

DEMONS 111

Chapter 111: eltit a fo kniht t'ndluoc I

I guess Thyme's just having a bit of fun. Kat took another sip of her drink. It's pretty nice though I have to admit, tastes a bit like pears... Oh, Oh "Hey Green what does your drink taste like?" asked Kat

"Um, fruit? Didn't you say that already Kat?" asked Green

"Yes but I suspect it tastes different to everyone" said Kat "Mine tastes like pear for example"

"Oh, yes it seems your right then. Um, mine tastes like serella" said Green.

Oh bother, I don't recognise that. Did Green recognise pear? Um, let's get a second opinion. "Hey Nixilei what does yours taste like" asked Kat

"Just plain water" said Nixilei

I have no idea how to react to that answer. What does that even mean for this drink. What does it say about Nixilei if it takes on our favourite flavours or something.

"Now that everyone's had a drink can we get back to the questions" asked Skye

"Calm down, why are you in such a rush" said Jim

"I just think this is pretty cool. Sorry, I'm a bit excited I guess" said Skye

As Skye said the Ryo finished gulping down her drink "Ok I'm ready"

Kress glared angrily at the water in front of him and the rest of the contestants not willing to join the conversation.

"Seems it's fine to start up again there are only a few questions left in this round. The next question is. During the maze, the second event, Green entered the Temple of Riddles. She was asked a series of questions by the guardian of the place. What was the answer to the second riddle"

Skye instantly hit the buzzer "The riddle was what runs around a city but never moves and the answer to it is a wall"

"No hesitation, I like it Skye. So we are still in the same round, but the next few questions won't just be about our tournament but about the Tournament of Five and some of it's history" said Thyme

"Thyme, can you provide me a fake set of glasses for this section" said Ryo

"Sure thing" said Thyme throwing over a pair of glasses with fake lenses

Clapping his hands together Thyme looked to the rest of the contestants for a moment to see if they were going to say anything but when nothing was forthcoming Thyme began to speak. "Firstly, what was the name of the first team that won the original tournament"

Skye and Ryo both pressed the button down in an instant before heads snapping to each other to see who was first. "Ryo, just barely edged you out there Skye. You first Ryo, what is your answer" said Thyme

"The very first competition was actually a draw intentionally to further cement the end of the war. They did this by stacking the games and teams in such a way that they'd end up with the same number of victories. Back in the original tourney each race fielded only one team, and there was no preliminaries" said Ryo pushing her glasses further onto her face.

"Excellent answer Ryo. Correct and even with more information than required" said Thyme.

"Next question. After existing for many years the Tournament of Fives opened up to allow for multiple teams applying by themselves. This was a cause of contention mostly due to the varying rates at which the races age and was deemed unfair by some. Who was the person behind this change and why did they want to make it" asked Thyme

Once again Skye and Ryo pressed the button at almost the same time followed slightly by Jim, and Kress didn't even attempt to answer. "Skye, it's all yours" said Thyme

"It was introduced in the 12th iteration of the tournament and the one to propose it was a dwarf by the name of Reckal, no clan affiliation. Originally he was met with massive pushback, but he simply beat everyone else on the committee in a fight and said that anyone could show great strength if allowed and none should be barred from entering the tournament" said Skye

"Perfect answer" said Thyme "Next question. After running the competition for over a century the first dryad entered and competed. This was the first and last year a dryad would ever compete. Who was it and why were they banned"

Nobody put moved for the button. They all glanced around wearily. Ryo and Skye especially were eyeing each other, waiting for the slightest movement in each other's hands signalling they were about to try and make a guess. Jim watched them both warily as well, but wasn't as ready on the button.

Kress however eyed his button suspiciously and would occasionally sneak glances at Thyme every now and then. *nOveInExt.CoM*

"Thirty seconds" said Thyme as the big numbers appeared above his head.

Kress gaze on Thyme intensified. *Wait, was it Thyme? Could Thyme be the dryad they are talking about?*

Kress glanced at the others and noticed none were really paying attention to him. While they were distracted with each other and the timer was counting down he debated over pressing it. His hands wavered over the button until he glanced at the scoreboard and saw himself firmly in last place.

Slamming his hand down on the button he looked Thyme dead in the eyes and said "It was you. You were the one dryad and you competed, by yourself and still won"

Thyme burst into laughter "Oh that's funny" said Thyme as they slapped their hands against their knees. Thyme kept this laugh going until it was getting awkward for everyone else before finishing "And also entirely correct. Yes that's right, I stand before you the only person in history to win the games by themselves. Of course, dryads were quickly banned from the tournament of fives, which is fair considering it is for the weaker members of each species before they truly gain power

"Good guess Kress. Now for the next question. Over the course of the tournament, there have been a number of powerful and unique rewards for the winners. What was the prize for the 12th tournament, the-" Thyme was cut off when once again Skye and Ryo pressed their buttons not a hairs breathe apart from each other.

Thyme motioned towards Ryo to speak "It was one piece of armour, or a weapon crafted by Reckal himself. Or at least, that is what he said was the prize. The truth of the matter was that his wife made the gear in his stead, but she was the much superior smith, Relanna the Anvil"

"Correct once again Ryo. Now for the final question in this round, and please listen carefully it is quite a long one" said Thyme. "Over the course of history, the Tournament of Five has been successfully completed almost every year since the great war. Despite this though, there have in fact been a few times where the tournament failed to conclude or failed to start. I need you to name three of those times and explain the specifics as to why the tournament was unfinished"

Skye and Ryo pushed their buttons shortly followed by Jim. "Skye, you first" said Thyme

"The three I will mention it, the great plague, the eternal winter, and the great collapse. The great plague was during the 15th tournament and as the name entails, a great plague ravaged the capital the tournament was meant to be held in, thus leading to the cancellation of the tournament that year

"The second was the eternal winter. During the 28th tournament the weather had become so fierce that it was impossible to travel unless you were part of the inner continent. The tournament was suspended so that the organisers could protect the cities and villages from the cold and help grow enough food to make it through the weather. The final one is the great collapse. This was during the 88th tournament and is famous because during the grand finale the arena collapsed into an ancient ruin. Instead of continuing with the tournament the teams opted to explore as the grand finale but none returned" said Skye

Thyme sucked in a breath "Ooh I'm afraid that's wrong Skye. Ryo your next"

"Well, the great plague did happen, however it was actually the 115th tournament not the 15th" Ryo then went on to explain the eternal winter and the great plague before "And the final one I will mention is the 3rd tournament. The third tournament's catastrophe has no name, because it was no great event, simply there was a mistranslation and they held the fourth tournament instead. For some reason nobody noticed this error until after the tournament had concluded and thus the 3rd tournament never happened"

Thyme raised a hand and then lowered it again. "Hmm, I'm, well I guess that's correct actually. Assuming it's true, but I do believe I've heard something like that one moment" said Thyme as they brought out a small stick and put it to their ear.

"Chronicler? Yes, can you confirm if the 3rd tournament ever happened?" asked Thyme

"No, I'm not joking" said Thyme "A mistranslation was the issue"

"Yes, yes, ok thank you" said Thyme putting away the branch "Ok the Chronicler has confirmed your correct. Five points to you Ryo"

"Wait you know the Chronicler?" shouted Nixilei

"Yes" said Thyme simply

"What are they like" said Nixilei agitated

"Please calm yourself. If you wish we can discuss it later, but for now, we have the final round of our little quiz to prepare for" said Thyme grinning madly

Chapter 112: And the Winner Is?!

"This final round will be a bit different. Similar to the third round, anyone can jump in and answer for any question. Except, each question will be worth a progressively higher amount of points starting at 3. The catch is though, if you attempt an answer, succeed or fail, you are not allowed to make a guess for the following question. If there is only one person in a round, they get two chances to guess the correct answer. If there is a round nobody would be in, everyone gets a chance to guess again

"As the points get higher, the questions will also be getting harder, so waiting around might be correct, or it could let the win get snatched away from you. Also, unlike the previous round where you could interrupt me, the full question needs to be said before you can press the buzzer. Pressing it too early will disable it for 1 second. Finally, the first person to reach 30 points wins, everything, this includes points from all previous rounds" *N0veLnext.cOm*

"Just to bring everyone up to speed though, Skye is on 18 points, Ryo is on 22 points, Jim is on 9 points and Kress is on 12" said Thyme to which everyone else nodded along in understanding. "To be honest, not sure why you guys needed that reminder considering the scores are behind your head at a truly massive size but anyway, let's get onto the first question. Name every member of your own team"

Everyone was a bit shocked at the quick transition into question but even then, Kress managed to hit the button just as Thyme finished speaking, much faster than Skye and Ryo who trailed behind slightly with Jim last.

