

DEMONS 1251

[Chapter 1251 1251 Lost In Thoughts](#)

Thyme clapped their hands together to get everyone's attention on them once again. "Before we all leave, I have a few messages to relay. First, the next event will likely run through the regular lunch time. As such, when you return to the inn, you'll find I've got not just snacks for everyone, but a spread of things for lunch. Feel free to eat early, or save some room to eat a late lunch once the second event of the day is over.

"For everyone participating in that event, know that you have thirty minutes after I finish my speech here to eat, and then get ready for it. Perhaps you'll want to save eating for after, perhaps you want to have a quick snack. This is all up to you. In that same vein, I also understand that this particular event could be really boring to watch if the competitors all try to get as far away from the platform, and each other.

"As such, I will be leaving a doorway that connects to a room in the inn. You can return to the floating platform I'll have prepared whenever you want. Additionally, I will be showing off illusions of all five competitors on separate walls down in the basement from the first day. I'll be doing the same in the sky, so take your pick of where you want to watch things.

"A final last note, before I open things up for questions. Gareth here does need to rest. I suspect he'll be out for the rest of the day, and after discussing it with Green, I'll be leaving him in this coffin looking device, and leaving that in their shared room. If you wish to check up on his recovery you'll need to see Green about it. Despite appearance, this coffin is actually heavily enchanted with healing magic. I made it look like a coffin because it really is for people on the edge of death. Now, any questions?"

I don't have any questions. You?

[Not really. It all seems straightforward. Well, I have questions about that coffin but it doesn't feel appropriate to ask them right now, or even just while it's in use.]

Where do you think we should watch the next event? I was able to look through your eyes without too much trouble.

['Without too much trouble' she says. Kat, you were bleeding from your eyes at one point during your tests and having your own eyes open while trying to watch through mind causes everything to overlap. That is some trouble.]

I have regeneration, my eyes healed. I probably shouldn't have tried to 'see' that way anyway, it was bound to cause issues. I'm more thankful that despite all the blood it didn't really hurt. That means you can't be mad at me.

[That's really not the point.]

I think it somewhat is. I'm not in danger really.

[I don't like that you think getting hurt is no big deal.]

It's really not a big deal though. At Rank 3 I might even be able to regrow limbs, so it really is just pain.

[Don't you fucking dare test that Kat.]

Look, I know the idea isn't nice to contemplate, but it's better to know if I can or not before it becomes necessary.

[Nope. I refuse. I know you Kat. You'll start trading limbs as part of your normal combat strategy if you learn you can regrow them. I have enough problems with your combat style as it is, and I'll not be giving you permission to make it worse.]

Yes dear. No cutting of my arm for fun.

[Good.]

"It seems we've got no questions, lovely!" said Thyme, dragging Lily and Kat out of their mental argument with somewhat embarrassed looks on their faces. Both had forgotten that Thyme had been waiting for people to ask questions, or that the pair might have questions for Thyme at all. *Woops.*

Thyme snapped their fingers, and a small door appeared at the back of the room. It looked like a completely normal door for the inn, which Kat supposed made sense. "Go forth, and eat... or relax for thirty minutes, I don't care," said Thyme as a clock appeared behind them and started ticking.

Kat looked over at Nixilei and asked, "So what's the plan for you?"

Nixilei shrugged, "In a larger sense, I'm not yet sure. It will depend on exactly what contraptions Thyme has for us when it comes time for the next round. I imagine a lot of planning will have to be done in the immediate aftermath of that reveal. As for right this moment? I think I'll check out the snacks... and potentially fill my pockets as well. Thyme never said we couldn't bring food or water with us. I think you should take a look at

"The question will be if the extra weight is worth it. That's something I'm less sure about. I might just eat what I have before dropping off the platform. The water might be more important... but it also weighs more," explained Nixilei. *noVelNext.Com*

"Can't you use your storage rings?" asked Kat.

Nixilei's eyes widened. "Oh... oh right. I suppose you wouldn't know, and I guess we never thought to tell you because you don't have one... storage rings are allowed to be worn, but not access during tournament rounds. In between bouts is fine, but not during. It's one of the few rules that applies to the whole tournament so Thyme doesn't have to say it. It's why we all have sheaths and what-not for our weapons. Well, that and it's a bit slower to pull a weapon from your storage rings so it's still worthwhile, but for a lot of things the rings are just better," Nixilei explained.

Oh. That makes sense.

[I feel sort of like an idiot. How did I not notice they weren't using their storage rings?]

Probably they don't exist on earth and they just look like normal rings no matter how you look at it. I wouldn't worry about it. Seems like an easy mistake to make.

[Sure, but I was also ignoring a really useful tool. Storage rings open up so many possibilities.]

So... should I look into getting one?

[Maybe? I wasn't really thinking about that considering we don't have any money for this world, and you probably need mana to use it, but at the hub they'd have demon versions. Even if I remember you mentioning to me that they can be somewhat restrictive.]

"Hey, you two, I'm off to get some snacks," said Nixilei.

Kat and Lily winced in synchronisation and Kat apologised for them both. "Sorry about that, we seem to be very distractable at the moment. Don't worry about us, just go work out what food you're going to smuggle into the task,"

Nixilei grinned back and gave the pair a nod before getting up and heading for the door. Kat looked around and saw that everyone else had already left so it was just the two of them. "Well... I guess it's just us now,"

Lily decided that was a good enough excuse and transformed back into her human form and leaned into Kat, giving her a kiss. "Well that's quite nice. Still, I'm not sure about getting a storage ring. You can't use them in the Hub easily, and I'm not sure if we could take it into the tournament depending on what exactly the rules are. Plus, I have no idea what something like that would cost,"

"I imagine it's based on the amount of space inside it," offered Kat and she pulled Lily into her with her tail.

"I can see that... but then the question is, do you save up for a big one you'll possible never fill just so you don't have to upgrade it consistently?" asked Lily.

"How long do they last though? Surely not forever?" said Kat.

"Huh... yeah that's not something I thought about. I guess we should both try to remember to look this all up once we're finished 'competing against' Stan," said Lily.

Kat gave Lily a kiss on the cheek and let out a hum. "So... what do we do now? We've got thirty minutes to kill, and then we've got two whole hours of doing just about whatever we want. I do want to be around for the obstacle course, so if you don't mind we'll be watching that... but have you got anything you want to do with me while Nixilei is off flying around?"

"So... this might seem a little weird but I sort of want to build a sandcastle with you. After seeing all the cool stuff Kress did with his... and the other teams as well of course. Even if we don't have a Timmy to help out or special adaptive buckets I'm sure Mint has a few normal ones. It's not something I'd normally enjoy, and the sand will probably be annoying... but I just feel sort of inspired," answered Lily.

"Of course Lily, whatever you want," said Kat tightening the hug just a bit more.

[Chapter 1252 1252 Cute Moment In Thyme](#)

Thyme must've still been watching the area, at least somewhat, because as soon as it became clear that Kat and Lily were there to stay, at least until the next round, Thyme removed all the extra chairs, the

various flowers, the red carpet. Everything except the two chairs Kat and Lily were sitting on, even if it was more that Kat was sitting on one chair, and Lily was sitting on Kat with her legs on the other.

Once everything else had vanished, a new couch popped up. Just to rub it in a little, the couch's leather back looked like a pair of wings, and the cushions Thyme provided all had a little kitten printed on them. Kat rolled her eyes at the sight. "Shall we move?" asked Kat.

Lily blushed looking over at the clearly personalised couch and grumbled, "When did Thyme even make this! Surely it had to be in storage somewhere... I'd really rather not think of the implications if Thyme made it, just now, for a single joke,"

Kat shrugged as she pulled Lily up with her. With Kat's tail tying them together it was a little awkward to move, but not all that much. Kat moved over the couch and lay down with Lily resting atop her stomach, before her girlfriend rolled her eyes and lay down as well. The couch was pretty comfortable, and the armrests had more give in them than was probably necessary for a couch, but they doubled as great pillows. Kat spoke, "Honestly, I'd be less surprised if Thyme did just make the couch for the joke.

"Thyme would just need to make the couch's base out of wood, and I'd be pretty surprised if Thyme doesn't have something they can grow that looks enough like leather. The pillows might be harder, but if it's all made of plant fibres Thyme can use magic for that as well. They are very cute though, so Thyme might've just had them around. They're missing your horns and wings after all, so they aren't 'Lily Pillows' just cat ones. Then you have to consider that Thyme can well... stop time. So it's possible that it took a real second or two, but actually closer to thirty minutes or so from Thyme's perspective. And really? I bet Thyme is more than willing to use up thirty minutes of magical time for a joke,"

"I hate that your reasoning makes sense," grumbled Lily.

