

## DEMONS 301

### Chapter 301: This is Where the OP Would Play

The inner compound had been destroyed. Huge chunks of the buildings had been cut and sliced into, clearly by Xiang's sword, as when he swung it flashes of golden light would follow behind. There were broken and battered disciples littering the courtyard, completely collapsed and strewn around without a care in the world.

Kat was somewhat glad the pain had dulled her hearing so that she couldn't make out the breathing of the disciples over the clashing of swords. Xiang and Hu were engaging in, she didn't want that knowledge of who still lived.

Hu and Hong were more than a little battered. They stood bleeding from a huge number of cuts all over their body that made Kat think they had to be more blood than skin at this point. It was almost certainly more blood than a human could lose and keep fighting, but Kat just guessed that they had blood replenishing pills. It made more sense than many alternatives.

Kat was shaken with just this much, but it was what sat behind the brothers that drove home Kat's feeling of despair. Behind them was two cribs. She couldn't see if they were occupied, but the fierceness of the brothers' attacks more than answered her question, if the next shout didn't hammer the last nail in.

Hong was shooting arrow after arrow, and had three discarded quivers around him. Hu had his signature coated in so much blood it was becoming more like a club, and based on 'Xiang's' appearance, it had to be Hu's.

"Oh look, the other one showed up" said Hu bitterly "Do you have no HONOUR!"

Hu charged 'Xiang' again before being smacked away with the flat of his blade. Clearly Xiang was playing with them. Forcing them to attack over and over, and be beaten back further and further after every strike. His sword danced and intercepted any of Hong's arrows, littering the ground with them.

"You're right Hu, I don't have honour, but even this is a step too far, for any decent sentient being" said Kat, pushing her energy to rotate once again. It tried to fight against her, but she forced it to move. Kat shot forward, pain nearly blinding her, but she channelled that pain into her hands forcing flames to form over her fists.

Kat drove her hands back to slam into Xiang, fire and all, at the same time that Hu charged again, coming in from the side to slash him. Yet, Xiang didn't falter for a second, he smashed his sword into Hu, throwing away, the same time he extended his leg behind him and kicked Kat into the chest forcing her back.

Kat's body tumbled, rolling multiple times before slamming into a large piece of rubble and falling down face first into the dirt. Kat felt her body screech in protest as it got to work healing her. It felt more like it was trying to tear her apart in the process, but she concentrated as best she could on the specific injuries and felt them healing alongside the pain.

Before she could recover fully Kat was already trying to push herself back to her feet. Her legs groaned in protest so she tried for her wings. More pain came for her, but they at least heeded her call. Hovering more like a drunk fly than her usual grace and speed, Kat wobbled in the air as her body BURNED.

\*Come on Kat. Revenge is one thing but kids?! I can't allow that. I draw the line there.\* Kat forced herself to fly forward, gritting her teeth and ignoring the pain. Hong saw her new charge and reached into the tattered remains of his robe to pull out an arrow he had strapped to his leg.

"Arrow From the Edge of the World" whispered Hong to himself. Not even Kat could hear his hesitant voice as he drew back his bow. The arrow started to glow with a pure white light, gathering it in a spiral focused on the arrow head.

Hu looked over at Hong, and grit his teeth in pain. Hu then started to choke his words out through clenched teeth. "Sword of Sacred Flame"

Hu leapt first, taking Xiang's first strike. His flame seemed to spread to Xiang's sword, but then the sword in Xiang's hands just flashed gold as he started to throw Hu away. This was when Kat tried to slam into him. Xiang raised his foot again, but this time Kat was ready, right as Xiang kicked out, Kat bent around the foot and kept going towards his chest.

It wasn't enough though, and before Hong could finish charging his attack, Xiang MOVED. His sword backlit by golden light, threw Hu away, sending him flying straight into the back wall of the compound, narrowly missing the two cradles.

For Kat, his legs both shone with gold light, before he spun in place, smashing into Kat, but she was ready for that too. She let out as much fire as she could straight at Xiang. He reflexively summoned a gold skin around him, but the fire clung to it anyway. Kat was smiling through the pain as she swore that the gold skin was being worn away.

Until Xiang reached up with both hands on either side and ripped his golden armour in two before hurling it at the wall, along with her flames. Kat tried to stand, to launch one more attack against Xiang. To stop him from doing something horrible... but, her despair started rising when her body didn't respond.

With Kat on the ground, and Hu buried into the wall, Hong grimaced as he held the arrow before him. He didn't make any movements, except the slight wobbling strain on his arms from having the bow pulled back. \*Move dammit.\* Kat felt her tail twitch slightly in eagerness to help at all, but nothing more.

Xiang took a few more steps forward before looking around. Golden eyes acting like searchlights scanning everywhere. They moved over Kat's prone form and Hu's form buried in the wall, as well as Hong's.

Then Xiang wasn't there anymore. He was in front of Hong in a flash of golden light. Kat didn't see the transaction, or when Xiang kicked him in the chest and sent him flying as well. Then Xiang started to walk over to the cradles.

Kat's blood ran cold. She screamed at her body for it to move... and it obeyed, kicking and screaming as well. She couldn't feel much energy in her if she still had any at all. Her wounds had healed but the pain had not. She didn't care though.

Kat ran forward as fast as she could, which was nothing better than a jog at this point. Xiang looked over her, before looking back at the cribs and raising his sword very slowly, clearly taking his time, allowing her to approach. Kat ran, like a drunk stumbling home, using everything she had to get just a bit closer before Xiang swung that sword down.

Kat was only a few paces away, when Xiang's face twitched just slightly. The edges of his mouth flickering down just the slightest amount before settling again, and swinging the sword down.

Kat didn't know what she was doing, but she acted. She kicked off the ground with everything she had, throwing energy she wasn't sure she still had into her legs, and launching her forward. Kat slammed into the crib knocking it out of the way, before the sword was brought down upon her.

The sword bit into her neck. She was still crouched down, so for once Xiang stood over her, and he looked just as emotionless as before. His eyes flicked to the sword and then back to Kat who stood in defiance and grinned at him. \*Got there... in... time.\*

Xiang pulled the sword back, before stabbing it forward, letting it sink straight into Kat's stomach and out the other side. Kat's body was ready to collapse, but she saw a hint of movement in the corner of her eye, and instead, she pushed herself forward, digging the sword further into her stomach and gripping onto Xiang's shoulders hard.

"Hold" Hung let out a hacking cough "Him just" more coughing racked through Hung but he kept speaking "Right there"

Kat couldn't nod, couldn't do anything. She kept her grip tight but her vision was fading along with the pain. "May this arrow send you back to its home. RELEASE" shouted Hung with a cough at the end.

Before it hit though, Kat felt herself falling backwards vision dimming. \*Is this enough? Was this enough revenge? You have destroyed the sect, decimated their warriors, and nearly killed their children. Please let this be enough.\*

Right before Kat's vision disappeared completely, she saw a familiar wall of burning text.

Potential deadly attack found. Banishing demon before damage sustained is too great.

But Kat's mind didn't see the words. She just had a warm feeling in her chest that said everything was going to be fine. She was certain that it wasn't the burning sensation of a sword being ripped out as Xiang was sent flying by Hung's arrow.

### **Chapter 302: Nurse!**

Kat shuddered, but before she could try and take stock of the situation, there was pain. Everything was pain. Her body screamed at her, she couldn't properly feel what was going on. She tried to order her eyes to open, but that only caused even more pain to slam through her body and mind... until suddenly, it all stopped.

There was still a dull ache that attached itself to her mind, but she could start forming coherent thoughts. Before it was only pain, and now only around half of her mind was filled with pain, and she could push that to the back of her mind and ignore it to some extent to help with that.

Her thoughts were coming together slowly though. She could think again, but only at a drastically reduced speed. She didn't have time to fully form any thoughts before a gentle voice seeped into her ears, or she thought it did. She'd later be proved wrong.

Anyway, this voice that reached her was very soft, it made her think things were going to be ok. It had a very slight lisp, causing certain sounds to be exaggerated, but even that seemed to further soothe her mind.

"Now Kat, I need you to remain calm. I'm currently separating your mind from your body with an ability of mine to stop the pain. I need you to stay calm and try not to fight me. You have a strong mind and you might be able to fight me off before I get through the explanation.

"I'm sure you have many questions but just know that for now, you are safe in the demon hospital. You've made it back from your mission and you can relax. Now, I'm going to open your eyes and I need you to stay calm. Please don't fight me.

Kat didn't feel anything as the person speaking to her opened both her eyes. Then, all of her pain slammed into her for just a split second, enough for her to start trying to spasm, but she was held in place by something, likely ropes or straps, before the pain shut off. The strange thing was, she could still see even though the pain had stopped.

