

DEMONS 1131

[Chapter 1131 1131 The Final Team \(Or Well, Technically We Have A Whole Extra Arc Later But Don't Worry About It\)](#)

At the front of the final group was the mage. How did Kat know she was the mage? Well it was because the person in question was a dwarf. A dwarf riding a floating metal disk, with several smaller disks orbiting her as she moved. Kat frowned at that. *I know that means she's a metal mage... but how does that work? Doesn't metal interfere with magic for the most part.*

[Not sure. Perhaps we can ask Nixilei?]

Kat thought that was a good idea, but before she followed up on the questions, Kat wanted to finish examining the dwarf woman in question. Her name would later be revealed as Romilda. She had an impressive chest for her size, and the robe she wore was cut low to reveal a deep valley of cleavage. Though... what was a bit strange, for Kat at least, was the beard that was excellently braided. Apparently, female dwarves do, or at least, can have beards.

Romilda's shoes seemed to be immovable metal bricks pretending to be footwear. Perhaps whatever magic let her float around on a metal disk helped her wear atrocious footwear but Kat could feel her feet hurting just looking at the woman. It also made the fact that Romilda was wearing robes somewhat confusing. The rules for metal mages really didn't make much sense at a glance.

So Kat decided that needed to be investigated. Extending her stride a bit to catch Nixilei, Kat asked, "So... how does metal magic work because... like..." Kat waved her hands over in Romilda's direction.

Nixilei squinted, her eyesight was good but not as good as Kat's was naturally. "Kat, I'm going to need a bit more information. I can't seem much through the team on the middle pier and none of them have metal magic from what I can tell,"

"Oh..." Kat looked over and found it so odd. She could focus on the furthest team without too much trouble despite Nixilei being correct. If her eyes were working purely based on what she could see as a human, then she'd be much more limited. Kat shook her head, determined to test that at some point later, "There's a dwarf floating around on a metal disk and I'm wondering how that works,"

"Ah," said Nixilei with a nod. "Right so... metal affinity. It's an annoying affinity that operates on its own rules. Summoning up metal is basically impossible for them, and this includes using it for normal spells. Instead, they have to completely saturate a piece of metal with their mana, and attune that metal piece to their whims. Then they imbue a spell into the metal, before retracting their mana.

"They can activate whatever spell is in the metal chunk later by filling it with mana. Based on what you've told me? I'd assumed that the disk is charmed to move according to the dwarf's mental commands. Perhaps it was made with multiple chunks, or they have a secret family technique to make the disk responsive. Or... I suppose they could be a Rank 3 mage, but that's unlikely considering the age limit on this tournament,"

"Makes sense," said Kat with a nod. "Though now I have to ask, why is it that they aren't wearing metal armour?"

"The bigger the piece of metal, the more mana it takes. My best guess is that they don't have enough mana to keep it imbued in armour and everything else. Metal that a metal mage has enhanced, but isn't currently trying to power will still suck in mana if it can, making it very hard to wear metal armour, and charge other metal. That's my best guess anyway," answered Nixilei.

Kat nodded, "I suppose that makes sense... though they have a few bits of metal circling them, and metal boots as well," explained Kat.

Nixilei frowned at that and said, "They must be powerful, or their family figured out something special. That's a lot of metal to be controlling so fluidly. There has to be some sort of limitation you're not seeing, or perhaps they have some way of providing extra mana to the metal, a crystal hidden somewhere perhaps?"

Kat shrugged, "I don't see any crystals. Is it a concern?"

Nixilei returned the shrug and answered, "Too early to tell,"

Kat accepted that answer for now and went back to examining the rest of the final team. Behind the dwarf was a human man with a pair of tonfas strapped to his waist. His name was Carl and would happily share that information with anyone who asked. His armour was made up of a mix of metal plates and leather strips. The upper half of his chest was guarded with metal, while the lower was just covered with leather. His arms had plates on the forearms, alongside metal pauldrons that sat somewhat awkwardly above his shoulders. Kat didn't think they would protect him from much.

His helmet was made out of leather with a metal cap over just the top for extra protection from overhead strikes. It looked a bit like a mess if Kat was being uncharitable. The fact his leg armour looked to have once had metal plates that had since been removed didn't help that impression at all. Any hair he might have had was also tucked inside the helmet, but there didn't seem to be that much room up there so it was probably on the shorter side, and his eyebrows were black... but Kat had seen a number of people with black eyebrows and blonde hair, so that didn't necessarily mean anything.

Kat then moved on to the next person who had a sling as their weapon, not that Kat could see that right now. They had a bag on their back filled with heavy metal balls and the wrapped-up sling. Their name was Cyan, and they were a fae with hair to match their name. Cyan was a tall fae man... though he still wasn't as tall as March. His armour consisted of light leathers that seemed to be fairly popular. Nothing else really stood out about him, and Kat couldn't even see his weapon to speculate on it.

So she turned to the next second last contestant. Another dwarf, and this one had a miniature cannon as a weapon. Kat had no idea how that was effective in combat, and Borgick, the crazy dwarf in question, wouldn't be revealing that secret before he had to. Of course, the answer was that Romilda would use his cannon to fire one of the floating bits of metal before pulling it back to them afterwards. Though Borgick's bag of black powder was plenty deadly by itself if you weren't immune to fire. Then again, nobody was completely immune to being smacked over the head with a couple hundred kilograms of stone and metal, which made it a surprisingly effective weapon.

Though weight of the whole ensemble did mean that plate armour was off the table. Borgick needed what mobility he could get because the cannon itself was already near his carrying capacity. As such, Borgick settled for some nice steel greaves and sturdy leather gloves alongside padded leather armour.

Then last, and potentially least, was an elfen girl that had to be part dwarf. If she managed to reach five feet, Kat would eat her hat. Her name was Asteodia. The girl was much thinner than the dwarves, but still stockier in the arms and especially legs. Her face was still made up of sharp lines, and her ears made it clear that she WAS an elf, regardless of her lacking height. Her hair was cut short and hung loosely around her head and was a light brown that caught the light well.

Asteodia wore a magician's robe and carried a spear with a wooden tip. The elf in question hid her talent for fire magic well. No acting on the urge to burn things down, and the wooden spear was a reminder of her resolve not to give into pyromania, something that awakened in many a fire mage. It was mostly the fact that Asteodia's mother was a farmer with a healthy respect for the land that kept Asteodia's darker impulses in check. Good thing she never asked if ash was considered good fertiliser.

An interesting team. Not really sure what to say about them though. There's just nothing that really jumps out at me combat wise, and I don't feel like commenting on the elf's height overly much. Ok no... I really want to ask what the fuck is up with the cannon. I mean... what good is it? Where is the ammo?

[I'm guessing that he just hits people with it? If not... they might have a good storage ring somewhere?]

Maybe? I don't think I saw any of them with jewellery on but I guess the metal mage could be hiding it somewhere, ready to bring it out once the fight starts.

Lily indicated towards the fae with the sling, not that Lily knew that. [Maybe Blue Hair has the ammo? I mean, that's what the bag's for right?]

[Chapter 1132 1132 Thyme For An Explanation](#)

As all the groups left the pier, the copies of Thyme all rushed together, before splitting apart. Now, there were three Thymes, one in a butler outfit, one in pirate getup, and a final one dressed as a maid. Except, the butler one took more feminine features, large behind, noticeable breasts and a pinched waist, while the maid Thyme had massive arms and legs with bulging muscles to match March. The pirate was split down the middle, with one half looking feminine and one-half masculine. Apparently, Thyme wanted to look as crazy as possible.

It was the pirate Thyme that spoke first. "Yarr, welcome to me island. I couldn't give yar a vacation for this round, so I did the next closest thing maties!" Kat's translation ability informed her that Thyme wasn't quite sounding that way, but they were trying to go for the realm's equivalent of a fake pirate accent so it was close enough.

The butler Thyme stepped forward to continue speaking... except just to keep things mixed up their voice was even gruffer than the pirate's, despite the formal language used. "Now that you have been cordially invited to my island, I shall inform you that the first four rounds will be made up of a thematic set of three party games. Nobody can go skip more than one round of participation, and nobody can participate in three rounds in a row,"

Maid Thyme stepped forward, their voice was softer than silk, and seemed to tickle the ears. Stan, the incubus on the middle team, looked way too interested after maid Thyme started speaking, "Though there will be one event that I am specifically banning Kat, and perhaps Romilda from as well. To pre-

empt the obvious question, it involves flying, or more accurately, falling while aided and the ability to simply fly instead of participating in the task properly is too much of an advantage. To compensate, I will allow Lily to participate in Kat's stead, though Kat and Lily will count as the same 'person' for rules purposes.

