

## DEMONS 131

### Chapter 131: A Bolt from the Blue

\*Actually system\* thought Kat as she tried to maintain her balance \*How much blood loss would kill me. That seems like important information\*

The amount of blood loss to kill User Kat would depend on a multitude of factors, but the lowest reasonable amount would be about 800L of blood while not summoned.

\*Wait what? Litres? As in the bigger unit, not millilitres? Do I even have that much blood in my entire body?\*

User Kat has approximately 8L of blood at any given time, however User Kat can regenerate blood using demonic energy.

\*Right... and what about this whole not summoned part?\*

In the event of a fatal attack or experiences one dealing crippling damage User Kat will be banished and returned to User Kat's Home

\*Oh, that's a relief.\* Thought Kat as she stared down at the Barbarashi eyeing her from a distance. It didn't seem to be preparing to charge either physically or its beam, but its eyes were still clearly locked with her own.

Kat noticed in this stand off that her balance wasn't what it should be. Trying to move her wings and tail a bit to correct she instantly found the problem. Her tail and left wing responded well, shifting as ordered, but throwing her balance of even more. Kat's right wing seemed to be damaged. She could still feel it resting against her back, and when she brought her right hand back just a bit she could still feel it attached.

However Kat's moment of distraction was enough of a signal to the Barbarashi to take off charging. However just as it was about to step through its sigils and charge an arrow shot towards its eye.

The Barbarashi reacted quickly throwing its head up and to the side allowing the arrow to bounce harmlessly against its beak but at least managed to stop the charge. While the Barbarashi was recovering from its rapid momentum shift Kat pushed more energy towards her back.

As Kat did so she could feel the muscles knitting themselves back together... it was less than pleasant, but as it continued the aching pain and dripping blood starting to slow, and she started considering it a net positive

This time though she made sure not to take her eyes off the Barbarashi leaving her balance solely to her tails instincts as her wing was pulled back into place. "Grace what the hell do we do about this thing"

"I don't know" shouted Grace "We just wanted it to fly away but not its wing is frozen and it's stuck here with us I really don't know"

As Grace shouted the Barbarashi turned to face her instead. Kat felt it much safer to keep its attention on her. Kat used her tail to reach down and scoop up some snow and deposit it in her hand.

Winding up a pitch Kat hurled the snow towards the giant bird... and thoroughly missed. The snowball going far wind of the Barbarashi. This didn't seem to matter though as it instantly turned its gaze back to Kat

\*Well at least it's easily distracted. Maybe we can work with this.\* Kat got ready for another charge, just as her wing snapped back into place. Flexing them just a little Kat found that there was no lingering pain, nor did it feel uncomfortable to use.

\*Hang on, system why are my wings fully operation unlike that time with Minor\*

Dodge

\*What?\*

Kat then realised that asking questions while a one tonne bird barrelled at her was probably not the best of ideas. Jumping straight into the air and flaring her wings to slow her descent the Barbarashi travelled underneath.

As it finished its charge it glared menacingly at Kat as she floated back down to earth. \*Looks like it takes great offence at the fact I can still fly and it can't \*

The Barbarashi summoned its sigils and opened its mouth trying to blast Kat out of the air with its beam but Kat just closed her wings and let gravity carry her out of its path. Kat did however fail to land properly, with her wings still retracted and Kat unwilling to roll and risk taking her eyes off the Barbarashi she had to take the impact with her knees.

Legs shaking she faced off against the bird and stared it down. \*Ok, we really need a new plan. I can dodge this all day if I just stopped freaking out, but we also can't exactly deal any damage to it.\*

Kat let her eyes drift towards the Barbarashi's frozen wing. It was still iced over but her flames had died out and no longer supported the ice. \*Maybe...\* Kat could feel the start of a plan forming.

Dodging another charge of the bird with her wings Kat made sure to land once again to keep its attention. "Grace, just nod if you understand. I need you to hit it somewhere just as it passes under me" yelled Kat

Once Kat saw Grace nod in the corner of her eyes she started preparing. The Barbarashi was weary though. It seemed it was realising its constant charging wasn't working and started to circle Kat.

She mirrored its steps, having to jog slightly to keep up with the Barbarashi's significantly larger steps. Grace too backed further off and made sure that she wasn't ever inline with Kat and the bird keeping to the fringes but with eyes locked on the right.

One full rotation the Barbarashi seemed to lose patience and charged once again. Kat jumped low this time, rather than aiming to clear the bird's charge safely she wanted to be as close as possible. As the Barbarashi charge reached Kat, Grace let fly an overcharged arrow right in front of the Barbarashi.

Rearing its head back and slowly significantly Kat used this chance to slam both feet down onto the frozen wing. Cracks ran along the ice as they spiderwebbed out from the impact. As the Barbarashi trudged forward with the last remains of its momentum the ice fell from its wing.

\*Yes.\* Thought Kat as she saw the coating of ice fall away and free the birds wing again. This however was turned to disappointment when she noticed something else. The feathers around where her tail had originally struck, and the area around where her feet had just landed were bent out of shape.

\*Ah shit.\* Hopefully it can still fly away. Kat watched as the Barbarashi examined its newly freed wing. After looking its wing over the Barbarashi's gaze returned to Kat but she could see it experimenting with its wing. Ruffling it out and moving it just slightly, though from Kat's limited knowledge on bird expressions it didn't seem pleased.

"Grace any ideas? Looks like the wings still damaged" said Kat

"I don't have any way to heal it, but I'm not sure we can fight it properly either" said Grace in return.

Just as the pair were contemplating what they should do a bright bolt of white light lanced towards the Barbarashi's wing coating it in a brilliant white glow. The bird seemed startled and looked around with a panicked expression before trying its wing again and settling down.

It took one last menacing glare at Kat before turning its back to her and activating its three sigils and charging back towards the desert. After its second step the Barbarashi took flight and shot off back towards the horizon.

As the Barbarashi left Kat let herself slide to the ground the adrenaline leaving her body. \*Wait do I even have adrenaline anymore?\*

No. User Kat has demonic energy as a substitute. Now that you have stopped intentionally cycling it User Kat body will need a moment to adjust.

Grace however stood firm to attention scanning the tree line bow raised. "What's wrong Grace" said Kat

Grace didn't immediately respond but after glancing over and seeing Kat's relaxed state decided to speak up "Well Kat, we still don't know who or what shot that bolt out towards the Barbarashi. We don't know that its friendly"

Realising that Grace was right Kat sprung to her feet once again and started scanning the nearby area for any sign of movement. This was complicated by the fact that during the recent fight, whatever was left of the pristine covering of snow had now been thrown about haphazardly in piles with dirt and debris mixed in. *novELnext.coM*

On top of this, just because Kat could see far, didn't stop the issue of height being a problem. It was hard to see footprints in the snow from far away just because she wasn't looking down at them, but with the recent experience with the Barbarashi and the high winds above the icy plains she wasn't willing to risk getting an aerial view either.

Kat tried to keep her vision steady as she let her gaze roam for wherever the new thing might possibly be. Grace for her part kept her eyes locked firmly in the direction the bolt had come from, as she'd been focused there since she had seen the light and was sure whatever it was couldn't have gotten too far.

## **Chapter 132: The Skye is the Limit**

As the moments passed and no further movement could be seen Grace spoke up once again, but her eyes never left their mark. "So, based on this we can eliminate a few people. It can't be anyone else

from my team, it can't be Kress, Gareth, or Green from your team. Could be Nixilei but I doubt it... In fact thinking about it logically it has to be Skye or Nixilei behind that tree"

Kat felt her gaze wavering and following Grace as she spoke but then returned it to scanning the area just as quickly "Why do you say that"

"Well, healing is a rather tough discipline, and I know my own Estelle isn't capable of such a spell. I don't know enough about the God Crusher's healer to know if they are capable, but considering their personalities I doubt they'd stay hidden" said Grace

"Hmm" \*She's right I really don't see those guys hiding away. So Skye or Nixilei... I think it has to be Skye, right? Nixilei would either reveal herself straight away without fear or just leave.\*

"I think it has to be Skye" said Kat "Nixilei would make the choice instantly. Either leaving or announcing her presence. This weird half measure of hiding nearby doesn't seem like her"

Grace seemed to consider this, but it didn't take her long to agree. "I do get that impression. Though, have you known her long enough to make that guess?"

\*Huh, I guess not.\* Just as Kat had this thought though, the person hiding spoke up. "Well, it seems you've narrowed it down. I suppose then that would make you Kat, and Grace"

Kat felt her eyes narrow and her vision sharpen focusing on the sound. The voice had been distorted and it wasn't clear who it was. Grace for her part started channelling mana into her bow and glared in the direction the voice came from.