"Then why can I feel your amusement through our bond?" asked Kat to the air.

Lily grumbled and just nestled herself further into Kat's shoulder. Not willing to answer the provocation, even as she felt her heart lift. Kat didn't say anything for a bit, just letting her hand glide through Lily's hair, careful not to start scratching. Wouldn't do to have Lily lose herself completely for now. Kat did have something to bring up. "So... this doesn't need to be answered now, but it's something to think about. What do you think we should do once tomorrow is over?"

"What do you mean?" asked Lily.

"Well, knowing Thyme I imagine they'll give us a few days, maybe even a few weeks of enjoying this little resort once everything is wrapped up. While that does sound lovely, and I'd be happy to spend however long you want relaxing here, at least until Thyme kicks us out... we do have an issue. Everyone back home.

"Now, I don't feel too bad about it. Sylvie needed to become less reliant on me, and even if my time away has... ensured that a little more harshly than I'd like, and we send letters to them all regularly before bed time. If we decided to stay here in vacation, we'll have to tell them. Callisto and Vivian won't mind, and Sylvie will say she doesn't mind... but I'm not sure how much I want to push it,"

Lily's mood had soared as she considered staying here, relaxing, a nice little vacation get-away for them both. Until Kat brought up 'leaving' Sylvie on Earth, dousing much of her cheer. Lily sighed. She wasn't

annoyed at Kat, or at Sylvie. The little girl was precious and looked up to Kat a good deal. It was making things a touch awkward at this moment though. "Ah," mumbled Lily, not really sure what else to say yet. I think you should take a look at

Kat waited patiently, continuing to brush Lily's hair as the girl thought. Kat didn't let her own mind wander, simply focusing on Lily for now, less she influenced Lily's mind too much. Kat genuinely wasn't sure how she wanted things to play out. Staying until either Thyme or D.E.M.O.N.S told them to leave would be nice... but there were problems with that.

The first was that, if D.E.M.O.N.S kicked them out, another mission would likely come up a day later. Which, while technically fine, would just make the issue with Sylvie worse. Waiting for Thyme probably wouldn't be much better, they'd likely only get a day or two longer before off to missions again. Kat supposed she could work out a way to take a week off or something, but Kat wasn't sure how easy that would be.

On the other hand, they'd had their vacation cut short last time. Both of them had been really looking forward to spending some time having fun in the snow. That had obviously fallen through completely. Kat wasn't going to complain, missing out on snowy fun times was obviously the best option in that situation, but it did mean she owed Lily a nice date somewhere, and a few days on an island paradise probably counted.

But, just as these things were important to Lily, and important to Kat... so was Sylvie. She was an adorable little girl, and important to both of them. Much too mature at times. Still, they would certainly be taking at least some time off. Just... maybe only a few extra days. More of a weekend away, then a week long vacation. Possibly.

Lily eventually said, "Perhaps we should try and sound out Callisto and Vivian, see how they think Sylvie is doing before we commit to a certain number of days. I'm sure there will be fun to be had. I'm not sure if any of the others will be staying, I could see so many people going either way... but that doesn't really bother me. The island isn't huge but it's more than enough for twenty-five people as it is, and I doubt everyone will be sticking around,"

"Yeah, but that's sort of the easy answer isn't it?" asked Kat. "Instead of making a choice, we're just putting it on Vivian and Callisto to potentially bear the brunt of Sylvie's displeasure. If we're going to have a vacation, even just for a day or two, I'd be more comfortable owning it. Stating we're taking this vacation. Sure we can still sound things out, but I'd like an idea of what we both want before reaching out,"

Lily sighed and said, "You always were the confident one, weren't you? I suppose that going about it that way would be more responsible. As for the answer... well I just don't really know. Sure an island resort sounds fun, and I'm sure we'd love it for the first few days... but then what? There aren't any shops here, the only activities are ones Thyme will run for us, or perhaps Mint. We could train and enjoy the great food, but that's not really relaxing, that's training. Even if arguably we might need it.

"Perhaps if more than just one or two people from across the teams stay we could do some things with them, like the obstacle course your running an extra time this afternoon. I'm not sure if I'd love to participate in that exactly... but it would probably be good for me to get some more combat experience. Once again though... that isn't really vacation stuff.

"I'll admit, it's a beautiful tropical island, so we can go swimming or hiking, and just taking in nature... but the island isn't exactly huge. We can probably cover the whole place, even at human walking speeds, in about three days. Heck, that might even be too much as it is. Despite all that though... I do think it would be nice to relax, properly, with just the two of us. Don't think I didn't notice you going off for a walk last night,"

Kat sighed and pulled Lily into a kiss. It was comforting, and a great way to stop Lily getting angry about her little midnight adventure. Lily wanted to be annoyed at Kat using the kiss as a way to get her to calm down... but she wasn't actually mad, and the kiss was pretty good.

Eventually, Lily needed to breathe so they separated and Kat said, "So really, we've got no better idea now than when I first asked the question... but we do know that staying here for too long just isn't worth it. Probably for the best. I guess we'll just keep thinking about it for now." Lily nodded and then moved back in for another kiss.

[Chapter 1253 1253 Eyes Of Nix](#)

--- Nixilei ---

Nixilei was the first person from her team to walk back through the doorway to Thyme. Granted, Kat and Lily hadn't left, but that didn't change the fact that Kress, Green and Gareth were all 'busy'. Kress was spending time with Stan, while Green and Gareth were just with each other in the medical bay. Kress' expressions had continually switched through a whole assortment of emotions that even Nixilei was unsure what they all meant.

*I can't decide if this is good for him or not. Stan seems remarkably sweet on the lout for some reason... but I know enough about demons to know that 'long-term' is a foreign concept to a lot of them. Kat and Lily are the weird ones. Sure they tend to settle into normal relationships eventually but they have wild teenage years. I'm not sure I want Kress exposed to that... or for him to have his heart broken.

Which isn't even the biggest issue. No, the real problem is how often is Stan even going to be around. Kress can't just summon the guy up every time they want to go on a date. Plus, I have no idea how they're going to keep in contact. Even if things work out, it's going to be very hard for them both... but Green and Gareth, or at least Gareth, seem to think this is a good thing so I shan't interfere.*

That of course, bought her thoughts around to Green and Gareth. Currently, Green was complaining about needing to show up for the introduction to the round, while Gareth was promising her various favours. Which was nonsense really. Gareth would eventually just pick up Green and carry her along, while Green would be able to get everything promised just by asking. Assuming Gareth was healthy enough of course. It was a rather normal song and dance... but with Kress also engaged in romantic activities Nixilei was starting to feel a bit left out.

*Which is ridiculous because I don't even have any interest in romance right now. Not only would that be a massive drain on my time and energy I certainly haven't found anyone I'm interesting in kissing, let alone courting or laying with. I just wish I felt less like a third wheel, or fifth wheel I suppose in this case. Perhaps it's not that I feel left out, but I feel as though they're moving on without me?

What a strange idea. I've watched over Green for many years, and Gareth has been around for most of them. They've been smitten with each other for a long time, and the marriage was arranged potentially even before that. Things have hardly changed... all that's happened is Kress might have found someone.*

Nixilei held in a sigh. She'd been emoting a bit too much recently, her training had been cracking. Not necessarily a bad thing in the short term, but it wouldn't do to make such a thing a habit once again.

When did I become their bloody mother! I shouldn't be feeling like this at all. We're practically the same age.

Nixilei stepped through the door and saw that things had been rearranged. There was now four sets of two couches and with a single red arm-chair between them. Things were a little different for the fifth set. There was one large couch that seemed to have bat-wings on it with a small couch on either side, and a red armchair behind it. In front of all that was a stage but nothing was upon it just yet. Thyme would likely show up there at some point.

The final thing of note was the big wooden sign near the doorway. On it, sat the words 'Competitors for this round please chose a red chair' in dripping red paint, Nixilei knew what blood looked like well enough to know this wasn't. I wonder if anyone will think that's blood. A few steps forward and Nixilei realised why there was an extra couch for one of the sets. Kat and Lily were resting on it. Though... Nixilei carefully walked off to the side. It looked like they were asleep now.