"For Romilda, I will have to investigate if there is a suitable compromise. If you are willing to accept having your metal taken from you for the task, and returned later then I can simply allow you to participate in that event if you wish... or if that is unacceptable you will have to remain barred,"

Pirate Thyme stepped forward to continue, "Yarr, it seems that simply giving Romilda the option is a mighty big compromise already. No offence to the wee lass, but while these activities are nothing serious, they are mostly test of physical ability. Of course, Kat will be restricted same as last round, so perhaps swapping out will be fine,"

Well I suppose that tells me that the other demon isn't as strong as I am. I wonder if he will be restricted at all? Though I suppose there is also the chance that he just wasn't around for the previous round of events.

Romilda floated around for a bit with a frown on her face, "I can't be separated from my metal, and I don't particularly like the fact that you're forcing my team to take a disadvantage because o' that fact,"

All the Thymes just shrugged before one more split off into a dwarf Thyme that then started to float... somehow. Lily, who had a small sense for things because of her space affinity, even if it wasn't properly active realised that Thyme was standing on solidified space. Which was apparently a thing you could do.

"I accept your displeasure and return your displeasure with bit of information. I don't care. It is well within my rights to dictate the specifics of a task, and if you wish to get into the specifics, the task in question disallows anything that would allow for flight, or levitation. This means if you want to participate you need to relieve yourself of your metal...

"Yet you don't see Kat complaining. She has WINGS for crying out loud. She could argue that her wings aren't a flight aid, as they are part of her body, and if she really wanted to press the issue, I might have to let it go and allow her the chance to compete regardless of my feelings on the matter. You may notice, that the boon I provided, the ability to allow Lily to swap in, is also technically allowed in the rules.

"Lily counts as a familiar according to the rules. The fact that Lily is completely sentient and basically a 6th person for their team doesn't matter. I'm actually placing TWO restrictions on Kat's team by forcing only one of them to compete in the events, but we all know that would be unfair, and once again, you don't see them complaining. Not even about the fact that Lily CAN remove her wings, so theoretically, if they used that line of reasoning, Lily could participate despite Kat's bans.

"Heck, arguably, the restriction bracelet that Kat is willing to wear isn't strictly necessary. The rules are really fuzzy about it. Especially in regards to if Kat can destroy it or not, and because I am actually a bit annoyed at your Romilda, I'll reveal this. Kat, according to the rules, if you can destroy the restriction bracelet during a round, you get to finish the round without one, before I am required to make another, tougher restrictor if possible,"

"Oh," said Romilda, not wanting to argue more, but not trusting herself to hold back from yelling if she said anything else.

"Oh indeed. I may be a bit unorthodox, but I already said I was trying to make this round of the tournament as relaxing as possible. That's why you'll all be staying here in what happens to be a new luxury resort! I'll be opening it up to the public later on, but I started a chain of them so that I could use them as a location for all of the teams, not just the five here," explained dwarf Thyme.

Huh... well I don't plan to make use of that information because getting on Thyme's bad side seems like a horrible idea... and it seems a lot less fun.

[Would you HAVE to for the Contract though?]

Nope, because the Contract was never to win, it was just to turn up remember? And it hasn't really been renewed properly I don't think? I'm not sure how it works exactly, and I'd ask D.E.M.O.N.S just to make sure it hasn't been an issue, but I suspect it won't answer me.

[Let me try]

D.E.M.O.N.S cannot answer that question right now due to restrictions.

[Should've listened apparently.]

Romilda floated back into her team, scowl on her face. It wasn't as though she didn't understand why Thyme had made such a rule. Thyme clearly had no idea how egregious of a social foe part it was to even request such a thing. Sure it wasn't something that all of the world abided by, but surely someone as old and powerful as Thyme would have seen similar situations before?

Romilda was of course overlooking the fact that Thyme might know and not care, which was a bit closer to the truth. Thyme had an idea of how precious the metal was, but decided that forcing a decision on Romilda was a great evil then asking her an uncomfortable question. Still, Romilda was fuming and Thyme was annoyed with themselves for getting so worked up over Romilda's response. Apparently getting everything organised, both this and the initial preparations for the final round, was getting to them.

Thyme breathed in and dismissed the dwarven copy. Trying to get in character for that aspect probably wasn't helping matters. Thyme let the butler version speak, keep things formal. "For the moment, you are all cordially invited to explore your residence for the next few days. Each team has been assigned a wing, one half of a floor. The ground floor is a common room for everyone, and you each have a room to yourselves... though double beds have been provided,"

Quite a few interesting reactions to that statement were noted by Kat. Green and Gareth obviously had a slight blush, but so did a few other people. They were just individuals though, so Kat wasn't sure who the androgynous elf was thinking of spending time with, nor the fae with orange hair, who both sported prominent blushes themselves, though Kat doubted they were paired up in any way. Stan did look excited, but considering Kat thought he was a Incubus, it wasn't hard to guess why. Perhaps Burgandy was dating him? The idea seemed wrong to Kat's mind.

Butler Thyme cracked their knuckles and continued speaking, "Food and drink will be provided in the cafeteria, it is located on the East side of the ground floor, though additional seating can be found on

the roof and your balconies, so you will not be confined to the cafeteria for meals. The menu can be found next to the serving station, and if you wish to make any requests, either for entire dishes or substitutes, you will need to provide me with six hours' notice. Meet back here one hour after the lunch bell has been called for your first task,"

[Chapter 1133 1133 Borgick, The Jokemaster](#)

"Well I'm going to get myself some sleep, Gareth, wake me up when we need to eat lunch," said Green, before she skipped off away from the crowd. Gareth just shrugged and followed behind her, while Nixilei let out a long sigh.

"Welp," said Kress with a grin, "I'm going to explore this place a bit. I doubt Thyme would leave anything around that I can use to guess the challenges, but it's a pretty small island, so I might as well take it in. I'll be back for lunch... and then I'll probably go work on a sandcastle. It was surprisingly fun last time,"

With that Kress gone Nixilei threw up her hands and said, "Right well, apparently we're all just going to split up then. I suppose I'll go investigate my own rooms and then find something to do with my time," Nixilei turned to Kat and gave a slight nod, which was returned, before heading off herself.

Lily transformed and started to lean against Kat, "So, what are we doing?" asked Lily.

"I think we should check the cafeteria so we know what's being cooked, then we can... do whatever? I mean, what would you like to do?" asked Kat.

Lily looked around and saw that most of the other contestants were wandering off themselves. Some into the inn, while others were heading off towards other parts of the island. "I'll think about it, maybe we can hang out with Blue? Let's just check out the menu first, see if it'll be interesting,"

With that decided, Kat and Lily headed off together. As soon as they entered Kat could see the main staircase, they were directly opposite the entrance, with a reception desk just off to the side, taking up space underneath the stairs after they doubled back. There was a number of little nooks for room keys, but they were all opened. However, there was a Thyme at the desk despite that.

The cafeteria wasn't hard to find. On the right was a lounging area with beanbags, that probably had something other than plastic beans in them, a few couches, big puffy chairs, and even a few hammocks. On the left, was a clean looking area, with smooth stone floors and hard chairs surrounding tables. There were longer tables that looked like they could fit ten people, and smaller circular ones that could fit five. On the wall furthest from the entrance was a big window that gave a glimpse into the kitchen, and to the side was a menu marked out on a chalkboard.

Kat and Lily walked up the menu, looking it over for a few moments before... "I... I have no idea what any of this is," said Kat.

"Nope, neither do I," said Lily.

"Like... I guess nothing translates properly because these are nouns, the names of the dishes so... yeah... even the ingredient list isn't useful because most of the ingredients aren't recognisable," continued Kat.

"I guess we just... go with it? I mean, as long as there's some meat I should be fine..." added Lily.

"Yeah, and I'm not picky... but worst comes to worst I can go a bit of time without food, and I can probably go diving in the ocean for some fish. Of course, Thyme is an excellent cook so I'm not terribly worried but..." Kat didn't know how to finish the thought.

But Lily did, "It is still awkward, isn't it?"

"I imagine so lass," Kat and Lily jumped, not realising they'd been followed. Borgick was beside them, staring up at the menu. His trusty cannon was resting on the ground next to him, though there was a strap that he kept wrapped around his gloved hand.

"Oh... um hello. Sorry we didn't notice you there, I'm Kat and this is Lily," said Kat.

Borgick looked them up and down then said, "Is that a short joke?"

"No?" said Kat confused, before the joke clicked in her mind. "Oh... oh no sorry about that, I mean... I wasn't even trying for-" Kat's panicked explanation was cut off when Borgick started laughing.

"Oh, oh you two are just precious," said Borgick in between guffaws, "I didn't mean to make you feel like you were being rude... but oh, your faces. It was definitely worth coming over here just for that," Borgick kept laughing for a bit longer before pulling himself together. "See, nah, some dwarves do take offense to the short jokes..."