Nobody was willing to make the first move. Kat and Grace stood still, unspeaking waiting for the person to make another move. "Not even going to congratulate me on my success. How rude. I mean sure, I could see Kat fighting the whole time, but guessing Grace was really hard. You all sound the same after all"

Grace licked her lips and kept the bow steady, with the string pulled all the way back. "If you come out we promise not to attack" said Grace

"Now now, I can't just take your word for it can I?" said Skye(?) "I saved you from that giant bird did I not? Surely some thanks are in order first"

Grace glanced at Kat to see if she wanted to input anything. \*Well I mean, I can't lie and I have no idea how to properly speak in this sort of situation.\* Kat just shrugged and tried to gesture for Grace to continue speaking.

"It was being handled. And besides, you threw a healing spell at the thing. Sure it ran away luckily, but you didn't even name it, how did you know it would run? What if you were healing it to encourage it to attack us more" said Grace

"Why I take great offence to that. I'm only trying to do my best in this competition same as you. And if you must know, I overheard you speaking, and inferred the best course of action. Why you should be thanking me for my quick wit, and excellent spellcasting" said Skye(?)

Grace sighed. "Well, be that as it may, you have ten seconds to show yourself or I'm firing an arrow at your location"

\*Grace what the hell are you doing? Is antagonising a healer the best idea?\*

"Well, that hardly seems-" started Skye(?) "Ten"

"Nine"

"Eight"

"Seven"

"Six"

"Fine" said what, was now confirmed to by Skye as she stood up. As she did the snow fell from her robes as she glared angrily at Grace, but Kat could tell there was no real heat in it. "Such disrespect. Kids these days"

"We're the same age!" retorted Grace

"Well, in that case what ever happened to solidarity amongst peers" replied Skye. *nov&Lnext.coM*

"Ugh" groaned Grace "Why were you hiding. Why not just present yourself"

"Well, I was willing to help but I wasn't going to risk myself when I didn't need to. We aren't officially working together after all" said Skye

Kat felt a light tingling in her eyes at this. Rubbing them seemed to get rid of it though so she continued to watch the conversation, splitting her focus between Grace and Skye so she could react if either moved.

"Do you want to make it official then? Healers are always quite useful" sneered Grace

"Why, I'd love to, but for some reason I get the sense I'm unwelcome" replied Skye

Grace shifted slightly and lowered her bow, but her gaze didn't soften even slightly "Well whatever gave you that idea. I can't imagine how you came to that conclusion"

Skye's eyes narrowed at that. "I see. Well, how about I lay my cards on the table. I found a sand skipper, but it needs at least three people to pilot it"

"Oh, three people is it?" asked Grace, to which Skye nodded. Grace flicked her eyes back to Kat for a moment then returned them to Skye "You think we should keep her around?"

\*How should I know, you look about ready to stab her in her sleep, and Skye isn't any better. Kat shrugged in response. I mean, maybe me and Grace only have such an easy partnership because of the contract.\*

Kat then thought back to the awkward first night and the amount of times she had to reassure Grace she wasn't here just to steal her soul. Ok, well maybe this is normal then. Kat tried to get Grace's attention then summoned flame around each hand and linked them by a thin line then mimed failing to pull them apart.

Grace seemed to get the implied meaning but shook her head. \*No contract? Why? Wouldn't it be better to offer some form of reassurance for everyone?\*

"Seems Kat has no issue with you tagging along. So why don't you show us to the sand skipper then" said Grace

"Not sure I quite trust you enough for that" said Skye staring Grace down once again.

\*Are we ever going to sort this out? Like isn't this getting ridiculous. I know your suspicious Grace, and I have my doubts to, but we are just wasting time at this point.\*

"Grace, we are just wasting time at this point. We either attack now or accept an alliance for a bit" said Kat

The tension in the area skyrocketed... quite the opposite of what Kat was trying to do. Then suddenly it vanished. Skye standing straight, and Grace putting away their bow as in under some unspoken agreement.

Skye started walking in the way she had appeared and signalling for the other two to follow. Grace instantly fell in step behind Skye, able to catch up swiftly with the reduced snow from the fight.

Kat looked at the two of them, confused how they could reach an understanding so quickly. Moving swiftly to catch up with Grace, Kat then stopped in her tracks. \*Where did Timmy go?\*

Feeling the top of her head, the two Timmy's seemed to be missing from their perch. Just as she was about to start looking around the snow next to her moved and out popped three Timmy's.

"So you were off gathering your friend... I guess that's nice but how am I supposed to fit three of you in my head. Two was already a bit of a stretch" said Kat

Two of the Timmy's looked shocked at this and instantly turned to glare at the third which just looked confused at the whole situation. The pair pretended to crack their knuckles, or at least that was Kat's best guess considering their fingers didn't actually move.

The third lifted it's hands in surrender and walked back into the snow drift while the remaining two looked smugly at Kat. \*I'm not sure how I feel about the Timmy's bullying each other for a spot on my head... but I'm pretty sure these two are mine and Grace's anyway so maybe it's fine... \*

"You know, that was a little rude" said Kat. The Timmy's just shrugged like it wasn't there problem. Should I discipline them? Deciding that answering yes to that would be too much work Kat just placed them on her head and followed after Grace and Skye.

Kat was a little behind, but considering Skye had to step awkwardly in the large holes signalling the path she'd already walked and Grace was following with a similarly awkward looking stride Kat was able to catch them quickly by just ploughing through the snow.

She was tempted to use her energy trick to walk on it again, but after the suspicion Grace showed and the fight with the Barbarashi Kat wasn't too keen to burn through her energy or reveal her cards like that.

### **Chapter 133: Teaching the Timmy's**

Already though, Kat could feel the tension seeping back into the air. Despite everyone seeming calm, that was only on the surface. As Grace walked her hand would constantly brush past her dagger. Skye for her part always seemed to have her hand twitch whenever it reached the end of its natural arc.

Kat for her part was just casually keeping up. Seemingly oblivious to the mounting tension, with her large strides and tail flicking. Her two passengers seemed to agree. The Timmy's were admiring the scenery as they trudged on and pretending to laugh at the occasional chunk of snow that looked a bit off.

"So-" Kat started trying to break the silence a bit but Grace just shook her head and Kat kept quiet. No reason to antagonise her contracted partner for nothing. \*But still, the tension is so thick I'm pretty sure I could slice into it with my tail.\*

\*Surely it would be better to calm down a bit. I'm not saying to completely relax, but this tension can't be good for you. I feel like I remember something about stress being bad for the body... Eh whatever.\*

The group continued forward, with tension just a thick, and Kat's attempts at lightening the situation forgotten by all but the Timmy's. The third one would show up occasionally in the corner of Kat's vision, and then flit away again. It seemed to be using the trees to transport itself.

\*And I guess that makes sense really. Thyme uses plants as the base for his teleportation I think, or the base for everything really, so I suppose it's no surprise that these smaller variations would do the same.\*

After another five minutes of walking the sand skipper came into view, and Kat wasn't quite sure what to think. The 'sand skipper' was more of a canoe with a sail strapped to it. There were two smaller sections that were attached to the main body, presumably for balance... but what really confused Kat was how this was piloted by three people.

\*In fact, I'm not even sure you can fit three people on it. Looks more like a one person raft if you ask me.\* Kat looked to gauge Grace's reaction, but other than a slight twitch of her ears, Kat didn't see anything that could signify a particular emotion.

"Well, looks like we're here then" said Grace glancing over at Skye

"That's right. You can stop glaring a hole in my robes now. See, everything intact and ready to go" said Skye

"Sure, if you count a single man sand skipper one that requires three people" said Skye with an edge to her voice.

"Why you wound me Grace" said Skye gesturing at the sand skipper in question "You need one person on the rudder, one person on the sail, and the third person is needed for balance"

"Sure..." said Grace clear suspicion in her voice

"Well, as an elf have you ever even ridden a sand skipper?" asked Skye, and seeing Grace's offence but lack of reply charged forward "Of course not. Now, are we going to pilot this thing or not"

"Well, I'm just a poor elf whose never even seen a sand skipper, how could I possibly help pilot such a complex craft" said Grace sarcasm dripping from her lips.

\*Welp, here they go again.\* Kat lowered the Timmy's from her head and started to teach them how to make snowman. The third Timmy popped out of the snow nearby to join in. After some minor demonstration and assistance the Timmy's really picked it up. [novelpnext.com](http://www.novelpnext.com)

"Oh, why it is very simple. I'm sure practically anyone could do it. And while I respect elves as a race with a long and storied history, full of intelligent individuals, perhaps if you can't even perform basic tasks you aren't one of them" said Skye

"Oh, you wanna play that card huh?" said Grace "After developing all the new methods of strengthening ourselves human lifespans have started catching up. I mean sure, you kill yourselves off in such great numbers that only the fact you breed like rabbits could keep your population stable but your trying right?"

