bad taste in my mouth.\*

Oditr stepped up to speak next, "I found the performance here... pretty middling for the destruction aspects but it looked AWESOME when it was destroyed. The towers all fell differently and the cascading effect as they topped one after another was a joy to watch. Five for destruction appearance and a... hmm... two for durability I think,"

\*Dam. Oditr is impressed. I kinda wish I'd actually paid attention to what this one looked like as it fell apart. I guess that's the downside to splitting things up into copies and only destroying the one. I'll have to be on the same one as Oditr for the next two I think. Assuming the 'last' one I haven't seen yet is in any way good. I definitely have to see how my own shakes out though. No question about that.\*

Mint and Steve looked at each other and then Steve said, "Ladies first," *noVelnExt.cOm*

"I'm not sure I count as having a gender, but sure I'll go first," said Mint with a nod. "Right... well I think this is a really cool idea and it's nice to look at from a whole bunch of angles. That said, I feel like picking a castle as the base for the idea is a bit boring, I'm thinking six or seven? Do I need to actually pick one? Heck, I might bump my scores up a bit if the last two aren't any good,"

"That's an acceptable answer," said Thyme. Mint gave a little clap and moved back.

\*Decent score. I think seven is probably more deserved, but we'll see what Steve says.\*

"Personally I find it a bit lazy," said Steve, "But that's not what I'm scoring you on, it's how good it looks. The problem with that, is that all the details that don't stay consistent between the different castles bother me. Perhaps the differences were intentional, perhaps not but I'm just not a fan of this one personally. I'm thinking... maybe a four?"

\*Huh... that's a bit harsh. I mean... if that's really how you feel sure, go ahead. But... yeah that just feels a bit harsh. Perhaps a few weeks ago I'd agree but whoever made this clearly put in a lot of effort, and if this wasn't such a serious contest I think I'd be very happy if I'd made this myself.\*

Thyme bowed and said, "Right then, next sculpture," I think you should take a look at [pandasnovel.com](http://pandasnovel.com)

Kress watched as the next sculpture came into view. He saw five trees all connected by rope bridges with little houses carved into the trunks, and sitting on the branches of the larger one. Kress was honestly floored by the details. As he was stepping onto the invisible platform and having a good look, something occurred to him. \*Wait... is... is Thyme ordering these from best to worst? Did he say this was all random? Because I'm pretty certain it ISN'T.\*

Kress quickly pulled Blue by the elbow away from the trees. She glared at him, until she saw the serious look on his face and started walking with him. They'd moved into the corner where Kress whispered, "Is it just me, or has Thyme ordered these from best to worst. Not to say I think we did better than whoever made these treehouses. The details are really nice, and none of it was just copied like what we did. Still... if you look at the order of everything..."

"You get best to worst," mumbled Blue as she thought it over. "Yes some arguments could be made of course... and with Titania, Oditr and Auctifer using strange scoring systems things might not shake out exactly the way Thyme has outlined it... but yes I agree. If we're using Steve's and Mint's scores it tracks. Roughly anyway,"

Kress nodded. "Not sure how I feel about it to be honest,"

"I think we DID do the best so I feel fine about that... but yeah the subtle ranking is a bit strange," agreed Blue.

Kress sighed, "Whatever let's just take in this sculpture before the judges get done with it," Blue nodded and the pair half jogged back to the tree to take it all in. Kress was personally amazed with the little rope bridges. They were remarkably well done. Probably something Timmy did, but no less impressive. Not to mention all the greenery on the trees. Honestly, Kress could see these are being small versions of real trees, sand bark and all.

Kress really wanted to ask how they'd managed to get the branches stable. He was sure just a few sticks wouldn't be good enough. Sure they branches themselves were pretty thick, but sand just wasn't that stable, and a core of wood for the branches wouldn't really work. Just the weight of the wood itself would likely be too much for an inner core of sand to support. No, the whole thing was likely supported somehow.

Kress looked to the one being destroyed and found his answer as the sand fell off after a few shakes. \*Ah. Stone centre. That means this was either Burgandy and Ellenell, or Gareth and Stan.\* Things kept shaking until one of the trees fell over into the others. That was enough to bring the whole thing down. Apparently they weren't all connected underground. Bit of a shame they didn't think of it. \*Not that they should've needed it but aw well.\*

With the destruction over, they all headed back to the main island, as was becoming routine. Oditr spoke first claiming, "Excellent destruction and pretty good durability. I can see a few easy ways to reinforce it if they'd known it'd need to survive longer so... I'm thinking... eight total points? Four in each category? I might want to drop it down one in survivability, but it all looked cool as it fell, and the trees still look decent without the sand or some of their branches,"

\*This is the first one I've felt bad about having destroyed. Even if I know it's a copy... this one was really nice. Much nicer than I'd expected out of a four hour competition. Sure we got more done, but Timmy was a godsend and I don't think anyone else made good use of him. They seemed to see him more as an accessory.\*

Auctifer came up next, "So initially, I was going to give this one a decent score, because the leaves were nice and the bridges were a great touch... but to find out the whole thing is actually made of stone with sand on top? It makes me... very confused as to how I should rate this honestly. Because this wasn't really a sand sculpture. This was a stone sculpture with sand on it. So... I'm going to say no comment for now?" Thyme was shaking their head, "Fine I'll go generic with a five until I figure out what I'm actually going to give this one,"

\*Huh... well... he's not WRONG I suppose. I think Auctifer is too nice not to give them a good score in the end even if that observation is correct.\*

Steve spoke next, "This is easily the best looking one we've seen so far. I'm giving the team behind this a nine. The only reason I'm not giving them a higher mark is because I know you're a sneaky bastard Thyme. So I have high expectations,"

\*Ah. I bet he figured out what Thyme was doing as well.\*

Mint followed with a frown and said, "I'm not really sure what Steve is talking about. This is a wonderful sculpture and I see no reason I shouldn't give it the full ten,"

\*Welp. Hopefully you'll see a reason not to give them full marks in just a few minutes...\*

Titania spoke up last, "I think that while this is certainly somewhat creative, the use of stone to support it brings things down for me. It's just a stone tree really, and those grow in nature as well. Still, it does look nice and there are quite a few little touches that raise my opinion. I'll give it a six for now, maybe a seven after I've had more time to think,"

Kress chapter

Judges: Ulf/'Steve' Auctifer, Oditr, Titania, Mint

Criteria: Looks, Not-sand features, Structurally Sound, Creativity, Looks

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Everyone was staring gobsmacked at the final sand sculpture on display. The judges. The contestants. Most of the other people around. The only ones that weren't surprised were Kress and Blue, alongside Thyme who had seen this before already. "WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS!" shouted Auctifer. "Was the team behind this playing by different rules or something! Just... HOW! I mean, where did the coloured sand come from? How did they have enough time to do all this!

"Sure the previous sculpture was impressive. The five trees all looked very nice... but all together they were MAYBE twice the size of that castle at the back... and that's just the castle at the damn back! What are all of these houses! How did they have time to do the roads! Is that more shit in the ravine over there? I don't know and I don't understand!"

Thyme smiled and said, "I can take everyone away again so that the team can answer those questions if you want,"

"No, I don't want 'the team' answering those question," sneered Auctifer. "I want YOU to answer those questions. I want to know how this is even possible!"

Thyme nodded and said, "I can explain how the team managed this, either simply, or with a more detailed explanation. Which do you desire?"

"Both?" said Auctifer after a moment. The elf king paused for a few further moments before nodding, "Yes. I want both please. This is ridiculous! Honestly, I don't know how anyone else can win,"

\*That's a bit rude. I still think those trees can compete with us, and because of the strange scoring system in place we might not necessarily get the win. It's perfectly plausible for it to be close. That being said... I can't help but feel a bunch of pride at that sort of reaction. I'm very pleased with myself.\*

Thyme nodded as Auctifer was saying this and answered with. "Timmy." Everyone glared at Thyme for a few moments before Thyme shrugged and continued, "Timmy really is the short answer to all of those questions. Unlike the other teams, who just had Timmy help with the smaller things that their Timmys were unlikely to screw up, the team behind this particular piece of art found out what Timmy could do and then abused that to the fullest.