"Green, Gareth, Nixilei... and uh Kat" said Kress

"I'm afraid that's wrong, next, Skye" said Thyme

"Wait what! How was I wrong" said Kress. Thyme just waved their hands and a bunch of clothe wrapped around Kress" mouth

"Skye, continue" said Thyme as Kress struggle to pull away the cloth

"Dusk, Clive, Eva, Kutruph and Skye" said Skye

"Correct" said Thyme who dismissed the cloth around Kress mouth who seethed at the realisation of who he'd missed in the team. "Oh, and let me clarify, just pushing the button won't eliminate you from guessing in the following round, it's only if you give me an answer

"Anyway, the next question is. During the maze, the second event, what was the final room to be found and explored by any explorer, and who was it that discovered it" said Thyme

Ryo and Skye shrugged their shoulders and watched Jim and Kress as they both glared at each other with hands over the buttons. Jim made to press his button slamming it down, but Kress quickly

responded by speeding past and beating him to the punch, only to look over and see Jim completely retract his hand instead of pressing the button.

Thyme nodded in Kress' direction as Kress clicked his teeth in annoyance "Was is the locked room that Green found?"

"That is wrong I'm afraid" said Thyme. "Jim, would you like to attempt an answer"

"No thanks, I'm good" said Jim

"Ok, that means this round is over, and nobody gets the 4 points. The correct answer was the Hall of Judges, as found by Green" said Thyme

"Wait, but she went to that locked room afterwards" said Kress angrily

"Yes, but she explored that room before the hall, thus it isn't the last room found and explored" said Thyme "The next question, worth 5 points is, please name every obstacle from the obstacle course event"

Skye slammed the buzzer down as soon as Thyme started to say event, making her much faster than the others. Ryo held back, and only after Jim locked in as well did Ryo do the same.

"Skye" said Thyme

"So, first was the platforms you had to jump across, then came the rope ladder wall, after that was those hanging vines, followed by um I'm not sure exactly what they are called, but you split everyone up into different rooms and let walls with their figures in different poses rush at them... except no one did that properly anyway, Clive and John busted through it, Grace stood sideways and let most of them pass her that way and Green jumped through them all. Finally, there was that forest of blades, and I'm not sure if that wall of blades at the end that you needed to open counts as an extra obstacle, but I'll say that as well"

"You are correct Skye, and with that you are our first contestant to be within the winning distance, with 26 points. Any question you get correct from now on is your victory" said Thyme "But alas, this next question worth 6 points is not one you can compete for"

Huh, so what's Ryo suppose to do then. She has 22 points so regardless of if she gets the 6 points or not she needs to win the 8 point one. Is it better to try and do both, or does she need to participate in the 7th one just in case? But then she still needs two...

"So, for our next question, drumroll please" said Thyme as they made a copy just for the drumroll "During the orb event, there was something carved into the walls. What was it and if there were multiple things, what were they each"

Ryo slammed the button down, long before anyone else and started to answer before Jim and Kress even got close to the button "The walls all had each competitor and how they dealt with each trail you offered. They continued until the final round which never got their own carving, and the round involving illusions had the busted walls in place" said Ryo slowly as if already regretting her answers

"Correct" said Thyme "Now Ryo join the one more to win club, but alas once again, you are barred from this round so it's up to Skye to see if she can take home the crown"

"To potentially win it all!" yelled Thyme bringing down a microphone from seemingly nowhere "What was one of my two recommendations I made to Gareth when I recommended food for him to order during the third round of the tournament, the orb" said Thyme

Skye quickly went to press the button, but instead it was Jim who got their first. His hand flashing towards the button so fast that Kat couldn't even provide her eyes demonic energy in time to watch it fall.

Before Thyme even started speaking Jim answered "Canyon Peppered, Vexbrute Steak, that has been tenderized to perfection, and the second thing was Bocriogella Salad mixed with Sugio Vumice, and topped with Southern Island Galangal"

"Ah, I only need one thing" said Thyme

"Did I stutter?" asked Jim raising one eyebrow to look at Thyme.

"Ahhhh" said Thyme drawing the word out before splitting in two and pretending to have a conversation with themselves. "I guess that's a pass? I mean I only asked for one, but I guess I never punished extra information before

"So, this next round is worth 8. Skye and Ryo are up for the win, but Jim can't participate in this round, so it's all up to Kress to prevent either from winning. Can he possibly do it? Or is he doomed to lose?

"Ok, for the win, for the glory, for the title of first ever Quiz champion, YES that's right nobody has ever done a quiz before" yelled Thyme into his microphone. Kress got ready on the buzzer. It didn't matter what the question was or if he knew it, he just had to be the first to press the buzzer. Waves of mana rolled off Kress as he pushed all he could into his right arm and readied it above the buzzer waiting for the end of the question.

Thyme pulled out a large set of scales, which made a thud as he dropped them onto the ground "If I place a kilogram of iron ore on one side and a kilogram of leaves on the other side, what's the heaviest?"

Kress slammed his hand into the button and answered without thinking "Iron"

"Oh, I'm afraid that's wrong Kress" said Thyme as Ryo and Skye both pushed their buzzers with Ryo just edging Skye out.

"Ryo, for the win? What is the heaviest?" asked Thyme

"They both weigh the same" said Ryo

Thyme took in a deep breath, then let it all out. "That is..." said Thyme "Still wrong"

"Wait what" said Ryo and Kress at the same time

"Skye, take it away" said Thyme

"The scales, because it has two kilograms of extra weight on it" said Skye

"That's correct, congratulations to Skye for the winner of the final round" said Thyme clapping their hands and shooting streamers from the scoreboard as a spotlight shone down upon Skye.

"This is bullshit" growled Kress, but a sharp look from Thyme quickly shut him up.

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Chapter 113: Frozen in Thyme

Kat let out a breath she didn't know she was holding. *That was actually somewhat tense. I guess I somehow expected Kress to win, but I guess he really wasn't suited to this kind of event. Actually how are these events scored anyway? I assume we are winning considering we've got three wins, but by how much? Does this last round coming up even matter?*

Kat's thoughts were interrupted by Thyme "Let's just clean up a little first" Thyme waved their hands across the stage and as the hands passed over the various bits and pieces sunk back into the ground leaving the quiz contestants standing in an open field once again.

Everyone had been reverted to their previous outfit except Kress, who immediately had something to say about it "Why the hell am I the only one still in a dress?"

"Well, everyone else will find it in the spacial bag they were provided, you however, will be keeping that on a bit longer as punishment for being rude" said Thyme

Kress tried to object but Thyme spoke up once again "I understand you might not be happy with me here, but please understand, the lack of respect you have shown me, while something I don't particularly care about, will be an issue in the future if you keep this up. I think this is a memorable and relatively light punishment considering the formal setting and the amount of power I wield. Do you understand?"

Kress sighed and nodded. Despite his anger at Thyme, the tree was right. This was supposed to be an extremely formal gathering with a long and respected tradition. His anger was unbecoming of him, if not entirely unjustified.

"Well, now that we've addressed that, we have one final event" said Thyme, who then paused and raised a hand into the air, several magic circles burst forth into being surrounding Thyme. They numbered in the tens, and was more than Kat had ever seen in one place, and was also the first time Kat had actually seen the dryad use sigils so obviously "Just a moment"

And the world stopped. Everyone froze in place and nobody moved an inch, they even seemed to have stopped breathing. Except for two, Kat and Thyme. *What's going on? Why is everyone frozen, and why am I still fine? Is this one of my demon powers?*

Before Kat could worry too much though Thyme spoke up. "Don't be too alarmed, I've just suspended their perception of time. I originally had a plan for the final round, but I realised that I failed to account for your true sight. Can you give me a moment to work a few more spells?"

"Sure?" said Kat somewhat confused.

Thyme just nodded and got to work, summoning a three new sigils that spun around Thyme in a lazy circle before stopping. The sigils disappeared and a thin mist seeped out of the space they once were. Snaking around each of the contestants standing around, it enveloped them all before fading into the

background. To Kat's eyes they still had a sort of misty tinge around them but it wasn't like she couldn't see them at all.

So... "What exactly was that supposed to do?" asked Kat

Thyme sighed. "It seems like it probably didn't work then. I suspected as much. See I had planned to turn everyone into more indistinct mist creatures and host a battle royal free for all. You could team up with a few people to try and get a mcguffin in the centre. The whole idea was how you wouldn't know who was who, and I thought it would be quite interesting. Of course the problem is you can still see everyone"

"Um, right, but I think the harder thing would have actually been hiding me from everyone else" said Kat

"Oh, what do you mean?" asked Thyme suddenly very curious.