The Timmy's showed great skill and expertise once they got their balls rolling. Already they had managed to create two snowmen each and Kat was looking for suitable things for the faces. She didn't want to just resort to compact dirt but there seemed to be a lack of real stones under the snow, but Kat was determined to find some.

"Oh ho ho. I was genuinely trying not to resort to targeting your race rather than your character, but it seems you can't even have a proper argument with me other than resorting to such childish stereotypes. Perhaps if you'd take a moment to calm down a bit we'd be already on our way" said Skye

Kat finally managed to find a rock. Perfect size and shape for an eye... just the one though. After seeing the Timmy's complete an army of snowman fifteen large, she instructed them to help her find similar rocks to the one she was holding. No snowman was complete without eyes after all... even if they had to skimp on buttons.

Grace took a long breath and then let it out again. "Perhaps we got off on the wrong foot. I'm nearly annoyed that we've been led astray by someone I don't trust. Instead you've given some strange excuse like needing the extra weight to justify us bringing you along"

The Timmy's were much better at searching through the snow than Kat. She assumed that they could sense the ground underneath it somehow, or perhaps it was just that they had three of themselves to look where as Kat was alone.

Skye smiled "But I'm not lying to you. Proper weight management is very important with sand skippers, and even if that had not been the case, why I was nice enough to share its location"

Having successfully procured the eyes, Kat then led the Timmy's on a search for twig arms. They needed to be surprisingly small because of the Timmy's snowman's size, but that just meant they could break up the larger stuff if need be.

"We didn't even need this. Kat and I were more than capable of making it across the desert by ourselves. We only came along because you said it needed three people, and you certainly weren't getting across yourself" said Grace.

Arms and eyes secured Kat wondered if there was something she could use as a scarf. Considering the rather barren landscape Kat thought it unlikely. Taking a quick look around, Kat remembered she had



yet to fix her outfit. Quickly dismissing and resummoning it, she continued her search for scarf materials but came up short.

"Oh? You can make it across, can you?" said Skye "Just like how you could deal with that Barbarashi tearing through your partner? Heck, I doubt you could have beaten the thing. And even if you could, you'd have been in no shape to start traveling, putting you so far behind the curve"

Kat tried communicating with the Timmy's to explain what she was looking for. Wrapping her sleeve around her neck and then gesturing to the snowmen. They understood what she was looking for, but gave her the negative when indicating if they could find something suitable around

"We were just fine. The Barbarashi couldn't touch us. Sure we might not have been able to kill it but outlasting it was certainly on the table. Worst comes to worst we could have run away ourselves, it can only chase so far after all" said Grace

Satisfied with the snowmen and accepting they weren't getting any better Kat then started teaching the Timmy's the rules for a snowball fight. Standard affair, one hit and your out. Start with ten ammo and go nuts.

"Oh yeah, while Kat was bleeding out you could pepper it with your ineffective arrows" said Skye "You guys landing one. Count it, ONE solid hit on the thing, and that was all Kat. Heck even then it didn't really do any damage. So pray tell what could you and that little bow of yours do Grace?"

Things were going well. If you ignored the fact it was 3v1. Kat still had the upper hand though. The Timmy's snowballs were tiny and she had an easy time dodging them, whereas her own were half the size of a Timmy and could be thrown much faster. Granted the various angles they were getting on her complicated things, but Kat was fine.

"We were never in any danger. Kat had my back the entire time, and she was more than capable of recovering from taking a hit or two. Once we had our stride dodging was the easiest thing in the world. Right Kat?" said Grace

Grace and Skye turned to find Kat expertly dodging by bending her back over on itself and letting three snowballs fly past where her midsection once was. When Kat dodged these snowballs they didn't just stop. In fact they kept flying until they made contact with the next thing in line... Grace and Skye.

#### **Chapter 134: I'm Walking on Sunsand.**

The Timmy's froze in place horror on their faces. Kat confused turned around to see what had caused them to panic... only to find a very angry looking Grace and Skye.

"So... you guys done with your argument then?" asked Kat

Grace spluttered and Skye set her mouth in a hard line but said nothing just continuing to glare at Kat.

"Guess you guys have finished your argument then?" said Kat trying to look innocent with the Timmy's in line behind her doing the same.

"Well, Kat" said Grace drawing out the word "Are you not the one who insisted we were wasting time?"

Kat glanced at the Timmy's for help, but they just shrugged in response leaving her to deal with Grace and Skye by herself. "I mean... you guys seem to need to just argue it out, so... I was having a bit of fun with the Timmy's" *novelNext.COM*

"Look Kat," said Skye "We weren't arguing per say... just, establishing our opinions in a firm and slightly disagreeing manner. Nothing wrong with that"

Kat shared a confused look with the Timmy's \*Is she serious?\* But the Timmy's just shook their heads, wanting nothing to do with the argument that was brewing. \*Maybe those guys have the right idea actually.\*

"So... now that you've firmly expressed your opinions can we start traveling? I mean I was only occupying my time while you guys were 'having that discussion' now that it's over we can, as you implied, stop wasting time?" said Kat

Grace and Skye had serene expressions on their faces, but their eyes were burning. Kat quickly hid her tail behind her back and started using it to give the Timmy's instructions. First creating a small snowball with her tail, then then pointed to it, one of the Timmy's then Skye. Kat then repeated this a second time but pointing to Grace at the end.

The Timmy's looked apprehensive at this plan but Kat couldn't see this with her back facing them. Assuming their resistance however Kat mimed that she would through snowballs as by pointing to the snowball, herself, and both Skye and Grace.

The Timmy's convinced saluted along and disappeared into the snow.

"Kat" said Grace

"Are you sure we shouldn't talk this out" said Skye

"We wouldn't want to leave you out of this discussion" said Grace smile crawling onto her face.

"Indeed, I'm sure your further input would be much appreciated" said Skye

At this point the Timmy's were in position and just waiting for the 'go' signal. \*You know... maybe this is a bad decision. Aw well, live and learn\*

Kat gave the go signal just as her tail completed her own set of snowballs. The two Timmy's unleashed a barrage of snowballs onto Skye and Grace. Kat quickly followed up with her own.

Skye and Grace both looked shocked, and somewhat annoyed. Skye not willing to waste her mana on any defensive spells just let the snowballs from the Timmy's hit her with the occasional dodge for one of Kat's. Grace on the other hand tried to dodge or block them with the edge of her bow.

After running out of ammo the six stood awkwardly around waiting for the next move. Grace and Skye looked towards each other and nodded. Grace notched an arrow and Skye summoned two sigils.

"Timmy's on me" said Kat. At this call the three Timmy's appeared beside Kat who scooped them all into her arms and took off running past the sand skipper. Grace shot a few half-hearted arrows easily dodged by Kat and Skye sent two spells that just barely missed Kat as she ran.

Kat quickly reached the sand, but this didn't stop her. She simply continued to run, more than able to ignore the extreme heat emanating from the sands as they shifted under her feet. Skye was surprised to see Kat was capable of simply running across, proving Skye's earlier statement to be true.

Once again sharing a look, Skye and Grace took off towards the sand skipper. Grace increased their tailwind with a sigil and Skye boosted their running speed with some kind of haste, speeding them ever closer to Kat.

They both took up their positions in the sand skipper with Grace on the till and Skye working the sail by some unspoken agreement. As soon as the sail was unfurled the sand skipper shot off towards Kat.

Kat for her part was just running at her enhanced speed and was surprised to see Skye and Grace gaining ground so rapidly. Of course, there was always a solution to this. Winking at the Timmy's before sticking her tongue out and throwing her head back towards her fast approaching teammates the Timmy's got the idea.

As Kat started speeding up her run, she looked back and poked her tongue out at the sand skipper with the Timmy's joining in, one even pulling on their eyelids... which did nothing considering their faces were made of wood but it's the thought that counts.

Grace seeing this said something to Skye. What it was Kat couldn't hear and didn't feel the need to use her enhanced hearing for. Shortly afterwards though a large sigil appeared in front of Grace as she summoned her bow.

It wasn't loaded with an arrow, but she drew the string back and pointed it towards the sail. Skye latched her feet under the benches and gave a nod to Grace. Grace loosed the "arrow" and a massive gust of wind followed increasing the sand skippers speed drastically.

Seeing this Kat decided it was about time to stop the fun. Kat let herself slow down as the skipper rapidly closed in on her. Just as it was about to reach her, she unfurled her wings and gave a slight hop. Expertly gliding to land lightly on the front of the vessel.

Once Kat landed softly, she sat down and started laughing. Grace and Skye gave her a weird look at the start but started to laugh as well. This was slightly dangerous considering Skye and Grace were supposed to be steering, but because they only had to travel straight, they managed to not cause anything catastrophic to happen.