"But when you're by far the shortest species, and all the others are about the same height it's just something you get used to, or ya stay angry all the time. Honestly, that sounds like a whole heap o' work if you ask me. It simply is what it is. Best leave that sort of wondering to the scholars,"

"Are... are there really scholars that are attempting to figure out why dwarves are short?" asked Lily.

Borgick nodded, "Oh, aye, there are. Not just dwarven scholars, either, or so I've heard. Then again, some o' their ideas were pretty ridiculous. Ah think my favourite was the one that stated the reason everyone else is so tall is because they spent too long looking up at the clouds!" Borgick burst into laughter again. Kat and Lily couldn't help but join in. It wasn't all that funny, but Borgick's laughter had a way of pulling people in.

[You know, it's possible that's partially true. If dwarves are actually built for living underground, then smaller dwarves that are sturdy enough to survive minor cave ins might be the optimal build for them. Less energy digging smaller tunnels. Sturdiness helps protect from falling rocks. Assuming that they didn't just spontaneously start existing, I imagine they evolved from moderate sized burrowing animals.]

Hmm... probably? It's hard to guess without knowing what animals are even in this world, but what about everyone else, or heck beastkin?

[Beastkin are probably all descended from one powerful shapeshifter that had way too much sex.]

I hate that you could very well be right with that guess.

[It makes more sense than any other idea I can think of for them. Otherwise, how would they all be so genetically compatible? My assumption is that they lost the more elaborate transformation abilities over time, or perhaps all at once if they were only half whatever. Imagine if it was a dimension hopping shapeshifter that just goes from place to place having sex with everything. Might explain it.]

You know what? It very well might, but I don't think I want to know.

[Fair.]

"Thanks for the laugh... actually I don't think we got your name? Lily and I are going to head off to do... something? Perhaps explore? Though yeah... I don't think you mentioned your name," said Kat awkwardly.

"I s'pose I didn't, my names Borgick, Borgick Stoneheart lass and it was nice to meet you. I'm going to check out what additional facilities are here, I somehow doubt there's just rooms, food, and a relaxation area," said Borgick.

Kat nodded, "Probably, we might check that out later as well. See you around Borgick,"

With that Kat and Lily headed off, potentially to explore, but as soon as they looked to be heading for the door, the maid Thyme at the reception desk waved them over. With a shrug, the girls moved towards the Thyme who spoke, "Sorry to call you over. I've keyed the mana signature of everyone here into their respective rooms... except you and Lily. If you remember the first tournament, where there was a similar issue, I can provide a similar solution!" *novelnext.com*

The Thyme pulled out a metal card with mana flowing through it. "This is a key-card, and it's what the doors will be setup to work with in the future once the tournament is over. It's pretty sturdy, but not perfectly so. You can either leave it here with me, or carry it around. If it breaks... it's a bit annoying to replace, but not all that hard. So don't stress too much if it does break, but if you're doing anything risky I'd rather you leave it with me.

"Still, if that makes you uncomfortable for some reason, I can let you have it. I don't want you to feel like you need to see me every time you want to get into your rooms," said the Thyme before bowing.

Which, seemed a little odd. There was something not quite right about this Thyme. They lacked a certain... something. "I'm sorry if this is a weird question... but what's wrong with you?"

"Pardon?" asked Thyme, with a tilt of their head.

"No offence... but you just don't seem like Thyme, or well, the rest of Thyme," said Kat bluntly.

"Oh," said 'Thyme', as they awkwardly scratched their cheek. "That's because I'm not,"

"Wait what?" asked Kat as her brain short circuit.

"Um... yeah, I'm using Thyme as a base model... because they built the body for me. My name is actually Mint, and I'm Thyme's much younger sibling. I'm not really supposed to be out of the groves yet, my mana control is awful, and I'm not very strong... but I was just so board and well... here I am!" said Mint.

[Chapter 1134 1134 Minty Fresh](#)

Kat and Lily blinked dumbly for a few seconds as they stared at Mint. [Ok... while I wouldn't mind going on a little walk around the island together this is so much more interesting. I have so many questions!]

Go ahead, I love hearing you excited about things Lily. I'll just stand off to the side looking pretty while you do your thing.

Lily smiled, "I have so many questions for you! That is... if you don't mind?" said Lily.

"No of course! That's one of the reasons I left the grove! Hit me with anything!" said Mint with a smile.

"Well, first, before we get too far into things, are you... genderless like Thyme? They're pretty comfortable shifting around all the time, and seem to go by 'they' but you're a Maid Thyme at the moment, and it seems like that's your only body?" said Lily.

"Oh? Oh I see, I'm glad you seem to have the demon translation ability like your girlfriend, otherwise I might not have understood the question," Kat and Lily shared a glance at that, but just assumed Thyme told Mint as she continued speaking, "So, it's a tad complicated, but I mean, you're asking me questions right? So I should give a full answer?"

"So... I'm a dryad, obviously, so like Thyme I don't have a gender the same way you guys do? Gender? Is that the right word? No... not quite... sex? Hmm... your words are confusing even with the translation magic. Too many things overlayed... hmm... right. Well, I am a tree, like Thyme, and as a tree, I have both sets of genitalia?"

"So in the dryad language, which, is only sort of a language because we don't have to talk to understand each other, wait... no ok let me start again. In the dryad language there isn't really a word for that sort of idea. Thyme did explain it to me though, and myself, and the others that took Thyme's classes in preparation for leaving the grove, were recommended we picked a pronoun so that we could tell people.

"Thyme recommend 'They/them' because it's the most accurate way to convey the idea we don't really fit into the same categories as the other sentient races... but I happen to really like the female form. Both too look at, and to wear, so I decided that when people ask I'd just tell them I'm a girl. It's not true, but it's easier then explaining dryad culture to everyone that asks. Still, you were curious so..."

Lily nodded with a big grin, "No, no please go on if you have other thoughts. I wish I had a notepad actually because this is all really interesting to me. Other than Thyme, I've never met someone that didn't identify with one gender or the other so this is all interesting to me,"

"Um..." Mint ducked under the counter and pulled out a notebook and pencil. Well, it looked more like a predecessor of the modern pencil. It was a black stick of pencil lead, that had a leather wrap around it so you could hold it without coating your fingers in it. "This should do? Also as I said, I've sort of claimed female pronouns as my own. It just seemed easier, and I like the look,"

Lily nodded and said, "Thanks for the pencil. And yeah, I see, I see. Would you mind elaborating on those classes you mentioned?"

"Of course!" said Mint with a smile. "So... Thyme has been trying really hard to get more dryads out into the world. We're a... slow species naturally. I don't think I can properly explain to you how different our concept of time is. Everyone else seems to be doing stuff all the time, but a dryad can relax in the sun and sleep for a few weeks without thinking it strange.

"So all of the other races are really weird in that they do things every day! Anyway, Thyme has been trying to encourage us all to be more... consistently active. Part of this big push is training up the younger dryads and getting them to interact with all the other races. Thyme seems to think it will make

us smarter and more active? It's hard for me to tell how true that is, because I've always been considered rather hyper for a dryad, but I think Thyme might be right.

"So Thyme's been doing these 'how to interact with the other races' classes and because the older dryads are being super restrictive about the whole idea Thyme first had to develop... well I don't really know what they are but they're teeny tiny little portals that let me control this body even though my main body is still my tree and it's safe back in the grove.

"With that, Thyme's been letting those of us who scored highly in his classes have the chance to open an inn! Normally there'd be multiple dryads working at each one, but for now it's just me and Thyme. Thyme is going to be slowly rolling things out as the tournament goes on, and this is a bit of a trial run. Thyme trains me, I train the next dryad, and then they go off on their own and train another. Eventually everyone will have training!

"It's all very exciting and I was a bit surprised I managed to get top marks for the classes but I'm happy to be here!" Mint was practically vibrating in place, her joy wafting off her in practically visible waves as she hopped around the area. If they hadn't realised that this wasn't Thyme before, now it was very obvious.

Even when Thyme was being silly, Thyme still had a slightly regal heir to themselves. Like they were a performer and the world was their stage. Mint in contrast seemed like somebody that never lost their childhood spark. Energy for days even if she still had the same way of speaking as Thyme, Mint just had a slightly different tone. It wasn't quite an accent, but it was close. Which did make sense, if Mint had learnt to speak a more easily understood language under Thyme.

"You sound just as happy as I was when I started to learn magic for the first time!" said Lily with a grin. "Though if you're still up for questions, I want to know what you mean when you said Thyme designed your body?"