"Well, I keep getting told it's really hard to hide my demonic features, so I take it that while you could do it, it'd be really hard" said Kat

"Hmm, well, do you mind? This is rather interesting to me" asked Thyme with a smile on their face.

"Sure go for it" said Kat

First Thyme summoned a basic sigil for disguise and tried to cast it on Kat. As the seconds ticked by Thyme's smile got slightly more strained, until 10 seconds in they stopped that sigil and summoned three more in its place. These sigils all glowed with power and Kat could almost feel the mana pouring off of them as they directed themselves towards Kat, only to see Thyme frown.

Oh dear. Thyme split into three and dismissed the sigils again. Now each of the three Thyme's summoned five more sigils and poured a veritable tsunami through them. Kat felt the moment the spell activated, as the mana washed over her like crashing waves. The mana was so thick in the air that were the others not frozen in time even unaided they could see the faint shimmer of mana directed at Kat.

The Thyme's grit their teeth as the sigils began to rotate around themselves. Seconds passed and the mana didn't let up, constantly pouring itself towards Kat. She could feel it pressing against her skin, like a warm blanket. Her wings and tail felt compressed, like someone was trying to squash them down, but her horns were by far the worst. They felt like they were being painfully constricted.

The worst part was though, some primal part of her demonic heritage was screaming out against this. Kat felt her arms start to twitch. The desire to attack the thing generating those sigils pressed against her mind but she kept her arms down. *It's fine. I'm fine. There is no reason to attack.*

Still straining against her instincts to fight back and unleash her own demonic power, suddenly everything clicked. The sigils disappeared, Kat felt the mana wash past her and stop and two of the three Thymes collapsed onto the floor with the third barely standing.

Thyme took in a shuddering breath and pulled in some of the nearby mana. A few moments passed and the central Thyme looked fine once again, though there was an uneasiness to their demeanour. "That was... truly excessive. I've managed to cast an illusion around your demonic features, but you are right, that took more mana than it would take to construct that maze again, and without cheating this time

"And the worst part is, it doesn't even work on you, so you can't tell because you have true sight" said Thyme, calming down a bit "Though thank you, this was a rather interesting experience, and it's shown me that perhaps my illusions need more work than I'd thought"

How much mana even was that? I've never felt anything like that pressure. Even Thyme said it was excessive. Surely there is a better way right? System?

User Kat is somewhat correct. Demons are able to more easily influence their own appearances, and those with close bloodline ties. Using an energy type that is not Demonic Energy, will result in the spell being prohibitively expensive.

So, I can change my own appearance more easily? "Well Thyme I'm glad you... I'm not sure enjoyed yourself is the right word? So what is your plan now" asked Kat

"Well, my current plan is to regenerate the mana I just used on you. The next step is figuring out what to do for the final games now that it's clear I couldn't keep an illusion around you for the duration of the event while keeping my other spells I'd need active. That and of course the true sight" said Thyme "Do you perhaps have any suggestions?"

"Well, um, what were you going for?" asked Kat

"Well, I want this to be still a show of teamwork, but of trust and betrayal and uneasy alliances. I planned to have a separate prize for the final five, and then the final winner would of course get points for their team" said Thyme

Hmm. Kat spend her thoughts up so she could think it through. *What other options do we have? Actually pretty simply, why not just run the game without the identity hiding stuff.*

"Why not just keep the rules the same and remove the whole, you can't see who is who thing? If everyone starts in a random spot and you can have a few people make it to the end maybe you'd still get what you are looking for" said Kat

"Hmm, well perhaps, but I feel like people would be too inclined to meet up with their team. I know the God Crushers and Boring will certainly attempt it, and I suspect they can manage it in almost no time with a few abilities" said Thyme

"Well, why not make it so the final five, uh, make it four, all have to be from different teams?" asked Kat.

Thyme thought for a moment before nodding "That might just be crazy enough to work"

Chapter 114: Pre-round Prep

"Ok, yes, that's what I'll do. Thank you for the input Kat" said Thyme. "Let me just dismiss the illusion around you, and can you stand slightly more to the left? Great right there"

With Kat in position Thyme dismissed the spell on everyone else and continued to speak "Thank you for giving me that moment. Now, as I was saying, we are going to be starting the final round, which I've changed rather drastically from tradition. Normally it'd just be a round robin tournament with each time fighting against each other, but I decided that was boring.

"Instead, we are going to compete in a large free for all" said Thyme spreading their arms out and waiting for a reaction. When mostly confusion was forthcoming the explanation continued. "Right, so, I'll be splitting you all up and dropping you off at random locations in an arena I've made somewhere else

"The goal is to survive to be the last one standing, or alternatively an orb will spawn, somewhere near the centre of the arena. Up to four people can activate it, to transport them to the second round. Here is the catch though, the orb cannot be used by two people in the same team. So, your best bet is to team up with some others from the enemy teams.

"Getting to the second stage will net your team some points as well as a special reward prepared by my personally. The final battle will then be another free for all, in a small arena, with the last man standing being declared the winner. Winning the second round only nets you points for the tournament overall

"Now, I'm before the round officially begins, I'll be giving you a chance to speak amongst yourselves. Once everyone is done speaking, I'll commence the teleportation. When you arrive you will be inside of a tree. This is for your protection. You can knock on the wall three times and it will open up, or if you try to wait for more than five minutes, you'll be kicked out automatically.

"It shouldn't be a major concern, you'll all be separated by quite a distance, you see, I may have commandeered an island for this little challenge of mine, so I have to make the most out of that space. Oh, and it might be just a smidge later in the day when you arrive, the island is pretty far from here.

"So obviously no questions, right? Good? Good! Oh, and while your chatting it will be in soundproof bubbles, we have a few contestants with ears a bit too good" said Thyme as they summoned a small sigil, and covered everyone in a transparent dome, with little blue lights around the edges to mark the limits of the soundproofing

Well, that was quite a lot to get handed to me at once, and I got extra time compared to the others. Kat looked around for some indication of what the others were feeling but it was hard to tell. Green was still hiding behind her, Gareth had a rather neutral face, Kress was still angry but that was probably related to the dress. And Nixilei looked the same as she always did.

Kat let her gaze rest on Gareth hoping he'd have some input but it was actually Nixilei who spoke up first. "So Kress, about th-

"Not. One. Word" said Kress

"It-" started Nixilei "I said. Not. One. Word" said Kress.

"Nice dress" said Green and Kress whipped around and drawing the swords that had been returned to him towards Kat and Green. *Green don't get me involved in this.* When a wall of earth appeared to block Kress strike.

"Enough, and we'll ignore the dragon in the mountain for now" said Gareth glaring pointedly and Nixilei. Kress let out a huff of air but didn't say anything else.

"Now, is there anything we need think about for this event? We aren't really able to work with each other, so I'm not sure why we've been giving so much time to speak" said Gareth

"I-" started Nixilei once again until Kress turned their swords on Nixilei. In response Nixilei summoned three sigils of her own and kept speaking "I" Nixilei glared down at Kress daring him to interrupt "Believe it's because we aren't necessarily unable to work together"

"Elaborate" said Gareth

"Well, the orb can be used by four people total, and they have to be from different teams, but there is nothing stopping us wiping out everyone else on the island first and then picking someone from amongst us to go to the second stage by themselves" said Nixilei

"Yeah, but that idea's shit" said Kress

"Correct" said Nixilei

"Wait what?" said Kress

"Well, if we did team up, the others can very easily team up against us and then share three spots. In fact, because we are currently in the lead points wise for the overall tournament it is even more likely that given the chance, especially if we meet up as a group, the others will collapse on us" said Nixilei

"Do we care though? We can probably beat them all" said Kress

"Sure, maybe we can" said Nixilei "But the problem is, can we beat them all and prevent one of them sneaking off to grab the orb, or even a couple of them? I'm not quite sure how this orb mechanic is supposed to work, so maybe there is a big time limit on the whole event and they can just stall us"

Kress great his teeth "Dammit your right. So what do we do?"

"Well, first things first I recommend you find an alternative to that dress" said Nixilei and Kress threw his sword in response which was quickly slowed by Nixilei's spell who then grabbed it as it fell.

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"I'm giving you serious advice here" said Nixilei tapping the sword against her hand "You have no idea if you will have your clothes returned when we teleport, and you can't run around a deserted island in dress shoes and a ball gown"

This didn't help to diminish Kress' anger, but when Kat looked at his eyes, she saw a small glint of fear as they darted between the sword and Nixilei. *What is going on here?*

"Nixilei's right, whatever else that's probably something you should work on Kress" said Gareth.