"See, now you guys aren't stuck talking and we are already on the way" said Kat

Grace grimaced at this but said "Well, we only needed two people to catch you. It clearly isn't a three-person sand skipper"

Kat signalled the Timmy's in her hand and all three hurled a snowball in Grace's direction. "Wait where did those even come from" said Grace

"I'm hiding them in my sleeves. Do we need more ammo?" asked Kat with a raised eyebrow.

Skye was trying not to start laughing at Grace now covered in snow, though rapidly melting, as she also tried to steer the sand skipper.

Grace pouted and looked away, but still kept an eye on where they were going. "So, Grace, should we share a bit of information about what's on the other side of the desert as thanks for the sand skipper?" asked Kat

Grace looked somewhat annoyed at Kat still but nodded. \*See, fair is fair. And besides, it isn't actually much, so we can just look like we are prepared.\* "Once we pass through the desert, we hit a wall of fog. I can't see what is on the other side so it must be real fog"

Skye nodded and said "Is there anything you can tell me about the desert though? That's a bit more relevant to us right now"

Kat shook her head "Not really, I was distracted by the massive wall of fog, then the slightly less massive bird that came after me. So perhaps there is something noteworthy around, but I didn't see anything super obvious"

Skye nodded again and seem to be considering the information as she stared out at the horizon perhaps looking for some trace of the fog wall. Kat decided to copy her but with a bit of energy into the mix.

As Kat increased her visions magnification, she found that she could just barely see the wall. It didn't really look like a wall, it was more like a grey line because of the horizon but she could still recognise it knowing what it was.

As Kat was doing this, the Timmy's were collecting the remaining snowballs and hiding under the seats with them. Kat was unaffected by the additional heat but they sure weren't. Grace and Skye were fine, but only for the moment. They had both started to sweat, but the breeze helped them ignore it for now.

The Timmy's watched as their snow quickly started melting and gave away to the heat of the desert rising up from the sands. Placing a comforting hand on each other they all sat spread out underneath the shade. Waiting for this leg of the journey to pass.

Kat just sat at the bow of the skipper, trying to keep a look out for anything interesting. She had reduced the power in her eyes so that she could keep a better watch on the relatively close area rather than just the furthest reaches. She might not be piloting the ship, but she did want to be prepared in case there were more dangers like the Barbarashi.

## **Chapter 135: Fire Control**

Kat stared out across the sands as they sailed by. She had let her body relax even though her mind remained vigilant. She leaned her head over the front of the sand skipper using her arms as makeshift pillows. Her normally energetic tail with its constant balance corrections curled up on her back. Her wings fell to the sides hanging just slightly over the edges, though make sure not to catch the wind.

Kat's legs were in a less pleasant arrangement. Half bent and wedged against the canoe wall, but Kat didn't mind. Space was limited and her body didn't seem to mind sitting in awkward positions like it used to.

Kat stifled a yawn. She wasn't tired exactly but the sun and heat radiating from above and below was a perfect sensation. Like being warmed by blankets on a cold winter morning.

"Kat? You alright? Not getting heatstroke on us are you?" asked Skye looking at Kat's slightly goofy smile and relaxed attitude.

Kat lazily turned her head to face Skye and answered "Nope, I'm perfectly fine. Why would you think that?"

Skye wiped the immense amount of sweat that had piled up on her brow and looked at Kat confused "Um, because we are sweating more water than I've drank in a week and you just seem to be basking in the heat. If you've started losing it we need to know sooner than later"

Kat raised an eyebrow and looked past Skye at Grace, who was hunched over sweating buckets and looking at Kat with an unkind expression. What? Ooh... right. Kat quickly released her heat resistance was a much kinder boon then she really appreciated.

Grace sighed when she saw Kat not answering "Remember the orb?"

With that Skye's eyebrows shot up and understanding dawned on her face as Grace's words brought the scene of Kat hugging an orb capable of burning them all to a crisp like she was a cat in front of the fire during a snowy winters night,

With this Skye's expression fell as well, mimicking Grace's look of anger and disapproval towards Kat. "Give me back my concern" said Skye

Kat shrugged and returned to her lookout duties as she spoke "Look, I understand, but I'm keeping an eye out for anything on its way and just enjoying the heat"

"Wait a minute" said Grace suddenly even angrier "Don't you have ice powers?"

"Yup" said Kat

"And you aren't using them to cool us down at all?" asked Grace

"I don't exactly have the best grasp over control. I'm just as likely to freeze you both solid as I am to cool you down" said Kat

Skye seemed to see the wisdom in this. Understanding that Kat's fire was dangerous. She had seen it burn continuously over the orb to keep it frozen solid, and if Dusk couldn't manage the task she didn't want to know how much mana it took.

Grace, however, was much less used to the heat and dry air. "Try"

Kat looked towards Skye for confirmation. The healer had a pained look on her face. Torn between safety and the desire to be cooled at least a little bit. "How safe is it Kat? Could you limit the damage if something catches?" asked Skye

"Nope. I've not been able to put something out once I set it alight" said Kat \*Which is probably something I should work on. I know I have Grace's contract to learn fans, but controlling my really deadly powers is probably a better place to start.\*

Skye looked to Grace for some help but she just nodded in acceptance, as if implying that freezing to death was preferable to putting up with the heat any longer. Skye said and said "Go ahead"

Deciding to be a little careful with it Kat extended her tail as far as it would go. Which was about half way between Grace and Skye. The sand skipper being as small as it was, this was nearly it's entire length.

Leaving her tail to rest mostly on the bench that crossed the centre of the skipper Kat set the end of her tail alight and looked to Grace and Skye's reactions.

"What is that it?" asked Grace

\*Welp, clearly it isn't what she was looking for.\* "I don't think it's because it isn't cold enough, but that my flame keeps itself contained mostly" said Kat

"Are you sure?" asked Skye

Kat a demonstration would do best. Dimming her flame as much as possible she gently placed it on the side of the sand skipper. Just as the very edge of the flame touched the strange wood that made up the vehicle, the area flared purple for a split second then froze solid.

As Kat kept her tail in contact with the wall the ice started to slowly spread out from the spot, which was doubly concerning when you remembered that the sand here was super heated, and previously the wood had absorbed most of that extra heat without complaint, and yet it was not quickly dispersed in favour of Kat's flame.

Skye's eyes grew wide as she watched the ice inch outward from where Kat had made contact with the sand skipper. She examined Kat's face for any sign of fatigue or struggle that might indicate a significant amount of her total mana was contained in the small flame.

Of course her nonchalant and continued enjoyment of the desert heat quickly put those thoughts to rest. "That's enough I guess" said Skye.

Kat removed her flame from the wall. Just as she did so the ice around the edges started to melt and sizzle. Drops of water that fell onto the sand could be heard vaporising, and the ones running down the side of the skipper fared little better, drying up in just a few moments *novelnext.COM*

"Can you perhaps spread it around a bit more? Make it less concentrated" asked Skye

Kat was about to shake her head, when she decided the system might have a few answers. \*Hey system. Is it possible to disperse my flame a bit more? Use it as a coolant for these two?\*

Demonic Flame can be dispersed, though it is more accurate to say User Kat may break the Demonic Flame into such small amounts that Entity can more easily resist the effects. While not perfect D.E.M.O.N.S believes something with an affect similar to User Kat's desired outcome is possible.

"I can try. I'm pretty sure I should be able to, but it's a risk to start testing it-" before Kat could even finished Grace said "Do it"

Shrugging her shoulders Kat tried to disperse her flame. Focusing on the tip of her tail she tried to let it spread further. It rather quickly regained it's former size, and even managed to enlarge itself slightly but as Kat kept a tight rein on the amount of energy supplying it didn't grow much beyond that.

Kat then tried to focus on forcefully spreading it out, but she found something fighting against her control. It was like trying to spread your fingers out past their limits. She could feel the flame, a little like an extension of herself, but not quite the same.

When she tried to expand it further, she felt that it needed more energy. Giving that extra, she found it rapidly expanding... but not as she wished. Rather than thinning the flame out she'd just stretched it into a wall, and the power contained within still wasn't small enough that she'd think of it as safe.

\*System advice?\*

D.E.M.O.N.S has records stating this is the best Advice.

Loading Advice...

Removing names...

Replaying suggested Advice: You must learn to let go. Let go of the shape of your flame. Allow to flow freely while keeping a tight reign on your energy consumptions

Unloading Advice...

Resuming normal functions...

\*Huh, that's not the kind of imprecise mystical mumbo jumbo I'd expect from you system. I'm quite frankly disappointed.\*

D.E.M.O.N.S has found that the preceding passage has a superior rate of teacher compared to D.E.M.O.N.S generated Advice. Thus D.E.M.O.N.S simply replays those words.

