

DEMONS 491

Chapter 491: Rude

After that slightly heavy topic breakfast settled down. Mostly because Kat and Kamiko needed to be off shortly. So, they ate in a companionable silence. Nira also offered lunch to take, but Kat and Kamiko declined citing the fact they would be in combat and had no way to keep it safe.

When they sent themselves off, they were actually outside of the shed housing all the equipment. Stone was leaning against the wall eating a comically oversized rice ball with rocks mixed into it. *Um... I guess that's flavouring? Is the rice normal rice? I'm not sure I want to know.*

Stone paused between bites when he saw them, quickly finishing what was in his mouth he said. "Ah, glad to have you both. I've managed to recruit a third Succubus for your expedition. I want you to chat a bit, discuss your abilities and specialties. The main reason I called them in, is as a favour for a friend. They are only Rank 1, but they have a very rare ability to cover people in a shield that's constantly being recharged with their demonic fire.

"Kat will probably be fine without it, it's somewhat overkill for her, but I think it will be good for Kamiko. She can stay back and just keep up the shields. She's not completely hopeless but, well, Rank 1."

Kat looked over at Kamiko, mostly because this was for her. "That sounds great!" said Kamiko, always happy to have a chance to make friends, sadly those had been rare, "We'll go see her now"

Stone nodded, "Righto, just come and grab me once you want to head in. I've got a set of three earmuffs and I'll be opening the stone wall for you all again. I'll just be out here eating. Had to come in early to fill out the safety paperwork for the extra so I skipped breakfast, but I think it'll be worth it."

The Succubi pair nodded and headed inside to meet their new partner. Kamiko pushed open the door first, and froze in the entryway, blocking Kat's view partially. Kat frowned slightly, wondering what had shocked Kamiko so much, so she used her wings to hover a bit more and get a good look into the room. Kat nearly stopped flying when she saw the person on the other side.

Now, up till this point, Kat had been rather spoiled when it came to Succubi. They were never too different from her, even Kara from medical had on a proper uniform and it was really only the snake hair that was odd. The Succubus in front of Kat wasn't like that. She was straight out of a video game.

First off, she was dark purple, a few shades darker than Kat's flame for the most part, with only slight variations in her skin tone across her body, and Kat could see practically ALL of said body. What the new Succubus was wearing amounted to little more than strips of tight leather to cover her most private bits. Even then, it didn't help much because she was rather stacked both up top and below. Her chest spilling around the leather leaving nothing to the imagination. Her pants were no better, being basically just underwear that left her behind hanging out the side.

Trying to look ANYWHERE else, Kat found her wings. They were about halfway between Kamiko's and Kat's own. Large enough to be noticeable, but maybe not large enough to fly under their own power like Kat, likely still requiring a Rank ability to help with that, but gliding was very believable. Her tail was much shorter though, being only about half an arm in length.

The Succubus' horns were also new to Kat at least. They started on top of her head, right where the skull started to tilt sideways and went straight up in a spiral. They leaned ever so slightly to their respective sides because of this, but it was mostly straight. Her hair actually made her more decent, coming down past her tail, with a bit of curl to it, making her the only Succubus Kat had seen without straight hair.

The hair itself was mostly white with streaks of cobalt blue spread chaotically about. One might consider it dyed, but Kat could see from her higher perspective that both colours went all the way down to the roots. About a sixth of her hair from both sides had been curled around her arms for some reason Kat couldn't figure out, but Kat decided it added to the look.

"Um... hi?" said Kat, after a few seconds of noticing Kamiko was still shellshocked.

"Ugh, got a bunch of prudes. I thought I was teaming up with two Succubi not a priest and her choir girl" said the Succubus.

"That's a little rude coming from somebody who has more material in her hair than her outfit." Said Kamiko, showing that apparently her snark was full go today, "are you using your naturally long hair to compensate for your poor fashion choices?"

The Succubus just rolled her eyes, "That all you got? Bet I get more dick in a day than you've had in your entire lives... actually, let's add you both together and I'm sure you still come up short. Poor things."

Kamiko pouted at this, but apparently wasn't quite willing to give up the snark. Kat was trying to wrap her head around the fact she was about to be trusting Kamiko's safety to this bint. "You're talking a lot of shit to two demons that are stronger than you. Plus, have you heard of a thing called respect? Maybe we swing the other way. And even if we don't, that's still a horrible way of measuring success in life. Are you worried you'll forever be Rank 1?"

'Rude' growled at Kamiko and snarled out, "Oooh, the priest has a spine. Oh wait... that's probably the stick they shoved up your ass when you were little!"

Kamiko's eyes flashed and started to spin a little, "Well, at least I'm not worried about back pain. I was fitter than you when I was seven, and don't have to worry about being top heavy!" Kamiko growled back.

"Oh, you poor dear, thinking that my chest is a curse. Besides, I've got just as much down back, so my balance is perfectly fine. I can run around all day and I won't be getting my outfit caught on anything. What do you need all that fabric for? Hiding your ego in your sleeves?" snarked Rude

Should I stop these two? Maybe hit Rude with a blast of calming aura? It might be worth it at this point, because I have no idea how else we're going to be able to work with her. Kamiko huffed, "My sister made this outfit for me, and she's already a proper designer. I've got a whole wardrobe full of clothes, I guess you pick such skimpy outfits so you can keep it all in your shoebox."

"Aw, wittle baby's sister made her some clothes, and she actually wears them? Isn't that just precious" said Rude in a babyish voice.

As soon as the insult was finished, the atmosphere changed. If this had been yesterday, Kamiko might have taken a hard hit from that, or ignored it, now though, she had a lot more respect for Aslena and

was on her way to mending things, so what happened instead was she summoned up her weapon to hand and let her energy flow out.

"Oh? Can't take the heat so you're resorting to violence like a common Pit Fiend? Gonna beat me up while you're on punishment duty? Good luck trying that!" snapped Rude.

Ok that's enough. Kat pushed her aura out on full power. Something she hadn't really done in the real world. A wave of pressure exploded from Kat's body, covering both Kamiko and Rude. Kamiko's aura fought for a second, before it just gave up, clearly Kamiko was willing to let Kat handle this one.

Rude though, grit her teeth and tried to fight back. She only really managed half a second before her defence shattered though. Still, Rude was shocked when instead of fear, it was calm that hit her. All the issue she had with the stupid pair before her just started washing away. She desperately tried to cling to her anger but it was slipping out of her mind.

When Kat saw Rude's face finally settle, she spoke up. "Hello, my name is Kat, my friend here is Kamiko. We've been tasked to work with you because you have a nice skill to keep her protected and I'd like to trust you can do that without trouble. Might I have your name?" Kat's words were soft, and sounded like she was speaking with a calm and caring tone.

That wasn't reassuring to Rude though, as she felt the weight of Kat's aura continue to press down on her forcing something resembling calm, that didn't quite manage to erase the feeling of panic that was welling up in her chest. Kamiko had talked some smack, and was about to fight but Kat... well, she could feel that if Kat fought, she'd fight to FINISH things not to win.

Chapter 492: Sue

The rude Succubus clicked her tongue but wasn't willing to show any more defiance than that. Kat's aura was keeping her calm, and showing her just how outclassed she really was. On top of that, part of her was wondering why she was antagonising them in the first place but the rest of her argued that little part was reacting to Kat's aura. It wasn't her real thoughts... right?

"At least you two have pronounceable names. Mine's Sue. My parents actually wanted mortals to be able to say it without translation magic" Kat felt a part of her mind explode as she heard that from Sue. *Oh my GOD! That's why demons have such dumb names half the time?! It's because they can abuse the translation function of our heritage so they can just make their names whatever the hell they want. I never really noticed but when you hear it, you hear the noise and feel what letters make it up. My world has been shook.* "still, is Kat short for somethin?"

"No. No it isn't" said Kat, very glad she could say those words and it not be a lie. She'd claimed that. It was her name.

"Right..." said Sue, catching the slight glint of hostility mostly because Kat's aura had pressed down on her further when she'd asked the question. "well... um... unlike you creamy fucks, my specialty is something rare, targetable defence. It's the only skill Stone cared about, and by the end of this you'll be singing my praises, I'm sure."

"Kamiko, be a dear and help me intimidate Sue a bit" said Kat rolling up her sleeve and placing her arm next to Kamiko's weapon. Kamiko glanced down, and cringed at the idea, but new part of the reason this

was happening was because she'd felt like being snarky earlier, so she decided to grant Kat's request despite the pain it caused them both.

Kamiko sliced open a long gash down Kat's arm, even making sure to drag it over the main artery in Kat's arm so that blood gushed out coating Kat's arm with black liquid that continued to seep out for just a few moments before healing up completely and dripping to the floor. "I'm perfectly capable of keeping myself healthy as you can see" said Kat with grin.