παΠδαςNovel.com "Allow me to explain. The first thing they did, was order Timmy to go and find some colourful sand. Gave the little guy a time limit of five minutes, just get as much colourful sand as they could, focusing on gathering different colours. They even specifically allowed the use of magic, and marked a spot outside of the marked area to leave the sand. While Timmy was off doing that they started planning.

"Once they saw all the colourful sand, they confirmed their decision to make a town. They tasked Timmy with getting more colourful sand while one worked on a sand mix for the castle and the other tried to work out a way to easily copy all these houses. Then they swapped off, and one carved out the castle. They used a massive bucket that Timmy flipped over for them and started carving things out.

"I'm sure you can sort of guess how things went from there. They had Timmy summon up some small trees, and got the little guy to do a lot of the drudge work. Copying patterns, putting down houses it marked out areas. Making the road look like it was made out of stones. Anything that Timmy could do quicker then they could? They had Timmy do. It was all planned around maximising the use of Timmy,"

Auctifer glared back at Thyme and said. "Surely the others could've worked out that Timmy could do more, right?"

Thyme just shrugged and explained, "Perhaps but most teams really didn't use their Timmys much. They assumed, poorly, what things Timmy could do, and couldn't do while mostly ignoring the truth. The previous sculpture had Timmy working on the rope bridges... but the thing was, they didn't take into account that Timmy is still rather tiny. So they had to fix up areas where Timmy climbed up the trees, and thus treated their Timmy like they couldn't be trusted with other jobs.

"For the current team, when they wanted say... the castle to have the stonework done? They told Timmy what to do... then carried Timmy in their arms and moved the little guy around so Timmy could

always reach. It was both faster, and impossible for Timmy to mess up the castle this way. They used the trick in a few other places as well, but that was the big one. The castle and its walls,"

While this was going on, Oditr had just walked over and examined everything for a bit before coming back. "Right, I can see that you're going to be weird about this Aucty, but I'm curious to see how well it stands up to the destruction tests. It could go really well... or really badly. I honestly have no idea, and that's quite exciting. There's so much god damn SAND here. Even if we kept shaking it until everything collapsed, the mixed colours of it all might still look good. I can't even guess, and that's wonderful,"

Auctifer glared down at Oditr but said nothing... mostly because Steve jumped in. "We're all rather old. I'm sure you've seen more surprising things in your time, don't make a big deal about it this time," I think you should take a look at [pandasnovel.com](http://pandasnovel.com)

Auctifer let out a huff, "Like you're one to talk. I don't see many grey hairs except specifically on YOUR head. I'm clearly still in the prime of my life,"

Steve rolled his eyes and said, "If you'd rather I call you boy and spank you for talking nonsense I can do that too," Steve paused as his eyes widened in horror as Auctifer looked back with an evil grin. "Don't you say it, you elvish fool. I realise you'd probably enjoy that 'punishment' so I'll need to think of something else. Perhaps I'll put you in a corner,"

"Well as long as it isn't a closet I suppose I can live with that," said Auctifer with a grin.

"Will you two just fuck already?" said Titania from the side.

"I'm in a committed relationship with my wife," said Steve.

"Ya wife's dead," said Titania with a glare, and all the subtlety of a brick. "Maybe you'd be happier if you actually chose to live a little. Maybe find someone else?"

"I'm perfectly aware of that," said Steve with a sigh. "I'm not so foolish as to think she's still around but there will be no other woman for me. She was my other half, and I doubt I'll ever find someone that fits me so well ever again,"

"It's not like you loved her when you married," said Titania.

"You don't know that, you weren't around for it," retorted 'Steve' apparently no longer bothering to obfuscate the fact he was Ulf from the people who hadn't worked it out yet. "Perhaps I loved her despite our initial difficulties,"

"We've ALL SCENE THE PLAY!" retorted Titania. "We don't NEED to have been there for your initial courtship. It's been retold over and over and over again,"

Ulf shrugged, "Details change over time perhaps this is one of them,"

Titania rolled her eyes and went to retort again when Oditr jumped in. "Look, the guy doesn't need a wife, or a husband or whatever you feel the need to suggest. He seemed happy last time I visited that little farm of his. He's content with things. Don't push him into something that's likely to just get him hurt,"



"Oh like you're one to talk," said Auctifer. "It's not like you've been sorting out your own marriage prospects. I'm sure your parents would like some grandkids to spoil at some point,"

"Yeah well they'll be waiting a bloody long time," said Oditr firmly. "I just don't have any interest in that sort of thing. Maybe, MABYE, if someone can give me a good reason I'll carry an heir and do my duty, but I'm certainly not marrying anyone. I'm much too busy for love anyway. Besides, I wouldn't want to have so many broken hearts working for me,"

"I find time to for all my loves!" insisted Auctifer. "I may not be with them all constantly, but I make time for them all... and the fact that I know a spell that can clone myself and have the memories inserted into my mind when it dispels is a big part of that,"

"I just fuck people and then move on. If they interest me enough maybe I'll swing by a second time, but love has left me I think," said Titania, pretending to be terribly sad about the current state of affairs, but was more than likely trying to stop things escalating. Oditr and Auctifer looked like they were about to throw down.

"Then again... you're a bit of a pipsqueak aren't you? Even for a dwarf. So I suppose there's not much of you to love," sneered Auctifer.

Oditr didn't rise to the bait she just looked down her nose at him... well the best she could. She was much shorter than him after all. "Surely that's not the best you can come up with? You've had decades on me... perhaps you're not getting grey hairs because you're brain is taking all the damage!"

#### [Chapter 1214 1214 'Conspiracy Interlude'](#)

Kress chapter

Judges: Ulf/'Steve' Auctifer, Oditr, Titania, Mint

Criteria: Looks, Not-sand features, Structurally Sound, Creativity, Looks

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Kress sighed as he watched the scene before him. The argument had escalated despite Titania's attempts to calm things down and now Oditr and Auctifer were rolling around on the ground like they were five. Oditr was trying to pull Auctifer's hair out but it wasn't going well because he was keeping her hands at bay. Though she was still latched to the elf's face so he wasn't having a great time of it either.

Titania was shaking her head off to the side... while sipping on a glass of wine? Kress wondered where she got it before the obvious answer hit him. \*She's got wine in a storage ring. Duh.\* Ulf was watching off to the side as well, with a grin on his face. Kress was pretty sure that if Thyme wasn't staring from behind Ulf's back the old man would've been taking bets or something.

Mint had moved over and was imitating Lily. Which meant she was hiding behind Kat and trying not to be noticed. The real Lily was currently in cat form nuzzling Mint's face and trying to calm the dryad down. "So... like... what are we supposed to do about this?" Kress whispered to Blue.

"I have no idea! It's not like this is their full strength. There's no magic flying around, nor are there sonic booms from their overly strong punches this is just... literal play-fighting. Which still isn't a great thing to see two important rulers doing... but I suppose with Thyme here they feel safe to just... just... well do whatever this counts as?

"I'm not sure why they think it's safe to go about something like this with an audience though. Even if it's safe for Thyme to know what about the rest of us? We could tell anyone! Sure we've got some representation for everyone except the beastkin... but does that even matter?"

"Eh not really," answered Titania.

"Exactly," agreed Kress. Before freezing and turning his head slowly to see Titania sipping wine beside him. "Um... greetings your highness?" Blue was standing there frozen, unsure what to do. So Kress was hoping this would buy a bit of time.

"Ah don't worry about that nonsense, I'm just a guest of Thyme's right now. Nobody else can see us by the way. I've got an illusion up and running. Well, Thyme can probably see us despite that, but Thyme barely counts as an observer really. Considering they can observe just about anything on the continent, and probably the whole planet," said Titania, waving off the concern.