\*Well that actually makes a lot of sense...?unlike the strange advice.\* But Kat listened anyway. Trying to let go without letting go. She nearly slipped up in fact. The first time she tried to let 'let go' her flamed flared to life. Only by quickly pulling the energy back in prevented it from setting the area alight.

Focusing instead on trying to lose the shape, Kat found that her flame was more than content to just remain as fire. What could it possibly mean? Kat looked back at the tip of her tail, and the flame as it swayed to a wind that didn't really exist considering it was casually blowing in all directions...

\*Wait is that it? I have to change my idea of what my flame IS?\*

Trying this new approach Kat tried instead to clear her mind. Focusing on the flame at the end of her tail, not as a flame but as energy. Letting it carefully flow out from her without increasing in power.

### **Chapter 136: Aura Options**

Kat let out a deep breath and looked away from her flame. Letting her eyes drift and her mind wander. Her first inclination when trying to think of her flame as not a flame, was to instead to picture what her demonic flame looked like, that fiery version of herself.

Though Kat also really quickly realised that was just shifting the problem. That was still giving it too much form. She needed to think of it like a free bubble of energy. Kat's tail flicked in annoyance, and though she didn't notice Grace and Skye pulled back trying to avoid the trailing embers from her tail.

\*Is it so hard to just not think about it being fire?\* Though Kat also felt it was similar to telling someone not to think about oranges. It would never work, and only make it harder to focus on things other than the orange.

Changing tact Kat tried to focus instead on the passing sands. The sight wasn't as breathtaking anymore as it was the very first time she laid eyes on it, but the gentle curving of the red sands stretching out as far as the eye could see was still a wondrous sight.

As Kat stared out, she could feel her control on her flame slipping. Torn between safety and progress Kat decided to err on the side of caution and keep that control. Despite this she could feel the energy in the flame dwindling and the size shrinking.

Kat lightly pushed more energy towards the flame, though perhaps that's wrong. This time she tried to gently nudge it in the direction, like the faintest brush stroke on a canvas. Trying to be as gentle as possible while still encouraging additional energy to flow to her tail.

Sadly this wasn't the answer. After hearing a gasp from Grace, Kat turned her head to make sure everything was safe, and found that her flame had more than doubled in size and blazed fiercely... though as Kat stared at it that sense of gentle calm still came through.

\*Huh, guess I managed to push my aura into my flame... wait a minute idea!\* Kat retracted her demonic energy and turned to face Grace and Skye. "If something horrible happens, let me know and I'll stop" said Kat calmly.

She received a nod from Grace, and the Timmy's underneath her chair. Skye gave an awkward smile and a small nod as well, and so Kat closed her eyes. Kat focused on her aura, instilling her energy into it, but instead of trying to fuel it she wanted to merge the two. *novelNext.COM*

Pushing her aura out she felt it expand past her body. As she did so her control instantly faltered. Extending her aura in such a way gave her a... strange sense of everything. It wasn't that she could see, more like, she could feel herself touching everything nearby. It was a strange sensation, and not particularly useful.

\*I mean... no it's pretty much useless. You just feel like your touching everything, and you can't even tell where anything is in relation to everything else because you're in contact with everything at the same time, and nothing. \*

Kat stretched her aura out once again using the same method. Trying to ignore the strange sensation she pushed her aura out. As she felt it hit what she assumed to be Skye Kat's mind seem to shake at the feeling.

Kat opened her eyes and found her hand shaking. Looking up at Skye and Grace, they had concerned expressions... well Grace looked concern, Skye might just be squinting to deal with the flying bits of sand sticking to her face.

Kat recalled that strange sensation. Reaching out to Skye had felt... Kat wasn't even sure how to recall it properly. It was... like she was supposed to see everything that Skye ever was, but someone had stabbed daggers into her eyes.



Rapidly pushing that sensation into its own little box to be dealt with another time... hopefully never.

\*Ok time for a different approach. But perhaps not too different an approach.\*

Kat focused on her demonic flame. Instead of trying to push it out of a limb as a flame, she wanted to try and move it around like her aura. Grasping the edges of her power, Kat pushed it out trying to let it seep out and hover around her as her aura naturally did.

As Kat did this the space around her started to distort. Rather than the clear space it should be, little wisps of flame would appear and vanish. To Skye and Grace it looked almost like Kat was surrounded by a field of purple stars, winking into existence for just a moment before vanishing from sight once again.

Kat took a deep breath in and out, and then tried to push her flame aura further out. As she did so she could almost feel it dissipating as it expanded. She could feel that she was pushing things. Whatever she'd managed was threatening to collapse if she took this any further.

\*But then again. That's what testing is for.\* Kat pushed on the edges, forcing them to expand. As she did so all the 'stars' winked out. Leaving only clear air. Skye and Grace held their breath, but then a torrent of cold air hit them like a truck.

The hot dry desert air that had rushed past them this far because of the sand skippers movement was turned icy cool. Grace and Skye let out pleasant sighs as the temperature reached a much more comfortable equilibrium

On Kat's side though, things weren't quite so great. Fuelling whatever it is she was doing was eating at her energy in a major way. \*Why is this taking up so much energy? It's even worse than running full sprint, energy enhanced and freezing the snow as I run... What the heck is its problem\*

Kat let the energy drop and she stopped fueling the aura. "Why'd you stop" asked Skye "That was just perfect"

Kat shook her head "Perhaps it was the right temperature, but it eats my energy like crazy. It's almost as bad as letting it completely loose to set fire to everything"

"Oh... so like, how long could you keep it up then?" asked Skye somewhat hopeful. Grace was nodding along eagerly behind her, but with a slightly more apprehensive look on her face.

"Not long Skye, maybe a few minutes tops?" said Kat

Skye's face fell hearing this but nodded in understanding "I suppose that is just how it is then. Luckily the sand skipper is absorbing most of the heat for us, otherwise it could be much worse. Maybe just use a bit to cool down the skipper every now and again so it doesn't overheat"

"Wait what?" asked Grace "The skipper can overheat?"

Skye looked confused at Grace "Didn't you see the heat absorbing enchantments on the hull?"

Grace nodded "Of course I did, they're everywhere on the thing. It's just one massive heatsink"

"Yup exactly" said Skye

"I don't follow" said Grace

Skye's mouth hung open. Looking to Kat for any possible help Kat nodded in understanding "See Kat gets it" said Skye

"Well, then one of you explain it for me" said Grace

Kat looked awkwardly at this "I don't know exactly; I'm just making my best guess from something I know that's similar. It's just a heat sink right? As in it absorbs the heat, but it doesn't go anywhere, and if the sink is full, we are the ones that start cooking"

Skye nodded "Exactly. The magic can only take so much heat. I imagine Thyme is proficient enough for it to just stop absorbing heat, but worst-case scenario it could explode"

Grace looked at Skye wide eyed "Wait you mean to tell me this could explode at any time?"

Skye shook her head "No, no no, it's not just any time, we'd start to feel the temperature seriously spiking, and even then we'd probably still get some warning as the material itself tried to absorb some of the energy. Probably catching fire, or melting in the process, depending on what Thyme made this out of"

Grace nodded shakily not entirely reassured by this. Kat on the other hand slammed her hand into her face. \*I'm an idiot\* "I think I've got a decent way to keep you each cool" said Kat

"Oh?" asked Skye sceptically.

Kat shuffled carefully onto the middle seat making sure not to catch her head on the sail. Staying hunched over she stretched her tail at to the side of the skipper next to Grace and charged her flame.

The side of the skipper instantly started to ice over. Pumping enough energy to freeze a good chunk of the surrounding wood Kat then retracted her tail and watched as the ice started to slowly melt.

Grace however nodded in understanding. Shifting closer to the ice she sighed in relief "Well, it isn't as nice as before but it's something I suppose"

### **Chapter 137: Something on the Horizon**

Of course, the ice still melted rapidly. After Kat applied a bit of her flame to the mast, she had to refresh the section near Grace. \*How much is too much?\* Kat wanted to increase the amount of ice on these section of the boat without letting her fire just latch on, it was much too dangerous for that.

Kat wanted to find the line between freezing a lot of wood and keeping the flame off of it without setting anyone on fire in the process. She hadn't really seen what would happen to a person, but after seeing what it can do to quite a number of other things testing it out was not high on her priority list.

After a few minutes of back and forth between Grace's frozen patch and the one for Skye, Kat managed to figure out a bit of a trick. What she should be doing is running a faint amount of energy around the edge of the ice patch. Both to expand it and keep it from melting. For some reason the hull seemed to melt the ice starting from the outside, despite it all supposedly being the same heat.