She stared up at the ceiling. The lights weren't on in her room, but the ceiling was bright white, and was almost as bad to her eyes. It made it feel like they were itching even though she couldn't feel them. In the corner of her vision she could see the slight movement of something but she couldn't quite make them out.

Until they moved to the end of the bed. Kat realised it must have been the nurse who was speaking. She was currently carrying a chair, and was moving so that she would be seated at the end of Kat's bed, well within her field of vision. That's when Kat noticed something that had been bothering her. Vision. Her peripheral vision was completely shot. She could only see the edges of her single bed and not a whole lot more. She started to panic, but the nurse's soft voice came to her again as the nurse placed the chair down.

"Calm, please Kat, stay calm" said the nurse with a wince. Kat moved her focus to her, and wished she could drop her jaw in surprise. The nurse in question was certainly not human. More reminiscent of a medusa than anything else, the nurse had a bunch of snakes for hair. They were a dark green that Kat found somewhat appealing, reminding her of the grass around the old orphanage. *nOvelNext.com*

The nurse's face was very pretty. She had a soft round face with a small nose and a pleasant smile. The only thing that might have been off-putting were her eyes, both her own, and those of her snakes... which, were also technically hers. They were all the standard snake eyed slit down the middle with golden edges and a dark black line that marked the centre. At the moment though, each of eyes staring at Kat glowed, letting a faint golden light leak out. Each of them were locked onto Kat, making sure they never moved or swayed in position at all.

The rest of her attire was rather standard. Kat couldn't see past her midsection, as the bed blocked Kat's view, but she had heard footsteps as she walked so Kat was forced to assume she had legs and a skirt on. Her top was a plain white blouse that you would find in any human hospital, if slightly less form fitting.

"Ok Kat? Are you with me? My name isss a little hard to remember or sssay for the younger demonsss so you can call me Kara, ok?" said the nurse Kat now knew was Kara.

Kat tried to stifle her reaction. Kara had been very clear that doing too much might force her to break the technique, and Kat wasn't sure what was acceptable.

Kara tilted her head to the side, but all her snakes moved so that they stayed in the same fixed position relative to Kat, despite the movement of Kara's head. "Hmm, well dear, I think you've done a very well. It sssseemsss that you already managed to keep your reaction ssteady? Unless you went back to sssleep? Could you give me a ssslight twitch dear?"

\*Um? I hope this is slight?\* Kat tried to forcibly move her arm, and Kara winced, her right eye twitching rapidly as the glow sputtered a bit before returning to normal. "Oof, dear me. Thatsss some power in your aura right there. I know I asskssed for that but it wasss more than I wanted. That'sss ok though dear. I'm going to let you know what'sss happened. Firsst though, just know you are going to be ok"

Kara let that statement hang in the air. Kat made sure not to react, but Kara got a slight smile and a nod, as if understanding Kat was still following what she was saying. "Ok, sssso, your regeneration has fixssed you all up. Physsssically sssspeaking. It isss a rather ssstrange little ability. Usssesss a bit too much energy to be consssidered top tier and that almosst never changesss. Dessspite itsss inability to heal armsss or legsss or sssso I wasss told, it can heal organsss. Persssionally I don't think that makesss a whole lot of sssenssse but that'sss fine.

"It meanss that you will recover, and without any nasssty ssscars. It wasss a little ssscary at the sstart but it turnsss out your regeneration rate is quite good, and that regeneration of yoursss can be very good at keeping you alive when it needsss to be.

"Now, you are probably wondering about the pain. I'm afraid that will need to be dealt with yoursssself. Oncsse we finisssh here, another demon will come in and put you to sssleep. That ssshould help you through the worssst of it. Now, the reassson this happened, is becausssse you are sssuffering from sssevere energy deficssiencssy.

"From what we were told, you didn't actually ussse that much energy. The isssue was the destraction of your main regulation sssystem in and around your heart, along with your lapssse in consssiousnesss. Then repeating the SSSAME thing again dear. That wasss not good for you.?All the ssside effectsss ssshould be temporary, but we do need to keep you here under obssservation just in cassse." Said Kara, keeping her voice soft and soothing the entire time. It was like she was applying bandages to Kat's mind with every word, lessening the pain she was holding at bay slightly.

With this, Kara stood up and walked over to Kat and started to stroke her hair. She couldn't feel it of course, but she could see the motions of Kara's hand and had to assume that was what she was doing. Kat wasn't exactly able to turn her head at that moment to check.

"Now, when you wake up next, we might be able to have a real talk. When you wake up though, try not to freak out too much ok? You've been wonderfully behaved sso far plesse keep that up" said Kara before walking away and knocking on the door. What walked through looked more like a shadow than a person. Gangly stretched out limbs, entirely black body, and nothing identifiable as a face or a mouth. The only thing that identified it as anything but a monster was the bright yellow tie it wore around its neck.

They just walked up to Kat, and gave her a light tap on the head, and then she found herself in her pond, already deep in her meditation. Her mind sunk into the waters and prevented her from worrying what nightmare that doctor must have come from, and allowed her to just relax and ignore the signals of pain and outrage coming from her body. They were easy to ignore, because the water was so nice and tranquil, letting Kat drift along peacefully, no longer aware of the passage of time.

Author's note

The start of book 5 is going to be very lore heavy, finally answering some questionsss about how demons work. It won't just be a Q&A with Kara but Kat has nothing better to occupy her time while she heals up, so we will be spending the start fleshing these things out so just be prepared

### **Chapter 303: You Don F\*ed Up**

Kat's mind started to come together some time later. Thinking was still hard, but it was possible once again. However, before Kat could get properly comfortable, a dull ache started to make itself known. Seemingly radiating out from the centre of her pond, and covering all parts of her mind, Kat forced herself to come together and open her eyes. The first thing she noticed was that her vision was back in its entirety.

Sadly, this didn't help much. The dull ache remained but it was slightly less concentrated, now mostly just a continual throbbing across her entire body, especially noticeable in her wings, and even her horns. Strangely, her tail was completely fine. This was when Kat noticed that she could in fact move said tail despite laying down and that her wings were the same, except moving them caused the pain to flare up so she left them to the side.

While Kat was trying to figure out how her demonic limbs were free to move, a knock sounded at the door. Kat let her eyes drift there, and a moment later, Kara opened it and peaked in. This time, her hair was flat against her head. The snakes seemed to all be looking out in different direction and her eyes no longer glowed.

"Good, you are awake. May I come in?" asked Kara

"Yes" said Kat, her voice sounding surprisingly normal though her throat felt raw when she spoke.

Kara nodded again, stepping inside and taking back her seat at the end of Kat's bed. "Well, I'm glad to ssee you awake, and with the worsst of the pain gone. I have quite a few thingsss that I need to go over now ass your attending nurrssse, we can sstart with either sstuff for medical, or the information about your misssion and your debt"

\*Ugh, my debt. Hearing that I actually have to hear about it doesn't sound good... let's hear about my medical stuff first. I might as well get that one out of the way before I find out what sort of slave labour I'll be subjected to.\*

"Um, medical information first thanks" said Kat.

"Ok" said Kara "Just one moment then let me get the display"

Kara stood up and moved to Kat's side before ducking down and grabbing something from the bottom of the bed. What she brought out was a small plastic block with a hole in the centre and water filling up the bottom half. Kara then moved to the edge of Kat's bed and set the plastic contraption down, making sure that she didn't put any undue pressure on Kat's feet.

The bed was designed so that even much taller demons would have no problems, so there was quite a lot of space at the end of the bed for the whole thing. Kara then moved and sat sideways with her back somewhat to the plastic thing, and her legs off the bed.

"Right. To start with. I will say that in some ways you are extremely lucky, but from another perspective you are anything but. It seems that your regeneration can heal you from almost anything, even problems with your energy. The problem is, that it also takes energy to fix these problems. Other higher tier regeneration abilities use body fat, rage, or something else in combination with energy. Additionally, they normally fail to fix energy issues without outside help.

"This means that they will be pulled from contracts much earlier than you, and hence our problem. It's almost impossible to maim you. With enough time and effort, your regeneration can restore you to prime condition. Even top tier Wrath demons would be pulled out earlier because excessive scarring is considered maiming. This means that it takes something REALLY bad to pull you to safety

"So please be aware, that when I say you were in a bad way when you were delivered to us I'm not exaggerating when I say 'Don't do that again' even though it's likely to happen.

"The problem is that if your energy channels are damaged, you need to use more energy to fix them. This causes a bit of a feedback loop. Your healing might be perfect, but it's also too smart for its own good. It will first try to keep you alive and functioning then heal the rest including scars if necessary."

Kara glared down at Kat, and for her last paragraph all of her snakes turned and glared to Kat to reinforce how serious she was. Kat however, was still not at max capacity mentally and let it completely go over her head and said. "I don't see the problem though? If it can fix anything eventually why do I need to be careful? Especially if it uses energy? I've got plenty of that"

Kara let out a long hissing sigh from all of her mouths even her snakes, before picking the container up off the bed and putting it to the side. Once this was done, she turned herself to face Kat and said.