"Ah, yes, Thyme didn't just design it, Thyme built it as well. See, as dryads we inactively know how to produce a secondary body once we gain sentience but it's not very good. It's... um... hmm... I don't know the word... wait no you have translation. Does this make sense?" Mint frowned and then shifted slightly, her hair blew in an unseen breeze and somehow Kat and Lily got the word 'puppet' from it.

"Um... yes it does, assuming puppet is what you were going for?" said Kat.

Mint looked to Lily who nodded, and Mint smiled, "Yup, that's pretty much what I was getting at. It's so weird to have like... lungs and stuff! These bodies Thyme makes on a whim are soooo complicated! You might think we don't need lungs, we're trees, that's not how we breathe. Well, you'd be wrong. We need them to make sure our voice boxes work, and sure, technically we could skip that, but do you know how unbelievably hard it is to learn how to speak with a voice box? The answer is very.

"Thyme knows how to talk without one, and that's insane! I don't want to even think about the sort of effort that would take. So yeah, we have lungs, and these bodies have like... a full set of musculature and skeletons! It makes our movement a lot more natural seeming. Apparently it looks creepy if we don't?

"That part I never really got myself, but Thyme assured us all that the other races would find it off putting so we had to do a bit of training to use them properly. Which isn't anywhere near as bad as speaking! Thyme designed these bodies to sort of just... do what we want them to as long as we think

about it the right way. It's SUPER cool. I don't think I could ever be half as smart as Thyme. Honestly I don't know where Thyme gets the time!" said Mint.

"How much input did you have as to what the body would look like?" asked Lily.

Mint shrugged and said, "A little? Like all of this," Mint, having no sense of shame or understanding of body modesty simply pulled her outfit off her body revealing sensual looking curves. Mint then proceeded to gesture at 'her body' without shame. "This was all stock. Thyme has like three variations, to pick from, and lots of clothes for us, but the outfit?" Mint gestured to the maid outfit. "That's part of our uniforms. They fit the bodies, but we were allowed to choose FIVE whole outfits of our own for Thyme to make! I'm just not meant to wear them while I'm 'working',"

*Should we tell her about the whole 'being naked' thing? **noveLnext.cOm*

[I don't know? She's so innocent and pure. I don't want to taint that!]

But she knows what genitalia are. Surely she knows at least some of that already?

[Oh. OH. Huh... maybe?]

Chapter 1135 Magical Mint?

Eventually, Mint managed to notice the weird looks Kat and Lily were giving her, and glanced down. "Oh... right, this is that modesty thing I'm supposed to have. It makes more sense when you consider the fact that most people can't control what they look like down to the smallest detail. I suppose if I was unhappy with my body I wouldn't want to show it off to people either,"

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[Oh! That actually makes sense.]

It does?

[Yeah. For Mint, her body is more like a nice car that she enjoys showing off. Or well, I don't know how much she really enjoys showing of but it's the same principle. It's just something cool she can drive around in.]

Ah. I see where you're going with this. "Something like that anyway," said Lily with a nod. "Though it does also make sense from our perspective why you might not have the same concept of modesty. And, while Kat and I don't mind too much, other people will, especially if you're running the establishment, so you might want to reclothe yourself,"

"Yeah I guess so," said Mint with a bouncy nod. Lily totally wasn't looking at Mint's breasts when she bounced. But if she happened to glance that way, Lily would have been surprised by the fact that they didn't bounce properly. Of course, Lily would never have wandering eyes like that, so she didn't know. Totally. "It's not like the clothes are uncomfortable. I have a bit of a hard time... feeling them though."

"Oh yeah... does that body not have nerves?" asked Lily.

Mint shrugged, "I don't know what nerves are I'm afraid,"

"Oh... I can answer that if you want? Though it would take a while and I have other questions. Plus, it might not even be correct for it isn't totally applicable it seems interesting,"

Lily nodded and started to explain, "Right so... nerves carry little baby lightning bolts around the body, but for a reference you might understand, they're like little rivers with messenger boats on them, they deliver instructions all over the body..."

Lily started to delve into an impromptu lesson on the nerves of the body, and Kat could see that Lily was really getting going. Kat gave her girlfriend a quick kiss, which didn't stop the explanation, before heading off to the cafeteria. If I know Lily, she's going to keep talking until the explanation is over... which will be a while. So, like the good girlfriend I am... Kat found the obvious water fountain. It was a large barrel set into the side of the cafeteria and opening the novel let a jet of water out. Kat grabbed a mug, filled it to the brim and then walked back.

Lily was still talking, unsurprising, so Kat carefully placed the mugs handle in Lily's fingers when they paused after a particularly big gesticulation. Lily barely registered it, as she kept talking for a few more moments before downing half the glass in one swig before depositing it on Mint's desk.

Kat looked over at Mint and pantomimed if Mint wanted some water herself, but Mint shook her head that the suggestion, then started to carefully mime with her hands, that while she was connected to her main tree, only that needed water, and only irregularly. Rain was usually enough. Kat then tried to gesture and explain that Mint might want to try drinking just to try it... but the message didn't really get across.

Kat just shrugged at that, and went back to listening to Lily speak on the nervous system, while also bringing in the fact that this was all tested in a rather low-energy world, and that mana had to play an additional part in the systems operation otherwise everyone's reaction times wouldn't be so fast.

A few glasses of water later and Lily finished the explanation. Mint had her own notebook out as well, and had been taking a few notes about nerves to double check with Thyme later. "Well that was fascinating, what other questions do you have for me?" asked Mint.

"Well... now I'm wondering, do all dryads have nature affinity?" asked Lily.

"Not at all," said Mint cheerfully. "We do have a great deal of control over nature even without a proper magical affinity. We can use our mana to mould quite a few plants to our liking, but we can't cast any spells unless we have an affinity for it, same as the other races. I for example, actually have water and ice as my two affinities! Most dryads do have nature as their only affinity though,"

"You have both ice and water?" asked Lily.

"Yup! It acts more like one and a half affinities because there's so much overlap, but having a water affinity is really nice! I don't have to worry much about dehydration and I like having something that makes me a bit unique!" said Mint.

"Huh... you know, that brings up another question. How exactly does the multiple body thing work?" asked Lily.

Mint nodded, "It's simple, and also super complex at the same time. So... the leading theory, and one that Thyme has a fair bit of evidence for, is that dryads form when a tree manages to form a soul, a

mind, and figures out how to split them up. Now, it's unclear at what point all the parts form, or when we learn to separate things, but that's quite so relevant right now.

"What it does mean though, is that we can put our mind into a body while our soul sticks around back in our tree! A slightly more advanced application is forcing our mana to flow through the body our mind is inhabiting, and then if you're really smart like Thyme you can move multiple bodies at the same time. Splitting my mind up so many times like that seems really hard, if quite useful.

"We do seem to naturally impart something MORE than just our minds even when we first use secondary bodies, but we know from history that our true body, the tree that spawned us, is something special and different. Thyme, and myself obviously, think that's where our soul lives, but some people disagree. Still, we know that true bodies of dryads are hard to change using nature magic or just our own will. They're really stubborn. Thyme thinks it's because we'd need to be able to change our soul to change our true bodies, but I don't really know.

"I just know that they're super important. Plenty of stories about somebody evil cutting down the true bodies of dryads which always kills the dryad in question. I'm... not really old enough to have seen someone die in front of me... and dryads live a really long time so I've not seen anyone just get old... so..." Mint slowed down looking somewhat melancholy.

"Death is something I've only sort of heard about. I mean... I know it's bad, and I know sometimes my parents are sad even when nobody seems to have died... just... not existed instead? I don't really get why they're sad, but I understand that they are. Oh... um... yeah so no dryad has ever survived their main body being destroyed but that's just what I've been told.

"I know that Thyme moved their true body somewhere hidden, but not where they went with it. Though I do also know, because it's still talked about a lot, that Thyme managed to transform their main body into a big walking almost person body before they moved it... so you CAN move your main body without like... moving all the ground around. But yeah... Thyme does what they want,"

Kat and Lily nodded along, as if they'd just been handed a truth of the world. Which, perhaps it was. Thyme really did just do whatever it was they wanted. "Can you cast any water or ice magic?" asked Lily.

Mint frowned, her entire body drooping, "Noo, I can't. It's a bit annoying actually. I really wanted to be able to cast magic! It seems really fun and Thyme can do so much cool stuff with it! Thyme even explained a few unique ways that I could replicate so much of the cool stuff they do! So I really hoped I'd be a magical prodigy or something... but I'm just not. Perhaps in the future, after I'm a bit older I can try again. It's not a dream I want to give up on, and dryads live a long time so there's hope...