After widening the ice sheets by quite a large amount Kat finally sat back down at the front of the sand skipper slightly tired. She could feel that freezing all that ice had taken up a rather large amount of

energy, leaving her with just over a third, perhaps closer to five twelfths, but she couldn't get a completely accurate grasp on it.

\*I wonder what it is that burns through my energy so fast. It seems like it has to be whenever I project it outside my body. Using it to enhance myself or even regenerate takes hardly any compared to freezing a bit of ice.\*

\*Hey system, is this really the case? Why does it take so much extra energy to project stuff?\*

User Kat seems to have an efficient demonic form. User Kat's body merely requires the presence of demonic energy to show enhanced effects, it does not actually require it to be used. User Kat's body will use more passively if operating at higher than standard levels, but a large part of this is offset by User Kat's rather high demonic energy regeneration rate.

\*Huh.\* Kat hadn't thought the answer was so simple. Now that she thought about it though it did make a lot of sense. Back when she was protecting her eyes from that camera flash in the mall, she just had to pull the energy into her eyes and let it drop back. It wasn't actually used up for the most part.

\*Honestly, I was expecting some rather convoluted answer to that but it's rather intuitive?\*

Kat let a shiver run down her body as she enjoyed the sun and relaxed once again. Skye and Grace behind her scoffed at the lazy smile she had on. While they were much happier with the ice, the weather certainly wasn't pleasant and seeing Kat so thoroughly enjoying herself rubbed them the wrong way.

*noVeLNext.COM*

\*Now that I can be more comfortable using my energy for enhancement while let's get back to lookout duty.\* As soon as Kat enhanced her eyes though her face fell. "Hey, why do you reckon all the monsters suddenly came out for the desert round?" asked Kat

Skye shrugged but Grace spoke up to answer "Well, the desert we are in naturally contains some rather impressive monsters. Depending on how exactly Thyme got the sand here they might have just come with"

Kat nodded as this did make sense, so she continued "Right then what's the name for the giant worm that lives here?"

Grace narrowed her eyes "How do you know that? I don't even know what it's called just that there is one"

Kat pointed her tail over her shoulder vaguely in the direction she was looking "The giant worm heading straight for us"

Grace and Skye both looked in the distance but saw nothing. Neither had the eyesight that Kat did and they knew it. So they tried to relax, while keeping an eye out in the direction Kat had indicated.

For Kat's part she was pretty sure it was a giant worm. Something was pushing aside sand as it travelled. The sands rising and falling as whatever it was passed underneath. The thing was huge, clearly over twenty metres in length. Though the more Kat watched, the more it looked like a dune was running towards them rather than some strange creature.

Of course this idea was quickly dismissed when the worm in question surfaced for a brief moment. Kat couldn't get a good look at the details, but it was clear the worm was very red. It was the same dusty red as the rest of the sands with a bumpy rough texture that likely helped it blend in better.

Of course, once you were that size and moving rapidly it was rather hard to miss despite it's attempt at camouflage. When Kat had seen it surfacing there was only a thin line where the mouth likely was and nothing really else. It's 'face' if you could call it that was just as featureless as the rest of its body

"Ok, so Grace, what exactly can you tell us about it" asked Kat

"Um, well, I'm not too sure, I haven't read up on it myself, but I think I remember a few things. The first is that it doesn't actually eat animals. It survives by collecting the energy radiating of the sands. Swallowing large amounts absorbing the heat and spitting it back out." Said Grace

"Oh that's good news" said Skye

"Well" interrupted Grace "I didn't exactly finish. The problem is the worms are all fiercely territorial and will attack pretty much anything larger then a couple centimetres across"

"Oh that's bad news" said Skye "Can we just avoid its territory?"

Grace glanced at Kat and started to speak "You said it was heading right for us?" Kat nodded "Well, chances are then that we are already well into its territory. They have massive areas that they claim as their own. We might need to travel for a few minutes or even an hours"

Skye cursed "Ok Grace what are our options"

"Well, angling us away from the worm is probably a good start" said Grace trying not to sound sarcastic.

Her honesty seemed to get across though as Skye just nodded and started banking the sand skipper to the left. Kat had to hold on a little to prevent herself falling over. Turns out laying on the front of a sand skipper is only so easy and safe if your going in a straight line

"Kat, could you fight that thing?" asked Grace "I know enough to know my arrows won't do much, and their insides are even tougher then their outside"

\*Could I?\* "Probably not? It depends how it would react to my fire I suppose, but even then I used a lot of energy to put that ice next to you guys, I'm really not in great condition to fight for long. I could probably run away... but I think it's around as fast as I am maybe a bit faster unless I could fly, but then the bird will probably just come back"

Grace looked at the already mostly melted ice and clicked her tongue, regretting the request of some additional comfort. She'd thought they'd be mostly safe having not encountered any monsters before now but clearly things were taking a step up.

"Could you just distract it maybe?" asked Skye "You said it's around the same speed, could you just lead it around a bunch then fly back to us?"

Kat swished her tail and thought "I mean... maybe? It's a bit far off" Kat scanned the distance and noticed the worm had angled towards them and was slowly gaining ground "I'm probably just a bit faster than the sand skipper unless I can fly, and it really looks like it's gaining ground"

"That just makes sense though" said Skye "It's coming at us from straight on, so even though we've angled a bit with the right angle itself it can cut us off no problem"

\*Oh right. How did I forget that one.\* "Then its just a matter of flying. Can I fly low enough that the Barbarashi doesn't freak out?" said Kat

"Well why are you asking us?" said Grace "How are we supposed to know how fast you can fly when your close to the ground"

\*Grace makes a compelling argument. But what else am I supposed to do. It isn't like I've testing this properly... which I will. As soon as I get back to Earth, I will practice I promise.\*

"I guess I can do a little test then" said Kat. Standing up and jumping off the side of the skipper Kat flared her wings and started to follow behind the skipper. Trying to keep herself low, just barely above her walking height Kat scanned the skies for any trace of the Barbarashi as she tried to catch the skipper

### **Chapter 138: Stomping Around**

Kat was able to rapidly catch up to the skipper once she started flying properly. It didn't take long, and it was quite clear that she could outpace it should she desire. Though Kat still carefully scanned the skies for the Barbarashi as she flew next to the skipper not even a spec of it could be seen on the horizon.

"Ok, so I can certainly outpace the skipper if I'm flying. What's the plan now" asked Kat

"If you don't mind, I'd say you should grab the worm's attention, lead it away for a while then catch back up" said Skye

Grace looked like she wanted to argue but it seemed like a sound plan. Kat was indeed able to fly faster than the sand skipper could sail, and they didn't have a lot of other options. Skye was just a healer, Grace's arrows couldn't injury it properly and Kat said she didn't have the energy to fight it.

"Kat do you have enough energy to run the worm around in circles for a while AND catch up to us? Didn't you say you were low?" asked Grace *novelNext.Com*

Kat tried to measure the how much demonic energy it took to fly. It was somewhat hard to tell, but it seemed that flying on pace with the sand skipper didn't cost her anything at all. "One moment" said Kat

Boosting her speed to the limit Kat shot of in front of the skipper nearly doubling her speed. Checking her energy reserves she saw that it was dropping now. Slowly, indeed, but dropping nonetheless.

Kat thought for a moment and tried to do some calculations but quickly gave up. She couldn't get a detailed enough sense of how much she was actually using up. It was like asking to someone to tell you how much water a bucket was leaking when you'd never seen it before and the whole was miniscule.

Kat sighed and slowed back down "I think it should be fine. I can double my speed for minimal cost"

Grace took a quick glance at Skye but quickly returned her focus to Kat so as not to get caught "Well, how will you be able to find us again? The sand skipper leaves a bit of a trail, but that could be hard or impossible to find considering that it isn't very distinct"

Kat tapped the side of her face next to her eyes "I can see the edge of the desert. Shouldn't be too hard to spot you guys. And worst comes to worst I can meet you at the fog wall as long as you wait a bit"

Grace once again took another furtive glance towards Skye. She wasn't confident she could fight the healer and win. She doubted Skye was completely unarmed and the fact she could heal any minor injuries meant Grace would have to take her out in one or two well placed strikes had her concerned.

Of course, Grace didn't get long to worry about this because Skye shouted "I can see it now"

Kat and Grace instantly locked their eyes on the sand trail left by the worm. It was fast approaching and would be here any second. Kat took off flying in the worm's immediate direction using as much energy as she could push into her wings.

Right as she was about to reach the front of the thing Kat slammed her feet into the ground empowering them once again with demonic energy but making sure no flames escaped. Kat shot up further into the air and the worm stalled, before jumping up after her.