"Right, the issue is that it will keep you functional first even if there is a more efficient way to heal you long term. Even despite this though it still fixes everything. The easiest example is the pain you always experience during healing. You always heal your NERVES first Kat.

"If you try to force yourself to move too quickly while you are healing, you will likely cause even more damage to yourself as you move. The issue is this goes double for your energy. Because it is not strictly necessary for you to move and function for it to be in good condition, it will focus on other things first.

"And because energy channel damage isn't well understood or measured, the system won't consider it a problem no matter how much damage you do to them as long as you have enough energy left to heal yourself.

"Now though, your body has healed everything except your energy channels and it is going to be somewhat slow going. There are ways to speed it up, but first I need to explain the problem" said Kara, bending back down to grab the plastic model.

Pressing a hidden button, the water started to rotate inside the contraption, circling around the centre in a smooth flowing motion. "This is how your energy should work. Now, this is just to help visualize, so don't get too hung up on it, but it will help.

"Now, when you damage yourself excessively it's like freezing this in place" Kara pressed another button on the side, and chunks of ice started to form. The liquid still moved, but now the ice would brush up against the sides, making soft clinking sounds. "Now imagine this was a vein. This ice isn't much of an issue in small amounts, but..."

Kara gestured for Kat to fill in the blanks and she did "It will do a bit of damage when you circulate it, which in turn means more ice builds up, which causes more damage"

Kara nodded with a smile on her face. "Yes. Now the problem is that you heal with your energy, which means even as you damage yourself it also heals you, hence more pain. The worst part is that like most demons you generate energy from no one place in your body. Thus, even if basically your entire system is frozen"

Kara pressed a button and suddenly all that was in the container was a frozen block of ice stuck halfway around the centre. "It can still produce a bit of energy to keep you 'functioning' and, in your case not in need of extraction."

Kara pressed another button and small droplets of water started to seep from all corners of the tube, slowly moving over towards the ice and eating away at it. "This is what happened to you. Now, you can't regenerate your energy properly because your energy system is messed up

"Even still, it is healing you, slowly. You have the choice to force it by circulating SMALL" Kara's eyes all lit up and stared deep into Kat's "amounts. Small, I say once again. Do NOT overdo it. It will hurt either way, but if you do this slowly and carefully it won't be causing you damage."

Kat swallowed somewhat nervously. "What is the alternative option?"

"Just rest and let it happen. You won't be able to move much without rather extreme pain as movement will force some improper circulation of energy at this time." Said Kara, with a look of distaste, clearly indicating which option she thought Kat was better off going with.

\*Great, looks like I'm in for some pain.\* Kat nodded though, and said "I'd like to do this the faster way and try to get moving sooner rather than later, if that's ok with you"



Kara nodded happily. "Right sso thiss, iss what you need to do and what to watch out for while you are moving your energy around..."

### **Chapter 304: The Review Process**

Once Kara finished explaining the various exercises to Kat, she had Kat repeat them back to her to make absolutely certain she wasn't going to accidentally injure herself. Once Kara was satisfied, she asked if Kat wanted to move onto the second topic, her debt.

"It'sss gotten rather complicated. D.E.M.O.N.S can explain, but I'll likely be a bit clearer and more complete. Of coursse either way, doctor-patient confidentiality meanss I won't be ssspreading that information" said Kara

Kat... had a few questions about that, but she was hesitant to voice them. \*Well, I guess I might as well just go through it with Kara. She has a nice voice and it isn't as though I'm leaving bed any time soon even with the exercises she taught me. The real question is... why could I practically hear the difference when she said demons? I mean it's just demons right? But why can I tell she was talking about the system?\*

Kat wondered if it was rude to ask, but Kara's calm demeanour convinced Kat to just ask. "Um, I'd love you to tell me Kara, your voice is quite nice and it seems to calm me down further and help with the pain... but first I'd like to know... when you talked about the system just before, how come I could hear the difference? I mean... it's just demons right? And you didn't even have your lisp... which, I mean I don't want to be rude or anything but it's just strange"

Kara just smiled kindly "That'sss eassy. It is a quirk of the transsslation ability all demonsss ssshare. It worksss ass a ssstrange mix of language proficssienccsy, ssspeach quirksss and intent. You'll noticcse that I have my lissp becausse of my forked tongue. If I really focus I can sound more normal, but... I don't like doing this much, it feels disingenuous."

Kat's jaw dropped when she heard Kara speak without the lisp. It just... it sounded wrong to her, as if there was something fundamentally off about it. \*I can see why she chooses to keep it. Her natural voice is so calming... but wait does that mean...\*

"So I can say D.E.M.O.N.S as well? Oh yeah I can... that's weird..." said Kat "I think I'll still refer to it as 'the system' most of the time... but that's good to know?"

Kara nodded "You may find other dimensssionsss that have their own sssysstem where they will refer to as 'the sssystem' so it can get confusssing without that little quirk. It will mean however, that sssomone will never inssult you without intending to do sso. If they've been tricked by sssomeone elssse, you will likely hear both overlapped."

"Thanks for mentioning that. It seems good to know, and I... well I can ask the system most times but I have to actually know to ask you know? I didn't think too much on the more specific applications of the translation ability just that I had it and it worked. Now can you tell me a bit about my debt?" asked Kat

Kara nodded, keeping the pleasant smile on her face. One of her snakes even nudged the side of her cheek and she scratched it a few times in response as she spoke. "Well, where to sstart. I guesss from the beginning? Sso, on pure technicality you failed becausse you were banissshed, however, it will

now go under review. Of course because of your unique circumstances... it has caused some problems.

"So, normally it wouldn't be a problem, but your debt was already extended because of that emergency beacon request. Thus as soon as you failed your mission your punishment was queued up. There is nothing that can be done about that, so you will just need to deal with I'm afraid."

\*Dammit. I mean... I see how this happened but is there really nothing I can do? Surely... something? Wait Kara about to continue, let's see how much more messed up this really is.\*

Kara noticed Kat's focus return to her, and continued speaking "So, the issue is that you finished your mission failed, and now need to deal with your debt. But, once your mission gets examined at the appeal office you might have a chance to change that. For now though, let's skip that and come back in a moment.

"The reason this is even an issue is that while being punished you lose the right to appeal any other issues besides your punishment. This is to limit demons total infraction count and make things run a bit more smoothly.

"However, in your case it has the side effect that you can't appeal your contract completion without first dealing with the punishment from your debt or trying to appeal that. However any appeal against your debt will likely fail because you didn't pay it off and in fact can't unless you could appeal your mission result... and I'm sure you see the problem" said Kara switching to another snake that was asking for attention.

"Yeah I think so. Basically, because I'm in trouble, I can't appeal the other issues I have, which prevents me from paying off my debt and getting out of trouble" said Kat

Kara nodded "Yes really, this is very rare. If you hadn't already gotten an extension you would have gotten one automatically until your mission appeal occurred but... well, here we are. Would you like to hear about mission appeals while I'm here though? I can't tell you what your punishment will be because that isn't my decision. It probably won't be too bad though."

Kat nodded and said "Please, I'd be happy for you to explain it to me"

Kara smiled wide, but politely showing the tips of two elongated fangs which might have also contributed to her speaking issue. They didn't appear when she spoke though, so they might only come down occasionally, Kat mused.

"Well, before I get too deep into it, just know you can ask D.E.M.O.N.S for a rush verdict and it will make one for you. It won't help you this time, because you still can't appeal it, but you might find it useful later. The reason most people don't bother with it, is that unlike standard review which is normally more favourable, and likely to end in full payment if it gets that far,

"D.E.M.O.N.S will take a cut for speeding things up or wasting its resources, whichever you prefer. Additionally, it is more likely to give out percentages. Say you were tasked with delivering ten apples. If you delivered nine of them before banishment, the review committee will give you the

full reward because the payment is made at time of summoning and the demon in question finished most of the work.

"D.E.M.O.N.S would give maybe... fifty or sixty percent? For completing most of the task but not sticking around to finish and bother it. With the committee it would go no lower than eighty percent. That's why most will choose it"

"Now, the review committee has two main steps. The first is deciding if the case needs to be reviewed. Now, most of the time, if they were that easy to determine, D.E.M.O.N.S would just make the verdict itself without taking a cut and have it completed instantly.

"If it is decided that more people are needed, a panel of judges gather, and request the demon's presence in this case you, Kat. They will then state the reasons for believing you don't deserve full payment, and you will argue why you do, or at least deserve more than nothing.

"Don't worry too much, most of them will make you argue for everything even if they think you should be paid in full. They'll say it's to encourage demons to stand up for themselves more, or to encourage them to understand contracts better...