"Right" said Sue, eyes wide and staring at the now clean arm that Kat left visible. Regeneration on that scale without potential scarring was indeed rarer than her own skills but not by much. "Um... ok... then... uh... my other skill is poison mist. I can spit a poison that... honestly probably won't be much use against swarm rats. Too many of them... though it's enclosed so it might work? I mean... I have two. I have an aphrodisiac and a sleeping one, but the sleeping one doesn't really work unless the target is already half asleep... same with the first one but for arousal..."

"That's fine" said Kamiko, regaining her cheer. Kat glanced over to check, but it seemed real. *Her recovery rate on her cheerfulness is phenomenal. I wonder if it's an act? Doesn't seem like it but... does anybody really act like that?* The answer was yes, of course. For Kamiko did. "just having you defend me will be pretty good. Besides, it's not every day somebody volunteers to go down into a hole filled with rats just to help out."

Sue blanched at that, her purple face lightening a few shades and now more closely matched Kat's flames, without the light of course. "Did... did you say a hole filled with rats? I thought we were just clearing out a section of the mine..."

"Oh we did that yesterday," said Kamiko cheerfully with a slightly sadistic edge. "Now we have to go down into the nest and make sure to clear out the rest of them"

"Oh" said Sue, who was already recovering because of Kat's aura. The panic had subsided though she wasn't actually happy about that fact. Sure she wasn't angry either because of the STUPID AURA that stopped her from getting annoyed, but she was certainly trying.

"Are there any limitations for your defensive skill we should know?" asked Kat

Sue nodded, "It's mostly line of sight. If you duck out of it for a second or two that's fine, but it'll break soon after that. Also, it's doesn't work at all against grappling. It's not slippery, it feels more like... hmm... a bit like a rubber mat? It's probably got more friction than your skin anyway, and it doesn't deal too well with blunt attacks either. It helps somewhat, but my barrier isn't quite so physics defying as some abilities.

"So, blunt attacks still hurt, and jabs or thrusts will more easily break through but it has some defence against them. Slashing attacks do basically nothing, and magic is dependant on the type, but quite often will simply contest directly with my energy reserves, the spell burning out what it can, but normally it's a pretty efficient exchange"

"Will you be able to do two at a time? One for me and one to keep yourself safe?" asked Kamiko

Sue nodded and said "Yep, that's actually one of the things that lands my ability in the rarer category. I can keep it up on myself basically for free as long as it's not taking damage. It's doesn't cost that much to

have on someone else, but it's nothing on myself. I don't even really need to think about it either, only for other people."

"That's good" said Kamiko "For myself, I will mostly just be using my sword. I can shoot lasers out of my eyes and I have poison in my nails, but neither of those are as effective as just cutting the rats up with my naginata. The lasers take a bit to get going and use a bit too much energy. They're mainly good for ranged attacks but the energy efficient isn't what I'd like it to be yet, and the caves aren't really big enough to justify them."

Kat took this as her queue, "My main strength here is my regeneration. None of my other abilities really help for combat, unless you count how sharp my nails are, but I'm not quite sure if that's standard affair or not. I can also fly, but once again, not sure if that's going to matter here."

Sue rolled her eyes, "Of course you'd gets wings big enough to fly. Just my luck I'd get the short end of the stick there. Mine ain't that much shorter then yours so I feel pretty jipped at the moment."

Kat shrugged, "I also have true sight if you want something else to complain about"

Sue just deadpanned. It was the best she could do with the damned calming aura. "Yeah that just ain't fair. Is it proper true sight and not the low level stuff that lets you see through some illusions?"

Kat shrugged, "I dunno. I think it's proper truesight. I wouldn't really know the difference"

Sue sighed while rolling her eyes before saying, "Of course you wouldn't. Real TrueSight is about INTENT. When someone intends to obscure something your TrueSight will kick in. If you get good enough you can even use it to tell when people are lying. It lets you see the truth of things. This includes shapeshifters, though it gets a little weird with them, and illusions and a few other things as well. If they gain enough power you can start to use them to tell you facts about things. They are busted."

Can't you just use the system to tell you facts about things? "I'll keep that in mind" said Kat finally retracting her aura now that they'd gotten most of the important stuff out of the way.

Sue shivered when the feeling left her, and while it lingered for a little bit, most of what she felt was dread. "That's shit's real creepy Kat. I have fear aura and it ain't half as scary as the shit you've got. It's so weird, and while it's fine during it, now it's gone I feel all uncomfortable like someone has taking some steel wool to my soul or something. Creepy shit."

I wonder why? Is it because she's kind of a brash person, or is it because I don't consider her a friend? All the other times I used it, for the most part, was to help stabilise a friend's mood, not as anything offensive really. Does it have offensive applications? And what does it mean that 'soul scrubbed with steel wool'? It makes me think I've cleaned her soul a bit, but I also can't imagine it's a good feeling? Maybe that's what makes it weird and creepy, she feels better but also a little raw and has no idea how to deal with it properly

"Well... I've never heard anyone other than you complain. I'm not quite sure what that means though, and I can't check with D.E.M.O.N.S because of the punishment so... are we good? You willing to work with us?"

Sue groaned, "Fine, I suppose I am..."

Chapter 493: What Shall We Do with a Panicked Miner

After gaining Sue's reluctant acceptance they headed outside to find Stone eating what had to be a second onigiri. This one only had a single bit taken out of it after all. Despite this though, as soon as Stone spotted them, he held open his palm and let the food vanish somehow. "So ready to go?" asked Stone

"Yes, it seems so" said Kat

"I didn't know you had a spatial storage ability Stone" said Sue, "You can use that to smuggle all sorts of interesting things..."

Stone rolled his eyes which made a grinding sound as the orbs rotated in their sockets. "All you young kids always think that. You really think we haven't developed enchantments to scan through them? In fact, because of a few problems way back when, they're normally much more thoroughly searched than plain old hidden pockets or something. You'd be more likely to smuggle a bomb in your coat than even a half uneaten sandwich in a spatial pocket"

"Really? Why? I mean, sure they have enchantments for it but... why so thorough?" asked Kat

"Well," said Stone as he started to move towards the box of supplies for the group "the big issue is that in the past, before this Hub was even founded, there was quite a few issues with Spatial storage. Originally it was almost impossible for demons with that as a skill to get a job in any Hub, and they were perpetually brought in for stealing even if they were innocent. It's one of the many skills that was rarer in the past so it wasn't a big deal.

"Then Greed started to really make use of it for transportation, started forcing marriages or at least children, between two people with the skill and tried to get as many people with the skill as possible. To the shock of many, apparently it actually worked. It's one of the skills that's very easily inheritable or so they say. I'm not sure if it's still the case.

"Anyway, once a bunch of people had it, the concern over theft and smuggling came roaring back, so every faction even Greed, wanted some way to check the contents. So they put the best minds to the job. I'm talking Rank 7 and 8 powerhouses, perhaps even Rank 9, just to get this done.

"By the end of it, spatial detection enchantments were everywhere and even the poorest business had them as standard features that would scan a spatial pocket and catalogue all the items inside. At this point nobody even stores anything valuable in them unless you're a courier because everyone and their mother gets access to the scanning enchantments along with the records of them. So you can't actually hide anything in them. I mostly use mine as a lunch box because I got the version that stops time"

When Stone finished speaking, he took out the three earmuffs and threw them at the Succubi who easily caught them out of the air. They plonked them on their heads and got ready to enter the mine. Stone of course, pulled on his own set and lead the way.

The path was exactly the same as last time except when they reached the wall Stone turned part of it into a door instead of throwing the girls through. Once on the other side, Stone lead the way. The area had been cleaned of rats but the stains remained. As they walked, it was more likely they were stepping on blood than stone. It was simply everywhere, and the miners had no real reason to clean it up.

Still, it only took a further twenty minutes to get to the spot marked by the arrows. Stone looked them all over before he tapped on the earmuffs and took his own off. The Succubi did the same, and Stone started talking. "Right, so, once I open the hole you'll have to go straight into action. I actually had to reinforce it after the cleaning crews came in because the rats were already breaking through so you'll need to attack straight away.

"Secondly, I can't really leave it open. I'll be making it into a door with one of those vault door locks. You'll just need to turn it, but you will need to interact with the door. This means if you need to run, don't expect to be able to get straight through the exit. Finally, if you don't finish by the time I come looking for you, I'll be sealing things up again. If you could somehow direct me to where you are that would be great but I understand it will be hard.

