

DEMONS 291

Chapter 291: Cue up the Pink Panther Theme

Kat and Xiang approached the edge of the barrier, Kat could see the greenhouses now and was tempted to make her way further across to the compound wall for cover instead... but they did seem to be sufficiently full providing enough cover (hopefully) by themselves. "Ready?" asked Kat

"For what?" asked Xiang

"What do you mean for what. We are in the last stretch. The compound is right there. We just need to run up to the side of the closest greenhouse. What's so confusing?" asked Kat

"Are you going crazy?" asked Xiang, as he tilted his head to the side "There isn't anything but forest?"

Kat looked over at what was clearly a greenhouse then back at Xiang. Then back to the greenhouse once more. "Nope. That's certainly a greenhouse."

"Well you must just be blind then!" hissed Xiang.

Kat sighed. *Dammit. I'm sure I'm not blind... but I guess Xiang might be? It could be that there is an illusion over it... but can't I normally tell? System what gives?*

The Illusion User Kat is 'viewing' is so weak that any Rank 2 demon could see through it. There simply isn't enough power in the array. User Kat's eyes completely obliterate any remnant of the illusion.

Cool. Kat went to speak to Xiang but then had a second thought. *Wait... does that mean I might cause problems to it though? Will it just shatter if I touch it?*

User Kat brings up an interesting hypothesis. D.E.M.O.N.S has no idea, without seeing the specifics of the array.

Well shit. "Xiang... there is an illusion over the base. It's pretty weak though" said Kat "I didn't even notice it"

"Huh" said Xiang. A second later his eyes started to glow with the faintest white light, before he nodded "Ah, I see. Silly of me to consider that actually"

Who are you and what have you done with Xiang? Why are you suddenly owning up to your mistakes?

Kat gave Xiang a weird look but just nodded and slunk up towards the greenhouse. About three metres from the side of building Kat's hearing suddenly swapped. Now she could hear everything inside the bubble but nothing outside. Pausing and increasing her perception to quickly discern the location of anyone nearby. Kat wanted to frown when she heard someone working in the greenhouse up ahead. Most people were in their rooms, but there was one in this greenhouse, and one in the greenhouse on the far left. The person who had been hanging up clothes was now somewhere else.

Hmm, can't recognise them by sound alone. Might be that one person at the mess hall, but I guess them being in one of the greenhouses is just as likely. Kat glanced at the greenhouse, and did manage to spot the smallest hint of brown hair, but it was mostly obscured by the plants. *Good enough I suppose.*

Continuing to run, Kat made sure that when she reached the greenhouse, she was down low with her additional limbs tucked in closely. *It would really suck if a stray wing tip is what got us caught. I'd never live down the shame of getting us in trouble before Xiang does.* Kat's eyes turned back, and watched as Xiang darted after her, ending up right next to her. "What now? Take out the greenhouse and then ditch?" asked Kat without really hoping.

Xiang frowned at her "No. We have come here to get revenge. Why do I want pretty flowers?"

But... didn't you say your village was robbed? Why can't we rob them back? Oh why do I even bother.
"Ok then what is the plan?" asked Kat

"I shall go through each one and defeat them, and cripple or kill them" said Xiang with the same tone of voice one would use to say the lawn needs mowing.

"You can't be serious? Not only do I doubt you could beat them all... they have warehouses full of supplies!" said Kat in response.

"Oh? Where are they? Lead me there. Perhaps I will find something to stay my hand" said Xiang wistfully.

Kat felt her eye twitching in response. *Why do I get the feeling that nothing he can find will stay his hand?* Kat sighed and double checked the sounds from across the compound. The only people that might be issues are the greenhouse twins, or the guy in the cafeteria. *Hmmm, should be doable then.*

"Ok, to get to the storehouse we need to make a bit of a run for it. Lot of ground, no certainty we won't be seen. I want you to follow me. Stay silent but sprint if you can" said Kat

Xiang nodded, face hardening into a face of determination. Kat felt another sigh threatening to break free, but just turned around and moved to the corner. Taking a quick peek revealed what her hearing confirmed, nobody in sight, with the warehouses on the other side of the courtyard.

Kat took off at about human sprinting speed. Kat cast her glance towards the person she knew was at the cafeteria. They were just barely inside the building, and she hoped that would stay that way. As she ran Kat was crouched down with wings tucked in, letting most of her focus drift to her feet. She had to dodge a few twigs in the way to maintain her silence that almost seemed to spread from her feet instead of sound.

Of course, Xiang wasn't quite so careful, standing on almost every stick she'd dodge. Kat felt herself flinching every time a crack could be heard, but nobody she could hear reacted, and she hoped that would be the end of it.

When Kat made it to the warehouse wall, she glanced over at the smaller compound to the right. *I hope those walls are high enough.* The compound turned out to be on a very slight hill. She couldn't see inside from where she stood, and she could only hope this applied the same for people inside that wall... but she wasn't sure. At least she didn't hear anyone near it.

It was just a moment later that Xiang pulled up beside her, it was a good thing Kat took that chance to check up on him. He was still running full speed even though the wall was mere centimetres from his face. Kat suppressed the urge to click her tongue as she grabbed him by the collar and pulled him away from the wall.

Xiang let out a light choking sound but Kat couldn't find it in herself to care. *It's his own fault for running nearly full speed next to a wall.* Placing Xiang down, Kat gave him a disappointed look. Xiang glared back with no shame.

Now I just have to figure out what to do. That guy sitting up at the cafeteria will see if he looks over while we are opening the door. Can hear him in the seating area now. Hmm, is it safe to jump on the warehouse roof?

Kat let her focus return to her hearing. *Hmm, the only one that might is those guys from that enclosed area. I just can't be sure how high those walls are, especially if I'm sitting on the roof.*

Xiang however, was getting sick of Kat's planning. Pulling out his sword carefully, Kat turned to see him about to hack into the wall. "What are you doing?" hissed Kat

"Well clearly you didn't want to go in the front for some reason. This wall looks flimsy so I'll just break it" said Xiang

Kat shook her head and said "No Xiang. Not only will we get heard, I'm sure there is some security on this"

"I doubt it" said Xiang

Kat smiled and placed her hand on the wall, slowly, she pushed on it with increasing strength. As she did so a golden light started to shine beneath her hand, sparking around Kat's palm as it tried to repel her.

Thank god that worked. I just guessed that they'd have some sort of keep away. I can almost certainly break it but this is good enough to prove my point.

Xiang just clicked his tongue and looked away, not willing to admit Kat was actually right in this instance. Suddenly, there was movement from the cafeteria dude. Kat froze. *Shit. Is he coming this way?* She could hear them walking back into the building proper before exiting and... yes heading her way.

Shit shit. "One guy heading our way. Don't say anything, just follow me if we need to move" said Kat

Xiang gave Kat a long, pained look. Every second he wasted glaring back at her was another step closer that figure came to their hiding place. It wasn't even a very good one, as soon as he rounded the corner it was going to be enough. Kat cast a glance over to the small fence surrounding the field she hadn't properly seen from the air, thinking it was just some markings. *Dammit can I squeeze behind that? I mean... maybe... the wings though...*

Chapter 292: [007: James Bond: Theme]

Kat bit her lip and glanced over at Xiang. *Shit. With that armour I doubt he can fit either. It's not like it would be hard to knock the fence down... in fact, that might actually be the bigger problem. If I try to slip between it and the wall, the fence is actually the weakest link here not my own strength.*

Kat bit her lip as the steps got closer and closer, but prevented herself from burning energy to give her more time. *I only have a limited amount; I can't waste it.* At this point even Xiang could hear them and was looking around frantically as if a better option would magically present itself to him. *Can I maybe just balance on it? I'm not sure it can support our combined weight but... it might have to do.*

Kat glanced over at the fence once again and had to suppress another grimace. The fence was pointed. It wasn't anything major, just a bit of barely sharpened wood for some minor aesthetic purpose, however, Kat recognised that her shoes were not equipped to stand on such a small area without snapping the thing. *Dammit the fence really is the weakest link here.*

Kat went to wrap her tail around Xiang to pull him along but found the limb unwilling to comply. *Dammit!* Footsteps were already next to the warehouse door, she was moments away from getting caught. *I mean look I get why. He insulted my tail and now I'm being petty.* Kat shook her head. *I'll deal.* Wrapping her tail around Xiang's midsection Kat jumped off the ground quietly towards the fence.

Flipping herself upside, Kat held Xiang flatish against the wall, while her hands reached down to sit around the pointed tips of the fence. Kat could feel the wood already straining under the weight of two people, but her fingers held strong. Focusing on her hearing again, Kat heard the disciple walk around the corner just a moment later.