"But I also know that the judges panel hires a lot of Greed faction demons for the work, so they may also just be trying to get as much money as possible. Anyway, a cute girl like you doesn't have to worry much. I'm sure they won't be too harsh on you. There are rules about things like that. Killing intent and what not. They won't abuse that too much unless you do, and nothing you can't fight back against."

Kat let out a long sigh and felt her chest ache slightly with the extra movement. Wincing slightly Kat digested what Kara was saying about the judge's panel and simply decided to deal with it later. If they weren't too harsh on her it should be fine. \*I mean, I have perfect recall so I'm going to abuse the hell out of that. I should be able to answer any question even if it takes me a bit. Now... that one part though.\*

"What do you mean Greed faction demons?" asked Kat

Kara's smile faltered and she got a slightly confused look. "Were you never taught that by your... oh right, my apologies, I forgot you were once human"

Kat looked surprised "It's in your medical records of course" said Kara in response.

### **Chapter 305: Medusas and the Pit Fiends**

"It isn't really my place to explain it all, but the hospital isn't busy at the moment so I can if you'd like? It will only be the really top level stuff, and I'm fairly biased you know? You will have to learn the rest in your own time ok?" said Kara

Kat nodded and said "That's fine. I really know nothing. I mean, the system has mentioned it sort of, a few times, but I was always busy and had other things on my mind or was in the middle of something more important to chase up the details on what it meant"

"So to start with, there isn't just one planet or even one dimension that demons control. We basically have a monopoly over all dimensions that circulate demonic energy throughout it. The

Angelsss don't mind if we take thessee worldsss over becaussee nothing but a few ssspecific plantsss and our own demon kind can sssurvive in them. A tassk many higher ranking demonsss undertake is sssearching for worldsss with demonic energy in them" said Kara explaining the basics simply

Kat though, was still hung up on the middle of what she said about angels. "What do the angels have to do with anything?"

Kara tilted her head "You don't know? But you could hear me sssay angel? That'sss... very sstrange but... I can't sssay more if you don't already know. Literally cannot. Watch..." Kat could see Kara's mouth moving, but the only thing that came out was static. It sounded like she was playing white noise, and her mouth movements were distorted around the edges making it even harder to guess what she might have been saying.

"Oh..." said Kat, once the white noise had stopped.

Kara shrugged "It'sss just the way it isss nothing bad about that. Now, that you know that I can sstart to explain thingsss a little more. Each world capable of only sssupporting demonsss that we find is taken over and ussed as a 'Hub' of ssortsss. Thessee hubsss act mosstly independent of each other. Only the high ranking demonsss travel between them. Ssseeing ass you are here, thiss is your hub world, if not alsso your home world.

"Now, I don't know much about the wider politicsss between hubsss, I'm not that sstrong myself so I can't tell you. What I can sssay is that you can basssically treat them ass if they don't exisst for now. This hub isss the entierety of the demon world ass far ass you and I are concerned. If you get sstrong enough for thiss to change, you'll have to ask ssomeone else. I don't ssay thiss to be rude, but it'sss just how it will likely be. The Universsse isss huge and demonsss aren't micromanaged between hubsss. There isss more than enough for everyone to do with just the one." Said Kara with a soft smile. Kat could see that she really did mean what she said and was happy without exploring the wider world. \*Then again, if the hub is a whole dimension there might be multiple planets worth of space...\*

Kara shook her head and continued "Anyway, it doessn't matter much becaussee they all work in ssimilar waysss. One isss much the sssame ass the other. Ssso, in control of each hub are the Big Sseven factionsss. They have been around a long time. Mossst people sssay they are ass old ass the demon race and once only contained a sssingle member. However, we have plenty of demonsss who are purely one type of demon that matchess up with the founder, sso people inssist their musst have been at leasst two.

"The easiesst to point at are Succubi. There are plenty of pureblood succubi and incubi around. Sssadly you aren't an example of thiss but I assure you they exist. Thiss leadsss othersss to sssay that there had to have been at leasst a few at the sstart but it doesn't really matter."

"Wait" interrupted Kat "How can you tell I'm not a pure succubus? I mean I know the system said I wasn't but how can you tell?"

Kara smiled "Well, there are a few tellsss. The firsst being your hornsss. They are rather unusual, and certainly not standard. Ass a doctor thatsss the firsst I noticed, but the biggest give away isss that you have naturally white ssskin. Pure Succubi have red ssskin and almosst always get the ability to change that at Rank 1. I sssaw you exhaussted and unable to do anything. Even if I didn't see your records,

there would be no way you kept sssomething ass meaning less ass a pigment change going even in your sssleep at sssuch a low rank"

"Oh... right... can you tell me what I am? The system didn't seem to want to" said Kat

Kara shook her head and said "No, I'd need to do tesstsss to find out, and if D.E.M.O.N.S won't tell you I likely can't. Would you like me to continue where I left off now?" and Kat nodded in response

"Ok, well, back to what I wasss sssaying. What doesss matter iss that most of the Big Sseven have one dominant race that make up mosst of it'sss membersss. The Big Seven are, Lust, Greed, Gluttony, Envy, Pride, Wrath, and Sloth. There are other factionsss but they are normally attached to one of the Big Seven in an advissory role.

"For example, I'm a Medusssa, with dominant Succubus heritage. Thiss meansss I am firstly an Envy demon, secondly a lust demon, but I've joined the healthcare faction, Medical Associates Demon, normally shortened to MAD. Yesss, I know, the founder wasss jusst as bad ass whoever named D.E.M.O.N.S, but it iss actually one of the largesst factionsss outside of the Big Sseven and while we don't have the sssame political power they do, we have nearly ass many membersss we have sssomeone every major demon race and mosst stable mixes, thiss letsss uss continue without sssubordinating ourssselvsss to one of the Big Sseven."

Kat put her hand up again, causing Kara to let out a polite giggle. "Yesss Kat?"

"What do you mean by stable mix?" asked Kat

Kara gave Kat a light smile "You might be a bit young for that, and it issn't really part of my medical field..."

Kat pouted in response. "Fine, if thiss is what you want" said Kara with a smile "A sstable mix iss ssort of itss own speciess of demon. It meanss that insstead of one heritage taking over, they ssshare and can be given to their children. For example, I sssaid earlier I wasss a Medusa, with Succubus heritage, right?"

"Well, if I found another demon with the sssame mix ass me, our children would always be the sssame ass uss. Otherwisse, sssay a pure sssucubus and a pure medusssa had a child. Their children can be a Ssuccubus, a Medusssa an unssstable mix, or a sstable one. Unssstable mixesss, will only pass on their dominant heritage instead of all of them. Additionally, if a sstable mix hasss children with a completely unrelated demon, say once again myssself, and... a pit fiend, my children would be a mix the sssame ass me, or a pit fiend. They won't be jusst medusssa or jusst succubi.

"Unstable though, as I said only passsss on the main bloodline. Sssay mine wasss unssstable, I might have Medusssa children of Succubi children, but they will not be a mix like me. Doesss that make sssensse? I feel like we've gotten ssside-tracked a lot"

Kat was blushing a little at this point. She didn't really think she wanted to even consider having children, certainly not this early in her life. \*Heck I'm immortal, I can give it good few hundred years before I need to worry about anything... and I'd probably rather start an orphanage like Gramps...\* Still though, she asked "Am I a stable mix?"

Kara shrugged "No idea sssorry. I'd guess sssso? Knowing you were human before the chance your bloodline awakened ass an unstable mix ssshould be low... just considering what I know of medicine... but we don't exactly have a lot of casse sstudiesss..."

Kat nodded "Yeah, that's fine... I mean... it doesn't really matter I'm not planning to have kids for a while but... I do wonder a little about who I must be related to. I mean, if I'm a stable mix like you said there must be more of me? Or more of the same race as me right?"

Kara nodded "Yesss, that doesss make ssssse... though depending on how old your bloodline isss you they might not be around anymore. Sssome bloodline ss bleed into othersss and sssome ssstart having issuesss. For example, the Medussssa bloodline and Pit Fiend mixesss ocassionally turn into children that can't usse demonic energy. If Pit Fiendss were less..." Kara shook her head and continued "They have issuesss sometimesss having children that are demonsss and not jusst a normal sssentient. Of courssse there isss nothing wrong with that... Succubi have proved that they can have children with non-demons and turn out fine..."

Kat blushed even redder and insisted they go back to talking about the Big Seven. This had gone too far into territory she didn't want to be thinking about.

### **Chapter 306: Back to the Big Seven (Lust and Envy)**

"Now then" said Kara politely moving on at Kat's request "Let'sss sstart with Lusst ssseeing asss we are both desscendantss of Ssuccubi alright?"