Oh and one more thing. I've got you all some heavy duty lamps this time. They won't break from anything less than a full powered hit from a Rank 3, so you should be safe to keep them on you" Stone passed over the lamps in question, but they had no noticeable difference to last time. The only thing Kat noticed was that the tops of them were coated in red.

"Sounds good" said Kat and Kamiko at the same time as Sue winced.

"Do I really have to jump down there with these two?" asked Sue "They might be getting punished, and at least a little crazy but I'm not. Is there no better way?"

Stone raised an eyebrow "I'm paying you for this job you know. I can just... retract that?"

"Wait she's getting paid?" said Kamiko shocked

Stone raised his eyebrow higher, surprising Kat because it actually climbed above his face, hanging just by a tiny bit of stone "Yes?" said Stone confused, "She volunteered sure but the money on offer is pretty decent for a days work, especially a Rank 1."

Kamiko and Kat turned to glare at Sue. "What, jealous you fools have to do this for free?"

"No..." said Kat with a glance at Kamiko to see if she was on the same wavelength, "we're more annoyed at how hard you've been making this. Sure, if you were doing this for free and to help out we wouldn't expect much in the way of professionalism... but if you're getting paid that's a whole other ball game. What's with all the complaining? We aren't forcing you to be here, but we need to know you're in. I personally, was willing to allow whatever complaints as long as you actually helped..."

"But hearing that you're complaining and getting paid... it rubs me the wrong way? How can we trust you to actually do the job if you can't even handle speaking with us politely?" Kat's tail flicked in annoyance as she explained her reasoning. She didn't think it was too much to ask. She'd seen a few 'volunteers' in her time on Earth who really only did something either for the social credit or because someone else signed them up. They weren't the best, but they were still better than nothing. Kat's forbearance for that behaviour disappeared when it was a job though.

Sue clicked her tongue and said, "You can't tell me this ain't a shit job though"

"Sure, but YOU picked it" said Kat flexing her aura slightly, just enough to brush against Sue's own who shuddered when she felt it on her own.

"Fine fine" grumbled Sue, "I'll go down in the deep dank rat hole and get covered in blood but no I am NOT happy with this. I'll wait up here till the first lot are cleared though. Kamiko might have to as well. My shield is good, but if there's so many rats she's covered I dunno if I can keep it running"

"Deal" said Kat, even as Kamiko looked more hesitant. Kat had no such concerns though, believing in her regeneration and strength to get her through. She put her headphones back on and glanced at Stone. He held her gaze for a few seconds before nodding, and started shaping the stone. First, he raised the area around them, making it so you'd have to take a large step over the lip to get access to the hole. Once that was complete, he started removing the Stone, and the other Succubi threw on their earmuffs.

When the hole opened, Kat could feel the wave of sound and gained a new appreciation of her earmuffs. Still, she readied herself to go down it but Stone had other ideas first, pulling a large chunk of rock from the ceiling he hurled it down the hole just as the rats started bubbling up, nearly breaking into the upper section.? The rock splattered hundreds of rats as it fell, crushing those that attempted to climb up, and many of the ones below as well. Stone held up a hand in Kat's direction and hurled down three more, smaller but still large, rocks into the hole, making sure to send them in different directions before motioning to Kat.

Well. Here I go. Into the hole. Filled with rats. Oh so many rats.

Chapter 494: Down in the Dark Hole

Kat jumped straight down the newly made hole, very thankful that Stone had somehow been able to eyeball her wingspan at some point and make a hole to accommodate for that. As Kat fell, she observed her surrounding and instantly came to a conclusion she didn't like... and that was the realisation that despite the huge number of rats Stone had killed, it wasn't even close to enough. A veritable wave of the things was already washing in her direction and she didn't think some fancy blade would help her here.

Kat wanted to freeze. Her mind didn't know how to react. She'd be fine. Probably. Her regeneration would take care of it. She wasn't scared of course but... she had no idea what to do. There was too much, and she'd been told not to use her fire too much inside the mines. Then, as the first rats started to touch her body a small part of her mind spoke up. 'We aren't in the mines anymore' and 'As long as it isn't too much fire'

Another part of her mind tried to argue back, 'this is dangerous' and 'this is a bad idea' but a second later when another five rats came into contact with Kat's body, the only response was FIRE. Purple blazed out of her form, wreathing her in a bright light that would hurt mortals to look at. The temperature plummeted as the fire slithered out, sinking deeply into the bodies of hundreds of rats at a time as it BURNED and while freezing the vermin solid.

Kat spun herself around, throwing flames as she went, her tail extended and crushing the rats that had frozen, dispersing them into thousands of fragments, now unrecognisable from any other as yet more fire spilled out from her. In just a few seconds Kat had used up half her energy reserves, but the area around her was silent.

Untold numbers of rats surrounded her still, but all frozen in place with wisps of purple fire still leaving the corpses, making the temperature alone enough to end any of the rats, not that there was likely to be

any, that escaped Kat's rampage. She took in a deep breath, trying to real in her instincts that still wanted her to throw just a bit more fire on it.

Um... woops?

Kat looked out over the sea of frozen rats and was shocked at how serene it all looked. Just moments ago it had seemed a little unsettling but now that she looked, the slight shine from the remnants of her fire, the glassy finish across all the rats, even the scattered pieces of ice that glittered.

You know... maybe this is fine. "What the HECK KAT!" shouted Sue "How are Kamiko and I supposed to come down there when you've frozen everything. I can feel it chilling my nipples from up here and I'm not prepared to jump down"

"Um..." Kat heard Kamiko's much quieter voice ring out after Sue finished, "I'm like Kat and have an ice constitution. I'll be fine..."

"Of course" grumbled Sue, "I had to end up with the two frosty b-" Kat heard something impact something else. It was almost like a door being slammed. She couldn't see it, but what had happened was Stone slapping Sue's horns who groaned in response. "Oi, Stone, what the heck. They both have ice flames. I have the right to be mad!"

Stone sighed, and gestured to Kamiko hoping she'd be able to explain. When Kamiko just looked at him confused Stone gestured for them to remove their headphones. Kat couldn't hear them, but he said, "You know as well as I do Sue that you can summon up your own flames to keep yourself warm. You don't need to complain"

Kat did here the response though, which to her was out of place. "Oh sure, but that's a massive drain on my energy. How can I keep that going, plus two shields? I'm good, but not that good Stony."

Stone sighed, "Fine let me see if I have a coat for you..."

Stone stuck his hand into his palm before digging around for something. Eventually his eyes lit up and he pulled out a jacket. It was a thick trench coat like design with bright reflective strips across the entire thing to help with it's visibility. "Here" said Stone

Sue's eyebrows shot up. "You want me to wear that ugly thing that's at least twice my size? It's not just a jacket it's a walking fashion disaster."

Stone's eyes narrowed and his back straightened. "Now, I was going to let Kat and Kamiko deal with this for the most part, but your attitude has always been a problem. I know your parents are just as bad, but they have power to back it up. They also know when to stow the attitude, or to make it funny. Now. You can either take this jacket with warming enchantments and jump down to Kat, or, I can throw you down right now. And guess what the only way you can leave is?"

Sue paled at this but Kamiko grinned, "Kat. She's the only one who can fly"

"Indeed." said Stone, "Look Sue, I understand this is not a pleasant job, but you want be on the frontline and I did explain, in detail, what you were going to be doing. I didn't downplay it, and the only reason I've been so patient with you so far is because it is gross and unpleasant and I know you can't help but

run your mouth. Still, biting the hand that's offering to feed you is the height of stupidity. I didn't feel the need to make this a Contracted job, but I will if I have to Sue."

Sue grimaced at that, knowing that if this was really a Contracted job she'd have been forced to go along already. Swiping the jacket out of Stone's hands she draped it over herself and felt like a clown. The jacket might have well been a dress with how low it came, covering everything except her feet. It sat uncomfortably on her shoulders and she needed to do the jacket up just to avoid it from falling off because of the extra size.

The only thing that helped the jacket fit at all, was the size of her assets, which filled it out slightly more than it would otherwise. Without those four additional orbs of flesh the jacket would have just fallen off anyway. The enchantments were for self repair and temperature regulation, not resizing.

Seeing her wearing the outfit, Kamiko nodded and jumped down into the hole, easily taking the impact on her knees. Despite this, the ice still cracked a bit under her feet, as she'd landed a bit to the side of Kat and hadn't used the stone platform Stone had provided. The ice was solid enough, but not really up to taking that kind of impact.