Sadly, he did of course turn towards Kat's hiding place. She guessed he was actually heading for the compound rather than the yard or even looking for her... but it still put the pair in a tricky situation. Kat glanced down the fence and realised she probably didn't have the speed to make it. *Shit. I can maybe move fast enough... but I'm not sure if the fence will hold. It's already straining like this. Wait... if I use the same trick I did with the bandits...*

Kat spread her light film of energy over the fence... and found it did little good. Even as she watched the film spread lower, the structure of the wood wasn't stable enough for this. Neither did Kat really have time to take it slow enough to spread the energy across every fencepost.

Um... ok new plan... maybe... Kat glanced around. The upside-down view hardly affecting her. She felt no blood rushing to her head, and the slight distortion was nothing compared to flying around. Kat felt her eyes rest on the roof of the warehouse again. *I'm stupid. Now that he's moved I can hide on the other side of the roof... except that we'd be visible to anyone if they looked out the windows of the accommodation... of course if we break in the front door we'd be screwed anyway... so I guess this will have to be good enough.*

Kat flexed the muscles in her arm while bending her elbows. *I really hope the fence can take this... maybe if I just...* Kat tried to extend her film of energy over the ground, but it fought her every step. It was as if it was refusing to be contained for some reason. Kat frowned as the footsteps quickly approached the corner. *Dammit, no time.* Pushing herself off Kat launched herself off of the fence and over the roof. Seeing that she'd over shot her target Kat threw out her wings, catching the air on them and halting her momentum somewhat.

Kat started to place her hands below her to 'stand' on the roof, but as her palms approached the wooden slats that same golden shine started appearing across the roof. She wasn't touching it just yet, and decided to throw her mind into overdrive, and so the world slowed.

Shit. I don't know if I can push off that. Even if I can... I'm sure it will make at least some noise. I can suppress the sounds I make by keeping my own muscles enhanced, and that helps me step lightly... but if I start shooting off sparks from being in contact with the barrier... well that would be rather bad.

Kat checked her exact position. She was close to the edge, having just barely stopped in time to not fly off the roof. *Which in hindsight was clearly the right decision. I should have let myself continue... flying? Is that even the right word anymore when I can actually fly? Shit anyway...*

Kat looked towards her tail still holding Xiang. *I can at least throw him away... maybe not make as much noise? Unless... it might react to me not being human more than Xiang... so maybe I can use him as a stepping stool? Nah, I'll just throw him and use my wings, while praying they aren't too loud.*

Kat lined her movements up with her thoughts. First, she threw Xiang up higher and towards the walkway. After that she started to flap her wings, which thankfully were still out from when she killed her momentum. Finally, she pulled her hands in as close as she could to give her a bit more time before setting of the defences.

Kat used her wings mostly to keep pushing herself forward. It worked somewhat well but she could tell she was losing height rapidly. Pulling her head in and curling up as much as she could without bending her back too much and changing the angle of it, Kat just barely managed to slip past the edge of the roof.

Once she was clear, Kat let her body act on its own. Instincts flaring, Kat unfolded and ended up feet down, after twisting herself over into a complete flip. Before she got too comfortable though, Kat held her hands out and took a single step back. A moment later Xiang fell into a princess carry.

Xiang recoiled as if he was burned, quickly throwing himself out of Kat's arms. While he did that Kat listened for any sign that they had been heard. Once Xiang was on his feet, and Kat was sure that they weren't being investigated, she took a quick glance to check that the greenhouse front was also obscured by plants and they weren't being watched before turning to the door.

It looked to be a standard affair, with large barn doors to allow for bigger things to be moved in and out. Of course, for Kat the size and weight of the door were no concern. She had hoped there would be an obvious lock on the door... but it just looked like it had two rings for someone to grab onto.

Walking carefully up to the door Kat found the familiar golden barrier appearing beneath her fingers. Waiting a bit longer, until she heard Xiang walk up behind her and tap his foot, Kat asked "What would you like done? I can break this but I'm pretty sure it will make some noise"

"Well, maybe we just attack them all then" said Xiang, perfectly confident in his choice.

Dammit why. Why did we even take the time and effort to sneak to the warehouse door if you still want to go full assault mode? I mean sure this was my idea but... why are you still fighting this after you agreed?

Deciding she didn't want to argue anymore, Kat waited for the moment when the disciple that almost caught them knocked on the door. She timed her slam with the second knock, just to be sure. As Kat's hand hit the surface, she felt it creaking, and, realising it wasn't quite enough, she flared her energy and increased her strength for a split second.

That was enough for the barrier to shatter. There was a bright flash for just as second, but Kat was hoping it was something only her eyes caught. She glanced back at Xiang quickly and he was staring at

her with slight annoyance... but his lack of blinking helped calm her down. Pulling back on the door rings Kat opened the warehouse to reveal shelves stacked high to the ceiling with...

Bags of rice.

Shit. "Rice? We went through all this trouble for rice?" hissed Xiang

"Now now..." said Kat trying to calm Xiang down who was already raising his voice a bit. We still have more warehouses... this one just must be for food, don't worry"

Xiang clicked his tongue and stomped over towards the second warehouse. Kat flinched every time his foot hit the ground. It was much too loud for them to be unheard, and she could only hope that anyone in hearing range thought they belonged to someone else.

Chapter 293: Xiang, You Had One Job

Kat swiftly but quietly shut the door and followed behind Xiang. She didn't waste any time destroying the defence around the second warehouse. She could see Xiang was already getting tired of all the sneaking around. It opened just as easily as the first, and Kat threw the doors open praying for anything even slightly interesting.

Which was exactly what she got. It was the rest of the food supplies. Where the first simply had stacks of rice piled high, this one had meat curing on hooks in the back, as well as shelves of various vegetables lining the sides, with a door set into the floor. Before Xiang could get annoyed at yet more food, Kat moved to the doorway and lifted it up...

To reveal a fridge. It was filled with a few fruits she could almost recognise as well as a couple more pieces of meat. *Shit.* When Kat turned around, she saw Xiang already leaving. His boots almost sounded like thunderclaps to Kat, as they were just so much louder than everything else in the quiet compound.

Kat whizzed past Xiang, taking some care to limit the sound, but focusing on speed. As she broke the final doorway open Xiang just raised a tired eyebrow. Kat threw the doors open, and glanced around worriedly. Sadly, it was just more supplies. There were pillows on one side, blankets on the other, and some sewing supplies at the back probably to patch things up. Just as Kat was about to sigh, she spotted something strange. She only noticed it because she had been abusing her energy supplies to search for anything interesting at all, and her enhanced vision noticed that the floor under the sewing supplies wasn't the same as the rest.

"Well that was pointless" said Xiang, already turning away.

"Wait. There is something in here" said Kat

Xiang paused, and Kat rushed to the sewing cupboard and looked it over once again. On the join she noticed that instead of being bolted to the wall on both sides, it instead was left free on one, and had a hinge on the other. Pulling on it, the whole shelf swung forward and revealed a trapdoor hidden underneath it.

Kat smiled. Reaching down, Kat pulled the trapdoor up to reveal a set of stairs heading deeper into the earth. "This looks promising. If you can just shut the doors we can explore this" said Kat

Xiang gave a grunt, and moved towards the doors. Kat was already sneaking down the stairs. There didn't appear to be any light, but her night vision more than made up for it. The stairs weren't too deep just yet, and Kat waited at the bottom until she heard the doors firmly click shut before heading deeper.

Interesting. I have to wonder... where will this hidden tunnel lead. Kat spared a quick glance back at the staircase and noticed that Xiang hadn't made it to the bottom yet, but she just shrugged and continued on. *He can't get lost on a straight path surely. He can probably see in the dark with the same trick that he used to see through the barrier so we should be all good.*

Nonetheless, Kat summoned a clump of purple fire to light the way. It would help Xiang see properly and ensure he knew she hadn't just run off. Kat quickly settled into the familiar scenery. After walking in the tunnels for days with Minor, this was easy going. She started relaxing, and just let her soft footfalls steady her mind and relax her as she walked.

It was five minutes in that she started to get the feeling something was wrong. She flared her eyes and looked forward finding nothing. Flared her flame just a bit, and glanced around... but all she saw was bare rock. *Must be nothing... or maybe...* Kat reached out to the wall, and gave it a light scratch, easily cutting through the stone that made it up. *Nope, no enchantments on the walls.*

Ten minutes later, the sense was stronger still. Kat whipped her head around thinking maybe she was being followed. She abused her full speed and mental cognition to turn around as fast as she could... but the hallway was empty. Sadly. Kat didn't see the problem with that immediately.