Kat pouted and glared at Kara. \*I just got away from this now you want to bring it back?\* Kara smiled and gave one of her snakes a few scratches. "It'sss fine Kat, don't worry. We won't need to bring thosss things up again desspote the name. Lusst mosstly focussesss on cusstomer sssatisfaction and I mean that in an entirely platonic way... asss well asss the alternativesss

"Lusst doesss mosst things from ssalesss clerkss to pyschologistss, though we at MAD alssso get them, Lusst hasss a private practice and normally give more involved help. Sssome even usse dream walking a ssskill you ssshould be familiar with to help confront trauma. Lusst inssn't jusst about ssex... or at leasst the faction issn't.

"Lusst works closssely with everyone in a way, and manage to keep there possition in the Big Sseven becausse of their friendly relationss with everyone. They actually don't have the highesst numberss becausse they are much more willing to allow coupless to leave their faction if they get together with sssomeone outssside of it, and don't tend to forcsse their kidss into the family bussnesss.

"They have the besst relationssship with Greed faction mosstly becausse Greed hiress from them for work a lot. They have the worssst relationship with Envy, but that iss more of a technicality. Lusst workss well with everyone, and Envy... doessn't. Lusst and Envy butt headss a lot but it'sss not that bad.

"We alssso work closssely with them at MAD, and one thing I do know about wider hub politicss, iss that Lusst and MAD will happily trade memberss between them for jobss. Thiss iss very unusual, but we make it work. I sssay trade, but that issn't quite right. Mosstly we have a ssshared job board that keepss uss connected. Any questionss so far?" asked Kara

Kat shook her head. And Kara continued "Oh, right one more thing. Asss I mentioned the main race for Lust iss Ssuccubi and Incubbi, but the faction doessn't really care. Mosst don't well... like 4 of them don't. Wrath, Envy and Pride are a bit particular, but don't worry about them jusst yet.

"Or worry about Envy? I sssuposse, becaussse I'll move onto them next. Envy are the retrieval sspecialistsss and explorersss. They normally lead the charge to find new worldsss for us demonsss at the higher level, working in conjunction with Greed, with Wrath doing a teeny bit of help when they find a world inhabited by crazed monsttersss that lassh out at everything.

"Envy and Greed do thiss becaussse the finder'sss fee for new dimenssionsss iss a percentage of all currency earned. Envy demonsss do the main work, while Greed runsss logisticsss and financess the teamsss. Envy iss alssso in charge of the local police force, they don't tend to need to do much becaussse demonsss know not to cause trouble when they are at home.

"Technically the police force issn't just Envy, but it mosstly iss. It'sss like sssaying Greed doessn't run all the sshopsss. Technically true, but not practically true. Anyway, Envy demonsss also specialisse in stealth contractsss, however these alssso go to a lot of Sloth demonsss, or Sloth demonsss that join Envy insstead.

"In termsss of factionsss, Envy doessn't really get along with anyone, even Greed who they work clossely with, or maybe becaussse they work clossely with them. They have a particular dissslike for Sssloth, becaussse they alwaysss want more infiltration specialistsss but mosst Sloth demonsss would rather go into administration. It'sss a bit weird that they aren't on the worst termsss with Lust, because Lust is on worst termsss with them... but that just goess to show you how good Lust iss at keeping people calm.

"In termsss of original demonic race... I have no idea. Even ass a Medusssa that iss technically an Envy faction demon they don't ssshare that ssort of thing publicly and it issn't immediatly obviousss. We are one of the newer hubsss, and I'm not sssure the knowledge wasss ever well known here.

"I know it issn't Medusssa's like myssself. We don't make up a large part of Envy, and I'm sssure my parentsss would have bragged about it if we were in charge. Envy may like to keep itsss ssecretss, but they like to brag almosst ass much ass Pride, sso I'm sssure I'd have heard if we knew. Any quesstionsss about Envy?"

"Well..." said Kat "Not Envy specifically, but you've made me think... how are factions chosen? I mean, they seem to be somewhat exclusive, but you talk about how we can choose as well? What's up with that?"

"Oh right right, I forgot you're new to that ass well. Each faction hasss abilitiess they claim ass their own. You may choosse to join any faction that will welcome you, but mosst mosst, especially the Big Sseven, look for an ability that marksss you ass belonging to them. There is a big list, but they tend to fit the theme well enough" said Kara

"Like...?" asked Kat fishing for an example.

"Well, Envy likess to claim any rare abilities ass their own. True Sight, one of your own abilitiess, iss considered to be Envy and Pride" said Kara

"Aahhh... I don't feel very envious or prideful?" said Kat

Kara nodded "Of course not. They are genetically predisposed, but not certain by any estimation. True Sight isn't even really an Envy ability, but each ability can only be claimed by two of the Big Seven and the others weren't willing to push the issue."

Kat nodded and gestured for Kara to continue "Right well... other than that Dream Walking, that is the domain of Sloth and Lust, it's also quite rare and either would love to have you just because of that. Um... Regeneration is assigned to Wrath and Gluttony, with falling toward one side or the other, making it clear where you'd go. You actually have the Lust variant which is also rare, like stupidly so. It's considered the Lust variant because it leaves no scars, and Lust would accept you as a guard because of it but it isn't technically a Lust skill they look for...

"Nobody would fight them though, because it's exclusive to the Succubus bloodline not even Incubi get it. Honestly really, any faction would love to have you except Greed, but even they would probably be happy with you because you have such rare skills before Rank 3."

"Huh... well, I don't really know where I want to end up so I guess that's good? What about the fact that my fire does ice things? Is that rare or important?" asked Kat. \*The system did say it's rare... but I wonder what Kara will say.\*

Kara winced "Well... I don't want you to feel bad but it isn't exactly as rare as everything else. I mean... yes it is rare in the sense that it isn't as common as fire but it is the second most prevalent type of demonic flame. Still, I believe it's only like... 20% maybe? I don't know those statistics off the top of my head"

"That's fine" said Kat, who a moment later, turned to the side and coughed. She didn't feel the need to before, but now a large clump of black blood pooled in her mouth. Kat's cheeks filled up as she tried not to spit it out. Kara noticed this and moved swiftly, grabbing a bucket from underneath the bed and placing it in front of Kat.

Kat let the blood flow from her mouth, and was surprised when it didn't really stop. It took thirty seconds for it to all exit her, and then she flopped back onto her pillows and sighed. \*What the hell was that? Is something wrong with me?\*

"Ah, don't worry about that Kat. It's perfectly normal... well, it isn't normal but that was likely the blood that has been... dying for lack of a better word, while your energy hasn't been flowing well. I should really get you a drink though, now that that has happened... I'll be right back with some water" said Kara moving the bucket so that she was holding it by the handle now instead of the rim, before swiftly walking out the door. She gave Kat a smile just as she shut it behind her and said "I'll be right back dear"

Kat let herself sigh as Kara exited. \*Things are getting complicated now but I guess I should learn the factions now rather than later. I'll have to join one eventually, and I wouldn't want to accidentally join like... the bread makers union or something, though it does seem I should be fine wherever I go... it does worry me a bit.



I wonder if I will end up in the Lust faction... I... well honestly it doesn't sound that bad. I'm not the best at public relations, but maybe I could use my dream walking to help people if I decide to give up on contracts. Kara even said they are quite nice... but I just dunno if that's right for me...\*

### **Chapter 307: The Big Seven Takes Over (Greed)**

When Kara came back into the room with water for Kat, she found a peacefully sleeping succubus. So, Kara just smiled and left the water off to the side knowing Kat would be fine, and wasn't suffering dehydration yet. She stroked the red head's hair thoughtfully, before checking the measurements the bed was collecting. Satisfied that Kat was healing well, Kara nodded and headed for the door, ready to get back to waiting for a crisis.

When Kat woke up. Her mind coming together much quicker than it had the past few days as she pushed through the water and let out a deep relaxing breath. This peace lasted all of a second before Kat had the horrifying realisation that she was in the hospital and hadn't informed her fr-family that she was fine.

\*System can you send them off a message telling them I'm alright?\*

Accomplices are always kept informed when there connected User is Banished because of extensive wounds. Accomplices have been informed User Kat is stable. Does User Kat wish to give more details?

\*Uh...\* Kat tried to get her mind to work on a proper response but it was still slow. Without Kara to help ground her and give her something real to focus on Kat found her mind trying to drag itself back to the pond and put her to sleep. Kat slapped herself in response.

\*Focus dammit. They are important and I will not allow myself to sleep just because my demonic energy is on the fritz.\* Kat looked around the room for something to give her clarity and found the water left by Kara the previous... whenever it was. Grabbing it and taking a long swig, Kat let her mind drift just a little bit and muse over the fact that demons still drank water.