Kress growled in response but didn't say anything. Nixilei continued "The second main point is what do we do when we encounter each other. We could fight, or just calmly leave the area instead heading in opposite directions and will this change if we have people with us. Let's say I've teamed up with Grace and we both run into Kat. What is the plan of action?"

"Hmmm" mumbled Gareth "I see your point. I think if everyone is alone running should be the best option. Maybe a short discussion but nothing more, we don't want to give the others a reason to gang up on us"

"I say we fight, who cares if it's two against one. If I have to fight them both I'll go for it" said Kress

"I'll run regardless I think" said Green

"Of course you'd run, that's about all your good at" said Kress

"At least she won her event, oh wait, she won two events. How many did you manage?" asked Nixilei

"Ha, I could have done just as well in her events if not better. Just because I got stuck with that stupid quiz" said Kress who suddenly felt a shiver down his back. Kat looked past Kress and saw time staring at his back.

Note to self, the noise cancelling enchantment doesn't stop Thyme. "How would you have gotten through those knives? Plus could you honestly say your as fast as Green when she was navigating the maze" said Nixilei

"I'd just fight them all and steal the orbs. All Green had to do was run" said Kress

Gareth slammed his gauntlets together and spoke "Guys, stop it. We need to make sure we know the plan going into this. Stop getting side-tracked"

"Look" said Kress "Thyme said this event was a free for all, and I intend to treat it as such. I'll attack whoever approaches me and I'll beat them, it's just that simple. Do we really need a convoluted plan thought up by the pixie?"

"Kress, despite everything this is a team event" said Gareth

Kress sighed. "Look man, you're overthinking this. We're stronger than them. We know we're stronger, and if we just take out everyone we see nobody can stop us. It's really just that simple"

"Honestly" said Nixilei "He isn't so far off. Sure we can come up with a few plans, but at the end of the day it will come down to our fighting prowess. As long as it isn't us against all of them, we should have no problems"

Gareth shook his head "If that's really how you both want to play this"

Chapter 115: Timmy!

I guess that's that then. These guys are the professionals after all. Thought Kat as she looked over her team members faces. *Ok who am I kidding, I have to wonder how they get anything done... is it the fact this is a competition that does them in? Like if they didn't have an audience it would be fine?*

Or is it because Thyme has taken this in a very different direction to normal? They're still certain that we are the strongest team, and I don't necessarily disagree, but it sounds like a lot of points are riding on this last match. Is it really fine to just go with the simple plan of 'don't worry about it just fight people'.

And even that is a concern. I have no desire to fight Nixilei or Gareth, and I'm not sure I actually could fight Green. Ha, my one weakness cute things. Though that's another thing, we didn't even discuss team composition. Like, I feel as though you'd really want one of the healers, and a scout can fulfill a lot of jobs.

Kat took another glance at everyone's faces, but it seemed worry wasn't even on their minds. *I guess I am overthinking this then. When did I start worrying about these sorts of things so much anyway. Well, no, it's because this is a job now. I'm supposed to help them win.*

Well, that also isn't true, I'm only being paid to be here. Kat took a deep breath and let her worries escape as she exhaled. As the air left Kat's body her aura gained a light sharpness that was missing before. Her eyes contained the faintest trace of purple and unnoticed to Kat, her mouth had curled into the barest hint of a smile.

The Unfortunate Four took one last look at each other before nodding and turning towards Thyme. It was only a moment later that the sound barrier dropped, and Thyme stepped back into the centre of the groups. *Of course, Thyme could have just cast his time freeze spell again so we weren't waiting around, but I wonder if that would be a waste of mana.*

"Well, it looks like your all ready. Just two final things for you all. Firstly, just saying the words 'Thyme, I wish to withdraw from the competition' will have you teleported to a spectator's booth for the rest of the round. This will also happen if you get knocked out or sustain a killing blow.

"Secondly, I wish you look wherever you might end up. While you can only end up in a batch of 20 spots, which one you end up in not even I know. Good luck to you all" said Thyme

Kat didn't see and sigil, but she did feel the mana enveloping her. A split second of nothing and Kat was back in the stick darkness punctuated by the occasional flashes of colours should never have existed. Pressing in on the sides Kat felt constricted and warped.

Space continued to twist for around thirty seconds until a new darkness enveloped Kat. It didn't have the same feeling of wrongness, but Kat still shivered trying to shake of the awful feeling that clung to her like a bad smell.

Kat shivered again and instinctually ran a quick flash of demonic flame across her skin and outfit, theoretically burning away any unwanted elements that might have lingered on her. Of course, the fact Kat's powers fire froze things probably meant the feeling of cleanliness afterwards was something of a placebo

Yeesh. I hate that. Whatever Thyme uses to teleport isn't right. At least I don't have to... shit. I'm going to have to go back through it once the rounds over, and maybe even before depending on how the round works.

Well, standing in this darkness isn't going to get me anywhere. Kat reached out a hand to search for the exit. Coming into contact with a strangely smooth surface Kat knocked on it three times. Just as the third knock finished the front half of the tree swung open revealing... more trees.

Gingerly stepping out of the tree and carefully navigating her wings around the edges of the small opening that clearly hadn't been made with wings in mind Kat found herself surrounded on all sides by trees that stretched into the sky.

As Kat stepped onto the ground, she heard a sound behind her. Spinning in place Kat saw the tree she'd just exited sink into the ground. Just as it appeared to have disappeared completely a small shape made its way to the surface.

Slowly it formed a face and Kat could more easily recognise the figure, it was a very small version of Thyme though, with a much larger head than normal. "Um, hi?" said Kat waving at the thing.

The small Thyme waved back "Ok, um, what are you doing here" asked Kat

In response the small Thyme took out its left eye and held it up proudly. *Seems it still has Thyme's sense of humour* "So you're here to watch then?"

The small Thyme nodded. "Ok, do you want to come with me then?" asked Kat

Once again, the small Thyme nodded. Kat bent down to pick up the small critter and found it easily fit on her hand. *Now how should I keep you around.* Kat's first instinct was to place the Thyme into a pocket, of which she had none. Kat's second and much better idea was to place it just behind her horns so that it could sit on her head and use the horns to help keep balance if it even needed something like that.

"Well Timmy, I guess we should figure out where we are" said Kat. No response was forthcoming from Timmy(?) but that was to be expected considering its lack of speech thus far.

Kat brought out her wings and started to lift herself into the air. Whatever her weight limit for flight might have been Timmy, seemed to hardly matter at all, and the ascent was rather easy. That was until Kat reached the canopy and realised a slight issue. *NOVELnext.cOm*

Right, so, what's the best way to get through that. Kat examined the dense leaves keeping her trapped. *I'm sure I can break them but can I do it without disrupting my wings. That's really something I should find out. Clearly my wings are at least partially responsible for my flight, but if they were everything I doubt I could fly.*

So how do I go about this. Powering her eyes up a bit Kat tried to look into the distance but found the limiting factor was the ample number of trees blocking her eyeline and not a lack of energy on her part. Ok so I have to break through these leaves then.

Wait can't I just blast them?

Building up a dense flame in her hand Kat held it up towards the canopy above her. Boy I hope this works. Releasing the hold on the energy it blasted out just like she wanted. A gout of flame shooting towards the trees and coated everything in a layer of purple flame.

The branches hit by the flame froze on impact, changing to crystal coated branches that shined in the moonlight. *Wait moonlight?*

Kat took another look at the sky to confirm that the sun had certainly set. *Dammit Thyme. Where the hell are we then?*

Kat couldn't even see the moon, just the faint light the trees let through, so she had no way to tell if the night had just started or if it was close to ending.

Shifting her focus once again to the frozen leaves Kat examined them closely at before steeling her resolve. Just as Kat was about to break through she remembered the passenger on her head.

Depositing Timmy on a nearby branch and giving him the suggestion to find a little bit of cover Kat took off towards the treetops. As Kat climbed she found she wasn't gaining speed quite like she wanted. *Seems my vertical speed isn't quite as good as horizontal.* Undeterred though Kat continued her charge.

Holding her arms outstretched in front of her to give her wings as much space as possibly Kat tried to build up her speed. Kat closed her eyes to protect them from debris just as she felt her arms make contact.

The tree branches readily gave way beneath her admitted lacky speed shattering at just the lightest touch as she pushed her way through. Kat kept up her speed as she demolished several layers of frozen wood, and much to her joy, it fragmented into such small pieces along the way that the few that did actually contact her wings were hardly a nuisance.