It wasn't even close, Kat soared to nearly double its height even as it stretched its body out mouthing wide and gaping. What surprised Kat is that it had no teeth. The open mouth just had thick callouses that looked almost like red stone lining the mouth. As Kat stared down into the maw, she could also see a faint glow at the back.

After failing to catch Kat the worm fell, slamming itself onto the sand and throwing it in all directions. Because Kat's meeting with the worm was somewhat delayed by testing Grace and Skye were well within the blast zone.

Grace fed mana into her tunic's wind shield. Leaving the till for just a moment, she jumped to the top middle of the mast and hung there. The sigil engraved into her chest piece glowed a bright light and Skye could here the whipping of wind.

As the wave of sand came to slam into their skipper Grace's wind shield buffeted it away. The grains rolled off revealing the enlarged wind bubble she had created by overcharging the rune. Skye tried not to look as the sand cascading down around her. It's dusty red glow a difficult reminder that should too much of it all they'd be cooked alive as the enchantments on the boat failed to suck the heat out

Luckily for them though Grace's shield held long enough for the wave to pass and she slid down the mast and collapsed onto her seat. Grace took heavy breathes as she tried to regain her wits and a bit of mana.

Skye through a quick sigil up and sent it towards Grace, checking to see if she'd done any major damage to herself, but finding none continued to wrestle with the sail. A much more difficult task because Grace was unable to operate the till.

Additionally, the sand around them had all been displaced, with the skipper moving off centre. Skye could only tell by looking at their trail and how much they'd strayed without Kat's assistance, but even that too was obscured by the rolling waves of sand from the monster. Skye took a deep breath to calm her mind and faced forward, hoping that she was going the right way.

Back with Kat the worm was wriggling its way back under the sand. Kat let herself fall nearby and take of running away from the skipper though still towards the mist wall. Looking back over her shoulder to confirm that the worm had in fact decided to follow her.

Kat was of course quite annoyed to find that despite her running the worm had turned to face the skipper again. Though a tad behind after recovering from its jump. \*Ok think fast. It must be going after the skipper because...\*

Actually why? Kat slammed the sand next to where she assumed the worm's head would be, light though this time, and saw it instantly pivot back to her direction. Kat ran swiftly away from that position, but once again was annoyed to see that after only a few seconds of running the worm had corrected itself to go after the sand skipper once again.

\*Is it the weight? I can't be too light, because the Grace said the worm would go after anything larger than a few centimetres and I'm pretty sure I should count.\* Frowning Kat once again slammed her feet into the sand, this time near the tail of the beast.

The tail end flicked up throwing a wall of sand over Kat. She instinctively raised her hand to block and her wings followed along with it providing a wall between her face and the sand. Realising her wing now stood in the sand's path Kat poured some energy into just in case it was to sustain any damage.

Kat felt the sand bounce harmlessly off her wings. Once stopping she quickly pulled them out of the way to see that the worm had once again turned back to the skipper. What is its problem? Kat stomped in frustration, and once again, as if on queue the worm turned around. It headed towards Kat for a little bit before stopping, and changing directions.

At first Kat was amazed at how nimble the thing was, able to turn on a dime despite its size. Then Kat realised she really should be thinking of what its issue was. \*Ok, so it reacts to me my impacts, but just running isn't enough for it... wait are my wings making my footfalls lighter than normal? Wait no, even if that isn't the case there is an easy solution.\*

Kat stomped to get the worm's attention, putting her all into the strike. Sand flew up around her as she made a large dent on the smooth layer of sand. As soon as she saw the worm turn its head in her direction she took off running, though this time was a little different.

Every third step Kat made sure to slam her foot into the ground. Throwing up dust and sand into the sky. Every step she took looked like a small explosion as sand fell freely around the sprinting demon... and hopefully Kat was dragging the worm along with her. Kat couldn't actually see the worm following her on account of all the sand... but she could hear it, and it sounded like it was getting closer.

### **Chapter 139: 'Intense Battle'**

Kat kept her stomping routine up for around a minute, trying to make her steps as large as possible with her rather awkward running motion. She wanted the worm on her trail, but not right underneath her. Of course with the overwhelming amount of sand blocking her vision meant it was really hard to estimate any sort of distance.

After that minute had passed however Kat used her feet to dash forward rather than stomping down. It still threw up a large amount of sand, but it was concentrated behind her, and she was able to spin around during her short hop to try and see if the worm was indeed still following her.

This question was answered extremely clearly when a gaping maw burst through the curtain of sand with a roar that sounded like falling boulders on the hillside. Kat saw it was attacking more so the spot she just was and was able to dive towards the side. However as soon as she started the dive, she watched its head turn to face her instead.

Though its momentum carried it forward it was already readying itself to go after Kat. She took this quick moment of... minimal sand coverage to try and take a peak at the sand skipper but the falling sand worm's body had still kicked up enough in her line of sight that the skipper wasn't visible through the debris.

Kat didn't have the time to wait for it to fall either because the worm was already lunging towards her position. Kat's dodge was more graceful and deliberate this time, aiming to just barely miss the worms charge, eased by the fact it didn't have its full speed when jumping towards her.

With a flourish Kat landed on the sand and slid for a moment before looking at the worm with a grin. \*I could get used to this.\* The worm for its part used this charge to dive back underground.

As Kat saw this she made sure to stomp once again and head off just in case it was thinking about turning towards the sand skipper once again. As Kat did this she also looked at her energy levels. She saw that they weren't down too much, but it was about the same pace as if she was flying at twice the speed of the skipper.

\*How does that make any sense though? I'm not even moving that fast, and surely it takes more effort to cut through the wind once you are going that fast rather than just a light stomp.\*

Despite Kat's internal complaints she sped off stomping along the way as she continued to puzzle over her situation. \*So the real problem is I'm burning through energy a bit too fast. I can probably hover to get some back after leading the worm around in circles but I risk the bird coming for me.\*

\*And like how far do I need to lead this thing of course? I'd say the skipper was just shy of halfway to the mist wall after what... two hours of travel maybe?\* Kat grimaced as she thought of this.

\*Do I have to lead this dumb worm around for an hour or so then?\* Kat cast a worried internal glance at her energy levels. \*Yeah, I don't think I could manage that one. I probably have enough energy to \* Kat stopped her train of thought to dodge the worm growling behind her.

\*I don't even need to look if you're practically yelling in my ear every time you leap dude. Just oh I don't know, perhaps consider not screaming when you attack? Where was I? Right energy problem.\*

\*So, this is possible somewhat. I can probably keep it busy for the hour or so, but I couldn't then fly to catch up. But I can't just head off much earlier then that because the worms faster then they are.\*

\*Hmmm.\* Kat jumped backwards letting herself drift up and over the worm as it lunged for her position. Flipping and letter her wings out so she could glide the length of the enormous thing Kat took a sharp turn when she hit the ground just so that she could still be heading at least somewhat in the right direction again.



\*So the real question is, can I do something other than this stomping.\* Kat considered her options, and admittedly they weren't great. Anything that required testing and wasting energy wasn't ideal, and she really just had no idea how the crazy worm worked.

\*Well, when in doubt just hit it really hard.\* Stomping away and waiting for the next worm attack. As soon as Kat heard the roar signalling its attack she jumped to the side and whirled around. Right as expected the worm sailed past charging for her old position

Winding her fist up for a solid hit she slammed it into the side of the worm expecting a rather disgusting squishy sensation. That was not what Kat got. The moment of impact she felt like she'd slammed her hand into a solid steel wall. She felt her entire body ringing and vibrating in response, and the worm itself rang out like a gong but seemed to hardly even feel the hit.

It dove into the ground and turned to her just the same as it always did while Kat tried to shake her hand out as the damage regenerated. It was only some minor bruising but considering how much power Kat had packed into her hand she was surprised that was all the damage dealt to either parties.

Kat took a few more steps and stomps before settling back into the familiar rhythm. \*Ok, so clearly that didn't work. What the heck is the damned thing made out of? Felt like a solid steel sheet, I guess what one would feel like if a human slammed into it.\*

\*I wonder if I could rip through steel now? I mean I'm clearly stronger then before just based on how fast I can run. Kat dodged another worm charge. Then again, its not like steel is easy to tear apart. They use it for heavy machines for a reason after all.\*

\*You know, people always use steel as an example of such strength, but they also don't take into account how strong it can actually be.\* Kat dodged another worm strike spinning around just for the hell of it. \*Should I really be thinking about this now? Probably not.\*

\*But its also not like I have anything better to do. I can't think of a better way to keep the worm's attention. I can't afford to waste energy setting it on fire, I can't hurt it with a punch, it only seems to react to me if I make a massive racket with my stomps\*

Kat sighed. \*Who thought leading around a giant worm capable of swallowing a boat whole could actually be so boring. At least the Barbarashi had a decent chance of hitting me if I wasn't paying attention.\* Kat stopped and took a jump forward before bowing to the worm as it sailed over her.