\*Ah yes, because the idea that Thyme is nearly omniscient is a great one.\* Kress glanced at the still frozen Blue. "I feel as though I'd like an elaboration on the whole 'can see everything' bit you were just saying about Thyme,"

Titania shrugged and said, "It's just a guess but not a hard one to make. Thyme is connected to nature, and has spatial affinity. The idea that they can use a tree as a beacon for long distance scrying is an easy one to figure out. Plus, if that is technically outside of Thyme's capabilities... simply extending the root system of their main tree until another plant is part of the main body? Then that would surely work as a beacon.

"Now, normally, a fair counterpoint to that would be to point out that nobody can watch so many areas all at once... until you also take into account that Thyme has shown, on multiple occasions, to be able to control and operate over a hundred bodies seamlessly without any overlap between them. I know enough about how dryads control extra bodies to know that it's MUCH harder than it seems.

"I doubt Thyme can see into heavily warded areas of course. Not that Thyme couldn't get through them... but I'm guessing Thyme would need to noticeably break through the wards. If that makes sense? At least, that's how I've designed mine. A bit costly to replace them when they shatter, but not all that hard. Still... I do tend to imagine Thyme can hear and see me whenever I do something and the place I'm in isn't warded,"

Titania finished that sentence with a slightly silly smile. Kress could almost figure out why, but his conscious mind kept shoving the answer back into the dark. Somehow, he instinctively knew he didn't want to know. So of course, Blue had just go and blurt it out. "You're just using Thyme to fuel your voyeurism fetish!"

Blue's hands slapped over her mouth as soon as she said the words. This was HER QUEEN she'd just said that to. Titania grinned down at Blue with razor sharp teeth that definitely weren't there before. The

atmosphere seemed to get colder and colder, as curls of fog transitioned into almost hand-like shapes that reached out, grasping for Blue... I think you should take a look at [pandasnovel.com](http://pandasnovel.com)

Until it all shattered and there Titania was laughing in place. "Oh you should've seen your face..." laughed Titania. "Oh, that was great. I need to do that more often. To answer your question though... yes that's exactly what I'm doing. It pisses Thyme off a bit actually, because I keep spreading the idea that they're always watching. That way more people think about it... and the weirder it gets for Thyme. It's a win-win for me really.

"If Thyme isn't already doing this sort of thing? Not only does it allow me to get sexual gratification with almost zero effort, it also makes it a less appealing idea FOR Thyme. If everyone is already assuming you know everything, you don't actually need a surveillance network. Running one of those is a lot of work you see. I would know. So... Thyme is incentivised not to start one up.

"On the other hand. If Thyme already has one up and running? Then by spreading this rumour, I'm making it less effective. Not that I have anything against Thyme really. I love the dear and many of their quirks... but there is such a thing as too much power and I wonder if Thyme crossed that line a long time ago. If a lot of the madness and showmanship is to waste as much power as possible, or just to make them seem less powerful.

"Sometimes I think Thyme would be better served taking their own vacation instead of providing one for everyone else," Titania was sighing there at the end.

[pandasnovel.com](http://pandasnovel.com) "So... how long are you four actually going to be here?" asked Kress with narrowed eyes.

"A decent question... one with a few answers. We're only going to be HERE on this island for the one night. Though Thyme has set aside a little resort for royalty that allows us all to come and go. I'll probably be making use of it soon. Oditr might, but I doubt it. Auctifer will probably bring whatever parts of his harem can be spared the work. Old Steve..."

"I know he's Ulf," said Kress.

Titania shrugged, "Look I'm not confirming anything for you. If he WAS Ulf, and I'm not saying he IS. But if he WAS, then revealing that fact would be very, very bad for someone like me who's a lot weaker than Ulf was even a few centuries ago. I shudder to think of how powerful he'd be now if he tried. Regenerators don't really get weaker. Not once they figure out immortality,"

"Right... but if he WAS Ulf, would he have a place at the royalty resort?" asked Kress.

"Hah, the 'Royalty Resort' that's a good name for it. I'll have to suggest it to Thyme properly so they can pretend not to have overheard it. As for the answer... yes Ulf would have a place... and 'Steve' probably has one on account of being an old friend of Thyme's," said Titania. **noveLnext.CoM**

"I feel like admitting he's an 'old friend' of Thyme's is already pushing it considering Thyme's multiple century existence isn't really a secret... and Steve IS a human," said Kress.

Titania shrugged again and said, "Look, I'm confirming nothing so it's fine,"

"Right... well... how will it work for the beastkin?" asked Kress.

"Urgh, I hate dealing with those guys. I wish they'd just pick a fucking king or already. Or a queen. I'm not picky. Their way of doing things make it rather hard to get consistent policy from the lot of them. Oh they come up with good ideas sometimes, and those spreads... but it can be a massive pain trying to deal with them all. As for the resort? I don't know. Either Thyme will give them a separate one or they'll be on timeshare I guess? I've seen the building, it's not large enough to fit everyone if all the beastkin representatives turn up,"

Titania continued, while mumbling under her breath, "Then again it's not like it's really big enough for Auctifer and the harem either but we're all ignoring that part,"

Kress looked over at Blue who had gone back to imitating an ice statue. He wasn't too worried just yet considering she was still breathing. So it was fine.

### [Chapter 1215 1215 'Konspiracy Interlude 2'](#)

Kress chapter

Judges: Ulf/'Steve' Auctifer, Oditr, Titania, Mint

Criteria: Looks, Not-sand features, Structurally Sound, Creativity, Looks

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Everyone was still waiting for Auctifer and Oditr to finish their little spat. Kress was content to just keep talking to Titania, but he wasn't sure what was going on with Blue. Still, When Oditr managed a bit on Auctifer's ear... there was a rather strange reaction. Kress had gained an interesting thought to run by Titania, "Hey Titania... is Auctifer... flirting with Oditr?"

Titania made a 'so-so' gesture, "Yes but not the way you're thinking. Auctifer will flirt with just about anything that moves. Ok, he's not that bad... but unlike me where I go for the pleasures of the flesh over the pleasures of the mind, he's a really big softy for love and all that... well I hesitate to call it nonsense. My parents are still deeply in love and have been since they were married...

"Look, it clearly works for some people but I've never found that person for me. Auctifer on the other hand, is perfectly happy to love almost anyone who loves him back. So flirting is more or less his natural state of being. So... is he flirting with Oditr? Oh undoubtedly. Does he expect anything to happen? Probably not. Not only would it be rather awkward for Auctifer's harem to include TWO royal women, Oditr would have to accept a lesser station in Auctifer's court if she went along with it,"

"I'm assuming that's because Auctifer's court wouldn't all transfer over the dwarves?" said Kress.

"Exactly. One of them would have to give up being in charge of their nation, and it's simply impractical for it to be Auctifer at this point. His harem more or less IS the government. I mean, it works. They all seem to trust each other, and there's much less corruption and backstabbing in the top levels of the elven kingdoms than my own... but that also means when somebody isn't the best for the job, or they make a large mistake, even if it IS actually a mistake... well... they get a lot of leeway.

"Look, it has its advantages and disadvantages. Auctifer is good at picking trustworthy people who will enjoy being in his harem, but that doesn't always mean they'll be good at their jobs. Laziness is rather common amongst some of them. Though others work too hard and don't know how to delegate..."

Titania shook her head, "Sorry, I've let myself get sidetracked from your question about Oditr. In the end, Oditr doesn't have any interest in Auctifer, and Auctifer is fully aware of that. Despite that Auctifer is definitely flirting, perhaps in part because he knows it won't go anywhere... and Oditr probably wouldn't notice unless someone specifically pointed it out to her,"

Kress nodded. Blue, was off to the side still shell shocked. \*I thought she'd have recovered from her shock at this point. I mean, we went on this whole tangent and still she's not able to think properly? Or is her face just stuck like that for some reason. Wait... Titania is good at illusions. Am I just talking to an illusion while Blue has a separate conversation with her?

Titania never once said that she was bad at multitasking, just that Thyme was exceptional at it. In fact, she'd probably be more impressed if she knew just how hard it is. So... should I try and check on Blue? That was one of the big reasons I've been asking Titania questions and keeping her attention on me...