*Probably just Lily. Hmmm... maybe I should look into getting a pet or a familiar? That might keep me busy and when people are being annoying I can just sick a dog on them or something. That actually seems like an amusing idea. Not sure if it's worth making them a familiar... but it could be really funny even if they aren't. Perhaps if we win today I should ask Thyme for one?

What would I want if I were to get a familiar? Something sneaky, or at the very least, that can be trained to sneak around. Likely shouldn't go for anything too identifiable either... unless I go for something sufficiently small that I can hide in my pockets or something? I don't think I know any small animals that are all that powerful though. Sure there are various insect swarms that can be a problem, but really it's the numbers not the individuals.*

Nixilei grabbed the red chair behind Kat's and pushed it closer so she could sit on the armrest and looked over the back of the couch down at the pair. "I see you two have gotten comfortable," said Nixilei.

Nixilei was surprised when Lily opened her eyes first. It was almost odd to see the girl outside of her transformed state. It was oftentimes easier to believe the girl had started out as a cat and got a human form. Sure some beastkin took on the traits of their animals, but for Lily it was almost ridiculous. Nixilei wondered how Lily could sleep so much, ignoring the loud voice pointing out so did Green.

For a spy like Nixilei, watching Lily could be a fascinating thing. She was certain the girl didn't notice half of the things she did. Her tail would always swish off towards Kat instead of properly side to side, or that Lily always seemed to have her ears twitching in Kat's direction, constantly listening and checking up on the demon. Her eyes were usually quite sharp, sharper looking than Kat's... but that was the work of those slit pupils really. Lily was much less a wild cat, and more a housecat, despite the amount of magical power Nixilei could feel from the small girl. I think you should take a look at

Nixilei wanted to scoff as Lily pushed herself up, stretching herself out first as if she wore more a cat than a person, further proving Nixilei's thoughts. Lily yawned showing off a set of sharp teeth as she did so, before lazily looking around at Nixilei. "Indeed we are. Thyme made us this fancy couch so why not use it?" offered Lily.

"I'm surprised you're the one awake and talking," said Nixilei. "Usually you let Kat do all of that for you," "Are you implying something?" asked Lily, eyes narrowing.

Nixilei shrugged and said, "Do remember the first time I met you, you were stuck as a cat. I only half believed Kat's story of you being a person once upon a time, and even now you wear your influence strongly. I really am just surprised to see you as the one awake," *nOvelNext.Com*

Lily frowned. "Am... am I really that bad? Wait no, Kat isn't actually asleep, we're testing out having her see through my eyes more. I... I managed to get it working the other way around really quickly. It seemed to just... work on my end. Um... but anyway, what do you mean about my influence? I'm guessing I'm acting like a cat?"

Nixilei nodded and explain, "Indeed. Much more so then a normal beastkin,"

Lily frowned as well. "I was told that was pretty normal, that I'd have those sorts of habits after the change. I was also told not to fight them too much, or rather, only fight the ones I really don't like... but how much has it really changed me I wonder..."

Nixilei shrugged at that and said, "I can't truly say. I didn't know you before. You might've been more 'cat-like' then the feline beastkin I know of even before your transformation. Perhaps it isn't anything to worry about... but you don't see Nell stuffing herself and getting ready to hibernate, or the wolf siblings running around biting at each other all the time,"

"I don't bite people," said Lily.

"I know that, but it's not that you're acting like a wild cat, but more like a house pet. Perhaps I'm just noticing it more because most beastkin take after their wilder heritage in terms of instincts, but it is noticeable," said Nixilei.

"Hmm... well there was this one time I just ran down a boar. Kat had to chase after me, well she was faster then me so 'chase after' sort of implies she couldn't catch me. Anyway, um... no I definitely still have those instincts as well. It's just nice to be around Kat, and I'm not really noticing anything all that weird. Other than the sleep of course,"

Nixilei shrugged and said, "Who really knows. I am a touch surprised about the fact you were compelled to hunt, but I might just be seeing things that aren't there. Though... perhaps it is due to how much time you spend in that form? Even if most of that time is asleep?"

"I... I'll think about it," mumbled Lily.

[Chapter 1254 1254 Thyme The Used Car Salesman](#)

--- Nixilei ---

Nixilei left Lily to her thoughts, as she observed all the competitors coming in. Nixilei found herself unsurprised by the competitors that took the read chairs. First in was Ellenell, who arrived a bit before the rest of his team. *He's in a similar position to me. The team healer. The real question will be if there's anything I can use as an edge over him. I would suspect my physique is better, and perhaps my martial training... but how useful those things will be is a bit up in the air.*

The second person to sit down was Chartreuse, alongside most of their team. Nixilei didn't really have any thoughts about them just yet. They hadn't participated in any events before now, and it was unclear if they were chosen for their unsuitability for the obstacle course, or because they had a decent amount of mana. The book on their waist implied mana capacity... but they might've just been chosen because they were the team wizard. Time would tell.

Next up was Asteodia who was followed by Carl, while the rest of her team trickled in later. *Asteodia. She's creative, but perhaps not someone with a great memory. Then again, she'll likely pay close attention this time around. From what Kat let slip she took her poor performance yesterday pretty hard. I'll need to watch her, but I'm not too afraid of what she'll do just yet.*

The final contestant this round was Midnight, who also came in with their entire team. Nixilei also didn't have a lot of data on them. They weren't super well known despite hanging around Marigold, and while Nixilei did know they were a shadow mage, building sandcastles isn't a particularly good indicator of fighting ability.

Is it wrong of me to be glad that Ellenell is taking this round instead of Blue? After her display of capacity and control during volleyball yesterday she likely would've been the most dangerous opponent... barring Romilda and Kat of course. Hence why they were banned from the round. As it stands... Midnight and Chartreuse are likely my toughest competition but there isn't enough information on them to say really.

Nixilei glanced at the door, still not seeing her teammates. Where are those three idiots? Wait... I just realised that Gareth might be forced to stay in that medical coffin and Green would use that as an excuse not to show up... which is fair honestly. Where is Kress though? Nixilei looked around and found that Stan hadn't arrived yet either.

Well I suppose that answers that question. Now are they going to get here before- Nixilei's thoughts were cut short with Thyme appearing, answering the question she was pondering. Thyme was dressed up a bit oddly. They had hair for one. Not hair-like vines, but real hair. It might be a wig, but Nixilei had a good enough eye for detail to say even if it was, the hair was still real, just probably not Thyme's.

The weirdness didn't end there though. Thyme's hair had a whole mess of clear gel in it ruining the look of the hair, and making Nixilei wonder why Thyme bothered to have any if this was what they were going to do to it.

The rest of Thyme's outfit wasn't in great shape either. It was a suit and tie... but the suit had the top three buttons undone and the tie was hanging loose with enough space to pull it off again. The jacket was falling off one of Thyme's shoulders and while their shoes looked nice... Thyme wasn't wearing any socks. Not to mention the staining on the edges of the sleeves.

Though, when Thyme started to speak it was with an impressive booming voice that easily carried through the room. "Hello everyone and welcome to the second round! We've got a whole bunch of rules for you, and some fantastic machines! If in the previous round the enchantment was so bad you had to be a master trying to do it poorly, this round we've turned it all around.

"Each of the flying contraptions on offer are so perfected, why, you'll think you've doubled your mana pool! They're extremely efficient with their mana usage and all optimised as best we can make them for prolonged flight. Obviously the different designs will have different strengths and weaknesses, but in their own class? They're each unmatched! I think you should take a look at

"But before I show you what I have in store, we do have to go over the rules! So, everyone gets to pick one flying contraption. You can all pick the same thing, or each of you can pick a different one. Don't just follow the trend, follow your dreams! I'll be handing out a sheet of paper where you can pick your chosen vehicle secretly in just a bit! Don't get impatient now!

"As for proper rules? You score first off based on how long you're in the air. I do want the contest to end in a reasonable time though, so after two hours, if multiple people have managed to stay in the air, I'll then be taking the distance away from this platform in a straight line and using that to determine the winners. I will not be taking into account gaining or losing height for this. It is a purely horizontal measurement, so don't try and fly directly up or down. It won't help you out at all,"

Thyme paused here to loosen their tie further and take a drink of a flask from one of the pockets on the pants. Nixilei just shrugged at the fact the pocket was completely flat and didn't look wide enough to fit such a thing in it. Thyme was a space mage. This was simple stuff.

"Just so that nobody loses because they didn't jump off at exactly the same time, I'll be launching you all off the platform. You can calibrate how exactly you'll leave the platform. Picking the direction you want to go in, how far up I send you, how far forward and what not. Now, these launchers won't be a big help, but they needed to be configurable... well you'll see why later.