\*Unless it's like a cultural thing? Did they only give me water because I was human before? Kara clearly knows and maybe it's part of my medical history? Boy is that a weird thought that something like that could come up in my doctor's appointments.\*

Kat shook her head and downed the rest of the glass. \*Enough of that. I'll just send a quick message letting them know that I'm recovering at least and that nothing permanent is happening.\*

Kat sent off the barest details of the condition, letting the everyone know (including Minor once Kat realised she'd have gotten the notification about her hospitalisation) and was just finishing the finer wording that boiled down to 'we can talk about this later' when Kara walked back into the room.

She was smiling as usual, her eyebrows raised slightly seeing Kat sitting up and functioning a bit better, while her snakes seemed to be curled up for some reason. During Kat's previous waking hours, they'd all been happily dangling from her head and watching the world. Now they were all in one big pile wrapped into a bun on top of her head and looked to be sleeping. \*They can sleep? How... how does that make any sense? Are they part of Kara or not?\*

Kara just smiled when she saw where Kat's eyes lead. "Yesss, they do sssleep on their own. They are me, and yet they are not. They can sssleeeep in my place, though it cannot go on forever ass they are not me. However, becaussse they are me, it can work for sssome time."

\*I don't really understand properly but I think I get it? It's a bit like a more advanced version of my tail... huh I wonder if it's exactly like that? I mean... she is part succubus... but surely the snakes are from the medusa side... but maybe full medusas have more or less control over there snakes? And this is how they express themselves in a mix like her?\*

"Um... if this isn't too rude to ask... are they like that because of your succubus heritage? The way you describe them reminds me a little of my tail. I mean, I wouldn't say it isn't me... but it is also clearly different from my other limbs. It... well, it seems to have more instincts than the rest of me... if that makes sense" said Kat

Kara smiled at her, face brightening even more with faint traces of white sneaking out of her teeth. "Yesss, it iss possible of coursse. I take no offence, it'sss lovely you try to find a way to relate. To anssswer your quesstion I'm not sssure. It might even be that your tail iss very disstantly related to Medusssa heritage. What you sssaid makesss sensse though... I've never had any assk me like thiss though, and none of the sssucubi would bring it up becaussse to them, it'sss just normal. Your human... heritage is the wrong word... upbringing I guesss makesss it easssier to assk sssuch thingsss. If you have any more interessting quesstionsss do assk."

\*Maybe I should direct you to Callisto instead. She would love you to bits... well... you might end up in pieces later if I did actually introduce you... hmmm. Ok, no introducing Kara and Callisto until I make sure she isn't going to be poking around too much.\*

"Thanksss Kara" said Kat with a smile, and then a wince as she felt her energy start moving slightly.

Kara giggled at Kat's slip up, but decided not to call attention to it. "That'sss alright, want to hear about another faction now? Probably Greed." Kat nodded and Kara continued speaking "Right, well... Greed is rather different from the othersss. I mean sssure everyone who issn't a Wrath demon or the immediate family of one would think they are all weird, but you can undersstand them rather sssimply.

"Greed... well, Greed iss more like a loosse collection of other guildsss that band together sso that they can find each other with even lesss rules. I'll explain it a bit more, but just know that many people think if the Greed demonsss sstopped fighting amongsst each other they'd take over the place in a century or two.

"The reassson iss becaussse while other factionsss vie for power between each other, Greed mosstly just fightss internally and everyone elssse leavess them to their own fighting. Thiss iss becaussse it's not a physical fight, so it boresss Wrath... and everyone elssse iss happier thiss way.

"We are all told sstoriess growing up that when the other factionsss pusssh Greed too far. They jusst sssuddenly drop everything and blitz the othersss, perfect co-ordination, no infighting, just overwhelming financial might... and normally a bunch of hired Wrath compatriotsss.

"When that hapennsss every one elssse losssesss. I've never ssseen it happen but my Medusa mother told me sstoriess about it. Sssheee apparently sssaw it when ssshe wasss a young demon. Sssheee

wassn't involved directly... but it wasss horrible. I doubt you would enjoy the detailsss, and I'd... like to avoid it if I can" said Kara

It was the most uncomfortable Kat had actually seen Kara so far. She was still smiling, but it was pinched and tight, more like Kara was pulling on her cheeks then actually smiling. "No please do dwell on it for my sake"

Kara nodded. "Right... were wasss I then... yesss, Greed'ssss sssplit prioritiesss. Ssso, Greed issss made up of variousss mercantile interesst groupsss. The trade housse that makesss the mosst money hasss the mosst ssway over the faction. I believe they have a council, but I don't know how many people or the exact requirementsss

"Anyway, the council runsss the faction, and preventsss the infighting from getting too bad... but for the mosst part the biggesst rule is no attacking outside the faction unless you know they were hired by sssomeone within, and don't get caught. Honesstly, they make better lawyersss than anyone elssse even if they never join the public officesss.

"The main thing that ssetsss Greed demonsss apart, other than their mercantile endeavoursss isss that many of them are required to conssume sssome sssort of valuable. Mammones, the original specieisss of Greed demonsss require a certain amount of gold to keep themssselvess healthy for example.

"Thiss isss why many get into the faction. It'sss becausse ass cutthroat ass it isss, they ALWAYSSS provide enough sustenance for a demon to live on ass long ass they try. Now ssure the faction keepsss track and forcesss you to pay it back when you... well... sssafely might not be true, but ssaferly, pay it back.

"For thiss reasson a lot of Gluttony demonsss actually join Greed instead to fuel their appetitesss. Gluttony as a faction get on with them like oil and water though, becausse Gluttony thinksss Greed make them look bad or sssomething. I don't really undersstand it but they don't get along.

"Oh, and Greed lovesss Wrath. Thosse guysss will do sssomething sstupid and dangerousss for Greed and half the time, Greed getsss paid becausse they sset whatever it isss up, and Wrath sstill isss happy with them at the end...

"Guesss, I'll cover them next, they are much sssimpler."

### **Chapter 308: The Big Seven Strikes Back (Wrath and Pride)**

"Ssso, Wrath... wait did you have any quesstionsss about Greed?" asked Kara

Kat shook her head and the medusa continued "Right, ssso, Wrath... they are... well... sssimple isssn't entirely accurate, and they allow memberssss to join and leave really easily, but you can never ever come back. Once you leave Wrath once, that'sss the end, they hate people who try, and will either assign an impossible taskk or sssimply kill them for assking. Yesss we can die, sssurprise, though not all of usss have the power to permanently end another demon, mosst of Wrath doesss, or at leasst enough that it'sss a concern.

"Well, not for you ass long ass you don't join them. It'sss heavily regulated thosse kindsss of abilitiesss and everyone would come down on them HARD if they ussed it on someone elssse, but they aren't ssschemerss, and they keep it in-houssse ssso to sspeak. Wrath isss very sssimple both on the sssurface

and deeper down. They hardly even have tacticians. Most of the ones they do have are the smarter lot that have family within the faction that choose to stay on to give them a better chance of coming back."

"Wrath as a faction can be encapsulated by the idea that if you walk forward long enough a fight will occur. Sometimes they get advice where to walk, but normally they just wander."

"Wrath demons like to take Contracts to kill people at or above their level. They don't mind how hard it is and make for the best frontline combatants. Nobody really has a hard time with Wrath except for Pride, but, those guys are weird. Wrath for the most part is always happy with what they are doing"

Kara takes a moment to drink some water. She looks over at Kat as if asking for questions, and when Kat doesn't ask any, she continues. "For their leadership... it's as simple as it gets. Whoever the strongest demon is runs the faction. They have a ranking list of every member. When you join, you may choose anyone on the list to fight, and the winner gets that place on the leaderboard."

"If the challenger wins they get the spot and the defender moves down one rank. If the challenger fails they go to the bottom of their bracket, so, a Rank 2 demon will go to the bottom of Rank 2 brackets, assuming they didn't lose to someone in a lower rank of course."

"Once they are part of Wrath, they can challenge the person above them, and for every win in a row they can challenge the demon that many spaces ahead. So they had won three matches in a row, they can challenge between one and four spaces ahead. Also, all Wrath demons must accept at least one challenge a day if they are offered."

"So, if they aren't challenged, they get a break otherwise they must fight the first challenger. If they get multiple at once, they can either pick their favourite or challenge both. There is no upper limit. Now, a lot of Wrath demons will spar anyway, even if it isn't an official challenge, but that's something anyone can do."

"Oh, but that reminds me. Wrath demons make up most of the weapon trainers. There are a few they don't do, but a lot of people go to them for training... it's...? a bit of a mixed bag. Some will take to being a trainer like a duck to water, and others just never work it out." Said Kara

\*Huh, interesting. I guess if that deal with Minor and Euko falls through I can always recruit a wrath demon... though... actually... can I get back here? Is that allowed? How does that work?\*

User Kat may return to the Hub whenever User Kat desires as long as User Kat is not participating in an ongoing Summoning Contract. If they get permission to leave temporarily from Summoner, that may also be acceptable. User Kat will be required to pay a minimal fee to return more than once a week.