But if her attention isn't really on me, or at least not focused on me is what I'm doing even worthwhile?\*

Kress ignored the little Nixilei in his head that said "Any information on a ruler's thoughts is quite valuable. Should you have the chance, grasp as much of it as you can, and remember it to report to me later."

\*Of course. Counterpoint to you internal Nixilei. This is Titania. Not a foreign ruler, but our own. Surely you wouldn't encourage spying on your queen right?\* Kress wasn't entirely sure of that line of thought. Nixilei might agree, or she might point out that Titania wasn't HIS queen and therefore it was fine, or perhaps she'd point out that spying on your own ruler and succeeding is something you can report about and use to improve information security.

"You've gone awfully quiet. Am I not entertaining enough for you?" said Titania with a sultry smirk.

\*Woops. I got too lost in my thoughts. Do I just admit the reason? I mean, why not?\* "No, but I was concerned with entertaining you. I'd been asking questions to keep your focus off the fact Blue seems to have frozen in shock... but now I think the 'SEEMS TO' part is the most accurate. You've got an illusion talking to her as well, haven't you?" stated Kress, with more confidence than he felt. I think you should take a look at [pandasnovel.com](http://pandasnovel.com)

Titania giggled and said, "Oh yes. I'm a little surprised Thyme is allowing me such free reign at the moment. I suppose it's because I'm not touching on the tournament too directly. I've got a copy of myself chatting to quite a few people. Though I'm not as good as Thyme, so I can only manage a handful of copies, and not with any great range. Still... everyone is rather close together,"

Kress sighed and asked. "So is there any point in keeping the shocked looking Blue over there?"

"Of course there is," insisted Titania. "Her face is hilarious. That's actually what it looked like. I didn't need to do a thing to make it look so silly, and she really was frozen for quite some time. It wasn't until I split you both off into your own illusions that she unfroze,"

Kress nodded and asked, "Right... so if a whole bunch of people are in separate illusions... does that mean that Kat is just seeing a bunch of people all talking to themselves?"

"Kat?" asked Titania confused.

"The succubus over there," said Kress pointing Kat out. It seemed she was now chatting with Mint and Lily. "She's got truesight,"

Titania froze in place and seemed to stutter for a moment before the illusion seemed to fix itself, "Thyme that sneaky little shit," grumbled Titania. "That's why they've let me be so free with my illusions. Everything I've said that demon has heard. It doesn't exactly look like she's paying attention but that's now a risk I can't take. Damn. I can't believe I missed that..."

"In fact... Thyme might be able to just ask for the memory from Kat once this is all over. So they'll know what I was doing and if it constitutes undue interference. Damn, damn, damn. I'll have to be really careful then. I don't think I've crossed the line... but Thyme would definitely cause me trouble if I was toeing it, just to annoy me. Thanks for letting me know about that little detail Kress," said Titania with a toothy grin.

\*Why do I feel like I've made a mistake? She's still not my enemy, and I didn't really think my question would be so... divisive. Surely Titania could've worked it out without me right? I mean, if she's chatting with Green or Nixilei they might've mentioned it... I mean obviously they haven't yet but... ah whatever. I'll just have to hope it's not going to be important.\*

"So... are you just talking to all the fae?" asked Kress mostly just to have a question in the air, so he wasn't caught lost in thought again.

"Oh not at all," said Titania with a wave. "I just don't have the skills to talk to them all plus the others I'm interested in. I won't be spreading who they are though. That little bit of information is for me, and me alone. I wouldn't want to be giving you info on your competitors now would I? Thyme might get mad,"

\*That didn't keep her talking as long as I'd hoped. Um... what do I really want to know? Maybe just... \*  
"Why all the sex?" asked Kress before he could talk himself out of it. He WAS curious, and Titania had made reference to it herself more than a few times so it probably wasn't a taboo subject.

Titania smiled and answered, "Not too many people are brave enough to just come out and ask. As for the answer... even I'm not that sure. It's just something I enjoy. I've tried to stick with single partners long term more than once but I simply... wear them out. I seem to have an extremely high libido compared to the norm, and I struggle to... how do I put this... 'satisfy myself' I suppose? Yes that sounds about right.

"Perhaps part of it is how strong I am. I'm already in the top one percent, of the one percent in strength. And while I'm no Thyme or Ulf, I'm closer then almost anyone else will ever get. I need to go for people at least Rank 3 otherwise I'd probably break them if I wasn't extremely careful... or massively poisoned,"

"Wait is that why you experiment with so many drugs?" asked Kress before his brain could catch up to his mouth.

Titania just nodded though, as if he'd asked a completely reasonable question. "Yes exactly! I'm looking for something that both makes sex better AND weakens me enough to be able to sleep with more normal people. I thought I found one once... but I developed an immunity to it ridiculously quickly. I have no idea why! I was so pissed when I found out about that... might've destroyed a mountain in the process of venting my anger..."

#### [Chapter 1216 1216 Exhibits K For Kress, Obviously](#)

Kress chapter

Judges: Ulf/'Steve' Auctifer, Oditr, Titania, Mint

Criteria: Looks, Not-sand features, Structurally Sound, Creativity, Looks

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The illusion around Kress shattered and he could see that Oditr and Auctifer were standing back in a line with the other judges. Mint was still over by Kat, but Thyme was reaching over to grab her. Literally. Kress watched as Thyme inflated their form and leaned all the way over like a creepy shadow monster. Mint froze in place as Kat and Lily looked up at Thyme behind her. Mint slowly raised her head until she saw the grasping hand of Thyme, and then screamed as Thyme snatched her and put her back with the rest of the judges.

Mint was holding a hand over where her heart would be as she said, "Geeze Thyme that terrified me. I nearly lost control of this body as you did that... also am I holding my hand over the correct spot for my heart? The lack of beating makes it hard to tell,"

"Yes it looks about right," said Thyme with a nod before turning seriously. Deadly serious. Thyme now had on a suite and tie with a big briefcase... and looked super dried out and creaked as they moved. Deadly serious. "Now. We've had enough fun and games. You all need to actually JUDGE the final entry. You haven't even moved from this podium judges,"

"Can we just call this team the winner and go eat?" asked Steve.

"No," said Thyme. "You can't. Things might surprise you,"

"I give them a ten. Now can I go eat?" said Steve.

παΠdαsNovel.com Thyme walked over and went to slap Steve on the back of the head before pausing. "Wait... would slapping you for not doing your job properly be considering interfering with the judges because I'm inflicting pain upon you after you've given a score? Even if I don't think it's a valid one... is that my place to judge?"

Thyme mumbled a few more things as they opened up the briefcase and reached in, with their whole arm so clearly it was bigger on the inside, and pulled out this massive book. Thyme swiftly flicked through the pages until they reached the one they were looking for... probably. At that point Thyme took out a pair of spectacles and carefully read over the paper while mumbling nonsense as they went. "Ok... says here I can make a formal protest but going so far as to hit you would constitute undue

interference on my end, despite the fact that it wouldn't hurt you and certainly wouldn't cause any lasting damage..." mumbled Thyme.

Thyme then put the book back in the briefcase before rummaging around in it a little longer and pulling out a piece of paper. Thyme flicked a hand over it quickly and suddenly it was completely filled in. He then slapped it on Steve's face. "There, that's my official notice of complaint. You can go do whatever you want while everyone else judges the sculpture,"

Steve shrugged and moved off to the side to lean on the wall. While he did that the other judges investigated the scene. Kress walked out onto one copy as well, the one with Oditr, because he didn't want to give away that it was his and Blue's work. It was also nice to look over what they'd done with fresh eyes.

Honestly? What they'd done was stunning. Kress was beyond happy with how things turned out now that he'd seen how things had gone for everyone else. Kress had been worried about what everyone would use Timmy for and what ways they might've found to use the little guy better than him. A big worry was Gareth and Burgandy using magic to make stone platforms, having Timmy magic up a sand sculpture, and then carry it back into the square. I think you should take a look at [paπdasnovel.com](http://paπdasnovel.com)

Clearly they didn't think about that. No, it was all... rather simple things for everyone else in the end. Kress knew he could be proud that he'd built a whole damn town. Hopefully the fancier buildings would show enough creativity for Titania. The parks, flags and various other little details would impress Auctifer, and that it would hold up well enough under the shaking.