"But wait, there's MORE RULES," said Thyme with a wild grin that was too wide for their face. Literally. Thyme expanded the smile past their cheeks and it was now about twice as wide as Thyme's face.

"Perhaps things won't go perfectly. Perhaps, you'll get into fights, which is allowed. All bets are off. Brawl if you want. If you fall though...

"You'll need to wait. The rule is, after being on the ground or ocean for longer than five minutes I'll teleport you back to this platform and repair your flying contraptions. You cannot switch contraptions; you'll get a copy of your old one. You can return to the platform at any time to get your things repaired, but landing here stops the 'time in the air' counter, and obviously if you're back here your 'distance away from platform' will be practically zero.

"A special note in the case you manage to steal someone else's vehicle. You'll be allowed to keep it, and if you return to the platform you can pick either one to have fixed, but only the first time. After that you'll be 'locked' into that choice. With that being said, if you have your vehicle stolen it's no big deal. Just another five minute break on the ocean, or land and you'll get it back.

"Oh, I'm sure you're all wondering how you'll survive the fall to the ground? Well each contraption comes with a harness that has, if nothing else, a safety feature built into it. You'll bleed momentum

before you hit the ground... but it's been enchanted in such a way as to not work if your flying machine is in good condition, so be careful landing them.

"Which brings us onto the final point landing your contraptions. Every time you touch the ground, you'll incur a one minute penalty on your time, and a 100m penalty to your total distance. If you run along the ground for more than 100m during take-off... then you'll be further deducted twice the distance you travel along the ground. This is meant to be a challenge of arial skill, not your ability to skim along the ground to cheat height and distance off of me,

"Now, that's all the rules out of the way, I'll open the floor for a few questions. Keep in mind, there will be another chance for questions after I introduce all of the vehicles. So no pressure here,"

[Chapter 1255 1255 *Slaps Glider* This Baby Is So Mana Efficient...](#)

--- Nixilei ---

"No questions then?" said Thyme, too-wide smile and booming voice going full force. "That's ok, that's ok. We can move right along to the main event!" *It's not that I have no questions at all, just that I'm waiting until after I see these contraptions. Though the rules do seem quite self explanatory.*

Thyme bent down and pulled a miniature hang glider from the ground below them before spinning it around and letting it explode in size up on the stage. The wingspan was massive now. Nixilei was pretty sure her whole team, Lily included, could lay head to toe across the whole wingspan and still not cover the whole thing. Thyme bent down a second time, this time grabbing a full sized harness with one hand, and a pair of boots with the other.

"So, first off, before we get to the good stuff, this is the safety harness. It comes standard with all contraptions. It's got a teeny tiny connection to me inside of it. This provides it mana, and lets me feel how far away you are with shocking accuracy. It is there to protect you in case something horrible happens. In this case though, I can enforce the safety rules further.

"Taking off the harness means I'm no longer tracking your distance accurately. If I'm not tracking your distance accurately, that means you could, theoretically, be cheating. So taking off your safety harness is grounds for disqualification. Now, don't worry about it getting damaged. I said I'm providing it mana? Well that will give it more than enough strength to survive just about anything. That includes monster attacks,"

Thyme waited for the shocked looks across the competitors. "Yes that's right. Currently we aren't too close to that island paradise you remember, no we're right in the middle of a monster hotspot! Sure most of them are stuck on the ground but the few that fly? Well they're aggressive little buggers so do be careful. I wouldn't want any of you to get hurt on my watch." Thyme's smile widened even further. Their face was more smile then face at this point and Nixilei could almost feel a headache coming on.

Shit. That's the twist! Sure you could fight with your competitors, but it would be better for everyone if we just flew off in random directions... except if we DO that means we're going to end up getting attacked by monsters all by ourselves. Shit.

Nixilei scanned the room. Most people were still in shock, or too busy glaring at Thyme... but Asteodia was looking around just as she was. Their eyes met and Nixilei held up one finger on each hand and joined them together. Asteodia's eyes shone for a second before nodding and turning back to Thyme. The pair hoped nobody else had seen their small interaction, hopefully too busy looking at Thyme.

Right. Asteodia's got a creative head on her shoulders. I'm not sure how trustworthy she's going to be... but I think we can work together for at the very least the first hour. It just wouldn't be profitable to screw each other over before that. As for what we'll do afterwards... I guess we'll just have to see.

"Just a bit of trivia before we begin. This whole ensemble, boots, glider, and harness were the initial design for this trial. All other flying options you'll be offered came after this setup. Sure the harness has been made standard and upgraded massively, and the boots and glider have a lot of features they didn't when we started... but it all began here! The glider, the boots, the idea of spending as long as possible in the air! If you just can't decide, let the gold standard decide for you and pick the glider getup!

"Now, I'm sure your all interested in the glider itself, but let's look at these boots first," Thyme said as he slapped the heavy duty looking shoes. "These babies can be set to unleash either a short burst of high pressure air, or a nice long constant stream to keep you moving forward. They are the real engine of this glider... but that's not all! Enemies in your way? Why, you can unleash a deadly cutting wind to slice through them all. Not as mana efficient as the short burst, or the long constant stream, but if you need to kill something... well that's how you do it quick and easy!"

*Seems a bit cumbersome honestly. The glider itself is has such large wingspan coverage that you'd need to fly OVER the enemy and unhook your feet to have a chance at a proper attack. That seems... rather bad honestly.*I think you should take a look at

"Ah, I see not many of you are impressed. I suppose I should pick up the star of the show!" Thyme slapped the tight material that made up the glider's wingspan. "This little baby might look simple, but in between the membrane that makes up the wings is an enchanter's wet dream. It's packed with dozens of little optimisations to make the ride as smooth as possible. It's quite durable, and basic slashing or biting attacks won't be able to take it out of the air.

"In addition, the surface is designed to take in what wind attuned mana it can, which is fairly abundant this high up, and use it to provide a small updraft, providing additional lift and keeping it up in the air just a bit longer! Then you have the arm bar, the straps, and the foot rest. All enchanted for maximum comfort and using not a drop of your own mana! You'll barely even feel the miles as you fly!

"But..." Thyme's smile finally dropped. Their eyes sharpened as they looked around at the ensembled people one by one. "Sometimes, a comfortable, efficient ride isn't enough. Sometimes your under attack, and the boots aren't doing you any good? Well... if you twist these front handles..." Thyme lifted the glider up to show the bar. "For the small price of your mana, this little baby will shoot out high speed arrows from the front to tear through your enemies!"

Thyme twisted the bar and a hail of small arrows that were basically just arrow-tips shot from the front of the glider, flying off the side of the platform and continuing into nothing. "But, that's not all... if you really, REALLY need something dead, you find these buttons on the side," Thyme showed off the cherry red buttons on the outside of the gliders hold. "It's not cheap on the mana, and I can't demonstrate it

here... but the glider will summon a large explosive projectile guaranteed to take out whatever you're pointing at...

"Just be careful not to fire it when said thing is too close to you. It is a massive explosion after all. While your harness can definitely survive it, the glider itself might not. It's mildly fire resistant, but that mostly comes from its ability to defend itself slightly from attacks. I'm afraid proper fire immunity would take more mana to keep active, or even on standby,"

"Of course, while we didn't manage to pack in fire immunity, we did manage to do something about the rain... and it didn't even take any extra enchanting! Courtesy of a rather crazy dryad friend of mine,"

Does Thyme mean themselves because they're playing a character? Or is there another crazy inventor dryad. "water just bounces right off. Spray a bit of this coating across the whole glider, and no amount of water is ever getting through the coat.

"Snow and rain aren't likely, but if you did run into either know it will be no problem at all. Even lightning is only a minor worry because the glider is designed to harmlessly bring the take the lightning and fire it out the back of the glider harmlessly. Of course, if it did come down to it, your trusty safety harness would protect you for everything,"

*That's... interesting. We'll have to see what the others are like but this seems like a strong start. Fighting with it could be awkward, and despite Thyme's claims of great mana efficiency I'm not entirely sure that I can make it two hours on the glider. Sure I'd need to test it to be sure... but I just have the feeling that two hours is too long.

The fact this is the first design, and possibly how the entire event was tested is interesting to note. I'm not really sure what that means though. Is it the best option, as the challenge was designed with this in mind? Or the worst, because the challenged was designed with this glider in mind. I'm not sure I'll have the time to figure it out once I've seen all the options that are being presented here.