"But I also recognise that I might just be no good at it. It might take me twice, or four times as long to do things as better magicians... but as a dryad I've got time, and well... maybe it's worth it? I've just put it to the side a bit for now, hopefully I'll be able to do more with it once I'm older,"

Chapter 1136 1136 Stan

The group noticed that everyone was piling into the cafeteria, though most were leaving as soon as they got their food. Kat couldn't see Blue or anyone from her team yet so they after a quick chat with Mint, it was decided the three of them would head off to Kat's room to keep chatting. Kat and Lily grabbed their

food, but as they were about to walk out, Kat noticed Stan heading her way, even if she didn't know his name just yet.

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Kat shared a glance with the other two that just shrugged and took a step away. Stan seemed to smile at that, and nodded thankfully towards the other two before motioning to the lounge. Kat shrugged and followed along, handing her plate of food off to Lily. Stan slid into one of the beanbag chairs, and Kat grabbed a second one.

"Thank you for speaking with me. My name is not Stan but I like to pretend it is, and I will insist that you refer to me as such. Sorry for calling you away but I wanted to chat a bit before we got started on the events. I have a few questions," said Stan.

"My name is Kat, and questions are fine with me, what did you want to ask," said Kat.

"Well, I before we get to the more distasteful details, I was wondering if that picture of rugged perfection on your team is single," said Stan.

Kat frowned, "Um... who exactly do you mean by that?"

"You can't tell?" asked Stan, genuinely curious.

Kat just shook her head, "Not at all. I'm asexual and even if I can sort of appreciate people from an aesthetics standpoint... it's kinda hard. I mostly just abuse the fact I can look into my girlfriend's head and react to that sort of thing accordingly, which means I'm still limited in regards to picking out good looking men,"

"Ah, I see... well I don't rightly know the man's name, but I believe he is in your team. To save myself the embarrassment of describe features you probably didn't notice... I'm talking about the one not in plate amour, for while he is a fine specimen, he isn't to my taste, and if he isn't together with the green haired fae already, I suspect he will be soon," said Stan.

Kat felt like a hammer had just been taken to her worldview. *This guy likes Kress? He took a look at our group, no ALL of the groups... and decided Kress was the most attractive person there? Somehow, I feel offended, despite the fact Stan here is obviously gay. Wait... is that rude? No, he's clearly gay because he didn't mention Nixilei at all and only mentioned Green because she's Gareth's fiancé.

I just... Kress? Really?* Kat wanted to shake her head to clear it, but didn't want to give away just how much the question had shook her. "Well, his name is Kress and to the best of my knowledge he should still be single. I mean, he was the first time I met him, but I haven't exactly kept track of that sort of thing... and I'm more friend with Nixilei on the team than Kress so I'm not sure I'd find out naturally... if that makes sense?"

"Oh so you've been with that team for the entire tournament?" asked Stan.

"Indeed I have," said Kat with a bit of a bow, complicated by the beanbag, but not stopped by it.

"That must be nice. I only joined my team when it came time for them to try and re-enter the tournament with that... I don't remember what Thyme called it, but the mountain climbing extra round for failed competitors," said Stan.

"Huh, that's interesting, I didn't realise you could sub people in easily," said Kat.

"Not easily, but it is possible yes. So I was contracted for that, as the backers for my team heard about your... rather impressive successes so summoned a demon of their own to help carry the team. I'm not entirely sure they NEEDED it, but their fifth member retired from adventuring after the previous round," explained Stan.

"Would it be giving too much away to ask what happened?" asked Kat.

Stan paused, tapping his chin for a few moments, "I don't think so? If it is, it certainly isn't against my contract and I'm not exactly close with those four like you seem to be. They're all somewhat... dismissive of me. Strong capable fighters? Sure. Willing to work with me for the win? Absolutely. Respect me as a person? Not a chance,"

Kat bit her lip, debating for a second. "Well... not to discourage you too much, because god knows Kress needs to get laid... but he has a bit of a problem with demons. Though maybe just 'had'? I've not had any issues with him in a long time, and especially recently" *Like yesterday recently* "he's really calmed down and mellowed out, so you might have a good shot... assuming he's interested in men... I'm not sure he's ever made a stance clear on the matter, and once again... I'm not the person he'd tell,"
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Stan frowned at the news, "That's not ideal to here... though if I could just get a good lay out of him I wouldn't be too mad. Still... not ideal. Not your fault though I assume? If he's been getting better?"

Kat shook her head, "No it's something that happened in the past, I'm not sure of the exact details because I didn't want to pry, especially not after how things were looking when it first came up, we still weren't getting along then. I think a demon was responsible for either the death of his family, or the destruction of his village... or at least he thinks so. I've not met any demons that would do that sort of thing,"

Stan shook his head again, "Really not good news... but I can work with it. I don't want to be relying on anything other than my natural charms, and starting from such a shitty position will only make it better once I succeed! Though you are a bit naïve. There are plenty of demons that use summoning contracts as an outlet for... more unsavoury desires. The hub doesn't really put up with that kind of thing but Contracts are... less closely monitored,"

"I would have thought D.E.M.O.N.S would stop things getting too bad?" offered Kat.

Stan snorted at Kat's statement, "D.E.M.O.N.S main job is keeping us from committing genocide, either intentionally, or by accident, on missions or back at home. It's pretty impartial most of the time, unless someone high up in the chain is making requests, and using D.E.M.O.N.S to do it,"

Not totally sure I believe you, but I'm not going to contradict the idea. "I see... still, you seem... not overly genocidal, so what were your other questions?" asked Kat.

"I was wondering what your Contract actually is? Mine requires me to work as hard as possible during the tasks... but they didn't actually specify what I'm supposed to work hard at. I could spend all my time doing difficult math equations or perhaps contemplating the secrets of the universe. I'm not saying I'm

willing to completely throw the game away, I do have some pride. I'm just saying that... well... this doesn't have to turn into a big slug fest between the two of us," said Stan.

Well I'm not going to mention that I might not technically be under Contract at the moment. "Mine is basically to just show up and look pretty. It's not what I plan to do, I actually like my team, so I'm going to do what I can... but my Contract isn't forcing me in any way," explained Kat.

Stan nodded slowly, unsure look on his face "Ah... that's... surprisingly lax?"

Kat nodded, "The team basically just needed an extra member. For some reason they had awful luck with their final members. Constantly leaving the team, some for happy reasons, some for sad ones, but all of them left. When they summoned me, they just needed a person to fill in the paperwork and claim to be on the team," explained Kat.

"Oh... yes well... they were a dwarf and during the previous round, when the team was split up and everyone had to work together "Ah... and they just kept using minimal restrictions when they resummoned you because they didn't think it was necessary?" asked Stan.

Kat just nodded, not wanting to risk having her words prevented. To help keep Stan from noticing Kat decided to change the subject, "Hey, so, I just noticed you didn't say what happened to their previous team member?"

"Oh... yes well... they were a dwarf and during the previous round, when the team was split up and everyone had to work together with someone from an enemy team... did you have that?" Kat nodded as Stan spoke, "Right well... their missing team member and their partner were both dwarves and they wandered into a spider trap. Poor dude thought his teammate had abandoned him... then he got wrapped up by a spider, and was seconds away from being 'killed' before passing out, missing the fact that it was all part of the tournament. Traumatized them something horribly..."

"Oh" mumbled Kat.

[Chapter 1137 1137 No Bulli](#)

"Right..." Kat didn't know if it was appropriate to ask anymore, or if she even wanted to know the details if Stan had them. "Is there anything else you wanted to talk about before I go off and eat?"

"Nothing important, we can chat more later, if that's ok?" offered Stan.

"Yeah, that's no issue with me, I'll see you later?" said Kat as she stood up and held out a hand. Stan nodded, shaking Kat's hand in turn... and Kat could feel something being added to her hand with the shake. *Just don't comment on it.*

Kat walked away and strode up the staircase until she checked her hand. There didn't seem to be anything there, but she was certain something slimy was on her fingers. Kat let her fire explode out from her hand and instantly heard sizzling. The 'skin' on her hand started to bubble and pop but Kat felt no pain. Flexing her hand, Kat noticed watched as the 'skin' on her palm cracked and fell off revealing an unblemished hand underneath.

Hmm... I wonder what that was? It's not like it hurt me to remove it... and it wasn't hard to notice? Did Stan think I wouldn't or something? Heck, maybe this was his way of helping me... I just don't know and I'm certainly not going to risk it. Still... this is a black mark against him.

Kat strode up the stairs, past the first floor, and onto the second, taking a right and heading for her room. The door was locked when Kat got there, so she had to knock, but Mint simply commanded the door to open. "I thought these were all locked based on magic?" asked Kat as she stepped in.

Mint nodded, "Yes, they are all magically locked, and they aren't tuned to me at all... but... the wall next to it has no such protection from me," said Mint as she pointed to the doorframe, which now had a conspicuous hole where so the locking mechanism could remain in place even as the door opened.