There was just so much for everyone to poke at. Thyme had to make the invisible surface visible in a few places. Stairs down into the ravine, stairs up around the castle so you could look at it all properly. There was so much there. The only thing Kress was a bit sad about was the lack of a dock area, but that was at too big a risk of being washed away, so while it was sad, it did still make sense planning wise.

The houses were still a great touch. Kress especially liked how Timmy had ensured they weren't quite perfectly space, and that they had different little details. Some had trees, others had fences, something that must've been Blue's idea. Then there were the houses that Blue had intentionally destroyed to add a bit of flair to certain sections. Or the few houses that were half finished and Timmy had added scaffolding too.

Lots of nice little details. \*I can hardly believe we managed it. I'm proud of what we accomplished. Though... hmm... I wonder if Thyme will keep it around and preserve it somehow? I wasn't too bothered with it washing away before. It was just four hours of work... but now I kinda hope it sticks around. I'll mention it to Thyme later I guess.\*

Eventually, it was time for the destruction testing. Kress watched as things started to crumble. The ravine was surprisingly stable, and so was the castle. The road was the first thing to go, because the nice crisp lines quickly fell apart. The houses were next, even if the trees near them tended to stay strong. Then came down the prison. Too many delicate bits of work there. Once a small part went down, so did the rest.

The library held up surprisingly well, even as the castle started to collapse. It was in fact, the last building standing if you didn't count the parks. Timmy had clearly planted those trees quite firmly. Eventually



though, it too fell and Kress berated himself for not paying attention to the destruction tests the other sculptures went through. He didn't have the context to know if this was a good result.

With the destruction done, everyone walked back over to the main platform and Thyme said, "Right, you've now seen everything so it's time to go over the final scores. Most of them will be hidden for now... but as is tradition, why don't you tell us all what you're thinking for this final sculpture?"

"I already said, 10," called Steve from the corner.

Mint spoke next and said, "I think I have to go for a ten as well. It's fantastic really. All the colours, the little details. Everything from the little houses, to the parks to the massive castle in the background is all just... exceptionally done. Heck there were ROADS, sand roads. How they had the time, even with Timmy's help just... it's not something I could imagine being done in four hours.

"Then there were all the unique buildings and the ravine! They could've just made a town out of copies of the same house but they branched out and added so many cool things. It's just... yeah it's wonderful I'm giving it full marks,"

"I'm giving it full marks as well," said Titania. "The unique buildings show enough creativity for me to give high marks, but the extra details are what push it up even further. If that wasn't enough, finding out just how well they leveraged Timmy adds the final point of creativity for me,"

Auctifer went next and said, "I hardly need to say anything here. I never considered that anyone would make such good use of things other than sand. It's worth mentioning that the sand is still definitely the star of the show. This isn't a case of making things and putting sand on them like last time. It's a SAND TOWN with a few little things that couldn't use sand, like the trees, added in to really make things pop. I give full marks as well," *nOvEInext.cOm*

"I'm not sure I want to give full marks like the others," said Oditr. "I mean... I might still do it, I need to think about it for longer. Unlike the rest of these guys I only just saw the destruction stuff... and I'm still on the fence. The colours make it look awesome even after its all been destroyed... but in the previous examples more things survived if that makes sense? Sure the sand structures were sturdier than any of the others, but the trees stuck around after falling over. So... I'm a bit torn. It does look wonderful though, so I think this team is looking at least an eight from me. Just not sure if I should give the two extra points on the 'holds up to destruction' side of things,"

\*Even if Oditr doesn't give us full marks... we've still won. I've done it. I've got another win under my belt for the team and I couldn't be happier.\*

#### [Chapter 1217 1217 Sitting Down For A Meal With Royalty](#)

KAT CHAPTER! It's been so long! Wait how Long? 3 weeks! Woops

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"And there you have it. Kress and Blue take the win, with 2 points for each of their teams, while Ellenell and Burgandy take second place," said Thyme with a grin. There was a round of clapping for the winners, though it didn't take long for Thyme to speak again. "Normally I'd want to go through everyone's scores and explain who got what... but I can see the judges are ready to beat me up if they

don't get their promised free food. So I'll be assigning everyone random seats so you can all get to talking,"

Lily quickly jumped up into Kat's arms and glared up at Thyme as if daring the dryad to try and separate them. "Fine, couples can stay together if they're holding hands," allowed Thyme with a sigh. Kat noticed that while a few people did share some glances, it was only Gareth and Green that held hands. Though part of that was because Kress and Stan were too far apart. The demon did look like he wanted to run over there and grab Kress by the arm.

Lily of course transformed back into her humanoid appearance to latch onto Kat's hand, just in case Thyme decided sitting in Kat's arms didn't technically count as holding hands. Which while accurate, would've been annoying for them all. \*Well this has been an interesting round. I'm not too surprised that Kress won, but I am surprised by how much stuff he and Blue managed to build. Maybe we should've stuck around to watch instead of going off and training?\*

παΠδαςNovel.com [Perhaps... but we put in some good effort for the training and I doubt watching everyone build sandcastles would've stayed interesting for four whole hours. Though... perhaps training nearby would've been fine.]

\*I still say that it's safer to make sure we weren't going to be a distraction. Based on what Thyme said Blue and Kress were using the area outside the marked squares, so it's quite possible the other teams were as well.\**NovelnExt.cOm*

Before Lily could say anything Thyme had teleported everyone. There were six to a table, or seven in the case of Kat's group because of Lily. These weren't the standard dining room tables either, instead there were all outside under the stars with a few stray torches burning with what looked to be normal fire, but considering Kat couldn't smell any smoke coming from them she had her doubts.

The tables themselves were split into three benches, each clearly intended for two people. In the centre was a big pile of food on a slightly raised platform that Kat would quickly learn you could spin around so that all the food was... mostly within reach. All sorts of dishes were piled high on the turning table, and each guest was provided their own set of cutlery as well as a cup that had 'tap and speak the name of your drink request' printed across them.

Kat wondered exactly how random this selection process was. Mostly because the bench she'd be assigned with Lily also had Odir on it. Kat knew that if they'd been assigned just about anyone else save Romilda, and perhaps Borgick things would've been a squeeze, but at it stood the three of them fit fine on the bench. Even if their cutlery was a spreading out a bit into the others' sections.

On Kat's left was Burnice, with Burgandy on her other side. Burnice didn't seem to mind this, but Burgandy looked a little despondent. Kat's best guess was that the fae had wanted to sit at the same table as Titania, but that was just a guess. On the last bench was March, who made Odir next to her look even smaller, and finally Marigold, who somehow managed to look perfectly comfortable next March.

It did prove that it wasn't 'one per team per table' which had been an assumption Kat had made about Thyme's seating arrangements. It meant they had nobody from Blue's team around, or Romilda's. Of

course, Kat found herself questioning the whole 'random seats' thing even more when a quick glance revealed Gareth, Green, Kress and Stan all sitting together at a table with Auctifer and Ellenell.

"Random fruit juice," said Oditr as she tapped the cup in front of her. Kat watched as the cup shook for a few seconds before letting out a high pitched sound similar to a bell being rung and the liquid appeared in Oditr's cup. It was a pretty dark juice, whatever it was from. Kat sniffed slightly and determined it to be something vaguely grape-like.

[Kat... I think I have to ask. But I'm sort of embarrassed to do so. I just... I NEED to know what's up with the juice thing.]

\*I can ask for you Lily. It's fine.\* Kat felt Lily's thankfulness across their link as Kat rolled her eyes, hiding the motion behind reaching for some food. Kat felt it was a bit silly to be worried about asking, Oditr surely got the question all the time. "Hey Oditr, I'm pretty sure it's rude to ask, but I'm going to do so anyway. What's with the juice thing?"