\*Well that's nice.\* Letting her eyes fall to Kara Kat asked "Is that everything about Wrath?"

Kara shrugged "Yes, I suppose so. The only other thing they don't get along with Pride, for reasons I'll get into soon, and that their founders were Pit Fiends. It's really not a secret and to this day, most members are Pit Fiends."

"Moving on to Pride, what makes them unique, as well as why Wrath hates them a bit, is that they try to do everything themselves. I know I told you that anyone with an ability matching them could get into a faction well... that isn't quite true for Pride

"They keep everything self-contained. You need to wait a while, and either have a few abilities that they want, pass a rather ridiculous set of tests that... well they aren't impossible because that wouldn't be allowed by D.E.M.O.N.S or the other factions, but... it's the next closest thing to impossible.

"The other way is if you are born into it. They let children of current members in rather easily if they have anything even close to the abilities they are looking for. You might be ok, because not only is True Sight, one of the rarer abilities, it is extremely rare at low ranks, and one of Pride's best abilities. Sure Envy claims it as well, but not really, it's almost all in-family Pride demons that get it.

"Now, Pride might be happy to welcome you in, or hate the fact you have it at all, not being clearly related to any known demon or demon families linked to them... I'd suggest being careful. They may take on everything and think themselves a jack of all trades master of even more... but they leave a bad taste in my mouth. I hardly see them outside their own little area, and when I do, they have a stick shoved so far up their ass you can see it in the back of their mouth when they talk" said Kara, voice thick with annoyance.

Kat flinched backward, not expecting Kara to have such a negative opinion of anyone. She had always been so soft spoken and calm while Kat knew her, and she had been giving quite balanced versions of the Factions, or at least Kat thought she was. This new thing with Pride was strange.

\*I have to wonder if there isn't a bigger story there. I... how about we just steer the conversation away from them? Kara doesn't want to talk with them, and I don't think I'd want to join anyway. Any faction that can so thoroughly upset someone as sweet as Kara doesn't really sound like a place I want to be.\*

\*I've got plenty of options why don't I just... distract her and ask about some of the others?\*

 Before Kat could get the chance though, her jaw opened wide and she let out a yawn. This had the double effect of Kara snapping her attention to Kat with a soft gaze.

"I am sorry I kept you focused on me and not your body. With your energy trying to repair yourself you will want to sleep more. I should have realized and left earlier so that you can start your exercises and rest. I'm sorry."

Kat yawned once more and gave a half-hearted wave at Kara trying to calm her down "No no, it was all very interesting. I didn't realize I was already so tired."

Kara shook her head vigorously, a few of her snakes opened their eyes a sliver before closing them again. "No no it is my mistake. I'm not just a friendly face here, I am your doctor. I should be paying more attention to when you are feeling tired and suggesting rest rather than complaining about my issues with Pride."

Kat shrugged, and felt her shoulder ache slightly with the movement but she didn't regret it. \*I can see she is at least aware of her distaste of Pride... so I suppose she knows why she doesn't like them? Or

maybe she knows she doesn't but not why? Seems like it would have to be personal though, else she would have just mentioned it.

She mentioned some of her problems with the other factions without issue, but really, she mentioned almost nothing but problems with Pride... the only thing is that none of the issues she mentioned should cause such a reaction.\*

"It really isss fine" said Kat

Kara smiled widely at Kat, before standing up and giving her a slight bow and heading towards the door. "Don't forget your exercissesss. They might be a bit painful, but now that you have sstarted it really isss for the besst you finisssh them."

Kat nodded as Kara shut the door. \*Welp, guess I should get started on them. I did choose this path, and I'm sure it will save me some long-term pain... but it doesn't exactly make it any easier in the moment. Remind me not to do this again in the near future.\*

### **Chapter 309: The Big Seven Grand Finale (Sloth and Gluttony)**

When Kat woke up, reforming her mind slowly, the pain hit her out of nowhere. She felt like her skin was being stabbed from inside with thousands of little needles. Despite this though, she could feel her energy spinning within her trying to cover everywhere and fix the damage. Focusing on the flow, Kat helped stabilise it, following the exercises that Kara had recommended her.

The energy flowed around and around, increasing the pain, but also increasing the pace and clarity of her energy as it went. As time started to lose its meaning and the pain started to cause her vision to swim, it all just stopped. Then, Kat felt her blood starting to come up through her mouth.

Panicking, she looked around for something to dispose of it when she noticed Kara was next to her with a bucket. She didn't hear Kara walk in, but Kat wasn't complaining in the slightest. Leaning over, black blood poured out of her mouth. The bucket was almost entirely full by the time Kat finished... but there was no pain, and no issues.

Kara smiled at her and put the bucket down. "How do you feel?" asked Kara

"Great actually" said Kat surprised. Her body felt light as if she was about to float away and her voice returned to its steadier tone, she knew to be hers. "I've not felt quite so good in a while"

Kara smiled and pulled out a bottle of water she handed over to Kat. "That'sss great. I'd like to assk you to sstay for at leasst one more day sso we can monitor you. Alssso I recommend you sstay mosstly sstill for at leasst one more day even if you want to leave. Your body needsss to get ussed to itsss energy working once again and needsss to balance itself."

Kat nodded "I'll stay then. You can tell me about the last of the factions that way" said Kat with a smile.

"That'sss likely for the besst. I'm glad to sssee my theory about your regeneration wasss correct" said Kara

"What do you mean?" asked Kat "What exactly did you think would happen?"

"You just needed to get past the turning point... hmmm, think about it like this. Most of your energy was locked up trying to keep your energy channels together. Forcing them to move, got the energy flowing, and repairing better, but what you really needed was for your energy channels to recover enough that they could fix themselves completely. If you check your problem only at like twenty-five percent energy, but because before so much of it was unusable you feel like your capacity has suddenly doubled or tripled, almost like ranking up" said Kara

Kat winced remembering when she ranked up to Rank 2 and ran into a few walls trying to move around straight after the upgrade. \*Yup, let's stay in the hospital. Besides, if I went home and was anything less than perfect health I might have to be worried about Vivian killing me for making them all worry. If I go home completely healed, they can't give me too much grief.\*

"I'll keep that in mind. What faction will we cover next?" asked Kat

"I suppose we'll go with Gluttony next and finish up with Sloth. Sloth is a good place to end really" said Kara. "So, Gluttony. For the most part they manage the food supply. Now Greed still buys and sells a lot of it, but Gluttony grows or raises most of the food. Now, that might sound altruistic, but they end up eating most of it themselves.

"They are also fiercely protective of their food supplies, possibly matching Wrath in pure military might as the larger faction as well as being able to abuse the home team advantage. Gluttony demons are more than willing to eat the attacking forces. Most demons can escape... eventually... but it's still a harrowing experience.

"Gluttony... gets along with everyone actually... I mean, not as well as Lust, but they get along with everyone at almost exactly the same level. It's weird how they do it, but they somewhat have something for everyone. Business for Greed, friendship for Lust, nothing Envy wants because they think making food is for peasants, they don't care that Pride does their own thing,

"Wrath actually respects them because of their willingness to defend what is there, and Sloth... just leaves them to do whatever. So it's hard to say who they get on the worst with. A final note about Gluttony is the original demon type. They are called Gorgers and just eat anything. They look like worms for the most part but this changes at higher ranks.

"Then finally... we have Sloth. Sloth is different to the others, because they tend to take administrative duties. Sloth likes to just find a place and stay there. Lust does some administrative stuff as well, but it just isn't on the same level. Give a Sloth demon a stack of paperwork and they will be happy until they finish it.

"Sloth demons are also strange because most of them don't need to eat. They can just sort of... exist? They are both the weakest and the hardest to kill. Sloth demons just sort of continue to exist.

"It's a really strange thing and you have to see it to understand properly but it is truly something to behold. They are normally assigned to investigative contracts, such as finding out about tax fraud or embezzlement. Perhaps the least glamorous with a lacking amount of combat...

"But they are feared for their stubbornness and determination to see a task through once started. Think of them like a rolling boulder. Hard to get going but once they start they never stop.

"Sssloth gets along the worst with Envy, once again, mostly because they always complain when it comes time for Sssloth to do the factional financial reports, alongside their very stubborn attitude, and their distaste for Envy's adventuring. They are the only faction that doesn't look forward to new worlds being found.

"Sure they won't complain publicly but they realize it just means more work for them once the world is found, and they feel that Envy doesn't appreciate the time it takes to actually keep this whole place running. The Sloth demon that supposedly started the whole thing is called a Watcher

"I'm not sure if you saw the other doctor that put you to sleep on that first day, but that was a Watcher. They are more shadow than flesh, and are impossible to hurt more or less. Even demon fire has a hard time damaging them. In turn though, they have to rely on other abilities for striking out as their demon fire does basically nothing more than provide a bit of light, and their full power punches can't even hurt a fly."