It took another two minutes of walking before her mind caught up to her. The path was empty. She was not being followed. THAT was the problem. *Where the fuck is Xiang?!* Kat turned, already pumping energy into her legs to get up to speed and shot backwards down the tunnel.

Straining her ears for any sign that he was following, Kat could hear nothing more than her own steady footfalls. What's worse, is that at some point she had crossed the invisible line of sound dampening and hadn't even realised it because she only had her own footsteps as a guide.

Kat made it back to the trapdoor in less than a minute, throwing it open and bursting into the storeroom. At this point, she could hear the metallic clang of swords ringing against each other. *DAMMIT.* Kat bolted straight towards the door... and through it, shattering the thin wood that was no longer reinforced.

What Kat found, was not an ideal situation. Xiang was surrounded by twelve guys, cutting off any escape, as one stood in the centre and taunted him. "And that's while you'll never be anything more than a weak country hick with no true clan to ba- what was that noise!" said the one facing off against Xiang not tacking his eyes of his foe.

He was distinct enough from the others. While the surrounding group was made up of shockingly similar men with short cut black hair and plain white robes. The one in the centre had a little more character to him. His hair was the same black as everyone else, with the same short haircut... but his eyes were a vibrant green, a stark contrast to the dark green of the surrounding plants.

To further separate him, where the others all wore plain white, this man instead wore a white robe that was trimmed with red silk patterned to resemble flames. As it moved in the wind, the light reflecting off the clothes almost gave it the appearance of real fire.

As the twelve turned to face Kat, the one closest to her shouted out "Some weird girl in a kimono Hu!"

"Deal with her then. I still want to play with this one a bit longer" shouted the one Kat had to assume was Hu.

Well, great. I'll make sure I take care of these guys faster than the bandits though. The mob started moving towards Kat, splitting into almost two even lines, but it was clearly unorganised. They moved forward and, when they saw Kat wasn't moving, started to surround her. *Yes, try and surround me. Not like I could fly out of it if it was a real problem...* oh wait. Kat let a grin show on her face, as she kept her main focus on Xiang, and the others she could hear in the compound.

There was one person crouched on top of the roof nearby, watching the battle, two more deep in the inner compound, as well as a third nearby the pair she could hear. On top of that, there was another seven that she assumed were watching from the windows in the buildings across from her, but she didn't spend the time to look up and check to confirm if that was right.

Xiang was... well he was looking fine, if perhaps a bit tired. Kat did note that he didn't have glow around him at the moment, but considering his opponent didn't either, Kat was willing to bet he hadn't used it just yet. Xiang was taking large swings at Hu, trying to hit him... it wasn't going well.

Hu would turn just slightly making sure that Xiang's sword always missed by the smallest margins. If it was any closer, Hu would have started to lose the edges of his outfit, but even after the three strikes Kat saw, Xiang hadn't actually managed to land a hit. Still, Kat turned her attention away to focus on her own fight. Hu hadn't drawn a weapon, and didn't even seem to be carrying one, unlike the sword wielding lot around her.

Well... let's wait for them to close in just a bit more. "Surrender now and you won't be harmed" said one of the disciples.

"Surrender now and you won't be harmed" repeated Kat.

The same disciple growled and said "Look lady, this is serious business, and you clearly have no cultivation. Even with whatever rare bloodline you have, you can't beat us"

Well now. That almost sounds like a challenge. Plus... you guys did see me break through that door right? Could a basic human do that? Seriously that was some sturdy construction, I doubt you lot could break it.

"Pretty sure I can" said Kat rolling her shoulders and showing her lack of concern.

Chapter 294: Arrow of Fate

Kat didn't waste any time at all. Taking everything she learned from the bandit encounter, Kat waited for the moment the first disciple stepped in to attack her and took that as her signal to start returning the favour. Kat's mind flew into overdrive, and she stepped in past the oncoming sword, before coating the disciple in energy and smashing him away. Kat then got to work on the rest.

As she wove in between figures, Kat could see them all starting to glow. They were trying their best to catch her, but really, they were just swinging wildly. Their eyes could only spot Kat's movements, not

keep up with them in any meaningful way. They were just barely competent enough to avoid striking anywhere near each other, so Kat didn't bother with anything complicated and just struck them in turn.

Halfway through, her rampage, she had a trick she wanted to try. Kat touched the flat edge of the sword blade belonging to the closest attacker and tried to make the energy film cover the entire disciple. Kat smiled when she saw that it worked and started striking the swords instead. *Nice. I mean... it makes sense because I was just covering their clothes before, but I hadn't really thought that would work after the fence coating failed to cover the ground. I wonder what makes it different.*

Kat didn't dwell on that thought for long though, and simply finished taking out the disciples surrounding her. When time returned to a normal state, Kat let out a breath and watched the disciples all fly away. To her surprise though, all of the disciples that had been struck on their sword, had their weapons shatter as they flew backwards.

Um... what? How does that work? I have to assume that it's because the energy from the strike isn't perfectly distributed... which actually makes more sense than it magically spreading things out perfectly... I suppose I just kind of assumed because it was magic it would work in the way I was thinking.

Kat's further musings would be cut short though, as eight of her attackers started to stand back up. There were also one or two more she could tell were awake, but both were missing swords and seemed very afraid, so she chose to put them out of her mind. "Oh? Seems you're a bit stronger than we gave you c-credit for" said the same disciple who spoke to her before trying to sound anything other than completely terrified.

Well shit. How hard am I meant to hit these guys? Kat looked around, and of the people still standing, five had swords, and three did not. It didn't seem like the different striking areas actually made a difference. *I mean sure, five have swords and three don't but those two groaning in the corner are missing swords and probably could fight me if they didn't look quite so scared.*

"Can't you just stay down? It would be easier for all of us" said Kat

The disciple laughed, perhaps trying to sound confident, but the slight cracking of his voice as he did so, betrayed him. "You can't do that often I'm sure. It would be an extremely high level technique to both use without a command and without backlash"

Kat quirked an eyebrow and checked her energy levels. *Nope, I'm pretty good actually. Taking the whole lot of them out only cost me... well I'm down about one sixth maybe a bit less than that, but I did have to sprint here at full speed first so, honestly I'll count that as quite good.* Kat suppressed a wince. *Though that does mean I was ridiculously bad at managing my energy for the bandit fight, like truly horrible.*

The leading disciple smirked, and Kat had a moment of confusion as he took that chance to signal the charge. What Kat didn't realise, is that she didn't quite manage to suppress her wince completely, and they had interpreted that as an admission of weakness on her part, signalling that the disciple had been correct in his guesses.

Of course, they were completely wrong. Despite the slightly better-timed attacks, intended to limit Kat's options of attacking... they were so close together that it was simple for her to strike them all once

again, focusing on their swords if possible, before moving on to the three that had charged her with their fists.

Just as Kat went in to strike the final person, Kat caught a glimmer of light in the corner of her eye. Jumping back, Kat jumped back not a moment too soon, as in the place she was standing was a shining arrow that exploded when it hit the ground. Of course, the disciple she was next to ended up going flying... but now she had bigger problems.

Must be the guy from the roof. And, as if summoned, said guy jumped down "Hmm, it appears you are a bit more trouble than those younglings can handle, you shall now face me, Li Hong"

Said Li Hong stood tall. His white robes decorated with silver flames around the edges, and a bow and arrow embroidered on either shoulder. He looked older than the others, but not by that much. His bow was more impressive. It was completely silver, and looked to be made of some sort of metallic bone. Despite this... there was only one thing on Kat's mind.

Why the hell does a BOWMAN get CLOSER to the enemy and then state their name? I mean... what? Who does that?

"Ah... ok?" said Kat confused

"Are you not going to state your name?" asked Li Hong

"Um... I'm Kat? And I'm trying to figure out what you are doing?" replied Kat sounding as confused as she felt.

"What do you mean? I have found you a worthy opponent, and as such I am giving you the honour of knowing my name, and I yours before we engage in combat" said Li Hong.

Right... but wouldn't it be better to... oh I dunno... keep attacking me from a distance? Someone please explain... I... do I just ask him? Bugger it, why not.

"I'm trying to work out why you jumped down closer to me when you use a bow?" asked Kat

"Well, it is only right that I introduce myself to a worthy opponent. Do you have no concept of honour?" asked Li Hong taken aback.

Well, I mean, that's a hard question. I'm not sure? I never really thought I needed honour... and if having honour turns me into an idiot like you I don't think I want it... but... "I don't see how honour dictates that a bowman should get closer to a fist fighter?" said in a questioning tone.