Still, Kamiko placed her earmuffs back on and waited for Sue to go down. After waiting for a minute and seeing nothing, Kamiko was about to just get started on the rats but Stone was of a similar idea and picked her up after placing her earmuffs back on. "Wait!" shouted Sue

But Stone didn't listen. He'd given her enough chances to officially back out or get on with it, and decided to force the issue. Stone noticed Kamiko waiting to catch Sue, and a dark thought passed through his mind urging him to throw her away from the smaller demon. Still, logic won out. He'd have to really throw Sue if he wanted Kamiko to be unable to catch her, and that would be potentially lethal at those sorts of speeds, and frankly, it was just unprofessional and likely to cause issues for Kamiko.

"Noooooo!" shouted Sue as she fell, not even trying to use her wings to help with the descent. Kamiko caught her easily though, taking her weight and resting her in a bridal carry for a few seconds to get her to recover, but just dumping her to the side. Sue stumbled slightly, courtesy of the ice, but she managed to recover with enough grace to keep herself upright.

"What? Can't handle this for more than a few seconds?" snarked Sue automatically as she tried to regain some calm.

Kamiko sighed. "I just assumed you'd find it embarrassing. Plus, I at least went to the trouble of catching you. Wouldn't want you to crack the ice and fall through..."

Sue winced, but her mouth was faster than her mind, "I'd never find being carried embarrassing, it's just my place, to be above the ground"

"Yeah and a burden to everyone else" said Kat without really thinking. *Oof. I... that was meaner sounding out loud than I intended. But... I mean... I'm not wrong? Just... ugh, she really is though. She's just complained and held us up at this point. Granted, I wouldn't want Kamiko to go in without her help but... I really don't know if I trust her to keep Kamiko safe at this point.*

Chapter 495: Decisions, Decisions, Rats, Decisions

Sue flinched back but recovered just a quicky, "Oh, so you don't want my barriers? I'd happily go back home and ditch this hellhole" ignoring the locked escape hatch that would require someone of Kat or Kamiko's strength and the ability to fly to open.

Kat sighed, "Look, I'm just saying, I'm not sure how much I can trust you to keep those shields up on Kamiko when mild inconveniences cause such a drastic response from you"

"I don't think that this number of swarm rats can be considered a 'mild inconvenience' unless you decide to just decimate the whole mountain range with a Rank 5." Snarked Sue

"Sure" said Kamiko, "But you aren't fighting them we are. We need to be able to trust you to do your job. Nothing more, nothing less, and we are worried you'll see something gross and run away, or just get lazy and drop the shield" Kamiko's voice was calmer than Kat's at this point even though she was the one more at risk.

Kamiko was trying hard to make Sue understand. She didn't want to sound accusing but they'd repeated themselves a few times at this point and Sue had replied yes, but never actually spoke in her defence to assure them she'd keep the protections up. Sure she'd spoke about how easy it was, but the difficulty was never the question, the will behind it was.

While this was going on, Kat was having some thoughts of her own. *You know, I think I understand now why those guys didn't care how much I helped out in the tournament. They didn't trust me, or, they trusted me to do my job and not a thing more. They might have honestly not expected me to do anything, and even if they did HOPE it wasn't worth trusting me to do things.

Sure, time kinda messed that up by randomly assigning people to the tasks in the end, which allowed me to show I was willing to help them out properly and not just be an extra member in the team. I wonder if that's the other reason they didn't bother looking for more people after their fifth members left so often...

Then again, as a group the four of them were very connected. Nixilei was Green's... bodyguard? Something like that... and Kress was Gareth's childhood friend and bodyguard, while of course, Green and Gareth were... engaged? I think? So they had a certain level of trust that was easily developed.

And the other groups all had a shared bond as well. The elves were all transformed into matching elf forms, the God Crushers had to be related somehow. They looked so similar and all had J names. I know the two casters were twins at least. I wonder about Skye's team. They seemed like professionals, but other than Clive who was her husband how did the others fit in? Just professionalism built up over years?

And now I have to deal with... this mess. Kamiko and I get along well. We clicked easily. It wasn't hard to fight rats with her. We knew our positions and even though I didn't really know how to fight, and still don't, Kamiko knows I'll happily take the front line and any major hits so she doesn't have to.

I in turn, trust Kamiko not to get too hurt from small fry. She can handle herself and while her margin of error is lower than mine because she doesn't have regeneration, she's MUCH better with a weapon than I am and is just better at combat as well. I think I've been relying on brute force more than I really thought, even in the Cultivation World.

Still, that once again, means I can trust her. I'm not constantly looking over my shoulder and worried about her. The problem is just Sue. I don't really like her and I don't trust her either. She seemingly has an easy job from what she's said, and it HAS to be true, but only for a certain definition of 'true' and while Sue's talked a lot... she hasn't promised to do her job properly.

Which, while normally somewhat bad, is much worse because I don't really need to worry about myself. I'd have been fine if she screwed up a bit helping me. But NOO she had to have a shield spell for Kamiko. Sure it's needed because I can't hold back all the rats. Ignoring the massive area of frozen rats proving that statement false. but I just wish I didn't now have to worry about Kamiko so much.

A scratch or two might be fine, but I bet, if Sue's ever going to get distracted or have her skill fail, it'll be when we get to the tougher stuff. When we're exhausted as a group, and fighting a more serious threat and I DO NOT want to deal with Nira if she has to heal Kamiko because she got injured fighting with me.*

Sue's posture shifted, but with the huge jacket covering her it was hard to see exactly how it was changing. Afterwards she reached up to tug lightly on her horns, realising the problem they were pointing out. "Look, I've said that this isn't exactly hard just... disgusting work..." said Sue slowly. "I... I'll promise to try. I don't want to promise it'll be perfect but I do promise not to intentionally cause the shields to drop during combat. I won't promise not to mouth off either"

Kat frowned at this. *That's still not exactly reassuring,* but Kamiko was much more accepting, "That's fine Sue. I can understand why you'd make your promise that way. I'm just glad you're willing to commit to keeping your shield going." And was willing to accept the statement for what it is.

I guess if Kamiko is going to give it the ok I won't fight that. She's the one being protected after all, and while I don't trust Sue or her skill, I do trust Kamiko's. So, I'll trust Kamiko knows what she's doing. Depending on how the shield works, she might even be able to tell if it drops

"So... what direction do we go and how should we go about doing that?" asked Sue

Kat was now much more aware of the fact that they were standing at the both the tallest part of the cave, and the part with the least rats because they'd been knocked away. To the left and right the tunnels were filled to the ceiling with frozen rat corpses and left no clear way to progress.

"That... that is a good question..." said Kat.

"I mean... we could just smash through?" said Kamiko with her head tilted to the side in thought. It was an option sure but not exactly an appealing one. The risk of having more rats flood in, or needing to swim through rats was not a pleasant thought.

"Do either of you have skills to like... carve a tunnel out?" asked Sue pulling on her horns more.

Kat and Kamiko both shook their heads. "Darn" said Sue and for once, that was all. She didn't have any other derogatory comments to add on top. Mostly because manipulating demonic fire was one thing, manipulating the PRODUCT of demonic fire was another, and pretty much impossible for people at their Rank.

"Look... if we have to I don't mind being the one to make a path. If more rats come... well... we can deal with that, either with more fire or by slicing them up." Said Kat, "That being said... I have no idea what direction would be better."

"That really does feel like something Stone should have told us..." said Kamiko quietly, though still more than loud enough for all the demons to hear, "...then again... it's not like we can clear this hole place out in a day. Maybe we should put some more energy into one side to keep it frozen, and then just start going the other way?"

Sue just shrugged, "Look, this'll take your skills and energy. I'm just as happy to keep standing here all day so I'll let you both deal with this."

Kat bit her lip, pouting slightly as mulled over her friends responses, "We got like a coin or something to flip? There's no real way to know otherwise"

Sue patted herself down, making sure to really emphasise her curves despite them being covered by pulling the jacket as taught as she could against herself while she was 'looking' for coins. To her surprise though, she actually did find one, and froze. Carefully reaching into the pocket she pulled out a gold coin with a lady wearing a crown on one side and a tree on the other. The metal was a dull bronze. "Well... this works? Heads or tree I guess?" said Sue honestly shocked she found it.

Kamiko took the left side of the room and Kat took the right. They both looked at each other for a bit before Kat gestured in Kamiko's direction. "Fine, person and we'll go where I'm standing, and tree we'll go with Kat" said Kamiko.

Chapter 496: Ice Sculpting is not what this is

The coin was shot into the air. This wasn't the greatest idea because it hit the ceiling causing it to ricochet off into a random direction. Kamiko sprinted after it and managed to grab the thing by diving after it... and then slide all the way over to Kat. "Um... woops?" said Sue awkwardly.