With one last crack Kat felt the cool breeze on her skin that was hardly present within the trees. Opening her eyes and letting the moonlight stream down upon her Kat took the first look at this arena she'd ended up in.

Chapter 116: The Trees are Everywhere

As Kat gazed out into the distance, at first it wasn't so bad, trees as far as the eye could see, which for a flying demon like Kat was actually quite far. So nothing to be concerned about right? Just a normal jungle? Well, applying a little demonic energy quickly dismissed that notion. As Kat added the energy to her eyes she started to see the tips of the trees turning white, until further in she could see frozen trees and hail buffeting the forest the deeper Kat looked.

Right, just a bit of light hail Thought Kat as she applied more energy to her eyes. Except instead of the weather calming down it swung in the complete opposite direction. Just past the frozen trees was a massive desert that even when Kat pushed more energy into her eyes couldn't see the end.

How large is the island? Thought Kat. Turning around to take in the view behind her Kat hoped to find the edge of the arena and was pleasantly surprised to find the water not so far away... at least until she realised, she still had her eyes fully charged.

Damn it. Why the hell is the place so large? It could take me days to reach the desert... Well, actually I guess if I can fly maybe it won't take me that long... Even still this is not what I expected.

Kat reverted her eyes back to their base state and tried to take a more general look around. *Yup, just trees as far as I can see.* The nearby forest was filled with densely packed foliage, that seemed to stretch unbroken into the distance if you ignored the large hole Kat had opened up below her feet, there were kilometres of trees in every direction.

What's the bet to find whatever the heck is at the centre I have to go through the frozen wasteland and the desert... And how does that make any sense anyway? Why are they next to each other.

Kat decided to lower herself a little bit to pick up Timmy. As she floated down, she found the small figure hiding under a leaf, to protect it from the debris. Once Timmy noticed Kat they waved back, and Kat scooped them up returning them to her head.

Once her passenger was safely secured Kat flew back up the canopy to try and find a tree slightly higher than normal to rest on and figure out what her plan would be going forward. That's when Kat noticed something strange.

It was so obvious above trees she couldn't believe she hadn't noticed it before. *Everything is the same height. The trees aren't even off by an inch.* Kat pushed herself to go even higher and started examining the treetops from a different angle.

What the hell is this? Now that Kat had a bird's eye view of the trees she could see that it wasn't just that they were the same height, they were the exactly the same tree. It was like Thyme had taken one as a base and just copy and pasted it until it covered the whole island.

What does this mean? Does it even matter that the trees all look the same? I mean, even if they didn't one area of the forest is much like another... Oh. I bet this would be hell for the scouts. If they don't go above the canopy, they won't be able to tell what direction they are heading. Man is it cheating that I can fly.

Welp might as well get on with it. Kat started to fly in the direction of the icy trees under the assumption that would lead her to the centre eventually and hoping the ocean she saw wasn't just a lake or something.

As Kat travelled it got harder and harder to keep her bearings. Even being able to see everything from above Kat noticed herself drifted off course. The only way she could tell, was by checking the distance with her eyes and noticing she'd stopped flying towards the ice.

Ok there is something going on here. Kat stretched out a hand and tried to feel for the wind and found it extremely lacking. Despite being so high above the trees, it was such a light breeze she had trouble believing that it was responsible for her changing course.

Dammit, there's probably an enchantment making me more confused. Is it because I'm flying? Or is it just over the whole forest even the ground. *nOvElN ext.coM*

Kat decided to use her powers to blast through the canopy and drift to the ground. One graceful landing later and Kat was still surrounded by endless identical trees. "Well little Timmy, looks like we're going to be lost one way or another"

Deciding to head forward Kat would place a hand on the trunks of the trees she passed. Pushing her flame into them and scorching a frozen mark on them as she passed. Kat tried using only the lightest amount necessary to leave an obvious mark, but the affected area was always rather large. *Maybe I need to get better at controlling that.*

As Kat continued, she looked back occasionally at her marks, but she didn't seem to be drifting off course. *But I feel like I am anyway.* Stopping in place Kat decided to trust her instinct. Crouching down next to the most recently frozen tree Kat lined her eye up with the edge and looked back with her eyes at full power.

Shit. As soon as Kat took the time to look like this it was more than obvious, she was curving away from her destination again. Just a few tens of trees back and already she could see her marks curving behind her eyeline.

"Well, back to the sky for us Timmy" said Kat. Placing her companion on the ground next to a the roots she blasted her way through the tops before coming to get her little friend again.

So, I need some way to stop drifting of course. I can probably just brute force it by keeping my eyes enhanced and watching the horizon, but then I can't really focus on what's going on next to me.

The other option is to... what is that?

As Kat had let her gaze wonder for any sort of landmark her eyes had locked onto one tree. To others it might not have looked strange, just one tree amongst the forest... but in a forest of identical trees that once noticed, made it impossible to miss even the slightest deviation.

Well, I know where I'm going. Kat checked the ice layer and the tree, and saw it was actually fairly out of her way. She'd have to take a pretty major detour all for a tree that just barely didn't fit the pattern.

To go or not to go that is the question. Pulling Timmy down from Kat's head she decided to ask for advice "So you think we should continue towards the ice or head for the funny looking tree"

Timmy gave a shrugging gesture. "What? You think both options are boring? Well I guess you could be right but look at all these trees. Isn't finding a unique one a big discovery?" asked Kat

Timmy just shrugged again "Can you even do anything other then shrug?" asked Kat

Timmy nodded incredulously at Kat "Wait, is it that you can't give me hints?" asked Kat

Timmy gestured with both hands looking at one then the other before shrugging "You can give me some hints but not really?" asked Kat

Timmy nodded energetically at this. "Right, well off to the funny looking tree it is then"

Kat picked up speed and shot towards the tree. Now that she had an obvious landmark in sight and didn't need to keep refreshing her eyes for it, keeping a straight line was rather easy. She still drifted occasionally to the left or right if she lost focus for a moment, but the tree made it much easier to correct this then before.

Progress however was slow. Even though Kat could tell she was moving with a fairly high speed on account of the rushing wind, the tree barely looked any closer. Kat tried to step up the pace but felt a resistance to it, less in the wind, but in her wings. *Damn, I guess this is my speed limit huh*

And so Kat flew along, making great time, but feeling the drag. It took her over thirty minutes until she could actually say the tree was fast approaching. Stopping just shy of the strange tree Kat blasted her way through the canopy once more and found herself on the ground.

Kat closed her wings and carefully inched towards the tree, unsure of what she would find. As she walked past the last few trunks a clearing came into view, with a much larger tree then the others surrounding it.

Of course, that wasn't what really caught her attention. That honour went to the bright red door.

Chapter 117: What's Behind Door Number 1

Kat stared at the door as she closed her mouth *You know, the tree looked a little different... I didn't expect such a drastic change when viewed from the ground. Why is there a door here?*

As Kat approached though, it was clear that the door was never intended for human- err demon use. The door itself sat at around waist height and only extended to her eyeline. Kat scanned the clearing for anything out of place as she slowly approached the door.

As Kat wrapped her hand around the door handle, she spun around scanning the tree line again but saw nothing. To Kat this whole situation smelled fishy and she was sure Thyme wouldn't just let such a prime opportunity for a trap of some kind go to waste.

Shrugging of her worries she carefully opened the door ready to jump back at the slightest sound. As the door opened Kat heard a slight creaking and sprung back as far as her legs would carry her. Charging them up she practically flew to the far end of the clearing backing up against one of the trees only to have the door creak fully open to reveal a box inside and no traps.

"But I look like a fool now, hey Timmy" said Kat to her passenger that had managed to keep its grip. Walking up to inspect the box Kat found that it didn't seem to be locked at all. Kat tapped the sides lightly just enough to lift the box and let it fall down.

Nothing happened. Kat flicked the lid of the box open slightly then braced herself... but nothing happened. Throwing the box open Kat then took a step back and looked into the nook searching for any form of traps.

Once again, nothing happened. So taking a step forward Kat investigated the contents of the box. Contained within was two things. The first was an ornate dagger covered in blooming flowers and vines that ran over the hilt. The second and stranger thing was a cassette tape.

Why is there a cassette tape here? Do these even work?

Kat grabbed the two things from the box and held them in her hands and started to examine them when she felt a light impact hit her horns.

Kat tried to raise her head to get a good idea of what had struck her but found herself stuck in place. Not forcefully, but there was something holding her horns in place. Reaching her arms up towards her head she quickly encountered a soft padding attached to her horns.

What is this?