Li Hong's mouth fell open looking stunned, as if the idea had never even occurred to him. Perhaps it hadn't, but instead of answering him, he shot another arrow at Kat. It wasn't as fast as the first one, and a lot less glowing, so she just bent backwards and let it sail over her head. *Dunno if I should... but I think it's funnier if I do.* "If you like honour so much why did you attack me during a conversation?" asked Kat

Well, Li Hong didn't seem to like that at all. His face scrunched up, and he pulled back on his bow despite not having an arrow knocked. "Piercing arrow of flame's fate" shouted the archer. *novelNExt.com*

All of a sudden, a glowing lance of light appeared on his bow. Drawing it back, even further Li Hong released the projectile, and as soon as it left the bow. The entire thing started to glow with golden flames. The issue was. It was still really slow, even slower than the previous arrow. Kat very purposefully took a large step to the side, and watched it sail past.

Kat watched the arrow with some amusement as it went through the area that she was just standing in... until the arrow turned around and came back, now angled slightly differently so that it would pass through where Kat was now standing. *Oh shit, is that a homing arrow.* Kat danced to the side once again, not using any energy to see if she could eek out a little more regeneration before fighting this guy just in case.

However, it seemed she was a little cocky, as after stepping out the way, right as the arrow past the space Kat once occupied, it exploded, showering her in golden flames that seemed to cling to her clothes and tried to burn her skin. Shit. Kat couldn't feel any heat from the flames, but she did feel them eating into her skin as her regeneration worked to counter them.

Flaring her own fire up, Kat was bathed in purple flames, for a brief moment to chase away the gold, before sucking the energy back in. *Dammit. That was a bit of a waste. Now I actually am down a bit of energy. Should have just run away more, or led it straight back at the archer dammit.*

Chapter 295: Shot Through the Heart

"Ah, a woman after my own heart. What kind of cleansing flames might you have?" said Li Hong somehow seeming entirely sincere as he knocked an arrow and pointed it straight at her.

"Um... these are just my flames?" said Kat confused as to why she was even being asked such a question in the middle of battle.

Li Hong nodded and shouted "Arrows of spreading flame"

The arrow Li Hong released, shot straight at Kat, but before she could react, it suddenly split into four, then each of those four split again into sixteen, then once more into sixty four. *Well... shit.* Kat checked her reserves and they were... at acceptable levels. The wall of arrows covered almost an entire human's natural field of view. For Kat however, she could see beyond that, and spotted one glaring flaw in the technique. She had wings.

Jumping straight up, Kat had to boost herself to max to ensure she escape the full force of the arrows.

Li Hong let out a long whistle when he saw Kat jump over the arrows, and it increased in pitch when he saw that she was hovering above the field now, simply flapping her wings. "Well I'll be. Those wings aren't just for show. Hu! Finish the runt off, I'm going to need some help" said Li Hong

"If you insist" said Hu. And in one swift motion, before Kat could even consider what those words really meant, Hu turned to face Xiang who was using his qi to go as fast as possible, causing his movements to blur slightly to the disciples. Still, it was nothing compared to Hu. "Heavenly Flame Lance!" shouted Hu, summoning what actually look more like a pike really, and shoving it straight into Xiang's heart.

Kat froze in the air, only her wing's ingrained instincts keeping her in the air, as she watched Xiang collapse. *Wh... what? He... he's dead? Oh... I... what do I do? I mean... I... Do I get revenge? I mean... I

don't... I don't know that I care enough... but... that's wrong? But isn't killing people in revenge wrong... but... I didn't... wha...*

Kat's internal issues were brought to an abrupt end, when Li Hong shouted "Now you aren't near anything precious I can do this. Great Flaming Arrow of Muspelheim"

The arrow Li Hong knocked was glowing brightly, the few sparks that seemed to fall off the arrow instantly charred the grass it hit. The fire was burnt out so quickly it didn't even have time to spread.

Li Hong loosed the arrow and it went straight for Kat. She still hadn't recovered enough to make intelligent decisions, and so she simply watched as it came straight for her. Some part of her told her that moving out of the way was a good idea, but another part said it didn't matter.

The flaming arrow struck Kat right in the stomach, the force from it pushed straight through her body and out the other side. The flames dispersed across her, clinging to her clothes but Kat just let her energy pool around the wound and watched it close up. The fire to her was a pleasant warmth. Where the golden fire did actually burn, likely because it actually had acidic properties, this attack was pure heat. So much that it retained enough physical force to pierce clean through her stomach, but once that was done, it wasn't even enough to char her skin slightly or burn her hair.

Instead the warmth was pleasant, and, had she not just witnessed Xiang's death, comforting. However, instead, Kat mostly just felt cold. Kat turned her gaze to Li Hong, and he stared back open mouthed. Kat's eyes had dulled, making it clear she wasn't quite all home.

However, to Li Hong who had just watched one of his strongest attacks be shrugged off like it was nothing, watched cloth and flesh weave themselves back together, and then to have those soulless eyes looking back at him caused no small amount of fear. So he did what he thought he had to, and shouted. "Hu! Summon Father!"

"And you lot! Watching from the windows, come gather the others. Get the younger disciples!" shouted Li Hong with but an extra seconds thought.

Well. This is fine. Thought Kat as she burned. The flame was so hot that when it struck Kat, it raised her body temperature enough to set the nearby air on fire. It wasn't an issue for Kat of course, but the flames didn't seem to be stopping just yet. *System. What do I even do now? I mangled that contract with Xiang so that I wouldn't HAVE to help him... and now he's dead? Why am I even still here... I mean... I just... revenge isn't for me really... I knew that... and I guess... I won't say he deserves it but I can't help but think this is what happens when you try for revenge.*

User Kat. Summoner Xiang has yet to perish. If User Kat examined the Contract User Kat would see it is still in effect.

Kat's eyes widened as she glanced down at Xiang in the dirt. He very clearly had a large hole burnt into his chest where his heart would be if he was anything close to healthy. *Excuse me what?*

D.E.M.O.N.S will repeat. User Kat. Summoner Xiang has yet to perish. If User Kat examined the Contract User Kat would see it is still in effect.

WHAT!

Kat's mind was ripped out of its daze, as the cogs turned rapidly and caught up to the fact that Xiang was not in fact dead. *Seriously? He isn't dead? How is he not dead?*

D.E.M.O.N.S is unsure. Would require further investigation.

Before Kat could ask any other questions however, she heard the words "Flaming Hand!" from somewhere nearby. A second later, she was slammed on her head with a great force, and shot straight towards the ground. After a few metres of travel, Kat flared her wings and looked around still stunned, as she let herself drift to the ground.

"Hmph. She is not so impressive. Couldn't even dodge a simple attack" said a someone Kat couldn't see, and whose voice seemed to come from multiple places at once. "Sons I'll let you deal with her together, though if she takes flight again I'll just knock her down"

"Yes Father" said Li Hong and Hu in sink.

Kat noticed the disciples behind Hu and Li Hong had started picking up the injured and taking them away. They looked like they were trying to be sneaky, so Kat just let them go, she was busy thinking...

Um... I mean... I could probably have dodged that... I was a little stunned trying to take in the fact that Xiang is apparently alive despite missing his heart. Actually system, what makes you think he is alive?

Summoner Xiang still has his soul bound to his body. Thus he counts as alive.

Wait does that mean... like... undead or whatever they are called? Those walking skeletons I've heard about in stories... assuming they are real, do they count as alive?

Yes.

Well ok then.

"Is she ignoring us brother?" asked Hu

"I think she is brother" responded Li Hong

Kat turned to face the two brothers, who at some point had ended up standing beside each other.

"Sorry, I got distracted" said Kat. *Maybe if I can keep them talking, I can even regen a bit of energy?*

Kat checked her reserves and let herself wince. She really hadn't been careful. She was down to just half now. *I wonder where most of it went? Healing maybe? Or perhaps it was when I burnt off that gold fire... Actually, is healing from a bunch of little burns worse than the one big hole in my stomach? That's something that would be nice to know. System?*

Unsure. D.E.M.O.N.S requires more data.

"Is she doing it again brother?" asked Li Hong

"It seems so" responded Hu

Kat smiled awkwardly "Yeah sorry. Just have a lot on my mind you know"

"Right..." said Li Hong. "If you surrender, we are willing to execute you painlessly if you provide us some information"

Um... why do they think I'm nearly out?"Why? I mean. I quite like living thanks. Plus, I'm really not that tired you know" said Kat

"But you keep using abilities without a chant naming them. That takes way more qi" said Hu

"It does?" asked Kat

"It doesn't" shouted the disembodied voice of their father

"Wait what? But dad you said..." started Li Hong

"It only takes more when you aren't practiced enough at it. You see me using a chant for this ability?" said the father.

