Dweal: Singed Souls

Created by T5 The Artist
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Created by: T5 The Artist
T5 The Artist is an artist from Ohio building an impressive tribe. Also the founder of PEC Episodic, an Ohio based entertainment studio. Visit [pecepisodic.com] for more.

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Chapter 1: Karen’s Sacrifice
Narrator: Tom Oak

Tom Oak: Black and fit with that fresh fade.
   Nineteen years old.

Author Note: [Anytime during the story you see words in brackets, that means it is from the author’s perspective, not the character’s perspective. Also, if this pops up: ●●●●●, it means that the word is redacted. Enjoy the story.]

I keep having this reoccurring dream. I’m lying on the ground, tied up. It’s dark. A golden moon is out. Like always I try to wiggle myself free. It never works. Then comes the growling. There is this red lion with a silver mane, the tip of its tail is silver, and it has silver feathered wings. It stalks over, looking like it’s hungry for its next meal. It’s over my body with one foot on my chest, crushing it. It leans down and roars loudly. Then it sinks its teeth in my neck and begins to feast. I can feel every bite the lion takes. Unable to move. Unable to scream. Even when I die my spirit still remains within my body, so I feel it all. I only wake up when the red lion finishes.

Yeah . . . it sucks ass. I have no idea what that dream means.

02/03/2017  00:13  Dayton, Ohio

It’s late at the library. The library is closed, but I have access since I work here. It’s easier for me to study here instead of at home. There’s something real serene and beautifully dope about this big empty place at night. I play with the wooden pendant hanging from my necklace. It helps me think. I never take
this thing off.

I’m working on a homework assignment for a criminology class. My mind begins to wander. A stream of different video games pop into my head. I’m thinking about changing who I main in Overwatch. It’s super quiet. This current assignment reminds me of . . . what’s that?

I hear a voice. That’s weird, because the doors are locked. The sound comes from a set of bookcases farther down the room. I pull out my pocketknife and proceed cautiously. The closer I get, the clearer the sound becomes. Someone is speaking in a foreign tongue. I turn the corner to see a naked female crouched in the middle of what looks like a satanic ritual circle with lit candles and a lot of weird symbols. She has her back to me. She turns her head without moving her body to see me standing there. Her face looks familiar.

“Karen?” I say. I can see the hatred in her eyes.

“He’s going to suffer!” she says. Before I can ask who, Karen slits her wrists and throat with a ritual knife.

“Karen!” I scream.

Oh no. Is it tonight? The satanic circle around her glows red as her body begins to change. Her skin falls off revealing her raw muscles and two tentacle-like things come bursting out of her abdomen and back, one tentacle on each side. Her eyes melt out of her eye sockets. A continuous lime green pus oozes out of her ear.

A new voice comes from behind me. I hear a man call out, “Hey, Jackie? Babe? Where’re you at?”

Using what I’m guessing is telekinesis, the monster that had been Karen looks at me and sud-
I am thrown to the side by an unseen force. I smack hard against the bookcase.

It comes walking up to me to say in a creepy-as-fuck distorted version of Karen’s voice, “Stay out of my way . . . or die!”

“Why the hell would Jackie want to meet at the library? I got a rad ass bachelor pad,” Rock mutters to himself.

The unassuming man comes walking around the corner to see the monster before me. I know him; the man is Rock Vurner. He screams and falls down to the ground dropping his phone. The phone’s flashlight glares across the floor.

“What the fuck!” Rock exclaims.

Rock starts to run but the monster stops him using telekinesis. The monster runs up and begins viciously beating him as he’s held up in the air. Blood is splattering everywhere as Rock cries in agony.

“This is for what you did to Karen. Feel her wrath!” the monster says in that same creepy voice. It lowers the barely alive Rock back to the ground and snaps him in half. The library is designed with a big space in the middle and every floor is within view of the others. The monster flings Rock’s corpse over the edge of this third-story floor. I throw a book at the monster.

I know; bad move. Like, what the hell is a book going to do?

Of course, this pisses the demon off and it prepares to attack me. Right when I am about to run, I see a yellow crackling blur pass my head, hitting the demon with the sound of thunder. I turn to see a woman in combat gear with a dope-looking mask holding a compound bow. The mask is black but has glowing yellow tribal patterns on it. There are light-
ning bolts on her cheeks, and a wind symbol on the forehead of the mask.

I recognize her immediately and try to play it cool so she won’t notice. Not that it matters—she’s too distracted by the demon.