Kat smiled "That's all pretty cool actually. Is there any other factions that are worth mentioning?"

Kara shrugged and said "I'm sure there are, but I didn't ever look around too much myself. I knew I wanted to join MAD early on, and I keep up with the Big Seven because it's important to know what they are doing mostly for your own health and safety. Plus, my parents belong to them, so they can give me the inside information now and then. They aren't really supposed to which is why I won't say anything I've learned from them"

"That's fine, I certainly wouldn't want you to get in trouble at all Kara, especially after you have been so helpful to me. Just, one more question I guess... what faction do you think I should join?" asked Kat

Kara pinched her lips together and to the side, clearly thinking about the question. "Well... I don't want to tell you what to do Kat. This is a big choice, one that you can't really undo, even if you swap factions, you simply don't get the same out of it even when you choose you first.

"I can only say you won't want, Gluttony, and from what little I know of you, Greed, Pride, Envy and maybe Wrath as well wouldn't be for you. I don't want to suggest Lust just because of your obvious heritage, but I feel like you'd be good with people, and they are good at taking care of their own. Something the others aren't that good at considering you know nothing about the demon hubs." Finished Kara with a somewhat wistful smile.

\*I guess it makes sense. I suppose it wasn't like I was going to become a demon that I'd hate being... well, maybe that would happen, but I do at least know I'm happy with what I got. I should probably look into the smaller ones more... but Lust doesn't sound that bad compared to what I had pictured in my head.\*

Kara and Kat managed to chat a little longer, asking for some minor clarifications over what she should expect when she was released from the hospital that mostly boiled down to. 'Medically speaking you'll be fine, but I have no idea what the system will make you do to pay off your debt. I just doubt it will be that bad'

### **Chapter 310: Clouded Thoughts on Return**



Kat was performing some last-minute stretches for Kara before heading out just to prove she was physically capable. The bed had been folded up into the wall, so she had plenty of space to stretch out without her wings or tail getting in the way. Kara was standing off to the side taking notes on a clipboard while instructing Kat through the routine.

Once she was satisfied, Kara smiled at Kat and said "Looksss like you are all good to go."

As soon as Kara said that, the system delivered Kat a message.

User Kat has been declared fit to be released from MAD care. User Kat will have 3 days of rest before being summoned to begin User Kat's punishment.

Kat's good mood at being told she was fit to be released instantly turned into a frown when the message appeared. Before she could get too caught up in her head though, Kara said, "Don't worry it will be fine"

Kat gave a small smile and said "How do you know? You can't see the messages that I get right?"

Kara nodded and said "No I can't but I can take a pretty good guess. It really won't be that bad Kat, trust me. It will be sssomething that you'll be fine with I'm sssure. It might not be pleassent but it certainly won't be ass bad ass you think it will be"

"If you say so" said Kat not fully believing Kara's words, but the Medusa just smiled at her before putting her clipboard away.

"I'll sssee you around Kat" said Kara

Flames started to appear beneath Kat and she could feel herself being pulled away. "Is there a way for me to maybe hang out with you some time?" asked Kat

Kara smiled wide. "Jusst come back to the hosspital and assk for me by name. They should direct you to me. I'll leave a note at the front dessk about it" said Kara before Kat's vision was engulfed by flames.

Kat thought they were beautiful just like always, but her mind turned to darker directions. \*Seriously though... what is going to happen to me once those three days are up? I've been given three days to make sure I'm in perfect health so... maybe it will be rather rough on me? Perhaps slave labour or something?

I wonder if I'll be forced into contracts I'm not a fan of? That might be the case... but it feels wrong. Why force them on people when they can find the perfect person for the job. I doubt I'll be given something too deplorable...

But if that's the case... why am I worried? I've been taken care of exceptionally well at the hospital and as far as I can tell it hasn't cost me anything. Kara mentioned we have good healthcare... but that's just so at odds with what little I know about demons and what Lily has told me...

And Lily... and Sylvie especially... what am I supposed to say about the fact that I saw someone die and didn't even feel bad about it? What about Xiao... I just left him there and didn't even check if he was still breathing... is... am I a horrible person?

I care more about what they're going to think about me than the fact that the deed was done and I didn't prevent it... what about what I helped do to Xiang at the end there? Is HE dead? The spell or whatever it was sounded like that wouldn't be the case and he was just sent really far away but...

The world, or at least, my Earth is made up mostly of oceans... what if he ends up stranded in the ocean and dies? That would be... well I can't even say that would be bad! He was about to do horrible things. He was about to attack defenceless children... Sure he clearly wasn't himself but...

Xiang always wanted revenge... is that what he wanted? How in his right mind was he really? Sure he couldn't say anything... but what if that was the only thing he was prevented from doing? Was everything else according to his desire?\*

Kat pursed her lips as the flames rushed around her, they flashed with brilliant colours and almost seemed to reach out towards Kat and try to assuage her worries. She didn't pay them proper mind though and continued to fret.

\*He was moving more like a robot at the end... but that also means his movements were close to perfect with no waste... I wish I knew more about bloodlines... because that's what that was right? Or maybe some hidden artifact? I mean I can get up from wounds like that because I'm a demon...

So what if Xiang also is something else and that's what let him survive? But the penalty is like... either loss of control or loss of just his voice? Xiao said his bloodline required you to be attuned with fire or whatever that means to prevent yourself from burning from the inside out...

So could that be Xiang's punishment? I just don't know... I don't know enough about that crazy world and I never wanted to take that contract in the first place... dammit. What if the punishment is really light on me? If it's no trouble at all... would I have been better to just reject it all completely?\*

Kat swallowed, thinking that might be an even worse outcome. To know she helped Xiang do something so questionable thinking she had no choice... when really, she had much more of one than she thought.

Before Kat could get too wrapped up in that line of questioning, the transportation dropped her down next to her bed. Kat looked around the room, mostly untouched, but the lack of dust build-up told her that someone had come in and cleaned. She'd never seen anyone actually cleaning around the house yet, but based on Callisto's regular attire, Kat guessed it was something she did alongside the cooking.

Kat looked from her bed to her door, running her options through her mind. Simply collapsing into the bed and meditating was such a tempting offer and a great way to try and put off the inevitable conflict of working out what she should be telling everyone now that she was back.

Just as Kat was about to sit down though, a brief flash of a memory containing Sylvie's pouting face made its way through Kat's mind and she realised what was in store for her. \*Dammit, if I do in collapse now Sylvie will not be happy with me. She'll be rather upset over the fact I got back without telling her.\*

Kat sighed, and looked away from her bed knowing that she couldn't just collapse anymore, not without risking the crippling feeling of disappointing Sylvie she was sure was awaiting her if she did anything other than look for the girl. Kat focused her hearing outwards and tried to locate everyone in the house.

However, she found something strange, her hearing was extremely stilted. She couldn't hear much outside of the room other than the odd creaks of the house. \*System? What's up, are my ears damaged?\*

No. User Kat's hearing is limited due to the lack of Higher Energy in the atmosphere.

\*Oh... ok then I guess.\* Kat pushed her energy towards her ears hoping that would overcome the difference. She was right, and her hearing range drastically improved... but it was still nothing compared to what it was in Xiang's world.

Kat could tell that at least one person was in Callisto's room, but that was pretty much all she could make out. Leaving her room, Kat was surprised to note that it was actually rather dark out. Moving off to the side and looking out, she found the simple answer to her confusion was the fact it was night time still.

\*Well, that answers that then. I can just go to sleep.\* Kat went to head back to her bed but felt her resolve cracking quickly. The desire to just hug Sylvie and forget her problems was growing stronger the longer she considered it. Once the idea had occurred to her, she couldn't get it out of her mind.

Kat sighed once again, and made her way over to Sylvie's room but just before she opened the door, she heard a rustling from inside. Halting her advance, Kat waited for a few seconds, as the sound travelled closer to the door. Kat heard it click as the door handle was turned.

The door opened slowly, and Sylvie's head peaked out of the room from between the door crack. As soon as she saw Kat's figure though, she threw the door open and leapt towards Kat with her catching Sylvie easily. Sylvie didn't say anything and just snuggled into Kat's shoulder and held her tightly.

Kat smiled and stroked Sylvie's hair, which only made the girl increase her grip on Kat. Smiling even wider, Kat led Sylvie back to her larger bed that would have plenty of space for the two off them, and lay Sylvie down beside her.

Sylvie groaned a little when Kat put her down, but saw what was going on. Waiting patiently for Kat to get under the sheets herself before snuggling into the demon once again. "Welcome back" whispered Sylvie.

Kat smiled at that and whispered "It's good to be back"