"Ooooh" said Li Hong and Hu

"Well, I guess we should attack then Hu" said Li Hong

"Yup, the fool didn't even notice that we managed to buy time for the rest of the disciples to sneak away" said Hu

"Ah..." said Kat. *Do I tell them I saw the whole thing? No... I'll just... let them think I didn't notice. It seems almost rude to point out how comically bad their stealth was.*

Chapter 296: Bloodlines, and What They Can do for You

As Hu and Li Hong started doing... something strange with their hands, Kat was simply breathing deeply. She let her mind enter a half meditative state, she could almost see the pond, but her eyes were open and everything stayed in perfect clarity.

Kat took a long breath out, letting the worries over Xiang's fate and what she should do in response leave her body. *I've been doing a rather large amount of stupid things this battle. The only thing I did right was taking those disciples out at the start, and even then, some got back up. Let's see how these brothers handle the same treatment.*

"Fire Arts, Fusion Move, Shining Arrow of Endless Flame!" shouted Hu and Li Hong. From their joined hands, a massive wave of fire shot out, it was a bright white colour, but Kat just readied herself, taking a sprinter's form. When Kat started to feel the flames brushing against her and confirmed they were doing her no damage, she shot forward.

Kat sprinted straight through the centre of flame, speeding up as much as she could in those few steps. *Let's go a little easy on them. This might be too much.* Kat held her arms out as she ran through the two, letting her arms flow backwards for just a few moments to delay the impact with the brothers to give her time to apply her energy coating, before slamming into them both with her palms.

The brothers went flying, they shot away like they'd been launched from a cannon. They looked to continue flying for some time, but that voice from before shouted out. "Gasping hands of Flame!"

Around both Hu and Li Hong, a hand of flames resembling a baseball glove, caught the two and then continued falling backwards with their bodies helping to bleed of their energy so that they wouldn't be injured by the stop or slam into the ground.

Huh... that might have been overkill. I didn't quite mean to hit them so far. Well, at least they're alive. Their father wouldn't have bothered catching them if they weren't... right?

Kat then heard a long reverberating sigh. "It seems I have underestimated you" said the father.

Kat looked around for the source once again, but what caught her ears was instead a set of slow repeated footfalls. Kat turned around to face the path to the inner compound, past Xiang's 'corpse' and watched as a figure turned the corner.

He resembled the two brothers quite a bit, with the same black hair and long robes... but that is where the similarities ended. The man before Kat had a sharp chin, looking like it was almost a weapon in its own right. His hair, while somewhat messy, had a single streak of vibrant red in it that covered his right eye slightly. The one eye that was fully visible was completely red, with the shade simply changing between sections. A dark red for the pupil, a lighter rose red for the iris and an almost pink colour instead of the normal white of the sclera.

His robes were cut short over the arms, revealing taught muscles, that despite being contained in a somewhat thin frame, twitched slightly in anticipation of the upcoming action. On his back was a rather plain looking bow and arrow combination, but that didn't seem to be his weapon of choice, no that honour went instead to the sword in his hand.

It had a light blue finish, with engraved flames that seemed to burst forth from the handle. The only problem with that... was that Kat was sure those flames moved slightly, with her eyesight, she could see the metal very subtly shifting and moving as it was held. The changes were only small, and someone with weaker eyes would merely be unsettled viewing it, but Kat's eyes were anything but weak, and the changes with minute and erratic, but still very clear.

His robes seemed to be the same plain white the standard disciples would use... however, at the final step he took, he started to glow. Unlike the others where that glow was a pure white, this man's glow had a tinge of red that bled into the white outfit, making it look as if it was backlit by a glowing fire.

"It seems, I have not trained my sons well enough. Please forgive me for that young cultivator" said the man, taking a deliberate step forward and stomping down on Xiang's leg. There was a cracking noise that rang out, but Kat held her face still. She had watched the motion coming, and decided it would be better if he thought it didn't make her uncomfortable, or worse, realise Xiang wasn't quite as dead as he appeared.

"I'm not really a cultivator" said Kat hoping to buy yet more time. The bit she managed to buy from the brothers wasn't even enough to bring back a quarter of her reserves. Now she sat just below halfway after what she spent to finish the brothers off. However, the man in front of her had a presence, almost a physical thing that tried to press down on her. While Kat's own aura could shrug it off, it was still a noticeable weight, and like nothing she'd felt outside of Minor's dream and those few times Thyme had done something truly impressive.

This man must be strong. It's nothing compared to Thyme's power... I don't think... but I'm honestly not sure if half is enough. "Oh? You claim some other source for your abilities? Reliant on a bloodline perhaps?" said the man.

Kat smiled *Keep him talking.* "I suppose I could tell you, but why not state your name first? I can hardly keep calling you 'their father' in my head, now can I?" said Kat hoping to bait him to answer as she knew Li Hong did. If this man really was their father, she was hoping that's where he learned the habit.

"Ah, of course. I suppose someone who can defeat both of my sons in a single move does deserve that honour, even if you seem to be resistant to fire... well, nevermind. My name is Li Xiaolong, but for an opponent such as you, I suppose I can allow you to call me Xiao" said Xiao with a smile.

Perfect, the monologuing gene is hereditary. "Well, as I'm sure you already heard, my name is Kat" Xiao nodded "and my resistance... well... I guess you could say it comes from a bloodline? It depends on how you define the term. My immunity is certainly hereditary but I feel as though you are referring to it in a different way" said Kat

Xiao looked Kat up and down. There was nothing sexual about it, the gaze was closer to a master craftsman examining his competitor's tools. "I see... perhaps. A bloodline is something hereditary it is true, but for the powerful, it is quite common to find and merge with one as you grow in strength. I have gained the bloodline of the vermillion bird for my service to the sect... but... I don't recognise what yours could be" said Xiao

Kat smiled. *Well... I have no idea how you can gain a bloodline... don't you either have it or not? How would you gain one? Though... I suppose... is that what Lily is doing? System?*

It is possible to give Accomplice Lily a bloodline, but that is not the process User Kat and Accomplice Lily are looking into currently.

Well that doesn't clear anything up does it. Can I ask for more information? He does seem to like to brag a bit. "So, a vermillion bird bloodline? How does one gain such a thing? Or even a bloodline in the general?"

Xiao burst out in laughing "HAhahahahaha. You must be a long way from home girl, to not even know that much. I suppose I am asking about your own power, so I will humour you if you promise to provide your own answer?" Kat waited for a few moments, making it look like she was considering his words to buy a few additional seconds of regeneration. Her energy was recovering now, and it was climbing steadily.

"I suppose I find that to be an acceptable trade" said Kat making the sentence as long as she reasonable could.

"Ha, an acceptable trade she says. A very proper missy you are. See, to gain a bloodline, you need to drink the blood of a powerful beast. One that has kept its own strength for generations without dying out. This is common knowledge of course, but you need to pick carefully. You don't want some random spark wolf or gale bird that has to cultivate itself. No, you want something like my vermillion bird which is BORN powerful. Their bloodline drags their strength up, as it will for those who ingest it.

"Additionally, you need to match your cultivation technique to it. A fire aspected beast like the vermillion bird needs you to cultivate the flames arts and build your internal flame resistance else it will simply cook you alive"

Chapter 297: Eighty Five Percent

Kat was a little shocked to hear that last part, and froze up more than she was proud to admit. She was still ready enough for any attacks Xiao launched, but it would have been delayed. *I... I never even considered that something like that could actually be a bad thing. Killing you seems rather extreme... but I suppose if they are so good there had to be some catch. Hell, even as a demon there are some catches like that anger thing with my tail. Still... is the difference that I'm a full demon? And how does that work anyway. I was human before, and the system admitted as much... but apparently I'm now 100% demon...*

"That seems a bit extreme. Me, I don't have a fancy bloodline like that, and I'm not sure what your first guess would be, but I'm actually a demon" said Kat

Kat could hear the instant Xiao's muscles tensed. It was like hearing a rabbit band snapping back into place. Every single one of Xiao's muscles contracted when he heard her speak the words.

Xiao's eyes narrowed and he said "Oh? The young lad seems rather dealt with... do I need to go back and wipe out his whole clan? Demon summoning was outlawed for a reason... it seems I might be unable to defeat you..."