Huh, I suppose that makes a master key of some kind redundant if Mint and whoever else Thyme gets to work here can just manipulate the wood a bit to open the door... but of a security hazard though.
"While a neat idea... what's stopping other people from doing that?" asked Kat.

"While we can key individuals, or keycards into the locks, Thyme has keyed me into the building itself. I can't move it as easily and fluidly as I can my body, but the whole building is, technically, VERY technically alive, and when Thyme hooked me up to the building it gave me a bit of control over it. It's... sort of like a familiar bond... wait is offensive? Thyme mentioned you both have something similar connecting you..." said Mint, with a touch of concern in her voice. She didn't want to be rude to her new friends. *novelnext.com*

Lily shook her head, "Not at all, that's basically what our bond is, and I knew that going in when I chose it. Plus, even if people want to be mean about it, I can just convince Kat to beat them up. It wouldn't even be hard,"

Kat tried to crack her knuckles for emphasis but her fingers were too flexible for that. Kat rolled her eyes at the failure, before going over to the sink in the room, freezing a bit of ice and then 'cracked' her knuckles but holding the ice in her palms. Mint and Lily just watched Kat go through the entire song and dance without comment, until Mint said, "Wow, I am very scared, totally. Absolutely terrified,"

Lily let out a giggle, and Kat decided her theatrics were worth it for that alone. "Yeah, I guess that's one downside to being a demon with a lot of flexibility and regeneration, makes it impossible to crack your knuckles. Then again... it's not really something you did as a human is it?"

Kat shook her head, "Nah, it wasn't," said Kat. "I didn't particularly like threatening people, and I certainly didn't want to scare off your bullies so that they'd ignore me as a free target. Too much effort to convince them I wasn't interested in breaking their legs afterwards," Kat sighed, shaking her head.

Mint frowned and asked, "Were you bullied a lot Kat?"

Lily snorted, even as she quickly covered her mouth to stop the water in it from going flying. Lily held up a hand, as she struggled to both laugh and swallow the water so she could laugh properly. [Wait I want to take this one!] So Kat just let Lily struggle for a bit until she managed to regain enough composure to swallow the water... and then promptly went back to laughing.

Mint was looking between them confused, not understanding the chain of events at all. Still, she was a dryad and patience was in her nature, so she just waited until Lily finally calmed down and explained.

"Ah... to say Kat was bullied... hehehe... it would imply that the bullies in question ever really bothered Kat. If they took it too far, Kat would knock them around a bit, so it was more like pranks, because Kat wasn't annoyed.

"Um... so... I changed schools, and a group of three girls wanted to pick on me because I looked like an easy target and well... Kat took exception to that," Kat managed to crack a bit of the ice that was still in her hands, and Mint tittered appropriately, "which led to an odd situation. Kat let the girls mess with her, in exchange they wouldn't bother me or anyone else. It worked for the most part. Kat normally just ended up with wet shirts, or got tripped occasionally,"

Kat let out a chuckle of her own, "Heh, when they tried to trip me I normally noticed ahead of time and just marched forward as firmly as I could. They weren't particularly sporty girls so instead of tripping me horribly, they got a big bruise on their ankle, and I would pretend to stumble a bit. God it was so hard not to laugh, even when the rest of the class would sometimes.

"It was just so silly for them to think that I was bothered at all. Then again... maybe they were laughing at the girl trying to trip me? I didn't really consider that before now... but depending on the face she was making at the time... it might have been chuckle worthy," said Kat.

Lily tried to remember the last time it happened but was coming up mostly blank, "Sorry Kat, I'm not really sure. I was more concerned with you not getting hurt then checking to see how distraught any of the trio were about getting kicked in the shin," said Lily.

"Did you have any issues with that sort of thing Mint?" asked Lily.

"Not really," said Mint. "Some people would make fun of me for not having nature affinity... but a lot of older dryads don't really... do anything? Like they don't have jobs like the other races do because a lot of them don't want or need anything, so an adult was usually around to tell them off.

"Thyme said... what's the word... coddled? Dryad children are very coddled. Apparently we're lucky that it doesn't cause us too many issues as we grow, but I don't understand the nuances as to why it would be a problem, or why it's not a problem for us specifically,"

Hmm... that's an interesting thing. I suppose that they're just wired differently compared to humans. Which just makes sense, but it is a little strange to think about. Then again... dryads are all trees, or plants at least. So they can just... exist. Training or earning money is very much an 'if you want to' thing because it's not like a dryad is likely to starve to death.

"Do you need food at all?" asked Kat, both because of her recent thought and because Mint didn't have a plate of anything at the moment.

Mint made a 'so-so' gesture, "We need sunlight and water, especially for our main body, and we can develop realistic enough bodies like the one I'm wearing that NEED food. This one doesn't, but it COULD if Thyme wanted it to. Um... yeah it's just not really an issue? If we have tastebuds in the body we're using we can taste things, and absorbing stuff through our roots does still... it's not the same, I have tried a body with tastebuds once, and it's definitely not the same... but it's not not the same as well? If that makes sense?" explained Mint.

Kat and Lily shared a look before nodding, and Lily adding, "It doesn't make perfect sense but we can work out a close enough idea of what you mean just from that. You're basically saying that you can taste things with your roots but it's not a similar sensation despite part of your mind registering it as taste?"

Mint nodded, "Close enough,"

[Chapter 1138 1138 The First Set Of Tasks Are...](#)

"Thyme is getting ready to make the announcement, you might want to head out," said Mint, seemingly out of nowhere.

"Oh... um thanks? Do you want us to do anything with the plates?" asked Kat.

"No, I can return them for you both. Hurry, you don't want to be late," said Mint.

Accepting the help, Kat and Lily shared a quick kiss before they both jumped out the window. What? It was the quickest way out of the building. Thyme was sitting on a tiny stage that had been set up on the middle pier. It barely lifted Thyme above the rest of the group. A few people were already there, including Kress who was the first of Kat's group to arrive.

She slid in beside him, and as they were waiting for the rest of the competitors, Kat decided to have a bit of fun... with the truth! "Hey Kress, so you know that demon guy on the other team, Stan?" asked Kat.

"Not that Stan was his name, but I've seen him, why?" asked Kress with a strange look.

"Well, he's decided to try and seduce you. So... good luck with that?" said Kat with a grin.

Lily was in cat form curled up in Kat's arms, and desperately trying to hide her laughter, even as Kress just stared back. After a few moments of staring where Kat's mask didn't crack in the slightest he looked around at the other groups carefully. When Kress' eyes landed on Stan, the demon through a wink Kress' way. Kress didn't react, other than to slowly turn back to Kat. "Did you put him up to that?"

"Nope," said Kat making sure to pop the 'p' as much as possible trying to get a reaction from Kress.

"I can't say I believe you," said Kress with a deadpan stare.

Kat shrugged, "Well, I can't lie, and I can easily state the following as the truth. I did not encourage him in any way. Stan approached me by himself, questioned me about your relationship status, and I simply answered his questions as truthfully as possible,"

Kress pondered on the admission for a few seconds, "I don't really know how to react to that, and I'm not really looking for a partner... plus isn't he a demon? Can he even stick around here?"

Kat made a 'so-so' gesture, "I mean, I think we can set new home dimensions? So... probably? Especially if you guys start something serious? I don't really know, it's not something I've looked into much,"

Kress tapped his foot a few times on the loose sand as he considered Kat's statement for a few seconds.

"You know, you've made this much more awkward then it needed to be. If you'd just left me in ignorance I could've pretended I was too dense to notice the flirtations before. Now that I know, and I've given the game away enough that he knows that I know, I can't pretend I don't know, unless I want to pretend I don't know he knows, but that's even more awkward,"

"I fail to see how that's my problem," said Kat.

"Yeah, it sounds hilarious to me," said Nixilei seemingly materialising from behind Kat. *How did I not hear her? Well no, probably the ocean. Let's just assume I didn't hear her over the crashing waves.*

"I don't need your advice on romance Nixilei," grumbled Kress. "Look, I think it's best to just... leave this to the side until the round is over, that way it's less likely to result in bad blood,"

"Ah, but Stan doesn't exactly like his team much," whispered Kat, "And his Contract had a pretty major loophole in it... so distracting him is a very valid tactic,"

"I am not going to be a damn honey trap!" hissed Kress. "I might not be the killjoy I was three days ago, and I might stay happier in general now my eyes have been opened a bit... but I have standards! I'm a bodyguard not Nixilei!"

"Rude, I've never gone on any real seduction missions you know," said Nixilei with a huff.

"Obviously. You'd never be able to pull one off," returned Kress.

"I got top marks in my classes!" shot back Nixilei.