Kat pulled her head back with a bit of force and felt her horns come loose. Now able to raise her head Kat eyed the device in front of her. It was a boxing glove attached to a string. Well, truthfully it was closer to a leather gauntlet, with stuffing leaking out of it, but the overinflated stuffing and the brightly coloured leather still left that impression.

In Kat's moment of distraction Timmy had jumped down and grabbed the cassette from Kat's hands. She managed to catch them just as they pushed the cassette into the base of the tree.

"Hello? Hello is this thing on? I sure hope so considering this is all pre-recorded" said Thyme's voice through the tree

"So, hopefully you like my little trap. Just a bit of fun to get you thinking on your feet, plus you got a cool weapon out of it? Right? I did leave this with a weapon right? Well, you can't answer me so I guess it doesn't matter. Hopefully the tiny versions of myself are finding you in good company

"They are a... bit of a work in progress really, so fingers crossed nothing horrible has happened. Anyway, that" the voice cut out with a clearly different take of Thyme jumped in "dagger" then the voice

switched back "Only has one special ability, but it's a good one. You can use it to make a shelter. Just place it in the ground and poof

"That should keep you safe in a few areas, though... let's just say it isn't well equipped to handle extreme weather"* Kat heard the tape continue for a few seconds longer, but the rest of the recording was just Thyme's laughter

I guess I'm not supposed to know about the frost area or the desert yet. Woops "I didn't think you'd have such a neat function Timmy. So do you make sure I can hear the recordings Thyme left?" Kat asked

Timmy nodded "Cool, uh, want a lift back to my head? You enjoy the view from there?"

Timmy nodded once again, this time though with a smile on its little face. "Oh, you can smile, nice" said Kat as she placed Timmy back on its throne.

Once Timmy was settled in, Kat took another look at the dagger. The blade had the faint impressions of blooming roses, and the edge looked rather dull but still gleamed in the night. The guard itself was a mixture of vines and roses, that gave way to the hilt that looked like the vines had broken through the original binding.

*So the question is, do I sleep? Kat looked at the sky, and failed to see the moon, of course it wouldn't have really helped that much. *No, I shouldn't. I'm just not tired and I don't really need to anyway.*

Backtracking a short way so she didn't have to break through yet more canopy Kat took to the skies and stared at the ground around her. *So what do I do then? Should I be trying find more of these stashes of weapons? Trying to find people? Am I so far out that I should just head to the centre until I accidentally bump into someone?*

Kat sighed. I'm doing that a lot lately too. Was I always so prone to sighing? Kat tried to look back on it but couldn't really bring up any notable examples.

And so Kat pondered as she sped towards the horizon. Keeping her eyes trained on the line of frozen trees and trying to avoid getting of course while also trying to spot anymore trees that were obviously out of place. She let her thoughts wonder as she flew just to keep her mind working as she travelled.

Of course, there's always the possibility I'm missing a tonne of stuff on the ground by traveling this way, but what choice do I have really? I may be fast but after seeing Green running through that maze, I know that despite my wings I'm not Green fast.

But does that matter? I can travel as the crow flies. I don't need to weave around the trees, and I can beeline straight for anything I see. Thought Kat as she slightly corrected her flight path once more. Ok, I can head mostly straight for anything I see. Curse this damn forest and its disorientation enchantment

Hey system is there anything I can do about it?

Would getting assistance from D.E.M.O.N.S not constitute cheating?

Oh now your going to go all rules lawyer on me huh?

Kat got no response. *Well, I guess that's kind of fair. Seriously though system can I do anything?*

User Kat is unlikely to be able to counteract the enchantment as it has been created by a vastly stronger being that greatly outclasses User Kat.

Then why can I still see through all the illusions?

User Kat seems to have an extremely rare trait known as True Sight. It grants unparalleled ability to see through illusions even physical ones. This ability is extremely rare, and even more so in such a low-ranking demon. Until it had been tested against the entity known as Thyme, it was unclear if Kat had truly received the full scope of True Sight.

Huh, does that mean I can charge people more when they summon me?

User Kat... *NOvelnext.Com*

Dismissing initial response

Calculating

Examining summoning parameters

Reaching conclusions

User Kat is in fact eligible for higher paying summonings, however this will not increase base rate for User Kat.

Well, a demon can dream.

As Kat got closer to the cold line she used less and less energy to keep it in her sights. And as she got closer, she found herself drifting of course much less. Finally, I can be rid of this damned enchantment. I'm not sure how cold it will actually be but surely whatever is in the next area can't possibly be worse than needing to course correct every thirty seconds because you realise you half turned around.

As Kat got closer and closer to the changing environment though, she rapidly noticed a new problem. While she might not have been unconsciously steering away from her goal anymore, the drastically increasing wind was taking up the mantle in its stead. The temperature hadn't dropped and there was no snow mixed into the not so little breeze, but looking ahead it was clear that wouldn't hold for long

It seems that Kat had traded one minor problem, for a potentially much larger one.

Well... shit

Chapter 118: Just a Little Forest Fire, Nothing to Worry About

"Right, so, do I want to try flying through a blizzard or consign myself to hours of walking slowly on the ground. Thoughts Timmy?" asked Kat as she stopped in place.

"Yeah, I guess your right, it is a bit dangerous to fly through a blizzard. Many would argue you shouldn't even walk through one" said Kat flying down to the ground.

Luckily, there was a break in the trees just before the environment shifted to endless frost so Kat didn't need to bust her way through yet more trees.

Landing on the ground Kat braced herself to cross the line that marked the break between forest and tundra. Taking one large step forward Kat was instantly hit with a wave of wind.

Hail flowed in from all directions, the wind howled and had easily double in speed. Even on the ground Kat felt the need to protect her face. The cold seemed to pervade her senses as she felt her fingers slowly freezing.

Kat looked down at her hands to assess the damage... but found her hands were perfectly fine. Well, they were still extremely pale, but that was normal for now. *What is going on here?*

Kat could feel wherever the pieces of hail had struck her and cold seemed to snake out from those spots, but now that Kat was focusing it seemed that instead of an evenly spreading cold from the impact site, it was only wherever she was struck.

Hey system, what's going on here?

D.E.M.O.N.S asks User Kat to clarify the question

Why do I feel so cold? I can't even see any frost building on my clothes.

User Kat should be highly immune to the cold due to User Kat's demonic flame and it's unique properties. Is User Kat certain that User Kat is actually being affected by the cold.

That... shit it's just like the forest isn't it. Wait aren't I immune to illusions?

User Kat is immune to visual Illusions. Assuming the cold is indeed a symptom of an illusion, it likely has no visual component and thus isn't negated

"Guess it's more mind games Timmy. Though I should be careful just in case I actually start to freeze" said Kat

Taking in her surroundings, Kat saw a winter wonderland. The frozen trees looked like beautiful crystal statues, and the light covering of snow and the ground made for beautiful scenery as it reflected the moonlight. *Wait, a light cover of snow?*

Kat looked around at the very obvious haling and realised there might be a few more tricks going on. Kat crouched and put as much energy into her eyes and hands as she could. Kat waited for the next chunk of ice to fly past. The moment it got within grabbing range Kat snapped out a hand and tried to softly catch it.

Contrary to her intentions though, the hail disappeared as soon as her hand made contact leaving only the feeling of impact and a lingering chill. *Shit, so this hail isn't even real... wait no that also can't be it. If they were just illusions, I'd be able to see through it.*

Ok now I'm even more confused. Kat waited for another piece of hail to get close and once again snatched it out of the air. This time, after the ice vanished the chill didn't even increase it just stayed concentrated on her hand.

So what's the point of this then? Thought Kat, flaring her wings to return to flying at full speed. This however was immediately met by condemnation by the wind as it pulled her sideways. Quickly closing her wings was enough to stop the pull, but not enough to correct her balance

Kat's tail shot out towards the nearest tree and halted her fall into the snow. Now in a rather awkward position half fallen over, only held up by her tail and a Timmy trying to complain by batter her head Kat decided against flying through this section.

Slowly pulling herself back to her feet Kat felt herself getting righted once again. *Ok, new plan... don't do that. Why did I suddenly think the wind was fake just because the snow was.* "Sorry about that one Timmy, my bad entirely" said Kat as she set off into the snow.

Every step Kat took she sunk deeper and deeper into the snow. It wasn't long before it had already reached her waste and it was getting awkward to push forward. "Timmy, any ideas? I can't just keep packing snow in front of me, it hasn't even been five minutes and I've already halved my speed" said Kat

"No Timmy, I don't know how to make snow shoes, plus I think they aren't supposed to be used for snow this deep" said Kat

"Well, look, I understand that maybe they'd be better than nothing, but what about the time loss it'd take to make them" said Kat

"Well, no, just making myself lighter by flapping my wings a bit wouldn't help, we saw what the wind would do already. Surely there is a better way" said Kat.