\*I mean look at this. It jumps in exactly the same way. Screaming every time like the world is ending, and it always targets the place I was not where I am. Is it only so scary because it's super tough?\* Of course, Kat was neglecting the fact that she was much faster and able to enact sudden shifts in movement unlike anyone else at her power level.

Being able to turn on a dime and redirect all her momentum once they reached such speeds was not a common skill. Alas her body was perfectly designed for flexibility, she could use it to turn on a dime just relying on her instincts.

Kat sighed. \*Really why is this so boring?\*

#####

Meanwhile – Back at the sand skipper with Skye and Grace

"Do you think Kat can manage" asked Skye, still manning the sail, but much more exhausted. Grace had recovered enough to use the till, but not proficiently like she once was.

"Well, um, I mean, I think she'll be fine" said Grace.

Skye clicked her tongue "True but you didn't see the endless plumes of sand I did. They must be having an intense battle to throw up sand like that. Just one of those plumes was enough to nearly take us out and it burnt all your mana defending. How could Kat manage to get through so many"

Grace bit her lip and thought of the contract she'd made with Kat. This certainly did seem like the best course of action for everyone, but she was in the most danger. Grace hoped that she wasn't about to be punished horribly "Well, um, I mean at least Kat isn't hurt by the sand right?" *noveLNext.COM*

Skye nodded but continued "Yeah, but I'm sure 200 tonnes of worm can still cause her plenty of problems"

Grace took a worried glance back at the area they'd last seen Kat. Worried over the intense battle they must have been waging.

## **Chapter 140: The Return**

Kat had been leading the worm on a wild goose chase for around an hour now and things really hadn't developed. Sure she'd led the thing plenty far away, and sure it hadn't managed to her Kat in the slightest, but she was down a lot of energy and the worm was also completely unharmed.

Kat looked at her energy reserves and saw they really were lower than she'd like. They sat just below one third of full. Which was actually pretty good. In her hour-long chase Kat had managed to refine her stomping a bit.

Changing minor things like limiting the amount of energy she used, stomping every fifth instead of third step, jumping carefully over or around the worm and using at a quick chance to burn no energy as it reorientated itself after the jump.

Nonetheless, the energy consumption was still a bit much, and Kat could see that the sand skipper was approaching the mist wall. They were still maybe forty-five minutes out or so, but she did still need to fly over to them

\*Is it time to start my trip?\* Kat thought as she jumped over the worm pretending to skate over its long body and landing lightly on the sand. After watching the worm turn around Kat decided to see if it was still actually chasing the skipper first.

Letting herself hover just above the sand she watched as the worm under the ground paused... and then headed straight for the skipper. \*Well I suppose that would make this too easy.\*

Kat tried to eye the speed of the skipper and the worm, but it didn't do much good. She couldn't estimate their relative speeds well enough. Kat sighed. \*I guess I should just commit to the flight then. I can't even be sure that I'll have enough energy to get to the boat now.\*

Kat took off following along the worm's path and rapidly overtaking it. She made sure that she didn't leave the relative vicinity of the ground to ensure that the Barbarashi didn't start to home in on her...

\*Wait? Is that actually an amazing idea?\*

Kat started to think of the implications. \*It is a giant worm and birds eat worms... if I could lead them together perhaps, they'd fight each other?\*

Kat started to picture the epic fight between bird and worm. One roaring its gravelly roar and the other shooting laser beams. The Barbarashi diving from above and the worm breaching from below...

Then Kat realised that the worm was easily twice the Barbarashi's size, weighed likely four times the amount if not more and could very easily just dig into the ground and ignore the bird leaving it to harass her in the open skies as she desperately tried to run to the sand skipper before her energy reserves ran out.

\*Yup, let's just scrap that plan as epic as it might sound on paper and concentrate on flying close to the ground.\*

##

Kat found herself rapidly gaining on the sand skipper. She was perhaps five minutes out tops. The worm was far behind and the fog wall was certainly in sight for the other two. The only issue that was still rearing its head was that Kat was rather low on energy. In fact, she was already started to feel the edges of fatigue creeping in and knew that meant she didn't exactly have much time.

\*Would it be better to run? No I doubt it. It seems to be more energy efficient to fly at speed then to run. Which I'm not quite sure makes sense but I'm not complaining.\* Kat looked towards the sand skipper and watched for Grace and Skye.

Neither seemed to have noticed her approach, with their eyes seemingly scanning the horizon for any further threats from the front. \*Still, a bit poor form to neglect the back. Sure I'm keeping the worm off but what if there was something else coming for you.\*

Kat didn't know of course that Grace's hearing was even better than Kat's own before she enhanced it, and anything sufficiently speedy to catch up with them would have been heard before too long... except for flying things such as the Barbarashi and Kat herself.

As the minutes ticked by and Kat got closer, she could more readily feel the weight of fatigue reaching her. The mist wall was close, the worm was far, but was the sand skipper close enough for her to manage.

\*The question is, can I afford to slow down? Am I burning more energy by trying to catch up quickly and then rest once I land on the skipper? Or would I be better off matching the pace until they hit the mist wall to conserve energy.\*

Kat eyed her rapidly diminishing dregs of energy as she flew. \*Nope, I really don't have the luxury to take it slowly.\* Kat pushed herself and her energy to get that last burst of speed.

She zoomed off, returning to her original speed after having lagged behind a bit. The sand skipper was so close. Grace turned around and saw Kat flying with a quick glance but soon went back to steering, assuming things were fine.

Things were not fine. Kat felt her strength rapidly leaving her. Kat's speed hadn't dropped just yet, but she could feel the last of her energy entering her wings and her other limbs growing heavy.

Kat focused on holding her wings steady. Ensuring that whatever happened she was at least on course. She inched closer towards the sand skipper as it maintained its max speed. Grace checked on Kat once again and saw her surprisingly haggard form before saying something to Skye.

Whatever it was, was lost on Kat. Her ears felt heavy and only the rushing of wind filled them. Her eyes were unfocused and her wings wanted nothing more than to let her drop to the ground and rest.

But Kat held on. Collapsing into the sands wouldn't help anyone. \*If I fall now they'll have to either stop or leave me. If Grace can't convince Skye to stop then she'll face whatever punishment the contract has in store.\*

Kat didn't notice this in her fatigued state, but it seemed that Grace had convinced Skye to slow their speed. Even as Kat herself lost speed and what little height remained, she continued to draw closer to the sand skipper.

Just as Kat felt her wings giving out, she also found the mast of the sand skipper in front of her face. Looking up quickly in surprise Kat slammed head first into the mast. Though she had tilted it slightly to avoid crushing her noes she instead felt the full impact on her horn before dropping into the floor.

The mast shook but held steady. As soon as Kat deposited herself in the skipper, Skye pulled the sail up once again and they shot off rapidly approaching the mist wall once again.

Skye first took a good look at Kat. Watching for any sign of possible movement or an indication that Kat was still conscious. Once she seemingly found none, Skye speaking.

"This might sound callous of me, but should we... you know" Skye said and mimed slicing her neck.

Grace shook her head

"Why not?" asked Skye trying to gauge Grace's reaction "She is probably the most dangerous competition. And I bet we'll have to fight her after the orb. This might be our only chance to take her out"

Grace sighed "Well, even ignoring the fact she just spent an hour and a half keeping a giant worm off our tail, I doubt we could"

Skye raised a confused eyebrow "She's knocked out. Face first in the ground and right next to us. If we can't take her out now how are we ever going to"

Grace cast a glance towards Kat and thought about speaking of how they'd met "Well, Skye, I suppose I should tell you how I teamed up with Kat. It was a situation much like this except she was face down in the snow"

Skye nodded but kept her gaze ahead of her as Grace continued "Well, I thought the same as you. Best chance to eliminate one of the strongest competitors and I tried to stab her in the back, quite literally

"Despite this, her tail managed to find my hand and grip it with such force that I couldn't move my arm a single inch" said Grace. Of course, she neglected to mention Kat wasn't actually unconscious and that there was a bit more to the story. *novelnext.COM*

Skye clicked her tongue, looking from Grace to Kat and back. "Is that true?"

Grace nodded "I had no chance"

Skye didn't seem to be particularly happy about this news, and if she could see the faces of the Timmy's she would see they weren't a fan of attacking Kat either. Perhaps that may have changed her mind, however for now at least, Kat was safe enough.

Kat for her part thought it was all rather funny. \*I mean I can hear them. Surely Grace knows right? I wonder how Skye would react if I jumped up.\* Kat tried to twitch one of her fingers and found it still unresponsive. Ok guess I'll have to take a raincheck on that one.