Kress managed his best look of pity, and said, "I'm sorry," as best he could manage, though his slightly twitching lip from his attempts not to laugh was a massive give away for Nixilei, and a decent one for Kat.

Green and Gareth rocked up to see the stare down between the two, but they just rolled their eyes, it wasn't an unusual sight, so neither bothered to ask what it was even about. The glaring contest didn't last long though, because Thyme clapped their hands, setting off a series of comedic sound effects playing instead of a normal clapping sound. At least it got everyone's attention.

"Welcome back everyone! I hope you all enjoyed your lunches! Now, the theme of the rounds this time will be 'vacation games' and I'll be keeping everything pretty casual and fun. Quite a few rules will be about encouraging people to not go overboard. The first round will be known as the 'Inside Games' round. It will have three different tasks, all set up inside the building behind you!

"The first game, table tennis," Kat noticed that the game technically wasn't called 'table tennis' but the game was functionally the same and the translation treated it as such, "where two competitors will be set on either side of a tiny table and be required to hit the ball back and forth across an even smaller net. If the ball doesn't hit your opponent's side of the table before it hits the floor, you lose a point. First to five points wins however, you need to win by at least two points.

"This means that the games can potentially go on forever, but I want to prevent that. So, I'm adding an additional rule that if both players get to twenty it counts as a 'win' for both teams in that case. The format will be round robin style, and the person with the most wins will earn 2 points for their team, while second place will earn 1 point. While there will be playoffs if there is a tie for first place, having a tie for second place is acceptable. Oh, and it goes without saying but no magic, and you have to stay on your half of the table."

Thyme paused, letting that little bit of information sink in before finishing up with, "Though... there is one more rule. If you're responsible for breaking anything during the game. This includes, but is not

limited to, the paddles, the table, the net, the floor or the ball, then you're immediately disqualified and put in last place for the round. So... don't go all out and risk breaking things!"

Well that complicates things doesn't it.

[A bit yeah... if Thyme hasn't made the paddles any stronger then they'd be on Earth then EVERYONE is at risk of breaking them. I think we'll have at least one accidental destruction. I'm not sure who would be best at this game.]

Green perhaps? Kat's internal conversation was interrupted by Thyme continuing to speak, "Now, the second game, will be dodge ball," once again the name was different, but correct enough. "This one will be a free-for-all game where everyone is thrown in a circle and provided a rubber ball. You'll need to throw them at other contestants.

"Everyone is allowed to be hit twice, and on the third hit you're out. However, if you manage to catch a ball, then it counts as a hit for the person who threw the ball. Same rules about breaking things apply, and while magic IS allowed, you are not allowed to cast directly at your opponents, nor are you allowed to make physical contact with anything that isn't a ball, so be careful about that,"

Simple to understand and probably the event I'd do the best in, especially compared to table tennis.

[Perhaps, but your wings make you a bigger target.]

Hmm... you're right on that... I wonder if I could catch a ball with my tail though?

"The final game, has a complete ban on attacks, and magic. Though, some application of force is acceptable. You'll be able to figure it out. See, this last game is called, 'Twister'" it wasn't, Thyme's game was actually called 'Stay on the Dots' but it was very clearly Twister, "I'll be laying out a mat I've done up, and it will be another free for all. Everyone will start standing in the middle of the mat, and then based on a spinner I'll be keeping off to the side, you'll need to put a certain body part on the correct colour! If any of your limbs are on the wrong colour, you'll be eliminated,"

You know... I'd probably be best at twister. Not only am I flexible, but I have a tail, so I could probably trip people up with it.

[Yeah... but I'd rather you didn't join in that one. Though... maybe we can get Kress to play that game with Stan?]

Hmm...

[Chapter 1139 1139 Pick Your Poison. Again. Probably.](#)

Thyme showed everyone the hidden door under the stairs, and announced "You have an hour to make your plans. Anyone not downstairs when that timer," Thyme pointed to a massive sand hourglass that Mint picked up from under the desk and put on the floor, "finishes, will be eliminated from this round and get zero points for all three events. Don't be late!"

How did Mint do that? Kat looked between Mint, the desk, and the hourglass as everyone else started to disperse. Thyme hadn't yet named the teams for everyone, but Blue's team was going upstairs to

their rooms, with the dwarven lead team following them, Romilda, whose name Kat still didn't know, floating up the staircase. Stan's team was heading back outside, and the last team, the one with the elven princess on it, headed back to the cafeteria.

Kat's team was heading upstairs as well, but Kat kept looking at the hourglass. It was nearly twice the height of the desk, and just as wide. There was no way it could fit underneath the desk without shenanigans of some kind. Probably Thyme's spatial magic. Lily nipped at Kat's hand then turned her head to the rest of the team who were already quite a ways up the stairs.

Kat sighed, letting the mystery of the hourglass flow out of her mind. Kat gave a bit of a wave to Mint, who smiled back, before she climbed the stairs, quickly catching up to her team. They headed up to their shared floor and piled into the room that technically belonged to Gareth. Based on the lack of use the room had seen before they entered, Gareth and Green had probably claimed Green's as their shared room.

Green flopped down onto the bed anyway, until Nixilei walked over and thwacked Green on the back of the head, "Focus now Green," said Nixilei.

"Meh... you guys can work it out right?" returned Green.

"Look, I know you've just had lunch, but this is important Green," said Gareth, knowing Green would be more likely to listen to him.

"Fiiine," whined Green as she got up. Gareth sat down next to the fae and gave her a few pats on the head. Green leaned onto his shoulder, but Gareth flicked her on the forehead.

"No sleeping just yet," said Gareth.

Green pouted but didn't say anything else. Kress grabbed a chair and flipped it around so they he could rest his head on the backrest while looking at everyone over the top, Nixilei stood of the side, and Kat slid onto the counter. "So, how are we starting?" asked Kress.

Lily transformed on Kat's lap and said, "I think we should decide who is participating in what matches. The most you can do is three total, and perhaps the last event. That one might have different rules though, so we can't plan around it too much just yet. My point, is that if say... we want Kat to participate in as many events as possible,

"Then she needs to participate in one, and two, then skip three, to participate in four, and possibly five. So I'd say we work out who, if any, should try to line things up that way. Then, we should decide who is the best at each event in question,"

Nixilei tapped her chin a few times but nodded. Green nodded as well thinking things sounded good enough, while Kress and Gareth shared a shrug. So Kress said, "I'm not saying that's a bad idea but it would give Kat a bunch of extra work, and while she may be the best option, I'm not sure I want to rely on that strength to carry us.

"There is also the event Kat will be barred from. We don't know when that event actually IS, and because it's a wings issue you'll be banned as well Lily. Which is another thing to consider, is there anything here you're particularly good at? Should we alternate tasks between you and Kat so someone extra can rest?"

"We can worry about the arial events when they show up, as for switching me and Lily out... I don't know if it matters? These events all seem pretty low key, so I think I could do every single event without rest and still have no problems. Lily not so much... but none of them are particularly intense so far. It just doesn't seem worth worrying about," explained Kat.

"That's fair... so does anyone have an event they want to try?" asked Gareth.

Kat spoke up again, "Actually, I'd like to point out that I really shouldn't enter the table tennis match. I can't scale my strength all that well, and I certainly don't have practice volleying a ball back and forth while relaxing my grip enough to keep the paddle intact. I wouldn't be surprised if I kept my arm strong, and then had the paddle break in half as the ball made contact,"

"Really?" said Green in surprise. "You always seem to be rather in control of your strength..."

Kat shrugged, "I can sort of flick it to 'settings'? I guess? I also instinctively seem to know how much strength is potentially lethal... but for inanimate objects? I've only really handled things at 'base' strength, I have no idea what the appropriate level for this sort of thing is. Things are... flimsy now that I'm rank three. I don't know how much Thyme will reinforce the paddles... but I'm just a bit worried ok?"

Plus, I doubt Thyme will be using a plastic ball that's nearly impossible to break. Dent? Maybe? But break? Those ping pong balls are ridiculously durable. Thyme's might not be quite the same.

"Huh... well, if it's control we need, then either me or Nixilei are the best bets... but perhaps Green could use her archery experience to aim the ball well?" offered Kress.

Green shook her head, "I've got no idea how the ball will react. I've never heard of this game before so I doubt archery is a particularly transferable skill. I'd... rather not," said Green.

Nixilei and Kress shared a look. Kress just shrugged. Nixilei shrugged back. Kress raised an eyebrow. Nixilei quirked a lip. Kress rolled his eyes while raising a finger ever so slightly. Nixilei glared back and puffed out her chest. Kress did a wave motion with his hand. Nixilei raised one eyebrow, and her pinkie finger of her left hand.