"No harm done" said Kamiko jumping back onto her feet, "this is all good" Kamiko looked at her clenched fist and slowly opened it to reveal the coin inside. An intricately detailed tree stared back at her. "Sweet, would have been awkward to walk back over to the other side"

Kat didn't say anything, simply nodding and slamming a fist into the ice. It cracked around her fist, grooves spiderwebbed out from the impact coating all of the nearby wall and spreading to parts of the floor as well... but it didn't give way. *Hmm. So I can't just bash this and let it fall apart? That's a bummer.*

So Kat adjusted her technique, now she was using her nails to dig into the ice, cracking it inwards somewhat before ripping off chunks. She started to go into a bit of a trance, speeding up her movement, increasing her strength slightly. With what looked like practice strokes Kat made good progress into the wall, visible by the second as she sank into it... until running into stone.

"Shit. We might need to dig down a fair bit here," said Kat. "I've hit stone... should I go back and try to make a ramp or just go straight down?"

Kat was thankful that the icy bits broke so cleanly. The rats had been frozen completely and the guts and blood had frozen just as easily as the skin. When she flung away pieces of ice, they might as well just be

normal ice made from water considering the lack of filth it created. This was nice, and nearly convinced her to get the other two to help, but it wasn't really worth it. They only needed a person sized tunnel, and Kat was the 'largest' of all of them because of her height and wingspan.

"Should be fine to go straight down" said Kamiko, "this isn't like the door up top, we can jump Kat."

Oh right. How could I forget that? And now Kat felt kind of silly. Kamiko's house was built around the idea that you could jump between floors easily. *The idea she couldn't get out of a slightly deep hole might have been insulting if she was a lesser person*

Taking that advice, Kat continued, this time downwards. She made it twice as deep as she was tall and that still didn't reach the floor. Considering it good enough though, she started to carve forward through the ice once again. This built up a good deal of ice chunks at the bottom of the tunnel though. While before she was just throwing them out into the large open space, her current area didn't quite have that available.

Before Kat could think of a solution though, Kamiko just jumped down and started to throw ice back out towards the entrance without complain. "I'll just ugh... wait out here I guess?" said Sue awkwardly, not wanting to annoy the other two.

"Sounds good!" said Kamiko as she shovelled away the ice, her body easily able to handle the cold. Honestly the small size of most of it was what really caused the issue not the temperature. Sure some big chunks had survived, but Kat had thrown things backwards without care, resulting in most chunks shattering into small fragments of ice only slightly larger than grains of sand, so it wasn't the easiest material to work with. Luckily Kamiko was fast enough that the small gaps in her fingers didn't have time to let the ice drip through.

With this setup, things went well... until the ice started to run out. Basically, as soon as Kat got past the frozen rats, things went south. See, the frozen solid rats... no problem. They were part of the ice, and easy to move without issue. The rats at the edge though, the rats that had died not from the turning to ice, but from the freezing temperatures created by the ice... they flooded in once the barrier was broken.

Live rats clearly pushed from behind but it was the wall of rat corpses approaching that sent Kat's mind into overdrive. *Shit what do I do?* Kat checked her reserves and found them lacking. She hadn't really given herself a chance to recover and only had around sixty five percent of her total. It wouldn't have been quite so low had she not been abusing her energy to more quickly clear away ice.

Still, it was enough for a response. Kat let her fire burn out of her hands, for surely, if that attack before didn't cause issues... neither would this one right? Besides there was plenty of rats to go through before infecting the stone... it would be fine...

For now at least, it was. The wave of corpses froze in place, the rats connected to each other and the ice around them, partially with the blood that was seeping out of the 'latest samples' and giving a more robust route for Kat's energy to travel down. Still, this was another big chunk of energy and Kat found herself back down to forty five percent. It was a shorter blast, but apparently calling it all up like that still hadn't been efficient.

Hmm... now what. Should I wait or... keep going? Can we even keep going? Will this be less of a combat mission and more of a... 'freeze dig freeze dig repeat' kind of mission. "Let's head back out and talk to Sue. I need to regenerate a bit as well." Said Kat, Just in case. *I want to keep above fifty percent I think.*

"Sure," said Kamiko throwing the last few handfuls of ice up before climbing out the ice. It was pretty easy for her. While Kat needed to stoop, mostly because of her horns, Kamiko was able to walk upright in the tunnel and was enjoying that fact.

Kat followed behind afterwards to find Sue leaning against the wall and carving tick tack toe boards into the ice next to her. Several had been completed already, with O winning most times, and X only a few times. What that meant, Kat had no idea. Hearing them both approach, Sue turned to face them and raised an eyebrow and said. "What, too tough for you? Talked big game before but a bit of ice was enough to make you give up?"

Kat shook her head, "No we found well... more rats, unfrozen ones. I just froze them as well but... I have no idea if this is actually going to be a combat mission at this point. If we just carve till we find rats, freeze and repeated I'm not really sure that you're needed. I mean, once we dig far enough your help getting the ice out would be nice but... it's just kind of weird? I mean... why would Stone ask us to do this? And is this the best way?"

Sue shrugged and said, "Well, if there really is that many Swarm rats we don't have to worry about things exploding at least"

"Why?" asked Kat automatically

"Simple. Demonic Energy likes to go through the path of least resistance. Monster corpses hardly resist the stuff at all, basically suck it in. So it's really easy to blast them. Now, doing damage is a different matter but it seems to be no issue here. Still, it means that your energy would rather go through rats than stone, likely even the unstable stuff. The really unstable stuff that it wouldn't... well the swarm rats would have probably set it off" explained Sue

Huh... that was... useful and presumably accurate information. Kamiko didn't answer me either, so... is this not common knowledge?" "Oh... um... thanks for the explanation? How did you know?" asked Kat

Sue scoffed, "I'm a miner's daughter. You learn little tricks like that in the business Kat. It's a really minor thing most of the time. The attraction to monsters isn't strong. It's not going to curve your shots for you... but if you trap a bunch of monsters in a box and send in the demonic energy... it'll go for the monsters, and then the box if it still has power left. Now, don't go full overkill, it has its limits... but you should be mostly safe with just how many rats there are."

Kat nodded but paused right at the end. "Is that why it was stressed before? There were a lot of swarm rats yes, mostly on the floor, but even that was nothing compared to the just... endless numbers we've already killed here?"

Sue nodded as the jacket shuffled around her, "Yup, probably. If you missed a rat and the energy sunk into the stones it could be a problem. Now however, there is just SO MANY rats that you can't miss unless you're brain dead. Its why Stone didn't say anything before sending us down here. You can't clear

it without fire, not in any timely manner anyway. Still, be a little careful. Use too much at once and well... the same issue applies"

Chapter 497: Adventure Can be Boring...

Once it had been established that as long as Kat didn't go too overboard with the demonic energy things had calmed down and settled into a routine. After recovering her energy Kat got back to work, chipping away at the ice wall until gave way to unfrozen rats, blasting it again, and keeping on.

At some point Kamiko had decided to be more efficient about things. She'd put together a bunch of ice in the shape of a snow shovel before freezing it together. She kept running her energy through it every now and then to keep it frozen as well, but that was mostly an extra precaution. She only did it because unlike Kat she wasn't really using much energy at all so this little bit of extra expenditure wasn't worth mentioning.

They hit the ceiling again a few times, and moved lower, though Kat did make sure to turn these into ramps. This was because Kamiko now regularly used her shovel more like a snow plough pushing it all the way back to the first drop and then throwing it out rather than just hurling it behind her. She was strong yes, but gravity was still a thing and it was just easy to run with it.

Granted, this tended to scrape a bit of ice off the footpath but that was a price she was willing to pay. Sue even gave them a bit of a hand by flattening out that first section somewhat. It didn't quite allow Kamiko to run up it with her plough setup but it made flinging the ice out easier. Apparently Sue's fingers still got chilled for a split second before the coat warmed them up again, not a fun experience apparently. She used much more colourful and insulting language of course, but at this point, the K's took it in stride and kept up the excavations.

The first surprise, was when they hit a wall. Literally. Simply thinking this was another case of the ceiling dipping down, Kat dug in that direction waiting for the ceiling to finally stop dropping. Of course, reaching the stone floor then, was a surprise. It actually took Kat a few seconds of looking at the rock, much to her shame, to realise why she couldn't chip away at it anymore.

Oh. OH! This... this is the floor. Kat didn't want to facepalm. That would be more embarrassing. Her left hand made contact with her face, broadcasting the sound of well... getting slapped all the way down the corridor. Everyone knew.

Shit. Um... what now? Go up? Is this a dead end?