Kat shrugged "Well, don't worry about genocide or whatever, the kid" Kat pointed to Xiang's 'corpse' and pretended to be unconcerned "found an old storage warehouse of some long dead clan. They thought it was this important site of their ancestors though. The summoning circle was busted enough that I ended up here instead of someone actually fit for the job, and it's well and truly broken now that it has been used and I may or may not have destroyed the defences around it as well"

Xiao's eyes narrowed further upon hearing the conflicting information Kat was giving out. To him, she seemed to be arguing for her weakness... yet she had casually managed destroying ancient demon sealing techniques. Those two things did not go together well in his mind, eventually he said "I see... well I suppose it is slightly good to hear that. What was the brat after anyway? Surely it doesn't matter now he's dead"

Welp. Try to embrace my inner succubus and hope it's good enough excuse. "Well, you know how it is... I'm not a girl to kiss and tell, so I won't be able to share that with you" *Because I've never kissed or told anyone. Unless you count Sylvie's cheeks... and Gramps' knee when I was really little... Eh, I'm going to say it doesn't count.*

"Well, I suppose that's understandable, if disappointing. And I also know how you demons love your contracts... so I suppose there isn't much getting out of this fight is there?" asked Xiao

Now that is a good question. Kat checked her reserves and found them... well they weren't full but she was willing to call 85% good enough. *I'd love to say we can all just walk away from this... but you guys are basically magic bandits... and that's pretty bad... even then. If Xiang wasn't somehow alive, I'd probably accept. I really don't want to be attacking people I don't really have a proper grudge against. It's just Xiang's word against theirs... Aw well.*

"I mean, you could always walk away yourself?" suggested Kat

Xiao laughed slightly, in a barking, disingenuous way. "No"

And that was the signal to start. Xiao's aura flared around him like a billowing flame. Unlike the others who had their own white light cling to their body, hovering only a few millimetres from the skin or clothes it was projecting over, Xiao's flowed around him, giving even more credence to his fiery tendency.

When he started moving, he jumped straight towards Kat. He had seen the failure of multiple high level techniques and was slightly regretting his fire specialty. His many fights it had won him, even against other fire users made him confident in it... and yet one demon with a complete resistance to even the strongest fires made him question it.

Nonetheless, he was an experienced combatant with a sword. And he subscribed to the theory that if your attack failed, you just needed a stronger attack. Sure, he was choosing to use a different one now, favouring his sword, but if the fire did no damage was it really stronger?

Kat for her part, while not particularly adept in combat, realised that Xiao was rushing her for a reason. She didn't know anything at all about technique in real battles, or sword fighting. But she did know that she wasn't confident enough with her fans to even attempt blocking the sword. And it would be hell on her reserves to use her skin and bones to make up the slack.

So Kat decided to double down. Pumping demonic energy throughout her entire body, Kat shot towards him in response. She moved as fast as possible and brought her hands down towards him clenched together in fists. Kat wasn't trying for anything fancy, she just wanted to hit Xiao with her full strength and speed.

So when he dug his feet in and met her charge, Kat was slightly concerned, but she couldn't stop now. Her fists met a loud clang ran out and the qi around Xiao flared. His feet were pressed into the ground, which cracked and gave way... but he did not fall. He held strong and started to push Kat back.

Now Kat, was already more than shocked that he could block her. For him to also start pushing her backwards was something she never considered possible. So, what she did next was acting purely on instinct. Luckily for her, it worked well.

Kat's tail snaked around from behind her and speared straight towards Xiao's exposed side. He managed to bring his arm down into the way while keeping her fists in place. A strange cracking sound, like glass that was being bent rang out, before he managed to recover and push Kat back a step.

That was enough for Xiao to make his own retreat. He jumped back and out of Kat's range. His leap kept him close to the ground, but the distance he covered was nothing to laugh at. It covered a full ten metres with his single leap.

Kat decided, it would be best to keep him on the defensive still. She charged right after him and... well... it was basically just flailing her arms towards the man and hoping for the best, or hoping her nails could scratch a large enough gash on his arm to start a bit of bleeding.

It did not go well. It was clear that Kat was much faster than Xiao, easily reaching double his speed, perhaps more. Each of her blows were redirected with a large thud and an accompanying flash of red light as his qi coating him dimmed just a little bit more. But it wasn't enough Kat was losing her own energy much faster in this purely physical match up. Xiao's eyes were just barely good enough to follow her movements, and his technique made up for what he lacked in speed against his untrained opponent.

Kat grimaced when her energy reached fifty percent again. She had wasted so much just slamming into Xiao, and hated to waste even more by bringing out her own, very lethal flames... but it was looking like she didn't have a choice. She could hear people in the inner compound moving around, and there were a few she had yet to lay eyes on, that, Kat was sure. If a second expert was around, Kat needed to be ready.

Kat let her purple flame leak out of her hands. Now every blow she landed let out a sharp hissing and popping sound, like boiling water squeezed into a tight space and desperately trying to escape. Xiao's qi reacted poorly to this. It flared and spluttered and pulled in on him rapidly, slowly losing its billowing flame like quality as Kat's own flames beat their superiority into his qi.

Xiao was growing desperate. He could see he was losing, but Kat hadn't slowed down at all. Her hits were untrained yes, but no less deadly for that fact. If an attack hit his body proper, he would burn through so much qi it might just be the end of him with that one strike. That however, lead to his tunnel vision. As his gazed narrowed and focused on Kat's burning fists coming one after another... he forgot Kat's other weapon.

Kat pulled back just a little bit longer on her next punch, breaking the nice rhythm she had settled into and threw all she had at Xiao. He was ready of course, and met her high strike towards his head with a cold steel blade. Of course... that now left his legs open to a blazing strike from her tail.

Chapter 298: One Pill, Two Pill, Red Pill, Blue Pill

Kat's tail impacted Xiao just below the waist on his right side. His aura of qi flared in response, screeching like nails on a chalkboard as it cracked and buckled under Kat's strike. When the qi dimmed once more, Kat's own fire seemed to flare up eagerly in response, shattering the already breaking barrier and sending Xiao flying.

Kat found herself pitching forward, that one strike had eaten up a full ten percent of her reserves by itself, and without having Xiao there to counterbalance the weight she was throwing around, she had no choice but to pitch forward. Even her normally ever ready tail had been used in the strike, and so it was only by a panicked flap of her wings that she managed not to simply faceplant into the ground.

As she stood, Kat saw that the right side of Xiao's outfit was covered in ice, and he had a trickle of blood leaking from his mouth. Before Kat could fully recover, the man swiftly popped something into his mouth. It was so small that Kat didn't even managed to get a glance at it despite her exceptional vision.

The moment the object entered Xiao's mouth his qi exploded. His once depleted reserves soared out of him once again, the image of a flaming bird appearing behind him and releasing a shrill cry. Kat's eyes went wide as she felt the sound travel through her and rattle her bones. It wasn't quite a physical force, but she could feel it causing disruptions to her.

It took her only a moment to recover from them, but that was enough for Xiao's qi to surround him with billowing fire once again, and the ice on his outfit melted swiftly under the reinvigorated "To make me use one of my rare phoenix fire rebirth pills. I am truly impressed" said Xiao, with a smile on his face and a wicked gleam in his eyes.

That has to be cheating. I mean... I know he just did it and this is a fight hopefully not quite to the death but... how is that fair? I have...

* Kat tried to ascertain her reserves. It was a little hard with the full cycle

she had going on. Her energy was moving around and providing more than a little help where it could, but it was also bleeding off quickly. She estimated that she had somewhere between twenty to thirty percent still available to her. *I guess being a demon is pretty unfair as well. I just really hope he only has one of them.*

"It seems I really wasn't taking you seriously enough. And I apologise for that" said Xiao, as he held up a pill in between his hands. *Oh come on, another one?!* Kat scanned the distance between them and was disappointed to realise that she was not fast enough to strike the man before he placed it in his mouth. If he really wanted to, he could simply start as soon as he moved.

Get him talking Kat. Just keep him talking so you can eek out a little more energy. Now that he has that bullshit this is even more important... but I'll have to take more risks with my fire because nothing else does enough damage. Dammit. "Well, surely that can't be considered fair. I certainly don't have anything to improve my own performance" said Kat

Xiao smiled "Well that is a shame. I suppose I am much to used to opponents who have their own equivalent. I am afraid however, that as you are a demon, I have no choice but attack with everything I have"

"I suppose I can respect that. Can you tell me why people seem to dislike demons here? I've seen such a wide range of opinions in my time you see, and it's rather interesting" said Kat spouting the first somewhat interesting thing she could think of.