Oditr looked Kat over for a few seconds, searching for something she didn't seem to be able to find. "Huh... you genuinely want to know don't you?" I think you should take a look at [pa11dasnovel.com](http://pa11dasnovel.com)

\*Welp. Can't lie Lily... so... Kats out of the bag. Pun intended.\* "Sort of. I'm curious yes, but it's my girlfriend that really wanted to know. She was just too embarrassed to ask, so I did it for her," said Kat.

Oditr's eyes immediately found Lily's, who was trying her best to look innocent, and mostly succeeding. Having big golden cat eyes and cat ears helped her look exceptionally adorable. Oditr sighed at the display, "Fine whatever, I'll tell you. It's at least somewhat interesting. Took a fair bit of looking on a number of people's part...

"But the best guess that anyone has come up with, and the one I chose to believe? Dwarves naturally have a disposition for fruit juice, or perhaps, it's more accurate to say that a long, long time ago we did. Somewhere along the line, that taste evolved from 'fruit juice' into 'fermented fruit juice' which, as you might or might not know, is one of the paths to alcohol.

"The logic thus goes, that for some reason, I've picked up the tastebuds of ancient dwarves instead of our current preferences. We don't really know why, but my parents were pretty old when they had me, and my grandparents were pretty old when they had my dad. So it's possible that I'm a lot fewer generations removed from those... let's call them 'Ancient Dwarves'. I'm a lot fewer generations removed from the ancient dwarves than normal, and as such, had a higher chance of developing this condition.

"The strange thing is, it's never been documented before. There was an assumption, with my being Queen of the Dwarves and rather publicly known for the condition that a number of dwarves would come forward and reveal that they too had this condition but were scared to admit to because... well because as a society we're pretty well hooked on alcohol. It's a hard thing to admit considering the social stigma you'd gain if you did...

"But nope. Nobody has legitimately come forward with the condition. We've got a few letters about grandparents or grand-grandparents that have since passed that supposedly had the condition... but that's impossible to verify really. We've had a few others come and claim they had the condition as

well... but it didn't take much testing to reveal they were all lying. Not sure why they bothered to do that..."

Kat felt her eye twitch at that. She wasn't exactly sure why that happened, until she sneezed afterwards. Obviously it was the sneeze that's why. Oditr continued, "Well no that's not quite true. At least one of them was a perspective suitor of mine, but the other two weren't... or at least, I don't think they were. So I'm at a loss as to why they'd bother to lie about something like that. Sure having it is one thing... but being known for lying to the queen? That can't be a good look."

"Some people will do anything for attention," suggested Kat.

Oditr shrugged, while Lily tried to muster up her courage. Kat started to gently rub Lily's back with her tail, and apparently that was enough encouragement for Lily to speak. "Um... so you said that's why you think you prefer fruit juice... but is that all you drink now? Or is there like... other stuff?"

Oditr made a 'so-so' gesture and explained. "I'm not incapable of drinking other things, just that when the choice is presented to me I'll always choose fruit juice. There's enough water in it that I don't need to drink that much either, though I still do. Usually before bed to help clean out my mouth." Lily gave Oditr a look, the dwarf somehow managed to interpret. "Hey, I clean my teeth properly, it's just a mental thing I think. I like to drink water afterwards ok?"

Lily nodded, "Yeah I kinda get it,"

\*I don't really. But then again, I mostly just drink water so perhaps that's why.\*

[Sometimes I really wonder how pleasant growing up in that orphanage was Kat. I know you like Gramps... but really just water?]

\*Oh... see... Gramps did offer us other stuff, but I'd just save it to bribe the younger kids not to cause trouble. Made less work for me.\* Lily let out a long sigh. Yup. That was her girlfriend.

#### [Chapter 1218 1218 More Questions For Oditr](#)

Seeing that Kat and Lily had finished with their questions for now, March stopped eating the large amount of food she'd gathered to ask, "Oditr, would you consider yourself strong?"

Oditr looked March up and down before frowning at the question. "That's... difficult to say. A lot of the time I wonder the same thing. In terms of pure power then yes, I AM strong. I'm on the upper end of tier four and it's assumed by just about everyone I'll break into tier five before the century is over...

"But I regularly wonder if that matters. I know Thyme. I've met Ulf. I'm nothing compared to those two monsters. Then there's Auctifer and Titania. I'm not entirely certain if they're Rank 5 or not, but I know they're both a good deal stronger than me if we're using Rank as a measure of power.

"So I'm in the odd position of being very strong compared to most. Standing head and shoulders about almost the entire dwarven population... and then I'm related to almost all of the dwarves more powerful than me. I'm friends with Thyme, as I already said. So... regularly I wonder if I should be trying harder. Forcing myself to train so that I can equal them in power...

"But I don't have the time. I'm a queen. I have shit to do, and when I'm not dealing with politics? The last thing I really want is to force myself to train. I have hobbies you know! I wish I had more time for them

then I do, but I accepted the throne as my parents' only child. God I wish I could pass this shit off to my cousins sometimes, but most of them don't have the talent to grow strong, and the two that do? They don't have the temperament for politics.

"Of course... if you asked Thyme if I was strong they'd go on and talk some nonsense about how I'm currently the youngest ruler that's still considered worthy of the name. That I've managed to overcome being a dwarf that doesn't like alcohol. That I've done great things in my time as queen. That part of my power is politics, and another is my mind...

"That being said? Am I strong? Perhaps March. Perhaps I am. I am objectively stronger than most... but quite regularly I feel weak. I cannot show this to the world, and I do not admit things like this often. Perhaps it is the atmosphere, or just that I feel so safe talking about this because you are not connected to my kingdom, and you ask this, not as a spy, but as someone seeking strength,"

Oditr let out a long sigh and took a long swig of her juice. Downing it in one motion before tapping the cup and mumbling "Refill" before sighing again and looking at March. "I think, when you are pursuing strength, you must first ask yourself 'what kind' and then 'what am I willing to pay'? There is a dark kind of strength that is easy to find... but it weakens you in other areas, and perhaps the price you would force others to pay for it would be too high."

March did her best to bow, though it was hard. The chair wasn't far from the table and March had a large frame. Still, Oditr appreciated the gesture for what it was. Marigold, on the other hand, thought things had gotten way too serious. "So... like, have you ever had sex?"

Oditr choked on the juice she was drinking. Oditr kept coughing for a bit as Kat oved her tail over to Oditr and started to rub circles there. Hopefully it'd help. Eventually, Oditr sucked in a deep breath and the coughing stopped. "Good gods. Of course you'd ask that sort of question Marigold. Not much of a surprise from Auctifer's daughter I suppose... though the real wonder is if you're related to Titania," said Oditr, voice still a touch raspy.

Oditr paused for a moment after that and seemed to consider the question. "Right... to answer your question... dammit why am I answering this question?"

"Because your silence would give me the answer?" said Marigold with a grin.

"Oh right. Auctifer's daughter," said Oditr with a nod. "Fine, I have. Exactly twice. Neither were particularly enjoyable experiences for me and I decided it just wasn't something I was interested in. Not that I had much interest before... but well, I wasn't exactly getting any younger and I'd remembered Titania's warning about how much harder having... relations is after you get to Rank 4. So I thought I'd try. It was... really not worth it,"

"Are you asexual?" asked Lily.

"Possibly?" said Oditr with a shrug. "I can find people attractive perfectly fine. I know what I like, and if I had to pick someone for marriage or something I certainly COULD do that... but sex? Eh not sure I could force myself to go along with it for long. I'm not sure if there's something more medically wrong or my libido is just so low that it's impossible to find myself in the mood," I think you should take a look at [pandanusnovel.com](http://pandanusnovel.com)

Oditr was blushing as she shook some thoughts out of her head. "Ok, there you've had your question answered Marigold, and I will be taking no more of that kind. No 'who was your first kiss' no details about my two encounters. I'm in a good mood, but I do not want to be interrogated about my non-existent love life? Ok?"

Marigold shrugged and then took to lean back on March's arm. March just rolled her eyes and said nothing. \*Huh. Not quite what I was expecting. I was curious to chat with someone else who is asexual but apparently that's not the case? I'm still a bit lost myself.\*

[Yeah so am I. I mean, her explanation makes sense I guess... whatever, it's not our place to pry.]