Kat observed the makeshift icy ceiling she currently had. *Hmm, this could be a pain. I mean... I can dig straight up, but I'm not sure if I want to? That'll be a lot harder than just digging down. I'm not quite sure how my energy reserves will keep up?*

Checking those reserves, Kat found herself at around sixty percent. Lower than she'd thought, but then again, she did rush into the next section a little faster than was perhaps prudent. She'd gotten into the groove and just gone for it. Still, it was more than fifty.

Just one issue. The hole she'd dug. Not quite large enough for wings... or to crouch down really, her knees hit the wall when tried. *I really boxed myself in here huh? Guess I can just jam my fists into the wall to climb up but... I feel like I've made a series of dumb decisions in rapid succession. Maybe I should stop and think about this for a second. Regen some energy while I'm at it.*

So Kat did. After five minutes she now had most of her energy back and no better plan so she started climbing. Halfway up she thought she could try that back walking technique where you pushed against the opposite wall and walked up. It failed very quickly.

As Kat tried it, she felt her wings being squished against the wall. Trying to use solely that pressure, Kat had let go of the parts supporting her arms and put her back further into the wall. That's when everything fell apart. Her wings were very smooth and she started to fall backwards basically the moment she put weight on her back.

She tried pushing down harder but it was so strange on her wings, like trying to squeeze the muscles out of your arm. Her wings felt pressured on all sides and slipped even further down. Kat's tail pushed into the wall to stabilise her slightly, and it worked for just a moment. She could already feel herself falling back down but it was enough. Slamming her hands to the side sticking them into more ice Kat felt her descent falter.

Ok. Not doing that again. I'm not a human with some grippy clothes or even normal skin. I'm a Succubus with smooth skin that nothing likes to stick to. Even if my clothing might have let me cling to the wall slightly with it's friction, though now I think about the fact that it's silk maybe not... still, with wings in the way it was a moot point anyway.

Using her tail to keep pushing herself forward, Kat managed to manoeuvre her body and grip the front wall once again, before pausing. *Hmm, is it better to keep my arms out like I had them? No wait that's dumb, I can't bend them properly like that. I'm flexible but not quite to that extent. I don't have double joints in my elbows or knees.*

With that, Kat managed to get out of the hole she'd trapped herself in. "You alright Kat?" asked Kamiko, shovel in hand and leaning against the wall. She'd trusted Kat to get out herself or just ask for help so she hadn't said anything before.

"Yeah I just found the floor. Not really sure what to do now. We could either try to climb up but that'll be costly energy wise as I use my wings to keep myself afloat while I chip through it all. Or go the other direction. Where do you think we should try and go?" asked Kat

Kamiko tilted her head to the side... which led her to smacking her horn lightly against the ice and rebounding. "Whoops" said Kamiko as she flailed very slightly as she regained her balance. "Um... I think... I think going up. Sure we could go the other way but that'd just be more frozen rats probably. Sure it's killing them but it's not like we're finding the real power behind the nest. With so many of them they must have some fancy rats around somewhere. Maybe they are up somewhere?"

"Sounds good. I haven't really got a better idea so I'm happy to go for it. Still, I'll have to take more breaks, I don't want to be caught in the air with anything less than seventy percent energy just in case I think" said Kat

Kamiko nodded, "That's fine. Should we ask Sue? Oh and should I wait here. You've got that hole below to dump the ice so... I don't know if you need me shovelling... hmmm. Yeah those two."

Kat bit her lip. *That's a good question. I don't really need Kamiko helping me out with this part but do I want her on standby? If shit hits the fan I don't want to be caught without support... then again... she's

pretty fast. If something happens, she can probably just run down to me... except then she won't have Sue's help... but she wouldn't have that anyway.*

"Go hang out with Sue I think. Take a small break. I don't need the extra hands I don't think, and while combat is a risk, if it's so risky that I need help, I'd be much happier knowing you had Sue's shield around you. If I just find more basic rats then I can deal with them myself" said Kat

"Are you sure? I don't want to be just messing around..." said Kamiko

Kat shrugged, "I'm not going to tell you what to do, but maybe try and make friends with Sue? That'll be the harder task between the two of us" said Kat with a grin

Kamiko giggled at the thought realising just how true that was. She then started to more seriously consider it. Sure, Kat had meant it as a joke... probably but now that the idea was lodged in her mind it really did seem like a valuable use of her time. "I'll do it" said Kamiko, eyes blazing with interest. She'd make Sue... well maybe not a friend, but at least less openly hostile. She was sure of it.

Well... back to digging. Kat first enlarged the nearby area around her, making sure that she actually had the wingspace to fly properly. She hit actually hit the wall on the left side, and needed to dig out extra on the right, where she thankfully didn't find more stone, to have the wingspan required. This did put the shaft off-centre but there really wasn't anything she could do about that. She NEEDED that extra room, and if a little structural annoyance was what she had to pay. She'd happily pay it.

Still... thought Kat as she looked up at the iced over ceiling. *This isn't exactly going to be a fun time. Rats flowing into you is one thing. I do not want to be too slow and have them crush me and force me out of the sky.*

Chapter 498: FREEDOM! To fight more rats T_T

When Kat finally broke through into the next section of the cave, she froze for a few seconds as her brain tried to adjust. After smashing through rats for somewhere between an hour and two, for it all sort of blended together, the lack of rats was a shock that Kat wasn't immediately prepared to deal with.

Giving her wings a couple more flaps, Kat looked around at the shockingly barren tunnel. There were a few individual swarm rats scattered around the tunnel, but most weren't moving much, and a few were almost certainly corpses. The fact that the floor was completely visible at least until the cave turned was a decent shock.

Finally though, Kat's normal thoughts resumed, and looked around for any major threat before dropping down to get the other two. It didn't take all that long to follow the ice tunnel back to the group. She found them more or less where she left the pair, just slightly further to the right. It seemed like once Kamiko had joined the tic tac toe games became an actual competition... sort of.

It was clear that both of them knew the secret to at least tie every match, so it was mostly just them trying out the same few moves for about ten copies of the board before switching to something else...

As Kat walked closer she realised that they'd changed things significantly. They were now playing checkers. The way it was done is that they redrew the board every two moves. Because of this Kat could see them slowly playing out the whole game as they were moving along.

It was clear that Kamiko was winning, but as Kat started paying attention she realised it wasn't so much Kamiko was winning as Sue was teaching her how to play and letting her. "... see, if you move it here you can take out two of my pieces next turn unless I move this in response, but I won't do that because I can easily take three afterwards if you make that move"

"Hey guys!" said Kat, somewhat softly. She didn't want to startle them, but she was honestly just happy to no longer be stuck in the ice tunnels. A change of scenery, even if it just meant more rat killings, was a great boon.

Kamiko looked over at Kat and immediately smiled, Sue, to Kat's surprise, did the same with the addition of a raised eyebrow. "You want in?" asked Sue.

Kat grinned and let out a slightly forced chuckle taking it as the joke she hoped it was. "Um, no, maybe later. I found the end of the tunnel, or well, I found a cave section with only a few rats. I thought it would be good to explore it a bit. I don't know if this is where the rats came from or not, but it's something at least"

"Sure thing" said Kamiko bouncing to her feet and offering a hand to Sue. The other Succubus looked at it with narrowed eyes for a few seconds before grasping both hands around Kamiko's and pulling hard. Now, Kat wasn't quite sure how intended the sequence of events were.

When Sue pulled her legs weren't really in position to stand up, so she pulled herself less up, and more forward and up... straight into Kamiko. A point in Sue's favour was that as soon as she noticed her trajectory she turned her head away, presumably so her tall horns didn't try impaling Kamiko. Still, Sue managed to fall into Kamiko somewhat awkwardly with her feet scrambling for purchase for a moment before Kamiko's other hand came around and under Sue's arm and pulled the other Succubus to her feet.

"You alright there?" asked Kamiko still holding Sue slightly awkwardly as she was lowered.

Once Sue was back on her feet she grimaced and looked away. "Yeah, I'm good. What's happening? Am I following behind you? How far? Are there many turns?"

Kat bit her lip. *Hmm, I'll probably just carry her. I'm not quite sure if she could make the jump... actually can Kamiko? The angle is horrible unless she goes all the way to the bottom, and with the extra distance to the stone floor... that might be a bit much.*

"You'll be with me. I'll need to fly you up to the next section. The angle is horrible and I'm not sure that Kamiko would be able to jump the whole way either. There aren't too many rats, so it should be safe. I'm just debating internally if I should take Kamiko first or if she can make the jump and it'd be better to take you with me and have her follow behind."

Kamiko scuffed the ice a bit where her foot was as she considered that. "Maybe I should just get you to carry me first anyway? Even if it's not too bad there is still some rats right? Best be safe and take me up and then go back for Sue to be safe."