Another woman comes running in. This woman has on a wooden mask with silver and yellow tribal patterns, lightning bolts over the eyes, and a mountain symbol on the forehead. This woman has combat gear on too and she rushes in, stabbing the demon with a blade protruding from a gauntlet. She’s got a gauntlet on each arm. She’s also wearing boots that have blades that can pop up from several different places. From the toes to the shin there’s a blade that lays flat on top until she makes it stand up. There’s a blade that springs out at the heel and a blade that springs out in front of the toes. The last blade lays flat at the bottom of the boot until she makes it stand up. My intel says she controls the blades with her mind.

I feel my phone vibrate, which means I just received a text.

More of those lightning rods come smacking into the demon. The demon roars loudly.

Seconds later, dozens of creatures come crashing down through the skylight windows. These things look like humanoid anorexic green monsters wearing clothes. A few have swords and a few have guns. The lady with the blade gauntlets jumps back towards us to say, “Go,” as she throws smoke grenades behind her.

We hit the other staircase on the far side of the room to go one floor down. We’re hiding behind some computer desks. Because of the moonlight coming through the big glass windows, I can see the woman with the gauntlets as she pulls out a dope-looking
handgun.

“This is odd. Qwaventiel usually travel alone. Why are there so many traders here?” the gauntlet woman says to herself.

“Fucking demons. Hey, you. Do you know where the light switch is?” the gauntlet woman whispers to me.

“Yeah. It’s two floors down on the first floor in a room,” I reply.

“Good. Lightning Bug, escort the civilian to the room. I’ll keep the demons busy. Leave him there and then rejoin the fight,” says the gauntlet woman to the woman beside me.

“Let me have a gun,” I say.

“No.”

“My guardian taught me how to shoot. I’m a decent shot.” I kind of lie on that one. My aim is shit.

“No. Now go,” the gauntlet woman orders in an intimidating voice.

“Yes, ma’am,” says Lightning Bug. That’s an interesting name. I can’t decide if it’s lame or dope.

Me and Lightning Bug go for the back stairway. One of those green anorexic demons comes to greet us. It charges at us with a long sword in its hands. Lightning Bug shoots at it with three quick lightning arrows. This kills it. As we run past, I snag the sword and sheath.

Bursting through the door on the first floor reveals a horde of demons. The demons holding machine guns unload on us. Lightning Bug and I dodge behind a bookcase. The closet with the power switches is in front of us—lucky us. I point to it and we go inside. The switch gets flipped. All the lights are now on.

Lightning Bug says superfast to the point
where I barely understand, “Stay here. Stay safe. This night should be over for you shortly sir. There’s no need to panic. Okay. Byeeyee!” She leaves. The way she talks is cute. She’s so upbeat even in this crazy situation.

None of this is going according to plan. It was supposed to be simple. It was supposed to be just one demon: the qwaventiel, the demon Karen had summoned. All of these traders, those green anorexic demons, had showed up out of nowhere.

Did know this was going to happen? I want to help those two demon hunters, but that would blow my cover. , I’m going to be so pissed at you if they end up dying.

My body feels like it’s heating up again. It’s been doing that for the past few weeks now. It usually goes away after a few minutes. It’s not normal, I know. I bend over, my knees and hands touching the ground. I can feel the sweat dripping buckets off my body. It feels like I’m literally on fire right now. Fuck! Why now?

Some seconds later I hear someone or something trying to break through the locked door. Then a couple of traders successfully break through the door. Son of a bitch. I can’t die here. I need to fight back, but my body feels like it’s melting. One of the traders raises its sword. I turn my head and a surge of pain increases immensely throughout my body.

Seconds later I open my eyes, expecting to be dead. Instead I’m on fire! I see the traders are on fire too. I smell the disgusting odor of burning flesh. But it’s just them that are burning. How the hell am I . . . Then I realize why. The reason why has me freaking the fuck out even more. This is bad. Real bad. Shit.
Lightning Bug comes running in saying, “Hey, are you all right? Whoa. You’re a spirit user? Did you just awaken? Cool.” She speaks so fast I barely understand her.

What do I do? Damn it! Come on. You got this. I exhale. Ok. I got it. I’ll play along with her. She may be right anyway.

“What’s a spirit user? What the hell is going on tonight?” I ask, pretending not to know.