Kat and Lily shared a look. Green and Gareth shared a similar one. Gareth broke first. "Ok what does any of that even mean,"

Kress shrugged and answered. "I have no idea,"

"Yes, it was a strange contest because we kept trying to throw the job to each other... but honestly I'm not sure who won that one," agreed Nixilei.

Gareth huffed, "Right, in that case, you both and Kat can participate in the first round. Pick and event. Green and I will participate in the next round. Problem solved,"

Nixilei and Kress both glared at Gareth but they didn't argue any further. It was as good a way as any to pick who should participate or not, they just didn't know what in the future they needed to plan for, so it made things hard.

"I'll take the table tennis then," said Kress. "I'm confident in regulating my strength, my reaction time is quite good, and honestly? I'm not sure I can beat Nixilei when it comes to situation awareness that I'd need for twister or dodgeball. Give me a one, on one any day,"

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Kat turned to Nixilei and said, "Well, in that case, do you want to play twister, or dodgeball?"

Nixilei pursed her lips. "I feel as if I'm the sub-optimal choice for both games when compared to yourself Kat. My flexibility is top class, but not supernaturally so. My situation awareness is excellent but your mind runs faster. I can aim a throw ball well, but you can out strength me massively..."

Kat glared at Nixilei, "You're really putting yourself down here,"

Nixilei just shrugged, "It's the way of things. As a Rank 3 demon all of your skills are a level above mind, and even if Thyme does restrict you somewhat, your mind is still free,"

"Should I play twister then? I doubt Thyme will need to restrict me at all there," said Kat.

Nixilei chewed on her lip for a few moments as she considered the offer. "No, I think I'll take twister. I have a feeling that you COULD win on your own, but I'll make use of... alternative methods of ensuring my win if I'm playing twister,"

Kat blushed hotly, realising a bit of what Nixilei was suggesting, even if she didn't know the specifics. "Um... yeah... I... I wouldn't be willing to do that sort of thing. Do... do you think Thyme will allow it?" said Kat awkwardly.

"As long as he doesn't consider it a mental attack? Yes, yes I do," said Nixilei with a grin.

[Chapter 1140 1140 Kress Take The Wheel](#)

An Ultra Rare 'Kress Chapter' has appeared.

As Kress stepped into the spatial enhanced box Thyme had hidden under the stairs, his eyes raked over his competition. After deciding on roles, Kress had ducked back to his room to remove his leather armour and put on some more comfortable clothes. He felt naked standing amongst competitors with just a cotton shirt and pants. He'd kept his boots though. Sturdy things that could break knees if necessary.

Nixilei had the same idea. She'd swapped her normal robes out for a pair of close-fitting pants and a loose shirt. Kress' gaze didn't linger long on her, instead, he was trying not to laugh at Gareth. He was currently glaring at his two friends... because he was still in plate armour. Green was asleep over his shoulder already and couldn't be relied on to help, so he had to glare uselessly.

Kat was of course in her normal kimono. Kress had never seen the demon wearing anything else. Rain, hail, shine, sleepy, injured, it was always the same outfit. Kress would wonder how she kept it in such good condition if he didn't know it could be resummoned at will. Lily was resting in Kat's arms. The little kitten, that was apparently a young woman, spent more time sleeping than Green. It explained why Kat never made a fuss about Green's habits. They were clearly familiar to the demon.

Kress let out a long breath as he shook his head to disguise his glances at the rest of the competitors. Most had stuck with their original outfits, but some had changed. Kress didn't know any of their names, but the big gorilla woman had stripped her armour off and now wore a dress that was at least a size too small and looked ready to rip any time she twitched. Stan was wiggling his eyebrows, but in the same clothes, so apparently Kress' quick glance wasn't as subtle as he thought.

*Still not sure what to make of it. If I didn't know Kat couldn't lie, I'd think she was just fucking with me. Not sure what I'm going to do about it either. Stan's a good looking dude, but he's a demon... and I'm not sure I'd be ready for the type of commitment it would require for him to stick around...

I'm also really not used to being pursued, so this is going to be weird.* Kress moved to lean against the wall so he could see the whole room and hopefully keep his investigations a bit subtler this time. *nOvelnExt.com*

Kress noted that quite a few weapons had been left behind even if the armour had not. It seemed that Thyme was trusted enough for that. The only other competitor of note was that floating dwarf, they were still floating, and kept their outfit as it was. Kress had heard her complaints earlier about not wanting to leave it behind... but it was unclear how that would apply to some of the events.

Finally, the door to the room opened and everyone stepped out into a large hall. In the centre, was a tiny little brown table that had been made of a single slab of wood and then polished to a mirror sheen. There was a net about the height of Kress' hands if he held them palms together. There was a paddle on each side, and a basket of paddles underneath, though based on the rules that basket might not see much use.

The little table was very small compared to the rest of the room, which had also been polished to a mirror shine, though it was made up of closely packed slats of wood instead of a single piece. Kress noted that little detail. With Thyme's ability to manipulate wood, making the whole floor a singular piece might not have been impossible, so perhaps there was some reasoning behind the choice.

The ceiling in the room was high, making Kress wonder just how far underground Thyme had taken them. It was easily higher than the building resting above it, and Kress wonder what the point of it being so high was. Certainly, it had no bearing on this game. The table was just so small that even if the ball was hit hard and directly down, the table would break before the ball had the power to hit the ceiling.

Thyme was walking around with a board, and pointing at it, Kress narrowed his eyes as he watched... but he couldn't hear any of the responses. The reason why was quickly revealed when Thyme got to their group and asked, "So who's participating in what event?"

As Nixilei gave the answers, Kress noticed that while people were looking over here now, they couldn't hear them. Thyme must have done something to prevent the other teams from overhearing the line-ups. *Interesting. I wonder how Thyme is managing such a thing?* The answer to Kress' question, was that Thyme was showing off to the magically inclined.

Thyme was manipulating space so that the group he was standing around were just slightly out of sync with the dimension. This left them still visible, but unable to be heard. The level of control needed to shift everyone just the right amount 'to the left' for the effect was astronomical. It showed a mastery of

space magic that surpassed what many thought was possible... and Thyme was using it casually as a silence spell. Most people couldn't tell what was being done, but for Thyme that was fine, if not funnier.

Once Thyme had gone around and collected all the answers, a blackboard rose out from the ground with the draw on it. "The first round will start in a moment. This is the round robin draw. The order was decided randomly, and if you have any questions asked them now,"

Kress looked at the board and saw his name was up first. He'd be someone called Willow, after which Vanya would fight Romilda, with Bonas, the female wolf sibling Kress remembered from the previous round would be getting the first by. There was also a few arrows on the chart, showing how the round would move afterwards.

Kress would be the first up, again, in the second round and fighting Bonas, then Vanya would fight Willow, with Romilda getting the by. How things would shake out after that Kress wasn't entirely sure, but Thyme could figure that part out if he wanted.

Kress stood and moved over towards the table, with Willow following suit. Kress could now see that she was from the same team as Stan who was currently pouting. *Probably hoping I'd sign up for the twister game.* They stood across the table from each other, and Thyme said. "You have five minutes to familiarise yourself with the equipment. You can break ONE paddle during this testing round, but not anything else... well, except the ball but I doubt you can manage that,"

Thyme then dropped a ball on either side of the table and Kress took the chance to examine it. It was made of a wooden lattice that kept it in a rounded shape but left it hollow. Kress picked the ball up and threw it between his hands a few times. It was light, exceptionally so, and didn't seem to be bending much from this light handling.

Kress watched Willow do the same, so he quickly picked up the paddle and made his way over to the wall. Kress through the ball up and whacked it against the wall, surprised when the ball shot back at great speed. Kress stumbled back as he struggled to hit the ball a second time, but he managed it. Then a third.

Soon he was using all of his training to keep the ball bouncing back and forth between the paddle and the wall. Willow was imitating him, though with less success. Her movements just weren't quite as fluid as his, once Kress recovered of course. Willow always seemed to be aiming just a little higher then the ball actually was, leading to some issues.

Kat pursed his lips, he knew he didn't have long to test things so he sped up. He kept trying to hit the ball back to the same section so they he could bounce it between the paddle and the wall, faster and faster. Kress didn't need to up his strength, the ball was speeding up all on its own... but that wasn't the point. Kress slammed into the ball with as much force as he could muster, and heard a cracking sound. The paddle had cracks spreading out from the centre but it wasn't quite broken just yet.

Kress smacked the ball again, lightly, at heard the paddle creak. *Hmm... that's not quite natural is it? I think Thyme has give us a bit of a hint here.* Kress smacked the ball back a few more times, the paddle gaining just a touch more damage, before Kress' eyes sharpened and he smacked the ball as hard as he could, the paddle splintering in his hands. Kress had to look away from Willow, to hide the smile on his face. *This is going to be easy.*