Sue shrugged, and Kat nodded. "Sure that sounds fine. I'll just um... hmm. Sue, wait here at the entrance, I'll pick you up here. Same for Kamiko, it might be a bit awkward getting you into my arms otherwise. Just... keep your legs tucked in the tunnels aren't too wide."

Sue actually looked pleased at the fact she'd be doing nothing for a few more minutes. Kat looked over at Kamiko who jumped up and twisted in the air so that Kat could simply raise her arms and catch her in a princess carry.

With Kamiko in place, Kat moved into the tunnel and paid attention to exactly where the other Succubus' legs were, seeing that Kamiko had indeed pulled them close and was bending her neck forward so her horns didn't scrape either Kat sped up.

It was simple to take Kamiko up out of the shaft, as once they reached the opening, the extra space taken up by her legs was irrelevant compared to Kat's wingspan. Dropping Kamiko off, Kat simply turned back as she heard Kamiko's "Thank you" echoing down the tunnel.

When Kat made it back for Sue, the other demon was wiggling her eyebrows. Kat just ignored that and brought her into the same princess carry. It was a bit harder because of the wings but by spacing her arms out more on holding Sue between the shoulder blades she managed to cope easily. It wasn't very comfortable for Sue, especially with her wings, needing to hold them closed as gravity pulled on them but they managed... for all of a few seconds.

While Sue wasn't as tall as Kat, her horns were much larger, and when taking them into account on both demons, made them about the same height. While Sue could pull herself in like Kamiko... it wasn't quite enough. "Shit." Said Sue, matching Kat's thoughts.

Backing up, Kat turned Sue sideways and started to shuffle down the path. She found that her feet didn't actually mind the movement, it would have been awkward with a purely human physique but her demonic one found the trouble negligible, if a good deal slower. Still, Kat had travelled this path a few times now and it wasn't a problem. Until she got to the shaft. Kat looked at the walls and guessed at the distance and noticed it'd be a tight fit.

Her wings were fine because of how fine control Kat had in the air. Going straight up was exceptionally simple. However, it would be much harder to keep Sue in the same place. "Are you going to fit here you think?" asked Kat, mostly asking if Sue could hold herself in place enough.

"Oh? I've never been into tail play, especially not while getting carried... then again... even if you're a girl I suppose I could experiment," said Sue

Kat felt the strong desire to drop Sue for a few seconds for 'no reason' of course. "Sue, please be serious" said Kat

"I'm completely serious. I'm straight as an arrow of course, but I mean have you seen your thighs? They're pretty tasty, plus you've got top notch hair. Do the carpets and the drapes match? I'd imagine so, but some actually mix and match, trust me, I've verified thoroughly" responded Sue

Kat winced at that and groaned out "I did NOT need to know that, Sue."

"What, I'm not allowed to have a little fun while you have me in your strong but lithe arms? Held captive down in this dark cave, at your complete mercy because I can't leave without you? A girl might start having mixed feelings if she doesn't get a chance to put her partner through the paces as well. I'm giving you a lot of trust you know" said Sue in a way that implied she wasn't really giving the trust so much as flaunting it.

You know what? If she smacks her head on the wall, it's her own fault. Kat stepped off the ground and let her wings pick up the slack. Sue's horns actually did scrape against the wall a bit but Kat 'politely' ignored that until she made it out of the cave. When they made it to the top Sue said, instead of a thanks or even a complaint... "Next time go harder on more horns. Hardly even hurt, so I can't get any pleasure from it"

Kat's strong desire to drop her intensified. For no reason of course.

Chapter 499: Prepping the Party

Kat stared out at the mostly empty hallway and pondered as she put Sue down. "So, anyone know why this place is so clean? Is this normal swarm rat behaviour?" asked Kat

"No idea" said Kamiko

Kat waited for Sue to speak up but she seemed much more pre-occupied with 'fixing' her outfit. Sadly, for Kat at least, this seemed to include making sure she was showing less skin, or at least that the coverings were all in riskier areas. Luckily the jacket covered most things, but she seemed to be looking at ways to 'fix' that "Sue?" asked Kat

"Look, I don't really know that much about swarm rats. Gangbang and bestiality are not on my list of fetishes, so I just know the basics about all monsters." Snarked Sue continuing with her 'fixes'

I... you know what. I might be ok with that answer. "Well, Sue... I didn't need to know that, but for once, I'll accept that answer because... yeah I don't really think those should be things anyone finds enjoyable..." said Kat

Sue raised an eyebrow and looked over at Kat, "I guess you aren't much of an orgy girl then. I mean, I'm not either, just doesn't tickle my insides quite the right way. Neither assembly line or pile up are things I'd go to bat for" 'explained' Sue

"Can we just focus on the rats?" asked Kat, not quite willing to go down that rabbit hole.

"Oh, I wouldn't have expected that from someone as proper as you. I'm a little surprised, but I won't judge you to harshly!" said Sue with a cheery tilt to her voice.

Kat looked over at Sue confused and said, "I don't follow."

Sue opened her mouth. Closed it. Raised a finger and opened her mouth again before letting it droop. A few more seconds passed before she finally spoke up and said, "You... you know what. I'm actually a little happy you got lost there. I don't know why but it brings me a slight feeling of joy so I'm not going to explain it."

Kat shrugged, *It doesn't seem important anyway, just likely more of Sue's jokes. If she doesn't want to explain it that's fine with me. Though...* Kat took a glance over at Kamiko who looked about as confused, but was spending more time scanning for rats than really paying attention to the conversation. She was keeping an ear out yes, but she was still in combat mode.

"So..." Kat let the word hang in the air as she looked around. "What are the chances this is the correct way? I don't know enough about swarm rats to know if heading further this way will lead towards the main base or away from it."

"Well it sure is cleaner!" chirped Sue

Kamiko ignored Sue to answer Kat's question, "I'm not sure. I know a little about monster behaviour and this is either completely the wrong direction or exactly the right one. See, some monsters like to group up. Wolves for example surround their leaders and protect them. The leader of the pack is the highest authority and they'll throw themselves at things and work together. They aren't disposable, but they'd attack without hesitation. They work together. Protect each other, but the pack leader is absolute.

"On the other hand, some things, like spider monsters are different. They like to keep the weakest of the swarm towards the edge of their territory. The they all become stronger the closer you get to the centre with the queen right in the middle. Or, sometimes a significant area in the middle or back of territory. Like... if they have a cave the queen will take over the very back of it.

"So... with swarm rats, they multiply quickly, but I don't think they're really pack animals, or at least not like wolves. I just don't know if a powerful swarm rat would push the others out of its territory. I guess it depends on the thought process.

"As I said, spiders get stronger towards the centre. This is because of a few reasons. Firstly, because they actually attack each other fairly often. The young simply can't compete so they don't stick around with the stronger spiders and either hang out on the edge of territory or leave.

"Other spider types all work together. The young stay at the edge not to avoid being killed by the older spiders but because they are less powerful, less useful, and are more acceptable casualties. Sometimes they'll have one decently strong spider protecting them and working as a unit, but that's rare and only for the really intelligent species.

"So... yeah... we could either be near the strongest swarm rat, and maybe some strong guards who've forced the weaker ones to run away... or the rats were pushing into this area and only a few managed to make it. I guess we have to just look around. It's easier then heading back and carving out more ice"

"I dunno" said Sue "I would love it if we headed the other way. I could use that as a chance to sit down on my fabulous ass."

"Well Sue, I suppose you can sit down while we continue but if you aren't on your feet... well... it makes it a lot harder for you to run or for us to pick you up if something were to happen..." said Kat. She wasn't threatening the demon of course... just... providing perspective.

"Are you sure? A big strong demon like you can protect me right?" asked Sue with big eyes gleaming with a slight sheen of fake tears up at Kat.

"I make no promises if you don't want to help yourself. I know for a fact at Rank 1 it's possible to stand basically forever with no discomfort" Kat shot back somewhat more harshly then intended.

Sue leaned forward dramatically, making sure that Kat could see down the opening of the jacket, "But Kat you don't have these..." as Sue talked she swung her breasts from side to side, "... they add quite a bit of weight you know."

Kat rolled her eyes, "Sue, don't even pretend they have any significant impact on your strength. You could easily do a one handed push up, probably even just one finger would do the trick"

Sue huffed and pulled herself back up but didn't actually deny Kat's words knowing that they were completely true. Once you had even a small level of super strength body weight wasn't really a problem. Weight distribution was a bit of an issue when it came to balance, but a Succubus' natural instincts helped out with that part.

"What should the marching order be?" asked Kamiko "Do we have Sue at the back or in the middle for safety? I'm not sure which is safer."