At least Asteodia seems willing to work with me. Though... will that mean we should chose the same method of flying? If we pick different ones, we might not be able to stick together too well. I suppose it depends what the other are. Not much to go off just yet... but plenty to be on the lookout for.*

[Chapter 1256 1256 *Slaps Basket* This Baby Will Stay In The Sky...](#)

--- Nixilei ---

"Next, for all your long duration needs..." Thyme said as the glider vanished back into the ground. "Is this wonderful contraption right here," Thyme then pulled out a basket and a large section of treated leather. From context, Nixilei was able to work out what it was. "This is a state of the art hot-air balloon. You might have seen them around already. They are quite popular with dwarven surveyors and certain beastkin tourist spots. It's got a number of nifty features...

"But it's primary purpose is to ensure that the person riding it WILL make it to two hours. While all of the flying vehicles on display can make it to that vaunted two hour mark... not all of them can do so regularly. With this, you will have no problems at all. The balloon itself will be filled with hot air before you take off, saving you the mana you'd need to do it yourself, and once in the air it can stay that way with just a few occasional blasts of mana.

"It works much like the surveyor versions do. The basket here has an enchantment tied to the metal box which spouts out flames into the air bag to keep the air inside warm and the balloon floating for as long as you require! It takes barely any mana to send up a burst of flame, and the flame is only necessary every minute or so. Dependant on your current altitude.

"Which of course, though it pains my heart, means I must admit to the imperfection of this wonderful design! It is quite limited in its capacity to manoeuvre through the air. It does have its ways, and when I explain all the bonus features, I will cover how you can help mitigate this downside... but a downside it is. The balloon itself creates a lot of drag. Which is good for being carried along by the wind... not so much if you want to go anywhere else.

"Now, there are some strong winds around this area, especially so high up. If you manage to pick a good direction, there is a decent chance for you to make it quite far with the balloon. It's just a risk, rather than a matter of skill, mana control or mana capacity.

"Now, onto some of the defensive details. This balloon has been greatly strengthened against slashing attacks and moderately against bludgeoning attacks... but it's a giant balloon so bludgeoning attacks won't do anything anyway. The basket itself is warded against fire and the elements so it will remain sturdy. The only real weak point, are these," Thyme smacked the support frame for the enchanted fire release that held the balloon and basket together. "They have been strengthened a good deal...

"But conceptually they are weak. They are a point of connection and rather separate from the frame itself. Strengthening it too much would increase the amount of mana it takes for the fire system. As such, while they have been strengthened, it is weaker than the basket made out of wood. As such, it is recommended you defend attacks against the metal in this area quite fervently,"

"With that being said... this little baby happens to have all sorts of little gadgets to help in that fight!" Thyme excitedly flipped the basket over to show the inside. There was a number of glowing circles all lining the inside surface of the basket. "Each and every one of these contains something useful. Just... a word of warning.

"While sealed, they weigh nothing. The basket can have all these neat gadgets for niche contingencies... but you can't return them to the seal. Once broken, the item will come out, and you'll be stuck with it in your basket unless you simply want to throw it overboard. So be careful what you use when, otherwise it will increase the weight on the basket, and the mana it takes to keep it up in the sky!"

That's... that's not how those sorts of enchantments are supposed to work at all! Thyme must have done this intentionally to make sure that the balloon isn't just the obviously best option. The problem isn't even the weight, like Thyme is saying, but the space. Sure the basket is a decent size and you could probably fit a few people into it... but depending on what the 'gadgets' are, and how large... it might be barely any space at all.

"The first gadget is a set of engines!" said Thyme as they pulled out two large jet-engine looking devices Nixilei didn't recognise. "These things are massive mana hogs, but they will get you out of trouble in a pinch... just don't keep them around too long once they're turned off because they're as heavy as they look!"

Something you could've easily mitigated if you wanted Thyme. Though I think I understand the game here. Each of the devices are powerful, but the less niche ones are problems. Those at least look like they clip to the outside of the basket, but the weight... depending on what it truly is? That could be a problem. I think you should take a look at

"Next is much less high-tech," said Thyme as they returned the engines to the seal, confirming rather soundly that Nixilei's thoughts were correct, the only reason you couldn't return them was because Thyme made it so. Thyme pushed down on another seal and pulled out a rope with a hook on it. "Pretty simple, just throw and the grab. The hook is enchanted to stick to whatever it lands on, so even if your throw isn't perfect you might still grab something,"

Hmm... I assume that works on other contestants? If so that might be a good way to attack, or to save yourself on mana?

Thyme then tossed the rope and hook over their shoulder letting it vanish. Once that was done they pushed another seal and pulled out a large pot on top of a hotplate. "This one is just in case you get peckish. It's a nice roast that's already cooked and is being kept at temperature by this hotplate underneath. It's good stuff," Thyme then proceeded to take a bite... out of the entire ensemble, hot plate and metal pot included. "Crunchy,"

Right... I see Thyme is just having fun with us now. There's still at least three seals from what I can see. Are the rest of them jokes as well?

The next seal held a bow with no arrows, Nixilei was pretty sure she knew where this one was going. "This here bow can summon up magical arrows, either attuned to kinetic force, or your own personal element. Just be careful... it's a bit weak," Thyme said as they pulled the string back too far and the whole thing snapped in half.

That's probably another intentional limitation. The bow's effective range is drastically reduced by the looks of things. Sure it might be powerful... if it's already right in your face.

Next Thyme pulled out a sword and waved it around a bit. "This here is just a good sword. I mean, nothing more to say about it really," said Thyme with a shrug. Nixilei agreed. It was rather self-evident what that was for. Though she did wonder what trick Thyme had in-store for whoever tried to use it.

Thyme then pulled a large net with a set of heavy stones on the edges. "This here is a net with rocks on the end. Betta throw it fast because it weighs a lot. The stones are enchanted with gravity magic to try and mitigate that a bit... for all of five seconds. Then it takes whatever its caught down with itself. Including your balloon if you're not careful." When Thyme finished speaking their hands were ripped off as the net fell through the ground leaving a massive hole in the stage.

So, a one use weapon that's very short range but practically certain to kill any monsters. Not other competitors though. They can potentially escape from the net before they hit the ground, or they can just let the harness save them before taking off a second time. It would prevent them getting the full 2 hours though... so it's still somewhat useful against competitors in its own right.

"The final bit of kit sure is an interesting one..." said Thyme. "So last but not least," Thyme pulled out a package that was soaked through at the bottom and dripping a blackish liquid. The smell then hit

everyone on the platform full on. Nixilei, and many others, recognised it instantly. "Monster bait," Thyme confirmed their suspicions.

"Of course, one should be very careful with monster bait here. Why, it's already leaking onto the ground as I speak. You can throw it at a competitor to attract monsters... but if those same monsters come from the wrong direction they just might pay you a visit first," Thyme finished with that too wide smile that now had a much more sinister look to it. Sharp jagged teeth included.

That seems more like a suicide tactic. It's not going to result in a death, but it IS likely to kill your chance at winning. Monsters will come for you just as surely as they come for your target.

[Chapter 1257 1257 *Slaps Helmet* This Baby Has So Many Hidden Weapons...](#)

--- Nixilei ---

"Now, maybe the sure-fire 2 hours isn't what you want," said Thyme as the balloon vanished into the ground. "No, what you crave instead is VIOLENCE!" A leather suit with a sturdy looking helmet rose from the ground. Nixilei noticed that it had a membrane connecting the legs and arms together. "This here is the ANSWER. While it is impossible for any one of you to fly this suit all the way to the two hour mark it is filled with hidden weapons galore and nearly indestructible!

"Perhaps you'll want to use it to take on your enemies, knock them all out of the sky early on and steal one of their vehicles. Giving you a strong lead, and a chance to batter them down again and again if you really want. Probably a waste of mana after the second or third time, but you could do it if violence is what you crave.

"But perhaps you like your fellow competitors. The idea of knocking them out strikes you as 'unsportsmanlike'? Well I've got a secondary solution for you! By channelling mana into one of the fingers of the gloves you can activate a wide variety of effects! The first, the left-most finger? It will provide you a magical bit of rope to wrap around monsters. It will be a battle of wills from that point, but if you win? Well, you'll have a mount to carry you to the end. Remember, you only get sent back if you touch the ground, and the distance is based on your harness, so it's a perfectly acceptable tactic,"

Yeah but only if you have the mana control to activate ONE FINGER. This suit seems like a trap really. While I can use it, and probably Ellenell, that's only because of our level of mana control, trained by necessity for healing magic. I can't imagine the rest of the competitors can activate just the one finger. Activating two or three seems more likely. I suppose we'll just need to see what they do.