"I suppose if we're all asking Oditr somewhat embarrassing questions I will as well," said Burnice after a few moments.

Oditr groaned and said, "You know I'll have awkward questions for you all... once I can think of them,"

"I found that acceptable," said Burnice. "Now, my question is... is it true that despite not liking alcohol you actually have one of the highest tolerances for it in the kingdom?"

Oditr shrugged and said, "Well I can't be sure about the whole kingdom but I do know it's considered very high and at least amongst my family it's the highest. Which is really annoying. Do you know how many times I've heard my cousins complain that I have the best and worst ability to enjoy alcohol? They all seem to think I really pissed someone off in my previous life,"

Burgandy tapped the table a few times as she paused in her eating of her salad to think up a question. While this was happening Kat and Lily started to actually grab some food of their own. Kat wasn't all that hungry, and Lily might've snuck a snack in before the meal so she wasn't either. Still, it would be rude not to have anything. Kat was grabbing little bits of everything to try it all out while Lily just grabbed a good-looking slice of meat. March certainly seemed to enjoy it.

"How friendly are you with the other leaders? It's not terribly embarrassing of a question but I'm somewhat curious. It was odd seeing you just... roll around on the ground with Auctifer, and you've mentioned Titania gave you advice so... how does that work?" asked Burgandy.

Oditr sighed, "It actually IS a bit embarrassing to admit... but I've sort of become the little sister of the group. Which is annoying. I'm over a century old dammit! Nearly two! Which, yes I admit it a lot younger than Titania and Auctifer... and everyone just pretends Ulf is still the human king but I don't always enjoy the position.

"I mean, it's useful, don't get me wrong. The others aren't so hard on me when it's time for political games and their advice over the years has been unbelievably helpful... but sometimes it just feels infantilising. I've been running a damn country for decades! I don't need that much help.

"Oh and Ulf treats me more like a granddaughter... which is somehow less annoying than the rest? Maybe it's because I know if he wanted to he could sneeze and wipe my kingdom off the map? Maybe it's just because he really does feel like a grandpa and never makes it into a joke... I don't know.

"But yeah... we're... I don't know that you can call us friends. Because despite us all being royalty we're not all that equal at the moment. I do hope it will get better in the future but I'm just not sure. Though

at least I don't get as much shit as the beastkin representatives or the humans. I almost feel bad for those guys sometimes,"

#### [Chapter 1219 1219 Another Look At Ulf](#)

\*Hey, so technically I've used my question asking for you right? Can you ask why the royalty all make fun of the humans and the beastkin?\*

[Sure thing.] "Hey Oditr, why are the humans and the beastkin sort of a joke to you guys?" asked Lily.

Oditr raised an eyebrow and asked, "Is that's Kat's question?"

Lily nodded, "Yup but because she asked mine, now I'm asking hers. Just in case you really were sticking to the rule of one question per person," answered Lily.

Oditr let out a small laugh and said, "As long as the questions are ones I'm happy to answer I'm not going to be that strict. Though I suppose I am allowing everyone one uncomfortable question. Think of it as a reward for getting this far in the tournament or something. This one doesn't count as uncomfortable at all... as for the others? Eh I'll think about it.

"Now, the humans and beastkin. We make fun of them for different reasons so I'm not sure who to start with. I guess we'll start with humans considering we've got March here, but no beastkin," March just shrugged and kept eating. "Right the humans... well the big problem they have, is that they're refusing to move on.

"Ulf was... strong. Unbelievably so. Still is I guess. The humans have had him, and his wife around for a LONG time. Even as old as I am, I can't properly comprehend it myself. Even before he was king he'd still be popping up all over the place saving people, and then he was their main general in the war. He wasn't king till after that. What people don't understand, and I didn't either till I asked him...

"Is that Ulf is the single oldest living human... and he has been for a long, long time. He was the oldest living human after just a few centuries of his life. He's a figure that no human can remember NOT existing. He has been part of their culture for centuries. He's like... he's almost the human equivalent of alcohol for dwarves. The idea that he could just... not be there has been unthinkable for generations.

"The fact that he's now NOT THERE is something that all the adults can scarcely comprehend. Even when he handed his crown off, nobody actually believed that he'd just... leave. That he'd really go. Most people thought he'd go train the military again, or maybe become a martial instructor at one of the big academies...

"But he just left, and the whole human population has been reeling ever since. Some of the kids, and I'm talking like, five-year-olds. They're starting to get it, or at least there's hope they will rise up once they're older and show the world that they're fine. That Ulf might be gone from their kingdom, but that they don't need him anymore...

"The really scary thing though? It might not be true. There have been no true contenders for the throne. Heck, Ulf's daughter... um... fekin... no I can't remember her name which is really horrible of me. She's Auctifer's wife and she taught me how to make bows for higher Ranked people properly... but now I

keep getting 'Bow Master' stuck in my head because I was calling her that as a joke... shit Marigold help me out here?"

"Artema," answered Marigold.

Oditr snapped her fingers, "Damn that was it. I was thinking Athena for some reason but I knew that was wrong. Anyway, yeah, Artema has been getting calls to come back and be queen for almost as long as they've been bother that one 'totally random' farmer about him actually being Ulf." Explained Oditr.

A round of snorts went across the table. Nobody at all believed that 'random farmer' was actually a normal farmer. In fact, at this point most of the people at the table had caught on to the fact that it was probably Steve that Thyme had invited... and that Steve was almost certainly Ulf.

Oditr continued, "Anyway, the problem they're having is that Artema's not interested in coming back, and even if she was? She can't have kids so this problem will just come up again when she dies or retires. Then there's the fact they keep going after Ulf trying to find him, or if they're right about the 'farmer' they can invite him back... I think you should take a look at [pantheonovel.com](http://pantheonovel.com)

"But they can't. Ulf can't. I've seen his eyes sometimes, and they look... so very old. I suspect that the only reason he's still around is to help prevent another world war. With him still 'out there' the human kingdom isn't going to be attacked so it's... mostly safe even if it's government isn't doing so well. They're trying at least.

"But yeah... the humans need someone powerful to rise up and claim the title of king and it just doesn't seem to be happening at the moment. It's a problem for us as well... because everyone year or so someone proposes we go off and conquer the humans. They've got some good arguments a lot of the time as well, which makes it worse. I just have to point out the Ulf will never allow it...

"I just don't know how long that excuse will last. Ulf has been staying out of things for a while now, perhaps someone will start poking the humans as a test... and if he keeps doing nothing? We might only have four kingdoms soon,"

Oditr let out a long sigh before shaking her head and continuing. "So yeah, that's why we make fun of the humans. It's because they don't really have a proper ruler, and even though they're trying... as a whole the race is just kinda weak at the moment. They got too comfortable with Ulf to look at for them and now he's as close to being gone as a guy like him can be and they don't know what do to,"

"What do you mean 'Ulf can't'?" asked Burnice. "You said that a bit earlier, and I wanted to ask before you got onto the beastkin,"

Oditr sighed again, "Right well... I'm not entirely sure I should be saying this... but you know what? Ulf can stop me if he damn well wants to. It's mostly stuff I've inferred anyway. The biggest part of it? Old Man Ulf is just... tired. Most people can't comprehend what he's seen, heck I can't comprehend what he's seen either. He was... so important for so long. He's done so much. Killed so many people, so many things. Saved even more lives. Heck, he's fought off natural disasters that threatened the human kingdom more than a few times...

"Yet... I really think his wife dying is what broke him. When he was younger he didn't need her support. Then, when he was older and he found it, it helped him stabilise. Then, together they ruled a nation for



what I think is the longest time in recorded history... and when she passed? It was done. Ulf never wanted to rule a nation. He NEEDED to rule a nation, and wanted to support his wife.

"Sometimes I wonder if he'd be better off finding a way to make himself weak again. To find new adventures... but nothing can really touch him. Not that I know of. None of the monsters or beast that I know of couldn't be slain by Ulf. I just... I don't really know what else there is for him to DO if that makes sense?"