"One thousand cuts of the falling leaves!" shouted Xiao in response. He sliced his sword down once, and Kat took a moment to eye him like he was a fool. *I'm nowhere near him? Why does he think that...*

Kat trailed off as LINES started to open up in the air next to him. First there was the solid line he trailed, then it split, and split again. This continued until there was a massive line of sword cuts floating in front of him. This time it extended far into the air. Kat eyed it and counted only about five hundred cuts, but as the wall of silvery red started to approach her, she decided that she had more important things to worry about.

Kat looked for some way to escape the strike but realised the only thing she could do was take it head on. It was simply too wide and too high for her to get around as it rushed towards her. Kat finally brought out her fans from inside her obi. Kat found that as soon as they settled into her hands the energy she had flowing around her body seeped into the fans, and made them glow the faintest purple.

Kat didn't have time to admire them though, as she placed them in front of her and tried to block what strikes she could. Kat managed to intercept most of the ones coming straight for her, but she felt the lowest dig into her legs for just a moment before dispersing. Kat grit her teeth and pushed the strikes away throwing her arms out. This was a mistake, as Xiao had been moving forward while her vision was blocked.

"Forceful Palm Crush" shouted Xiao, slamming his hands together in front of Kat. A moment later, she felt herself squeezed on both sides as two giant red hands tried to crush her. This however, was nothing, she simply elbowed them away. Her arms shook slightly under the strain, but she could prevent them from closing in on her any further.

Xiao was ready for that too, and followed it up by drawing his sword again, and stabbing it towards Kat's stomach. It entered into her midsection with a squelch before Xiao shouted "Endless Roasting, Swordflame Lance!"

Fire exploded from the weapon in question, engulfing Kat in flames from the inside out. She found herself... unamused. When the most recent shout was made, the fists dissipated. Kat wasn't quite ready for the drop in pressure and her arms fell to her sides as she hung from the sword.

Quickly recovering though, Kat whipped them up to Xiao's shoulder and clenched her fists closed, letting her nails dig into Xiao. His aura screamed in protest as sparks flew and Kat could feel the pressure building under her fingers. Xiao grimaced in pain as he felt Kat's nails digging into his shoulder. Qi was good, but it wasn't quite enough to withstand the attack, and while his aura hadn't failed him yet, it was close.

"Explosion of the One Eyed One" shouted Xiao.

Flames engulfed his body, and Kat was blown back away from him, his sword ripping another chunk of flesh from her torso as she flew away. As she was flying, the wound was recovering and Kat couldn't help but curse herself for not using her flames more. *Dammit. They are my best weapon. I panicked when I got impaled and didn't even go for a little spark when I breached his defences. Dammit!*

Kat cursed herself, as she put a hand over her wound. It didn't really help, and it was mostly healed, but it made her feel a little better about her idiocy. At least she could recover from it, though her reserves had dropped considerably from that stunt, and she found herself running rather low.

Damn. I've got... maybe one decent flame attack in me still and a bit of physical power. I can't stop circulating energy else I might lose too much when I stop. So, one good flame attack and I'll be mobile, two and I'll be completely out of it.

Kat glanced at Xiao and found him rather worse for wear. His blood seeping through his robes on either side, and was already putting another pill into his mouth. His chakra flared, but this time there was no scream. He looked flushed, like he had just finished running a marathon.

I might just have him then. It looks like even if he has more of those pills, he can't keep taking them. It's taking its toll somehow. The question is... do I need to risk everything with a big strike? If he can get away with having just one more, I might not be able to handle that. This might be my limit already.

Kat grit her teeth and stood tall. No remnants of her injury could be found in her stance, and her low energy level did not show on her face. She let her aura swirl out from her and prayed it would do something. She started pressing it against Xiao's own presence and found that it was flagging slightly. Kat's smile grew. *I think this might be it. Just one more, round. One good strike from me and he's finished.*

Chapter 299: This Isn't even my Final Form... or is it?

Kat readied herself, bending her knees slightly and flaring her wings out. Her tail flicked from side to side, keeping its movements erratic but still ready to strike out at any time. Kat watched as Xiao stared back at Kat, his eyes darkening. "I suppose you still have some fight left in you then" Xiao sighed.

Can I afford to keep him talking? I think I have to. He is more reliant on pills clearly, but what I need is time. I don't look to be flagging at all, but once I fall it will hit me like a tonne of bricks. The problem with keeping him talking is... he might do something stupid if he has more time to think. "Well, I'm doing alright for now. Depends how many times you are going to get back up, pop a pill and pretend you're back to full power" said Kat hoping to sound the right mix of condescending, worried for her opponent's health, with a touch of honour and trash talk. Basically, she was talking nonsense, and was honestly amazed she was able to say 'I'm doing alright now'

Is it because I am doing... 'alright' for a certain definition of alright, in this one very specific moment? In a more all-encompassing look I am not alright. I am rather glad this whole 'not lying' thing is actually a lot nicer to me than it has any right to be.

"Ah, a shame, I guess this is it then" said Xiao, sounding somewhat defeated.

Kat had a single moment of hope that the fight would actually be over, when instead Xiao took out one more pill. This one was the size of her eye, and looked like it would be horrific to swallow. "I suppose I likely won't survive either way. I'll go out on my own terms then"

Kat's eyes widened in horror and she sped forward. She knew it wasn't going to be enough, she was too far, and all he had to do was let it enter his mouth but she had to try anyway. Sprinting forward with everything she had, Kat shot across the ground, parts of the pathway cracking under her charge.

Xiao saw this and didn't panic, he simply through the pill straight into his mouth. Kat jumped, propelling herself the last few metres to try and get to Xiao, aiming for his throat, fists blazing, anything she could to prevent him from swallowing the pill. But it was too late. As soon as it entered his mouth, it was too late.

Kat's charge was halted, great waves of energy sloughed off Xiao, throwing Kat backwards. When she tried to stand up, the pressure only increased. Gritting her teeth and angling her face just enough so that she could watch what was happening, Kat couldn't believe her eyes.

Xiao stood now, at least two feet taller. His muscles bulged, and pressed against his now tight robes. His eyes glowed, a burning red as they met Kat's own, and his qi... it was something else. Where it was once a blazing fire that protected him... now it looked like its own beast. Reaching up, double Xiao's extended height, it formed around him, like a second skin. It had a vaguely humanoid shape, but it didn't match up to Xiao's.

"One more round then. For everything" said Xiao, but his voice was no longer his own. It was a little like when Kat spoke with a demonically charged voice box. However, in this case, Xiao sounded like a roaring fire. Each syllable cracked and popped as he spoke, and Kat wondered if she could only understand him because of her translation power.

Xiao rushed to Kat's side, easily as fast as Kat just a moment ago, and yet now she was still ground into the dirt. *Shit. Come on dammit.* Xiao kicked Kat in the side and she went flying. Smashing through the warehouse that contained bags and bags of rice. They split open just from the force of Kat's travel, and when she met the back wall of bags, she slammed right through it and the wall behind them.

Kat was slowed drastically, rolling and bouncing a few times, as she came to stop in the training field, realising that she hadn't even noticed the fence shattering. She was surprised to find that, the pain

wasn't all that bad. She could feel her muscles knitting themselves back together, and the bones in her wings setting themselves back into place. She could feel that her bones had actually held up the best. Nothing was cracked or chipped, merely... misplaced in a number of instances.

Kat groaned and faced the warehouse Xiao had kicked her through waiting for him to reveal himself once again. He took his sweet time. His footsteps echoed as he walked through the shattered remains before letting his eyes fall on a collapsed Kat who was getting pulled back together by her regeneration. "Well, well, still standing... well, I suppose your legs are still out of commission, but your eyes haven't given up. I'm afraid I can't have that" said Xiao sprinting towards her.

Kat checked the damage and found herself still in poor shape. She looked mostly together at this point, but she could tell her muscles and skin was still not in fighting condition. Her skin was still closing over and spitting out splinters, while her muscles still need to knit themselves back together and pull the bones into position.

Xiao had already reached her though, and he grabbed onto her horns and yanked her to her feet. Kat didn't even check her reserves. At this point, she had to pay whatever it cost. Kat let her fire explode out of her. Purple flames roared to life and leapt onto Xiao. He jumped back and away, allowing Kat to drop back to the ground, but her flames hadn't given up.

All of her energy had left her, but that energy was now happily contained within her flames. It licked and pulled and BURNED Xiao as he tried to brush it off. Seeing that fail, he ripped his robes, throwing them off, but the fire simply left it. The robes were not the one they needed to hurt. Xiao grit as the flames bit into his qi, draining it faster and faster by the second, even as the flames themselves, dimmed.