"Of course, perhaps fighting is in your blood. The next three fingers on the left hand are all various forms of attack. They are mirrored on the right side as well, so you can use both gloves to attack at the same time, or just one. In this case we will stick with the left hand, starting from left to right, you have a 'basic blast' from the centre of the palm, the next finger adds a cone of super-sharp air around the hand. It sticks around until you send another pulse of mana into that finger, and is a big drain on your reserves but it can cut through nearly anything.

"Then the third finger provides a powerful suction on the palm for just a short moment. You can use this to grab your enemies, and then perhaps throw them out of their vehicle, or you can use it, perhaps

with both hands, to stick yourself to said vehicle temporarily. You can trigger the suction additional times if you really want to hold on to whatever it is, but the suction uses a good bit of mana and only lasts for three seconds. So keep in mind that it might not be an efficient use of your mana,"

Interesting. Each of those abilities sounds really good... until you realise that if you accidentally trigger them at the same time it completely ruins the effect. You'd blast away the rope, or you'd blast whatever you were attacking away from you. If you were trying to slice something, a blast away is bad, but sucking it to you might be worse because then you can't cut it because your wrist doesn't turn that far. Not sure how the suction and whatever the last one is interacts but...

"The final finger, the thumb, on your left hand summons something rather familiar," said Thyme as they pulled out a dripping package. "I'm sure you remember this monster bait? Well now you have it at your fingertips. Not just one either. Unlike the seals in the balloon you can summon up as much monster bait as you want... but it will take exactly a tenth of your mana pool every time you use it,"

And there's the final trap. Based on how efficient Thyme has been saying everything is, ten percent is quite a lot. Which is already pretty bad. Magic forbid if you not only summon the bait, but ALSO went and hit the suction by accident. The bag looks flimsy enough that it might get torn open by the suction and then suddenly you're covered in monster bait. You'd need to be really careful with that finger. Heck, that and use the vacuum palm, just in case you summoned the bait as well.

Thyme kept speaking, not particularly worried about how many people had noticed the traps involved. "Next up, on the right hand, you only have two unique functions. The thumb, and the little finger. Activating the thumb has two functions., The first, summons a crossbow for you, and the second triggers if you already have the crossbow in hand, summoning an arrow for it. Summoning the crossbow, does of course take more mana then summoning the arrows," I think you should take a look at [NOVELNEXt.com](#)

Yeah and reloading the crossbow, in midair, while using a suit that seems to be kept up by the arms and legs is nearly impossible. So you've got one shot with it, if you're lucky. Despite that, if you hit a vehicle they're probably going to be fine so it doesn't even do anything unless you hit a monster or a person. So what's the point?

"Now the final finger, the little finger on the right hand side? Well it gives you this!" Thyme said as they pulled out a little pink cotton bag. Opening it, they showed the inside was filled with very fine dust of the same general colour as the bag. "This right here? It's high grade sleeping powder. You can pull the bag back into subspace by activating the finger again and it will slowly fill back up with powder... but if you lose it? No more sleep powder for you.

"It should be enough to knock most monsters and contestants out. Just be warned, if a contestant is returned to here after being on the ground too long, I will also be healing them of any injuries, including removing the sleep powder from their system. So... if you really want them out of the game, you might need to keep them around... but then aren't you helping them if you take them with you?"

*Interesting. The sleeping powder still seems pretty good. I don't understand why you'd keep them with you though. That seems bad for all sorts of reasons. Where's the trap though? Wait... is the vacuum ability on the finger next to the little one or the thumb? Dammit Thyme. That's the trap. You don't know, and you'd have to waste mana to find out. Hmm... it still seems like either the best or second best finger

on offer. The only worry is how fast the powder refills. That and how much you need to put someone to sleep...

Wait. You're flying. In the air. Possible against the wind. Shit. The powder works on you as well? Hmm... no you have a helmet unlike the other contestants. So... would you be safe? It's hard to tell just how fine the powder is. So... maybe you would be but perhaps you wouldn't? So the trap is 'don't hit yourself with the sleep powder'? That makes some sense I suppose.*

"Now, it's not just your fingers that are having fun, your feet can get into the action as well! Of course, the functions there are much simpler. By channelling mana into your feet you can get a constant stream of air... or a blast. It all depends on how much mana you introduce to the boots. They'll take whatever you give them, at just about any rate!

"That's not all though. The wingsuit does need some way to stay in the air right? Well if you push your mana out of your body anywhere around the chest area it will be fed to the wings and give you a constant updraft. Balancing the amount of mana going to the wings or your boots will be the true decider of just how good you are with this suit, and I wish you the best of luck," finished Thyme with a taunting gleam in their eyes.

*And there is the final trap. If I didn't think this was the suit for people with insane mana control that sells it. Needing to keep track of three internal mana streams while keeping it all balanced and sending it into an enchantment? I bet the blasted boots aren't even paired so you need to keep the flow to both completely even. I probably could use it... but it just seems like too much effort for too little gain. You'd need to be certain you were taking someone out... and that you could get away from everyone before they came for you.

Even that... that might still not be enough. The amount of mana it could take just to remove on competitor might be so much you'd NEED to steal the hot air balloon specifically and if nobody choses one of them... well you might have already doomed yourself. We'll have to see what, if anything, is left.*

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

[Chapter 1258 1258 *Slaps Wings* This Author Has Tired Of The Meme...](#)

--- Nixilei ---

"Now, I'm sure you're all ready to get started and flying but I have ONE FINAL vehicle for your viewing pleasure. I assure you, only the highest level of dedication has gone into constructing this vehicle." Thyme crushed the jacket in their hands down to nothing before tapping a foot on the ground.

The wooden stage split open like a missile silo as a full sized aeroplane rose up out of the floor. It was as very unusual sight for most, but Kat and Lily recognised it as an old-style biplane. It had the two layers of wings, a large propellor up front, and three wheels total. Two at the front and one at the back. The whole thing was also, eye-searingly bright yellow for some reason. In fact, Nixilei was certain Thyme had added a light enchantment just to make it brighter and her eyes were already watering looking at it.

Thyme clapped and the paint dimmed a bit, proving Nixilei's theory. "This here, is a neat little vehicle that I'm testing out for Oditr. It's supposed to fly all by itself... but it doesn't. Not yet. So we've added a whole bunch of enchantments of course! Though do allow me to show off what makes this so special,"

Thyme waved a hand and the wood between the seat and the propellor disappeared. Inside the plane was a massive amount of gears and rods all connected together alongside two different sets of peddles. One for the hands, and one for the feet. Nixilei quickly guessed, just as Thyme confirmed, "This is indeed the flying machine for those more physically inclined. It's heavier then the glider, and as such slightly less mana efficient. That builds up quickly over time, especially if you're aiming for the full two hours..."

"Yet with that in mind, if you have the strength of body to compliment your strength of mind then you can go much further. Using these pedals with either your hands, feet, or both together, you can see yourself flying faster, higher, and longer then any of the competition, except perhaps the longer then the hot-air balloon,"

*Damn. March could've dominated the round if she'd gotten the chance to use this thing. Her mana control is better then she thinks. Much better, at least, from what I've seen. Especially some of the information I overheard yesterday during the talks. I should really follow up on that and ask Kat about what she heard... though she may not think it's her place to share. Still, that 'steam body' technique or whatever it was called is a game changer.

Unlike Thyme's implication, I'm quite sure that March could keep this 'aeroplane' in the air using just her physical strength, and then with mana behind her physique enhancing it further? Truly a scary thought and we've not even got into the weapons or other unique systems it has.*

"Now, of course, we can't just leave you with a chance to make up for mana inefficiencies with physical power. That's neat and all... but what's the real draw for something like this? Well first and foremost is of course what I like to call 'the lock'. The entire system here can keep working for around a minute, perfectly fine, without someone at the controls. By channelling your mana into this bar here," Thyme pointed at a bar with a nice fluffy cover over it for resting your hands. "You will 'lock' the vehicle into its current operation. It will keep flying, exactly as you left it, for the next minute.

"It doesn't matter if you move around and hop on the wings. Doesn't matter if the wind picks up. No the only thing that would matter is if something physically got in front of the aeroplane, or just plane to save some time. Additionally, after that one minute mark things will start to wind down. The plane will start to lose speed. Changes in weigh distribution will cause it to wobble. Eventually, the changes will get to much and the whole thing will stop working.