Kat studied the snow in front of her carefully. The real problem was just that it was so lightly packed. The slightest extra weight compacted the snow, but it required large awkward steps if she didn't want to be pushing through it.

"Ha, if only I could swim through land. That'd solve my problems... Wait Timmy you're a genius" said Kat. Unbeknownst to Kat, Timmy was looking at her like she'd lost her mind, considering they hadn't said a word this whole time.

Keeping her wings closed, Kat pushed demonic power into them with a little in her tail as well for good measure. Diving into the snow like, well, a diver Kat dipped into it... and promptly hit the hard ground.

"Ouch, ok, not to self, whatever my wings are doing they don't just make me light" said Kat as she picked herself up" said Kat.

"Wait, but my fire is ice... can I do something with that?" *Hey system, can I control my fire after it leaves my body?*

User Kat may possess that ability. It touches on Rank 2 territory, but with User Kat's strangely shaped flame it might not be out of the question if User Kat is using it on similar substances.

Ok, let's have a try then. Kat let her flame spread out from her arms. Timmy for its part took an unconscious step back as Kat just let the fire flow

Fire poured out of Kat and into the surrounding seen setting it ablaze with an eery purple light. To this point Kat had always kept a close handle on her flame, but now she wanted it to SPREAD.

Kat's fire burned as it coated the nearby Ice and Kat tried to direct it. Nothing happened. *Um, hmm...* Kat tried to imagine the flame like an extension of herself forcing it to move left and right to her commands... but the flames hardly reacted.

Ok, what next? Kat let a little more flame leak from her hands but tried to keep it connected to her physically. As soon as that piece of flame Kat felt herself connected to the fire in the area.

A weight crashed onto Kat's shoulders, like she was trying to lift a mountain. *Shit.* Kat was close, she could feel it, the fire was almost under her control, but instead the weight of it seemed to press down on her. *NoVēlnext.com*

Dropping the bit of flame that connected Kat and the surroundings she instantly felt the weight lift from her.

Ok, let's just leave this area a bit. Struggling through snow and flame, Kat tried to leave the area she'd covered with her fire but found that it had spread a little more than intended. Even after trudging through snow she'd hoped that five minutes away would have been enough to get away from the spread.

Uh... Did I do this?

Kat looked around and the still 'burning' area around her a little concerned. *This isn't spreading is it?*

Kat took the time to enhance her eyes to try and look over the flames to watch it. As Kat tried to look over the flames.

As she looked out into the distance, Kat was pleasantly surprised to see that they only continued for another hundred metres. *No wonder I was having so much trouble controlling it, I released A LOT of fire.*

Walking just a little further to escape the burning hellscape she had accidentally created and was now trying to ignore Kat took another attempt at controlling her fire.

Maybe I should have started simple, like levitating it a bit above my hand, and not, setting a section of the forest on fire... Is it on fire if it isn't burning?

Shaking her head and making sure not to look behind her Kat summoned a little bit of fire and tried to make it bob gently up and down in a slight motion... What actually happened was that it took off straight into the air before exploding in a shower of purple fire.

Oh dear... please don't set more things on fire.

Chapter 119: Fire Control

Luckily for Kat, once the embers exploded out, they quickly faded as they fell towards the ground, none even coming close to the treetops. *Small miracles I suppose.*

Focusing again on her palm Kat summoned a thin trickle of fire. Keeping it on the edge of her palm wasn't so hard. The ember would happily sit there, or even accept more energy if she desired. It seemed so in control as it rested above her hand. *So what is the problem with the stuff on the ground. Hey system why is this so hard?*

Demonic bodies have been refined over a near infinite process to perfectly handle and conduct Demonic Energy at peak efficiency. So much so that even just the top of User Kat's skin can command Demonic Energy with unparalleled efficiency when compared to other mediums like air, or ice.

So I'm like a coil of Demonic Energy cable, and while it's happy to travel along my body it doesn't like to leave?

User Kat is only partially correct however a more in-depth explanation requires a higher rank.

Of course it does. Well at least I have something to go on I suppose. Staring at the flame in her hand, Kat once again tried to reach out to it. Instead of trying for a light bob like before, she went for moving it to the edge of her hand.

Kat found it surprisingly easy. Just a bit of focus and the flame would move from the edge of her hand and back to the centre with the slightest nudging in its direction. Next Kat tried to run figure eights around her hand. This too was accomplished with minor effort from Kat.

Ok, so as long as I'm not ordering it to leave my hand it seems really docile. But what happens if I do this.?Kat directed the flame to hover a bit further above her hand. The moment it travelled to about 3cm above her hand Kat rapidly felt the flame trying to destabilise.

Kat focused intently on the flame, trying to hold it together. It was, unpleasant but not impossible. She could feel it threatening to expand at any moment, if her concentration was to lapse, but she knew if necessary, she could keep this up for a few hours yet.

But what does it want to do? I think the key here might be letting it have a bit of free reign. Kat relaxed her control slightly and felt the flame threatening to expand, and wobble slightly. Easing of the last of her control the flame expanded rapidly covering her entire vision... and then it was gone, as if it had never been there at all.

Ok, so when left alone demonic fire likes to explode... or just expand maybe? I think that might be it, expansion. Is that why the stuff behind me isn't going out? It grew as much as it could with the energy, I gave it then sort of claimed territory?

Kat pulled another ember into her hand. This time she tried to focus it's energy into the tip of the flame. Releasing it into the air Kat was pleased to see, that it launched a column of fire straight into the sky as soon as her control weakened.

Ok, so I can control it to some extent. Now can I really control it, not just manipulate starting conditions. Kat pulled the ember once again and kept everything standard. Drawing her hand away she focused on keeping the ember still and contained where it was. As soon as Kat's hand moved away the task got much harder, but still, she could manage.

Kat nudged the flame to go left, and it complied, jumping two hands widths to the left. Directing it the other way, Kat let it return to its original position... or close enough anyway. *Seems I can only give it fairly broad commands.* Thought Kat as she felt her breath increase.

Watching the cold mist condense in front of her face Kat was surprised to find she actually felt a bit tired. Is it the manipulation? *All the fire? Maybe it was actually the flying.* Shaking her head Kat dismissed the thoughts. It didn't matter, she could feel her body telling her that rest would soon need to be an option.

But Kat also recognised she wasn't anywhere close to the edge just yet. Trying something else, Kat directed a thread of fire, keeping it connected to her ember as she led ordered it around. The thin line of fire moved jerkily, taking sharp turns and big leaps, but at least it moved.

Once again letting her ember go to see what would happen, contrary to her wishes the thin lines sped back towards the central ember and exploded in a shower of purple sparks, setting the surrounding ice on fire.

Once again though, if nothing is being burned away is it really fire? Kat let out a sigh. *It seems I'm going to need a new plan. I just don't have the control to push things away with my fire. I can hardly get it to move around with proper instructions and major concentration.*

So what can I do... Kat looked around and found her surroundings just as beautiful as before but not any more useful than they had been. "Well Timmy, guess I might have to go for your snow shoe idea anyway" said Kat

"Hey wait a minute" said Kat, that's it. *I don't actually need snow shoes, I just need the ice to be firmer under my step. I was thinking about making my weight less, but maybe I need to make the ice MORE.*

Redirecting her Demonic Energy into her feet Kat let her flames leak out and coat her shoes. Taking a careful step forward Kat placed her feet on some uncompacted snow. Pressing down, Kat slowly put her full weight onto the foot.

As she did this, she felt her foot sink, but only slightly. It hardly even covered her shoes let alone come up to her waist. Taking a step forward Kat felt herself sink again slightly but as her other foot came down, she found her balance stable.

Taking one step after another Kat found her journey much eased. Now that she didn't sink so far into the snow, she could make much better time. As Kat got surer in her footing, she kept increasing her speed.

However just as Kat reached a running pace, she felt something was wrong. As she kept moving and trying to identify the feeling of incongruity she found her when all of a sudden, she collapsed falling flat on her face and burying herself in snow.

Ok what? Kat focused on her body and found it exhausted. In just the few steps she'd taken she'd gone from getting tired for the first time since becoming a demon, and so tired she could hardly move in less than a 100m.

System? An explanation would be lovely.