“Too much to explain right now, but every living thing has spirit energy. Some humans are gifted with a little bit extra. This extra amount is what gives humans powers. We call them spirit users. I’m one of them.” She’s still speaking fast. She checks outside to see if anything is coming.

“How do I shut this off?” I say, referring to my flaming body.

“I don’t know. It’s your power. Concentrate on turning it off. Think about something relaxing, like working on a circuit board or building anti-demon grenades,” Lightning Bug gleefully suggests.

“Who relaxes that way? You’re so weird,” I say, amused.

“You’re weird,” she retaliates, “and your fire is weird. Why are your clothes not burning up? You’re the real weird.” She then shoots a trader with a few lightning arrows.

I nod my head. “That’s a valid point.”

My fire goes away.

“Huh. Look at that. What did it? Was it the circuit boards? It was probably the circuit boards,” Lightning Bug says. She touches her left ear. I’m guessing her partner is talking to her via Bluetooth. “Yea.” She peeks out the door with her bow cocked. “No, I don’t see it. I know there are at least four more traders
running around.”
There’s a loud thud.
“What the hell is that?” I ask.
A series of four more thuds go off. Then the exit door to our right goes flying off its hinges. Four traders come walking through, each carrying a tied up human over their shoulders. The humans each have Kim Jung-un masks on. The traders have demonic-looking axes, the axes are coated in dried blood and have handles made of bone. It’s crazy, because it doesn’t look like those green anorexic demons should be as strong as they are. I know from my training though that they are on average stronger than humanity’s top athletes.

“Hey, sis. We’ve got hostages and more traders,” says Lightning Bug, touching her earpiece again.
The traders drop the scared humans on the ground in the middle of the room like they’re trash. The traders remove the hostages’ masks and gags. They are all screaming, crying, confused, and pleading for their lives.
Why do they look familiar?
“My sister is fighting the qwaventiel and the other traders some floors above us,” Lightning Bug says.
“What are those traders doing? Why don’t they just kill them. I’m not saying they should, but they have their victims,” I say, studying the hostages again.
“I’m guessing the qwaventiel wants to kill them itself,” she says.
I pick up my sword and head out the door to hide behind the nearest bookshelf. Lightning Bug follows me whispering, “What the hell are you doing?”
“Trying to save those hostages even though
they’re assholes,” I whisper back. I’d finally recognized the hostages.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. No, you are not. You are just a civilian. You could get them killed including yourself.”

“Doing nothing could get them killed. Do you and your sister have a plan?”

“No, but—”

“Then I’m going. Those assholes deserve to be punished, yes, but not killed by demons.”

I move up closer, behind a desk. Lightning Bug follows. She starts to say something, but I shush her.

“My sister says the qwaventiel left the building. She’s chasing it now,” Lightning Bug says after a moment.

“Then we have to strike now,” I say before hopping over the desk to attack the closest trader. It dodges my sword and I jump back. I watch the other demons to see what they do next. Instead of attacking me or killing the hostages, they just sit there. If what Lightning Bug says is true, then they are probably making sure the hostages don’t run.

At this point I really wish I’d thought to get one of those machine guns, even though they probably wouldn’t have done much damage to the traders. Only anti-demon (AD) weapons have a real effect on demons. That and spirit powers.

“Lightning, you were right. Lay down some supporting fire,” I yell.

She does just that, blasting with her lightning arrows. She shoots but misses several shots. Two traders go after Lightning, one watches the hostages, and I’m still fighting one trader. It swings its axe with great speed and strength. It takes my all to defend myself. I thought my little bit of training with
would have me more prepared than this. Fuck I’m weak.

I jump back to get some distance. The fucker doesn’t let up on me though. Shit. Maybe this was a bad plan. If I don’t get help I don’t think I will survive this. Fear starts to creep up. Distracted by my thoughts, the trader manages to leave a deep gash in my left bicep. It lunges at me for the final blow. I yell, trying to psych myself up. Thankfully, my flames burst free. My whole body and sword are on fire and so is the trader’s right arm. It drops the axe and tries to put out the flames. Let’s see if can direct this. I point my right hand at it, hoping I can direct the flames. Maybe I can shoot fireballs or form a flamethrower. I don’t know. Come on, damn it. Come on.

Nothing happens.

The trader recovers. It throws its axe at me. I don’t move, because I’m betting it all on my newfound abilities to make this fire spirit power work. Lightning Bug steps in front of me at the last second and deflects the blade by shooting lightning from her left hand. The blade goes flying back and into the trader’s skull.