Kat looked behind and back at the hole before looking further back and just finding a wall. "I think that back is probably safer with you in the middle and myself at the front. Even if something was to sneak up behind her, which I doubt, we'll be close enough that we can deal with it. I can take a hit or two for her easily if it really gets to that point. Besides, only an ambush we miss is likely to get her, and if she's in the middle it doesn't really help, we'd still have missed it"

Kamiko nodded and gestured for Kat to lead the way, which she did. Sue gave one more huff before falling in line behind the other two and activating her shielding on both Kamiko and herself. It was instantly noticeable for Kamiko. It was sort of like wearing an extra set of clothes around your entire body with a small help of static.

It didn't quite touch the body the same way normal clothes would, instead floating off the body slightly using some kind of force placed between the shield itself and the body as a form of padding.

As the three made their way forward, Kat and Kamiko came to an unspoken agreement to take one side of the cave each. Kamiko would stab the rats on the left, and Kat the right. They didn't even really put up a fight. Unlike the ones in swarms they just sort of... died. Sure the two were fast but for the moment they weren't using much of that speed.

*This is strange. The rats should be able to react to us at least somewhat. It's like they just don't care... or maybe they don't see us at all? I mean they definitely still have eyes, and they aren't quite glassy and dead but... how much intelligence is really behind them still? Is it because they're alone? Swarm rats rely on the swarm...

Or could it be some other reason? All the other rats are dead or have run away. Perhaps whatever it was scared them comatose? Or maybe it's a mind eating monster or something? I could imagine a swarm rat developing into something with mental attacks or mental control just based on how they do their thing... something to watch out for I suppose.*

Chapter 500: Nicknames?

Kat tried to keep her ears out as they cut down the nearby rats, searching for any sound that might alert her to what was going on out of sight. Of course, with those headphones on, there really wasn't any chance of that tactic working. Kat realised this issue when she realised that she wasn't just not hearing anything in front of her. She couldn't hear anything at all, including her footsteps as she walked forward.

As Kat was casually stomping on another rat she asked, "Hey, do either of you guys have any good way to keep track of things nearby other than just using our eyes? I realised that because of the headphones we can't here. Well, we probably wouldn't be able to hear properly without them, but still..."

"I've got nothing I'm afraid," said Kamiko, "but I'm sure our eyes are more than good enough for the task. We have great vision and the lanterns won't let us dip into darkness even if that isn't too big of a deal for us."

"Speak for yourself" said Sue "some demons don't get night vision for free"

Kamiko shrugged, "I'm not even going to apologise for that one. It's a very common basic mutation for a demon to pick up. If it wasn't for the number of demons that don't use vision for their primary sense and the ones that get eyes that turn into flashlights, I'd say it's actually more common to be able to see in the dark"

Sue shrugged from the back but nobody was really looking at her to see. "I guess, it does kinda suck not having it though. It's one of the few things I am actually a little miffed about. I mean, I got over it, and it does mean that sense deprivation is actually an option for my vision, but never really had a good time to enjoy that. I doubt it's worth the night vision loss."

"Well..." said Kat not really sure how to answer that one.

"Well indeed," said Kamiko "I suppose I can see your point. You'll probably pick it up later though. It doesn't even normally take up your ability slot even if you do get it later."

"Bah" said Sue, "for you lucky ones that are already Rank 2 sure. I've been Rank 1 for half a decade at this point. It's not like I've got no hope of getting to Rank 2, but I doubt I'll get past 3. Rank 4 is practically a pipe dream, and that's not even thinking about Rank 5 or higher."

"You shouldn't take that attitude Sue" said Kamiko "There's a lot of research to suggest that believing yourself incapable, or desiring to remain at your current Rank can stifle your growth. I'd suggest trying to work on that, it'll probably help a lot."

"Yeah? What makes you say that shorty?" snarked Sue

"My mother is Nira, one of the Rank 5 medical researchers. She's looked into this."

Kat was surprised to hear the crash. Whipping her head around, she saw that when Kamiko revealed this information Sue had tripped. It was clear she'd tried to recover and failed, before throwing her arms out in front of her. Her hands had collided with some blood though sending her face first into the dirt. Kat was beside her before a human could blink and carefully lifting her up.

"Um... thanks" said Sue really softly before carefully getting on her feet. Kat and Kamiko waited for a second to make sure she was fine before Sue gestured for them to continue. When they did, she also kept talking. "Also... um... sorry for being a bit snarky asking you that Kamiko. I mean... look I meant it but... I also didn't really think you'd have any reason to know, you know?"

"I just... you don't... you don't really seem that interested in that sort of data... so I just assumed you'd heard from someone. Those... those sorts of rumours are common for people like me and... well... sometimes it's a little hard. I take enjoyment where I can but... it's hard to look to the future and wonder if you'll be weak forever."

What. Kat was nearly as surprised as Sue had been just before. Hearing her apologise sincerely. For the first time since Kat had met her. *Damn, this must be important information.* "It's no problem,"

said a smiling Kamiko, "I sort of know what you mean. Sometimes people say bad things that aren't true even though they can say them. Plus, these sorts of things are always a big worry for everyone."

"I'm still going to lay into you both though!" said Sue trying to regain a bit of her bluster. "Just because you've told me what might be the most important piece of information I've ever heard in my life doesn't mean you don't deserve to be taken down a few pegs!"

"Of course Sue" said Kat happily, smile clearly in her voice even while her back was turned to Sue.

"Yeah! I wouldn't have you any other way!" said Kamiko, mostly just happy to have more 'friends' or at least acquaintances. She was pretty sure after their checkers match Sue counted. She wasn't as great as Kat, and wasn't really best friend material, but there was something there... at least Kamiko thought so.

"Oh? Well, I need a better nickname for you then. Shorty is boring, and somewhat inaccurate. Sure, comparatively you're the smallest one here but you aren't actually that short for a Succubus. I can also tell your packing pretty decent heat under your robes. Dunno why you don't show that off, but I can't mock you for that either... hmm... this is going to require some thought..." said Sue

"Or you could just call her Kamiko, or maybe Kami? She's adorable no need to give her a derogatory nickname Sue" said Kat

"You ain't getting out of this either Legs. I'll figure something for the both of you just you wait. Plus, Kami is alright, but it's just shortening her name. It's lazy. You could just call her K at that point if you weren't also named with the same letter." Said Sue

"Legs?" asked Kat

"Look, it's all I got for the moment. You've probably got the best pair of the three of us, but I'm not quite sure if they're impressive enough on their own to carry that as a nickname. Your outfit is surprisingly good at keeping you covered even though it isn't that long... wait you actually want to keep yourself covered up?" said Sue, raising her voice at the end.

"I mean yes?" said Kat "Isn't that the point of clothing?"

Sue shook her head quickly before saying, "Nah nah nah, see, Succubi handle Demonic Attire slightly differently. It isn't just a convenient thing for us, it's a bigger part of our brand. I don't just wear leather straps for an outfit, I wear something that almost reveals everything but never does. It's actually part of my Attire that keeps it working like that. You however, seem to have gone the opposite way, with it keeping you as covered as it can without breaking physics too much"

Kat raised a confused eyebrow and shot a look to Kamiko as she slashed another rat in two. "I'm not sure Kat" said Kamiko "I've heard it said yes, but Mum hasn't tested it at all, and I wasn't really close enough with Aslena to ask if it was real or not before now"

Ah yes... that... that makes sense I suppose. Just as Kat thought that, they rounded the corner to a dead end.? Cursing internally Kat looked around but couldn't find any other exit. The path was... well not straight but there hadn't been any turns at all up to this point. The sudden dead end was a bit of the shock, the walls didn't narrow it just ended.

Right here, at this rather odd coloured patch of wall. Kat froze, looking at it more closely. The dead end was a darker shade than the wall, while that was mostly pale stone with some other colours mixed throughout the wall was much darker, closer to brown almost. It was also very uniform in colour now that she looked at the whole thing. It also had lin- Wait...

Kat took a careful step back and really looked at the whole dead end. Not just the wall itself but the edges of that wall. As soon as she did she spotted what was out of place. It was breathing. It wasn't a wall.

Oh shit. That's one big rat. Kat carefully walked backwards with her arms out letting the other two know that something was up. As soon as Kamiko saw this, she took another glance at the wall over Kat's shoulder and reached the same conclusion, arms out, carefully walking backwards.

Sue couldn't see in the dark properly and the lanterns had, at this point, left the 'dead end' behind so she wasn't quite in the loop. She did know, that neither Kat nor Kamiko were the type to play jokes on her, so she carefully stepped backwards making sure not to actually glance behind her lest that drop the shield around Kamiko. Things were getting serious, and while she wasn't really a fan. It likely had to be done.