User Kat has likely exhausted a large portion of User Kat's Demonic Energy Supply. User Kat's whole body now functions with the use of the energy, and it was likely not replenished by Entity Thyme, unlike the other contestants. In addition User Kat rapidly expended this energy by setting a large section of the area on fire, then proceeding to burn through even more by funnelling huge amounts towards User Kat's feet, after already using significant amounts for flight.

But why did I just crash so suddenly? Isn't there a gradient to this?

No. Demons very rapidly tire once their energy reserves get low

So am I stuck admiring the snow a few centimetres from my face for hours? How long till I can move again?

While the exact time for User Kat to recharge User Kat's Demonic Energy is unknown, movement functions should resume in less than five minutes.

Kat felt Timmy tapping her on the cheek. Perhaps trying to see if she was alright or if she needed help. Kat tried to reply but felt like her mouth was glued shut.

Right... um, guess I have to pass the time a little. So System, while I'm stuck like this, how much energy did I use exactly? *NOvelNext.Com*

D.E.M.O.N.S was not closely monitoring energy consumption, but it is believed User Kat used around 80% User Kat's energy when letting it run free in the environment before. This is based on a number of other factors and a best estimation on D.E.M.O.N.S part, but unless User Kat's flight takes significantly more energy than assumed, calculations should be off by no more than 10%

Wow, I guess I really screwed up with that part. Note to self, don't give demonic energy free reign to just go wild and attach to stuff.

"Well, well, what do we have here"

Kat heard a voice from behind her... and it wasn't Timmy.

Oh no. Kat tried to move herself and found that she could just barely make small adjustments she hadn't yet recovered enough for full movement. Standing up might be possible, if barely. *Ok, quick who is it?* Kat thought back to the voice and quickly recognised it. It was one of the elves... problem is they all sound the same. *Shit.*

Chapter 120: Graced with a Contract

"Now, the question is what do I do with you"

Kat heard the movement of steel sliding out of a sheath and knew that she could rule out the twins.

"I was looking for a partner, but finding the demon collapsed in the snow gives me mixed feelings"

Kat heard boots crunch as the figure approached

"I'd thought you'd be one of the stronger contenders in this challenge, but I guess not"

Kat heard the wind whistle and felt a blade coming towards her. Kat's tail without even the need for vision snaked itself around the attacker's arm and held it in an iron grip.

"Oh? Not quite as out of it as I'd thought... but why bother with the charade?"

Kat turned her head a bit, not enough to see past the thick wall of snow, but enough to use her mouth.

"Wasted all my energy a few hundred metres back on a dumb idea. If you want to stop attacking me for a minute, I'll be all good"

"Why should I when I can just finish you off here?"

"Well" said Kat "I'm not quite sure you could. From where I'm laying, face first in the snow it seems my tail has you beat"

Kat heard a faint chuckle "Well, how about this then... we make a contract?"

Kat could almost feel the power in the word despite not being the one to say it.

"You help me win, and I won't eliminate you right now"

Kat couldn't stifle the laugh she spilled out of her throat. "I'm really not that scared. I might look worn out right now but I doubt you can win this fight"

Kat felt the pressure on her tail increase as whoever was behind her tried to push the blade close to Kat, with zero success.

"Ok, fine, how about we commit to working together until the orb or something like that"

"Ah see" said Kat "Now your getting closer. The only thing is I have to try and remember what my contract actually allows me to do"

"Oh, why does that matter?"

"Well, I'm trying to remember, and it was either I had to try to win the last round, or I had to help them win the last round, which would mean drastically different things for this partnership" said Kat

"Oh, and why does that matter?"

"Well, as I said the wording is important. If I have to try and win, singular, working together with you to get the orb sounds like a great idea, but if I was asked to make sure the team wins then I'm not certain I can accept your offer" said Kat

"Oh, is that supposed to reassure me?"

"Well, I'm simply putting my offer on the table. If you don't mind I'd like to search my memories to confirm" said Kat

"Go ahead, I'm not going anywhere"

Kat sighed and got ready to use even more demonic energy. *Hopefully this isn't going to cost me much.* Kat started to try and recall the memory of the contract, but before she even put a sliver of energy towards her mind the answer came forward in perfectly clarity.

Oh, it seems I just have to participate with the intent to win. But it also says 5 man duel... which this clearly isn't.

"Looks like I'm good for the contract" said Kat "I just have to have the intent to win, and it seems to only apply to me personally. Are you ready?"

"Of course. Demon, do you swear not to attack me, and assist me as much as possible until we successfully use the orb, in exchange I offer the same, I will not attack you, and will assist you as much as possible until the orb has been used. Do you accept"

Kat wanted to say yes but found she couldn't, something was missing. *Why can't I accept? *

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User Kat requires knowledge of the Contractors name.

"I need a name to accept" said Kat.

"Oh, it's Grace" said Grace

Kat felt the last piece click into place. "I accept"

As Kat spoke the words practically dripped from her mouth, and the weight of their decision crashed down on them... mostly Grace. Chains exploded from Kat blazing a hot purple as they launched straight for Grace.

Kat heard a scream and felt the dagger slip from Grace's grip as she tried to wrench her hand away. Kat let her go, but it didn't matter the chains were much faster than even Grace's quick reactions. Hundreds of chains coated her pulling in before wrapping themselves fully around Grace and disappearing into her body.

As the chains vanished Kat felt a surge of fire burning through her body. Pulling herself to her feet Kat stumbled as she stretched up and blazed with a purple fire. "The contract is sealed"

Then Kat shook her head for a moment and took in Grace. The elf looked completely terrified of Kat now shaking slightly as she looked between Kat and the dagger with wide eyes and fear on her face.

Kat took a step forward and Grace took a step back. Grinning Kat took a fast step forward empowering herself with her flame and wrapped Grace up in her tail and released her aura coated Grace with a decent amount of calming energy.

"Calm down" said Kat

"What did you do to me" said Grace, trying to escape but lacking the will

"I've just calmed you down. Now did you really not know about the chains? Why do you think we demons place such importance on our contracts? Surely it isn't just because we can't lie?" said Kat

Grace shivered despite the calming influence. In truth she could feel her terror building even as the aura contained it. It was just now dawning on her she'd made a real contract with a demon. "I, um, I didn't actually think it would work, considering I didn't summon you" said Grace.

"Understandable, I suppose" said Kat as she loosened her grip on Grace "But I can assure that any formal agreement between demons will be enforced, with extreme prejudice"

Grace nodded slightly downtrodden. *Hey system, why do I feel so refreshed?*

User Kat isn't truly refreshed. The Contract is just temporarily boosting User Kat's physique. Further use of Demonic Energy will render User Kat immobile once again.

Got it no energy. Wait does my aura require energy?

User Kat's aura only requires energy at the highest setting, otherwise it is a natural ability of User Kat

"Do you think maybe you can let go of me" asked Grace

"I dunno, are you going to freak out again? You'll hurt someone's feelings if you look at them like a monster" said Kat

"What, someone's? Not yours?" asked Grace regaining a bit of confidence.

Kat used her tail to turn Grace around and set her eyes on fire, as well as placing just a little bit on the edge of her tongue. "Why, of course not. I'd take it as a compliment"

Grace shivered and once again tried to back away from the crazy demon. Kat tried to hold in her laughter to keep up the illusion but failed. As she did the fire fell away and her hold on Grace loosened enough for the elf to escape.

Grace watched Kat laughing to herself and realised she'd been the but of the joke. "Perhaps if you stopped playing pranks on people, you'd have more friends"

"Perhaps" said Kat shrugging "But I like the ones I have. Besides, that's probably the best joke I've played on anyone. I mean did you see your face? You looked like you thought I was going to eat you"

"So what's the plan now" said Grace

"Well... despite my jovial attitude, I'm still about to collapse. So perhaps we should take a short nap. Especially now that I know you won't attack me... wait where is your Timmy?" asked Kat

"Wait, what? Timmy? Who are you talking about" asked Grace confused

Kat pointed to the miniature Thyme still sitting on her head "That's Timmy, he follows you around and plays cassette tapes"

"Um, that creepy thing? I left it behind but it keeps showing up somehow" said Grace

"Naw, Timmy she thinks your scary... and wait you can teleport" said Kat as she put Timmy on her hand to watch it's reaction.

Timmy just gestured for yeah sort of.

"Right well, ignoring that I'll just set up the camp" said Kat taking out the dagger she found in the chest. Clearing out the nearby area with her tail and hands Kat shovelled a bunch of snow away.

"Here goes nothing" said Kat as she plunged the dagger into the icy soil.

The dagger trembled, and Kat got the faint impression she needed to step back. Jumping away and grabbing Grace as she passed Kat backed up a good 50m from the dagger and watched as it continued to tremble, shaking left and right.