"Well allegedly, he's taken up farming," joked Burgandy.

"Indeed, allegedly, he has," agreed Oditr. "Yes... perhaps he wants a simple life for a time? Perhaps he is just weary. I don't really know what anyone can do for him now. He... he's nice and kind and very grandfatherly... but just so, so tired that I can barely stand the weight when he allows it to creep into his eyes and bearing. I wish I knew what I could do for him... but I've got no ideas,"

"Perhaps..." Lily started and then stopped. Oditr turned and looked at Lily with curiosity. "Um... look... I'm sure it's something that has been thought of before..."

"No, go on," said Oditr. "Even if I've heard it before, a new perspective might open some other new ideas,"

"Well... it's just... why not try to figure out a way for him to leave the dimension? I mean... maybe not right now... or until the kingdom has stabilised or whatever... but perhaps... I... well Kat and I know that Rank 5, or even Rank 6 is not the end, even if it IS here. So perhaps he could find somewhere that things even stronger roam?"

"Huh... I don't think anyone has thought to mention that to him," said Oditr in surprise. "I've certainly not thought of it... and really? That could be a great thing for him. Not sure how I'd break it to him... and Thyme would probably be necessary for developing the spell that would let him leave... but it just might work. It might bring the spark back to his eyes."

#### [Chapter 1220 1220 Beastkin Government Discussion](#)

Everyone had to take a moment to let that sink in. Lily had provided a rather interesting path forward for Ulf, and the whole group understood the importance of that suggestion. It could drastically reshape the political landscape of the whole continent. Just a few words, a small, half-scared girl had given a suggestion worried it would be something heard before. Yet a demon and her familiar had different perspectives on these things. The idea to just leave? It wasn't one that anyone sitting here had thought of before.

Eventually, it was March that asked about the beastkin, just to get the conversation going again. She was unafraid of breaking the silence. It was a big step forward for Ulf yes, but not one that would be completed anytime soon, even if it was something that he was interested in. So she asked, "Tell about the beastkin, and what sets them apart,"

Oditr took a quick swish of juice and few bites of food before she began. "Right, the beastkin. Ok, to really get into it, I have to lightly touch on everyone else first. We've got a... sort of balance between everyone now. We did a long time ago as well, though said balance wasn't as clear back then. That's why we had a war about, or at least. That's what my grandfather likes to say as a joke.

"Beastkin, have always had the most martial might ready to be mustered at any one time. Not necessarily the most powerful fighters, or the best equipped or any number of other things, but ready, martial might. Beastkin tend to get to Rank 2 or 3, and even most of there 'civilian' members still get to Rank 1 to help support their lifestyle. Which isn't uncommon exactly, but for beastkin it is only the truly infirm that don't know how to fight at all.

"So that obviously gives them a pretty big stick at the negotiating table. Still, to counter this, the elves tend to have the highest quality fighters. We're ignoring the dryads by the way," Oditr mentioned almost offhandedly. "Things get really complicated if you include them, but there isn't even one hundred thousand dryads in the world so we can do that. Anyway back to the elves. They tend to live long, and get to pretty high levels of power... but not all of them are fighters and their population is a lot smaller then that of the beastkin. So if it came to a straight up fight... could go either way really.

"The humans have, or had perhaps, Ulf. I touched on it before, but he was scary before he became king, and only got stronger from there. Now... they have the most population and possibly the most land? It depends how you account for certain things like oceans so I won't get into that part much. It does however, mean they probably have the most food production which is also really important. Especially when the beastkin don't farm all that much, so their food production is rather poor.

"Then you have the fae. They tend to be really good at spying and many people say their magical scholars are unrivalled. It makes fighting an aggressive war against them arguably impossible. They can just ward the absolute shit out of their cities and turtle up until you run out of food. Unless it's the humans, but as we established, Ulf isn't going to help with an aggressive war, and the fae aren't really that scared of the humans otherwise. They've got firepower enough to return fire if it came to it.

"Now, my people, the dwarves... well we used to have the arms and armour advantage. We could equip whole squadrons with the best armour you can possibly imagine... but we kept up with the practice even as we entered times of peace and we've handed out quite a lot of said arms and armour just because... well a blacksmith needs to make a living doesn't she?

"I've been trying to get my people to innovate a bit. Perhaps come up with new arms or armour to help bridge the gap but research is slow going. I've got my own secret project that has promise... but it's still got a lot of problems, and while I don't mind chatting with you, military secrets are staying secret.

"Anyway. So that's the basic balance between the races as I see it. Perhaps I'm right, perhaps I'm wrong, but considering who my teachers were, I'm rather inclined to believe it." \*Yeah if anyone would know it's the other royals. So they've probably got a pretty good idea.\* "Which leads us back to the beastkin. They're pretty scary on paper. They can start up a war faster then anyone else, and if they time it right, they might even be able to end it. Theoretically.

"See the problem with that idea is that all of them serve under a different leader. There is no beast king. So they're actually a bit of a paper tiger. Oh sure, if we attacked them they'd all unite together faster then you can say savagery so it's still a concern, but not as much of one as they like to pretend on the regular.

"Which leads us to the jokes. The problem for the beastkin is that they're dealing on inherently unequal footing. They don't have a powerful king or queen, politically powerful that is, I know a few beastkin

chiefs stronger than I am, that can get shit done. So when they come to ask for trade deals and the like... I think you should take a look at [paflidasnovel.com](http://paflidasnovel.com)

"Well it's hard for them to bargain properly. Who do they go to? They find it insulting to go to duchess or even a marchioness... but that's all they are really. Oh we have different titles for important dwarves but that's what the other races use so I'll use it here as well. So then we have a problem. They can't come to say, me, because I've got way more authority than them, and they'll end up with a poor deal.

"They can't go to someone of lower station though, because that would be setting precedent that they ARE only on the same level as, probably duchess is what they'd choose. Now, even I think they're basically a collection of maybe marchionesses if they're lucky, not even to the level of a duchess except for maybe one or two... they'd never admit to that. So trading with them becomes really awkward.

"How do you go about it? If you send it to the council they have, all that will happen is they'll debate it endlessly and then conclude that trade deals are up to the individual members, but then said individual members won't want to negotiate as a group, they want to do it each separately. Which we don't want because that just becomes an extra headache. [novelnext.com](http://novelnext.com)

"But say you do go that route? Perhaps it all works out perfectly. You get the trade deal set up. It's all going well... oops what's this? You need to cross some other tribe's land to actually complete the deal? Well shit now you have to work something out with those guys as well, even if, technically speaking, it should have nothing to do with them and beastkin long ago agreed to give free right of travel through their lands... that all stops when there's money on the table,"

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Oditr sighed and continued, "Look, it just becomes a hassle. We can't NOT deal with their government as a proper recognised nation... but we can't really deal with it either because how things are set up doesn't really let us. We're supposed to respect each individual chief, but nobody can agree on just how much power they all should have and..." Oditr threw up her hands, "It's just a massive mess.

"So we joke about it amongst ourselves. Arguably... something that the beastkin are missing out on. They don't exactly share the same comradery the other royalty do... but they're stubborn and, as I mentioned earlier, powerful so they can continue with their weird form of government despite its problems because apparently it works for them.

"So there's the joke. Can't work with this, can't work without them. Can't work with individuals, or groups. Yet the joke is that it all somehow works... oh and animal puns. Might be a little racist, but we still do it."

\*It's really weird that the beastkin have the government most similar to our own, and one we might be tempted to argue for... but here it just doesn't work out. Or at least, it causes issues with the other nations.\*

[I think that has a lot to do with the fact you can get so much individual power in a world with magic. A king or queen doesn't just need to decide policy. They need to be a symbol. A symbol of the country's power. A ruler with the ability to personally defend their country with fire and brimstone if necessary. It's basically like electing a talking nuke as your leader. You need one, because other people have one.

The beastkin seem to get away with it by... I guess in this analogy having a lot of smaller bombs that are still quite deadly? Just, obviously not on the same level as the nukes, and everyone knows.]

\*What a weird but oddly accurate mental image you paint.\*