"Of course in a pinch it can still act as a heavier glider and perhaps you can get back into the driver's seat and prevent it from reaching the ground, but nothing magical will be keeping it functioning after around three minutes, but after that first minute the 'locking' magic will be winding down," I think you should take a look at

*That is a very neat feature. If this design wasn't so deliberately designed for someone with high physical abilities I might go for it just for that alone. Granted my physical abilities are quite impressive... but not for endurance runs like this. I am trained more for mana control, and short bursts of intense physical confrontation. The sort of endurance needed to make this work is more Gareth's style. Hmm... I do wonder if we should've handed this round over to Gareth. With this plane on offer he could've done

quite well... and I certainly have more mana then he did for the previous round. Then again... he probably counts Green doting on him as a bonus. So he's probably fine with how things turned out.*

Thyme then pulled the chair out to reveal a panel on the side of the plane, it had a number of buttons on it. "These here activate the other abilities of the plane. Each button you press will do something different. You can ask me for it to be on the left or right side of the plane, or both if you really want but they will do the same thing regardless of what side they're on. For the plane, if you press a button the chair will suck out the required mana, and then activate the function,"

Thyme paused their speech here for a few moments before looking over the crowd slowly, their mouth looking normal, if a bit annoyed. "Now, because this is enchanted to the highest standard you cannot Overdraft yourself like Gareth did earlier. It shouldn't be an issue... though you may still fall unconscious to be careful when using them if you're low on mana. It may not kill you, but it can still take you out of the contest.

"Now, first button. This activates the 'guns'. Streams of arrows will fire from here, here, and here, as well as on the other side of the wings," explained Thyme as they tapped the corresponding sections of the plane. "There is also a matching button bellow it that sends a stream of arrows flying from the back of the plane. It is weaker, but as its your only method for attacking directly backwards. Still quite useful.

"Next up is this second button here, it drastically sharpens the wings allowing them to slice through enemies that you run into. This, combined with the button below that, can be a devastating combination. As for the button bellow? Well it release a burst of air from the wings and tail that shoots the plane forward. Poor on mana efficiency for keeping things running, but good if you need to jump forward a bit,"

"The next button will turn off the passive drain of the chair. That's what helps keep the plane in the air, so it's quite useful. Still, if you just want to glide, or you're really low on mana you can press it and stop the drain. It isn't much, but it is a constant wear on your reserves so keep it in mind.

"The button below that is similar in a way. It instead increases the drain on your mana, and funnels it into the gears up at the front of the plane, allowing you to rest your body at the cost of some mana. This is not particularly efficient, and I don't recommend using it at all. It's barely worth it. This model is for those physically inclined after all. Of course, if your legs are injured somehow it just might keep you in the air..."

"Right, well the second last button creates a thick cloud of ashy smoke that really gets in your mouth. It will keep spawning as long as you hold the button down and can be great for obscuring your position... but the cloud can very much get in your mouth as well, so do keep that in mind. The enchantment is designed to send it away, but not all that strongly and flying back through it will defiantly get some of it in your mouth and eyes if you're not careful.

"Now for the final button. The final feature on the final vehicle I'm demonstrating for you... the big finale to end it all! By pushing this button right here," Thyme waved a hand over it. "You get..." Thyme paused, making sure all eyes were on them. "A lovely cupholder,"

Nixilei wanted to scream at Thyme for this ridiculousness. It's not like anyone here was carrying drinks! The cupholder was completely useless. Then Thyme continued, "Complete with a nice glass of water just for you," *Why did you wait like ten seconds to add the important part!*

[Chapter 1259 1259 *Slaps Face* That Plan Is So Stupid...](#)

--- Nixilei ---

"You've all got ten minutes, and as a nice bonus I've made sure that no sound can travel outside of your team's bubbles. You can see a slight indent in the floor around the area, just in case you feel the need to pace or something," said Thyme and a big counter appeared behind them, starting to count down already.

Right. How am I supposed to work out what Asteodia and I are doing? Working together is all fine and dandy, but we probably shouldn't tip our hand before we have to. If only there was some way to contact discreetly.

Those were Nixilei's thoughts as she looked around at the small group she had with her. Kat still had her eyes closed, Lily was laying on Kat. Kress was still missing, while Gareth and Green were probably together. Nixilei paused though, looking between Kat and Lily and back again.

Hmm... does Kat have that limiter on? Would it be cheating to have her move and maximum speed to deliver the letter? Then again, I'm not sure she could get up to speed without being noticed so it probably wouldn't work anyway... but Lily is quite small in her cat form. Rather agile as well... and with paper and shadow affinity. I think I know how to send that message.

Nixilei looked over and noticed Asteodia was watching her out of the corner of her eye. Nixilei just made a subtle 'wait' gesture and hoped it was understood before turning to Lily. "Lily, I require your assistance. Asteodia and I appear to have reached an agreement to work together on this one, and we'll probably need to pick the same vehicle to keep pace with each other. I'd like to keep it a secret so that the other three don't decide to team up against us, and just to have a general advantage,"

Lily blinked her eyes open and yawned, "Um... what exactly are you thinking? I feel like I should know a spell to link two pieces of paper but I just don't. Maybe it's something I need more power for, or I'm just not advanced enough in paper magic... I can make some paper for you though?" offered Lily nervously.

Nixilei gave Lily a slight pat on her head. Nothing too serious, Nixilei had seen how the girl reacted to that, but Lily was clearly starting to panic. *Perhaps she feels useless? Kat has been better for the various challenges than Lily, for mostly obvious reasons. That might be getting to her, so hopefully this will calm her down without getting too weird.*

"Lily, while that would certainly be ideal you also possess the ability to turn into a small animal that is much less noticeable than walking over there normally. The paper will be nice as well. I can write out a message for Asteodia, and if you're willing, hand it off to you for delivery," explained Nixilei.

"Oh, um... yes I can do that. I might get spotted but... um I'll do what I can?" said Lily shakily as she summoned up a piece of paper and a stick of shadow. *I didn't need the pencil of magical darkness but let's not say anything.* With a nod to Lily Nixilei wrote down the message. It said the following:

'Asteodia, I'm quite amiable to the idea of teaming up. I think it will allow us to win the competition with ease if we do. What vehicle do you think we should choose? I'm assuming it should be the same one, that way it will be easy to keep pace with each other. If you have a way of talking that would also be great'

Nixilei folded up the letter and handed it to Lily who put it down on Kat and transformed, then picked it up in her mouth. Waiting a few moments to make sure nobody was paying attention, Lily sped over to Asteodia's team. Nixilei smiled when she saw the elf in question pick up the letter and read it. Asteodia then turned to Romilda and a few seconds later Lily was running back over.

Lily came back and dropped two oddly shaped bits of metal at Nixilei's feet and then coughing a bit before transforming. "Urgh. That tasted foul. It didn't help the thing is too big for my jaw..." grumbled Lily.

"Right... but what is it?" asked Nixilei. I think you should take a look at

"Um... so apparently, it's like... like a cup and string? Did you ever do that?" asked Lily. Nixilei's eyes lit up and she nodded. "Yes well it's like that. The one on the left goes to your ear, and the other one you hold in front of your mouth. Apparently the sound quality isn't great, and the range is terrible, but for across the room like this they work well enough,"

Nixilei nodded, wiping down the metal first. She might have been trained for dealing with some level of grossness, but there was no reason to be unsanitary about it. Clean as Nixilei was sure Lily's mouth would be, having cat spit near her ear wasn't a good idea. "Hello?" said Nixilei softly.

"Hello! Yes I hear you," said Asteodia. At least, Nixilei was pretty sure it was Asteodia. The voice was majorly distorted and impossible to truly identify. *At least the words are clear enough to make out.* "I looked over your note to Lily, and keepi8ng things a secret like this is a good idea. However, I'm thinking of going a different route for the vehicles. You were thinking we pick the same one yes?"

"That was my general idea," confirmed Nixilei.

"Right well, as decent an idea as that is at first glance, we'd hardly be working together unless we got truly mobbed for one reason or another. What I propose, is that one of us chooses the balloon or the plane, while the other chooses the wingsuit. Thyme has rather heavily implied, in a number of ways, that only the harnesses matter. So we can work together and even stay in the same vehicle if we want," explained Asteodia.