Xiao took a knee, with a grunt, his qi flickering and fighting the best it could. Kat's flames were burning down, but the ground around him was now coated in ice. Xiao breathed in, trying to steady himself, focusing on his qi and trying to fight back against the ruthless assault he was under.

Seconds passed by, and all Kat could do was watch. Her vision was blurry and her body wasn't responding to her at all. Even her tail had for once, fallen completely silent. The only thing she could properly make out was the burning form of the man she was just fighting, as it sat immobile just in front of her.

Seconds turned to minutes, and Kat very quickly lost track of time, as her mind started to be pulled into its meditation, but as soon as the pond appeared Kat was always jarred straight out of it again. If Kat was in the right mind, she would be concerned that her breathing had stopped at this point, but her body didn't need air at the moment. It was working desperately with her remaining energy to fix the damage done to it, and the system had yet to consider this a serious injury.

Kat found some amusement in that. *Half dead, unable to move, can't see properly anymore, no idea how much time is passing, and yet I'm still not in danger of dying. You'd pull me out if that was the case right system?*

User Kat is correct. However, D.E.M.O.N.S request User Kat ask no more questions. It costs almost nothing to send messages to D.E.M.O.N.S but even that small amount is necessary at the moment.

Kat would smile if her mouth was responding to her. *Good to know you care.* Kat let herself relax further distorting her perception of time.

Soon, or at least Kat hoped it was, her vision cleared up. But what she saw was not a good sight. Xiao was stumbling to his feet. His sword was being used as a cane to bring himself up. He was covered in a thin layer of ice, but his qi was still around. He took one step towards Kat, and she felt her stomach drop.

Guess that's the end for this run. Then a glowing gold sword shot out of Xiao's chest. Kat's jaw dropped as Xiao collapsed forward, to reveal Xiang's body standing behind him. And yet, Kat saw nothing of Xiang in the body standing there. His eyes glowed a piercing gold, and even Kat couldn't see the pupils. *What?*

Chapter 300: A Climax on the '00 mark?!

Kat's eyes watched as Xiang pulled his sword from Xiao's chest. As soon as that was done, Xiang's head snapped directly to Kat. A moment later, he started to walk over, one step at a time. He looked like a robot as he moved, because while the movements were smooth, there was no variation, each step was a perfect replica of any other, and his arms always swung to a perfect tempo.

When Xiang made it to Kat's side, she wasn't sure what he was going to do, but when he turned his sword to face straight down, she got a pretty good idea. Kat strained against everything to get her body to move but nothing would listen not even her tail. Xiang waited just long enough to confirm Kat wasn't retaliating, then pushed the sword down towards Kat.

Just a millimetre from her kimono, he froze. Sword hanging in place and light swirling in his eyes. Xiang's face moved so that the glow from his eyes could settle on his arm, before he brought it up once again, higher this time and slammed it down into Kat. She felt the sword crash into her ribcage, the sword ringing alongside her bones as they withstood the force.

Kat felt the need to cough out blood but even that was beyond her for the moment. Xiang looked at his sword, and then back at Kat then back at the sword, before walking away. Kat wanted to let out a sigh of relief... until Xiang picked up Xiao's old sword, and slammed that against his own.

Xiao's sword cut his own cleanly and Xiang walked back over to Kat, and slammed the sword down on her again. It halted, for a second time, over the wound that was only now healing up, before raising it once again and slamming into her chest. This time her bones couldn't handle the strain. They had been battered before, but overlooked to heal other areas in more desperate need, then the recent strike weakened them, more, and this was the last they could stand.

Kat felt as her ribs cracked and the sword pierced straight through her heart. Xiang swiftly removed the blade from her chest and flicked off her black blood. That was the last she saw as her vision started to darken, the last thought she had was for the system. *This enough yet? Am I free to go home?*

But she found no answer before darkness took her. Then, just as quickly Kat jarred into consciousness. She found herself in her meditative state. Her pool of water was churning, but the disturbance was far away from where she felt her own mind to be. In fact, only the ripples it was causing could be sensed, whatever it was that was going on was too far away.

What happened? Why am I asleep? What's going on. Kat tried to leave her pond, but find her mind screaming in complaint. *No. I need to find out what's going on.* Kat pushed against the barrier that seemed to be preventing her from waking up.

This time, it almost seemed to plead with her. While the barrier held strong, it only pushed back with a light touch, as if begging her to rest. *But not right now. I need to find out. I need to see this through, or find out how dead I am at the very least.* When Kat pushed into the barrier a third time, she almost heard a sigh, and then felt herself falling back into her body.

It wasn't pleasant for less than a second, then all the pain hit her at once. Kat's body spasmed, as she twitched and writhed on the ground. Eventually, she steeled herself and wrenched her eyes open. This only caused more pain though, as the light stabbed at her eyes.

What... what is going on? I can move clearly, else I wouldn't have been writhing in pain but suffering in silence... system what is going on?

User Kat has been healed and is recovering demonic energy, enough so to move, but User Kat got dangerously low on energy and was severely damaged. User Kat needs time to properly recover.

As if in complaint to D.E.M.O.N.S request, a large explosion rang out. *Not... not yet. Are there any side effects if I keep pushing?*

The pain will increase, and the time needed for it to dim will increase as well. Further injury may cause harm. Without full knowledge of User Kat's regeneration, it might not be able to activate and prevent damage. Chances are approximately 50/50 for either option.

Why haven't I been pulled out yet if it's that bad?

User Kat has yet to suffer a fatal or permanent wound. Even this damage, while great, is not permanent nor does it have the potential to be.

Kat tried to laugh at the information, but all that came up with a bubbling cough and a thick wad of dark blood that she spat from her mouth. This too, seemed to be funny to Kat, but yet more blood was ejected from her frame.

Kat rolled herself away from the mess and tried to sit up, her body screamed bloody fury, but she pushed herself to her feet. *If permanent damage is to be dealt, will I be sent out before it happens?*

Unclear. Demon extraction is an automated process. With User Kat's strange combination of origin, regeneration, energy recharge rate, lack of formal training, full record of demonic, the extraction process may be delayed.

Great. What about if I just ask to go home now?

User Kat would be sent back, likely without payment.

Just great. What if I get injured and sent back?

User Kat's actions would go under review and may receive payment.

Kat took a step forward towards where she could hear the sounds of battle. *Guess I'll be pushing on then.* Kat felt for her energy and found that it was full, but fluctuating wildly. It dropped between full and around eighty percent every few seconds, and never sat at one amount for long.

Well that's weird. Kat took another step and felt pain shoot through her body again. Kat ignored it though, in favour of circulating her energy once again. It tried to refuse, causing pins and needles in the areas it passed over, moving at a sluggish pace compared to normal and amplifying the pain she was feeling, but she also felt herself speed up.

In response, Kat let her aura flare, pushing it out into the world, her mind screamed for just a second, before a strange calm fell over Kat. She could feel the pain, and choose to ignore it, and she could feel her aura leaking across the compound like a cracked basin. *Welp, hopefully that isn't a problem.*

Kat pushed forward 'sprinting' towards the inner compound. Her movement more an odd collection of rapid steps than sprinting but she made good time. When she started to climb the hill towards the door, she thought maybe to fly the rest of the way, but as soon as she twitched her wings, a pain much worse than before rocked her body nearly forcing her to the ground. *Right no flying for me.*

As she climbed higher, she could see the compound door had been cut in half. It had been sliced in a square pattern roughly Xiang's height in dimension. *Well I guess it's clear who did the cutting. Though I dread having to duck through that...* Kat shivered, and was met with more pain as a present.

Dammit, why does this even hurt so much. I'm pretty sure the gravel was worse... maybe... hopefully...

User Kat is in additional pain because of multiple healings and the destruction of User Kat's heart. While it is not necessary, it helps regulate the flow of demonic energy. Thus, while User Kat's heart was repairing itself, the energy ran slightly wild with neither a heart nor mind to direct it causing even more damage to repair.

Of course. Kat checked her reserve again just as she stepped through the door, ignoring the pain in her back, but a new pain came to her mind to join it. Her reserves were decimated. Just moving over had already consumed at least forty percent of her energy, she was left with a fluctuating amount between forty and fifty percent.

What the hell?

User Kat is currently unable to properly control User Kat's demonic energy and it unable to efficiently boost User Kat's strength.

Fuck, this just had to get worse. Kat looked up at the fight she had been hearing from outside and her face fell. *You know world, you can really stop now. I don't think I want it to be any worse than this.* Xiang was standing in the centre of the courtyard deflecting blow after blow from the brothers, and taking slow steps forward, but it was his goal that worried Kat the most.