"Ah... I can see the logic. Though I do wonder, why the plane?" asked Nixilei. *And what exactly does it mean if we're both standing in the basket but one of us is further forward? Does that mean we're going to have to wrestle for win? I'm still on board for this if that's how things are going to end... though who wears the suit might be an issue.*

"It... it would definitely be a bit of a squeeze but I think we're both thin enough that we could manage flying the plane together. There's less space than the balloon of course, but we might need the extra

distance the plane provides us, unless we want to go on the offensive at the start? Or whoever is in the wing suit at least. Still, between the two of us, we can probably keep pedalling for the full two hours and mana shouldn't be an issue. If we go either route really," said Asteodia.

*Ah I see. With both of us working together to keep the plan moving we can ensure that we potentially get the furthest. Anyone who picks the glider might still be an issue, but we can target them first before heading out. Other people with the balloon aren't an issue. We can just out distance them. Of course, with the wingsuit, we can defend better then everyone as well. Finally, we can outpace other plane users distance wise because having an extra person to pedal is a bigger boon then the weight is a detriment. Theoretically.

As for the balloon, that's much simpler. We just try to take out as many people as possible then go where the wind takes us. Perhaps using the wingsuit to pull the balloon along if that becomes necessary at some point.* "What are you leaning towards?" asked Nixilei.

"I'm really not sure. If we take the balloon we've got more space, and the wingsuit can be used more liberally. Whoever is using it can rest and regain mana properly, and we can switch off with ease because of the extra space. On the plane... I'm not even sure if swapping would be possible. Hard certainly, with only a minute to change unless we want to waste mana 'freezing' the plane twice or more.

"Oh, and before we make a decision, I'll also add that we can ensure we tie for first place. As the two-hour mark approaches we can simply stack ourselves with one of us on the other's shoulders. Only horizontal distance matters so that should guarantee a tie," said Asteodia.

*Well now. That's an interesting perspective. I'm not sure that really would ensure a tie... but at the very least I'm willing to go along with it. Not sure if I'll try to ensure I get first place or not. I won't fight for it if Asteodia doesn't, I think.

As for the vehicles... well I'm still quite unsure. Both have their merits but without knowing what the other contestants are doing I just can't see which would be best long term. Though I suppose the number of monster attacks we're likely to face might also be a major factor. One that is also completely unknown.*

[Chapter 1260 1260 That It Just Might Work](#)

--- Nixilei ---

"I really don't know what would be better for us. The balloon would let whoever took the suit go on a major offensive and then recover most, if not all, of their mana afterwards where as the plane wouldn't really allow for it. At the same time... if we take the plane and try to run, if we're forced into a fight because people realise we've teamed up, we could be in trouble. It's a risk either way as far as I can see and I'm not sure what the best call is. Who do you think should use the suit though?" said Nixilei.

Asteodia didn't waste any time in replying, seemingly anticipating the question, "Well I'm hoping that you can take the suit. My mana control is good, but not good enough for that damned thing. At least I wouldn't trust myself with it. I assume you would be though? You are the teams healer right?"

Not sure I like the fact she seems to know more about me then I do her... but... "Yes I am the team healer," answered Nixilei. "My combat skills should be up to par as well so I can accept this. Seeing as you will be the main, or at least, first driver for the other vehicle what are you leaning towards,"

"I'm afraid I don't know," answered Asteodia with something that might have been a sigh. It was hard to tell through the metal handset. "Both are good, and without knowing what Thyme has in store for us, we just can't know what would be better. Part of me wants to go with the balloon but the I've got no idea what the wind is like around the area we're going to be dropped off at.

"It could send us in a mostly straight direction... or it could be one of the stranger winds that does what it wants. I know of at least one place near where I grew up where the winds were circular essentially. Granted, I think Thyme wouldn't offer the choice of the balloon if it wasn't at least possible to win with, and if we're working together I'd still give us great odds... but how confident are you in taking out our competition?"

"Depends on what you're asking with that question," said Nixilei slowly. *And it depends on what I mean as well. I think I can certainly take out one of them. Whoever is closest I can burn mana and use my skills to force them out of the sky... but after that it would be hard.* Before it looked like she was stalling for time Nixilei continued with her answer. "I can certainly take care of one, the closest competitor to me. It might burn a lot of mana but I can guarantee you they won't survive my assault if I've got the suit on...

"But the issue arises with the other two after that. If either of them take off and just try to make time, I'm not sure I could catch them without exhausting myself. On top of that, if I get caught in a net thrown from a competitor's balloon I'll be in big trouble myself. Then there's the consideration for what to do if one of the other's picks a wingsuit as well. I'll need to meet up with you quickly to ensure we stay in the air. I doubt I can win without your help if I go all out at the start, and you would struggle to fend off an attack from a wingsuit so early,"

"Exactly the problem," answered Asteodia with a sigh. "The balloon has enough defensive options that I think I could weather the assault, or at least, not get thrown out of the air until you arrive to help. On the other hand, if we just try to run away with the plane... hmm... that's sounding more and more like a good idea as I work through it in my mind. Less that can go wrong.

"If we take the plane, I'll just need to wait for you to hop on before we really put the pedal down. It might be worth using most of my mana to take us as far away as possible then swapping drivers for a while so I can recover. It'll be cramped... and I'll probably have to sit on your lap or vice versa, but it sounds quite doable,"

"Agreed but a question, does the chair still drain you if you're not the one directly sitting in it?" pondered Nixilei.

Asteodia clicked her tongue and said, "That could be really bad if it does. I want to say surely not... but I suppose depending on how it's enchanted that's a real possibility. A dangerous one as well... if it tries to pull the mana through the other person... yeah that could get ugly..." I think you should take a look at

"I doubt it would," said Nixilei. "Thyme assured us all of the options were enchanted to the best of Thyme and their friend's abilities. Leaving a design flaw like that in it would be a major issue. We'd probably be able to call a time out and asked that it be addressed if it was going to cause issues,"

"That's a risk, relying on Thyme's goodwill to sort it out... but that is something the dryad seems to have in abundance so I can't say it's that big of a risk. So are we decided then? We're going with the plane?" said Asteodia.

"I think we're talking ourselves into it. As nice as the balloon would be, the plane seems better. The balloon has more things that we want, but the plane is better for what we need to do. If that makes sense," said Nixilei.

"Yes, it is starting to seem like that. I just hope it's right choice... though... now that I'm thinking about it. Would the wingsuit still drain you while you're driving the plane?" asked Asteodia

I... hmm... "Give me a moment to think here," said Nixilei. *On the one hand, the whole point of the suit is to fight other people and take their shit so that you can transition into a better vehicle for long-term flight and hope that knocking someone out didn't take too much mana. With that in mind, it would seem, on the surface at least, that the suit wouldn't drain extra mana...nOvElExt.com

But on the other hand, everyone is only supposed to have one vehicle. If you steal someone else's that's yours now, and Thyme might encourage you to if not discard, then at least, put the suit to the side. That does seem like a very Thyme thing to do... but Thyme wasn't the main mind behind the enchantments.*

"So I've thought about it... and I'd give it a fifty-fifty chance to go either way honestly. It would be a very Thyme move to force you to either abandon, or at least take off, the wingsuit. The problem is, Thyme wasn't the main mind behind the enchantments, and whoever actually did them might have intended for the suit to be kept on after you steal another vehicle, thinking of it more as a 'bonus' for taking the risk of the suit at all," explained Nixilei.

"Shit, now we're back to 'Balloon or Plane' again because I don't know if we could store the suit anywhere if we chose the plane. It might still be worth it... just chucking it over the side... but that does lose us part of the major advantage of keeping the suit around so I'd really rather we didn't have to throw it away. Which would imply the balloon is worth going for. There's definitely room in the basket for two of us and the suit... dammit," grumbled Asteodia.

"Yup, and I'm not sure if we can just ask Thyme for the answers. I'm sure Thyme can still hear us despite the silence field, but asking would probably cause Thyme to answer those questions for everyone, if they were willing to answer at all. It's not really a rule clarification, but maybe?" said Nixilei, mumbling a bit at the end before both women fell silent.

*So once again it comes down to the question of what mitigates the risks the best. The plane might still be the best option. Even if we have to leave the suit behind, that doesn't actually invalidate many of our reasons for choosing it. We can take the plane and try to run as far as possible and hopefully only have to worry about monsters...

But if we take the balloon we'd have more combat capability, a chance to rest when it becomes necessary and a nice defensible position that would take a bit to be knocked from the sky. The problem though... is that we can't outrun our competition with it, and I think that will be the final nail in the coffin that decides the matter. The balloon, nice as it is, and the potential options it could bring about... it just doesn't address the second core issue. With two people time will hopefully be a non-issue, so it will be distance that matters.*