“Nice,” I say.
“Lucky shot,” she says, seeming in awe of herself.

“I had it though,” I say.

Lightning Bug says talking superfast, “You had it. Are you— WHAT? If I hadn’t stepped in, you would have been chopped. Then they probably would have taken you, finished dicing you up, put you in a stew, and said, ‘Mmh. Fire Boy taste good.’ And then Lightning Keeper would be mad at me. She probably would scold me, saying, ‘This is why you can’t double as a fighter and technologist.’ And then I would be like,
‘Noooo! I can!’ And then she would be like—"

“Duck!” I yell as I tackle her to the ground, narrowly avoiding the flying axes thrown at her.

One of the traders I thought Lightning Bug had killed walks over to her. It’s bleeding. The demon lifts her up by the neck with one arm, as if she weighs the same as a stuffed animal. She kicks and lets out a cry as the trader chokes her. I attempt to get up, but the damn thing kicks the shit out of my stomach, leaving me fighting for air.

“No!” is what I would say if I had the breath to say it. I reach a hand out for her.

Suddenly Lightning Bug lets out a huge surge of electricity from her body, which effectively cooks the trader. The smell is terrible. She falls to the ground and lies motionless.

I slowly raise myself up and go over to Lightning Bug. Please don’t be dead.

After a moment I sigh in relief. She’s alive. I look over to see the last trader is still watching us and guarding the hostages. I bandage my arm with a piece of a dead trader’s shirt.

I’m pissed. I’m pissed off that they hurt her. I’m pissed off that there are so many demons. I’m pissed off that these fucking demons are making me save assholes who deserve to be punished. This whole fucking night is pissing me off. I use that focused energy to ignite all of my body in flames.

I pick up my sword and it catches fire as well. I ignore the pain from my slowly bleeding left arm so I can use two hands. I only use enough strength in my left arm to stabilize my sword. I swing and the trader blocks with its axe. I keep swinging my flaming sword and the demon keeps blocking. I raise my sword for a powerful swing. When I bring it down, the demon
dodges by tucking and rolling. It grabs another axe, so it now wields two.

We go at it again, trading blows. This time we both manage to get a few slashes in. Blood splatters everywhere. There’s an almost rhythmic sound of blades clashing. I dodge two swings from the trader by bending low, and use the opportunity to quickly get a deep cut in on its right side. While my long sword is still stuck in its side, the demon raises its axes in the air.

“Burn,” I say as I let off a huge flame that engulfs both of our bodies. The trader drops its weapons as it burns to death, crying out with inhuman screams.

I sheath my sword, though I’m still on fire. I walk over to the hostages and cut them free. “Run,” I tell them. They just look at me, unsure and scared. I repeat again, but in a deeper and louder voice, “Run!”

That lights a fire under their asses and they bang out to the nearest exit.

Yes. We saved them. I wish I felt better about saving those assholes. I sit down next to Lightning Bug, because I’m exhausted, and the blood loss is starting to get to me. She’s still breathing. Good. I want to lift up her mask, but that just feels wrong. Plus, I already know what she looks like.

I hear the sound of a door opening and closing. Moments later, the hostages come running back in, screaming. I see one of the hostages go flying past like a lifeless rag doll. The qwaventiel comes running in, snapping each of the hostage’s necks, then snapping each of them in half like Rock Vurner. Then gauntlet lady rushes in from behind the qwaventiel and slices off both tentacles with her gauntlet blades. Then she delivers the final blow, piercing its heart and
slicing off its head.

I just sit there, trying to come grips with the fact that I was too weak to save them. Their deaths were unnecessary and avoidable.

I need to get stronger.

02/03/2017   01:23   Dayton, Ohio

Me, gauntlet lady, and Lightning Bug are outside on a bench in front of the library. Lightning Bug is still resting with her head in her sister’s lap. She did wake up briefly to tell her sister everything that happened when her sister was chasing the qwaventiel. That included my awesome heroics.

A few unmarked vans show up. People hop out in work uniforms. They go into the library with body bags, cleaning supplies, and forensic equipment. Some of them are wearing suits that make me think of the secret service. Shortly after, a few cop cars show up. Finally. Where had they been? The secret service guys talk to the police and the police drive off.

“Can you take my spot? I don’t want her to rest her head on this metal bench,” gauntlet lady asks.

“Yea sure,” I reply, partially because I fear she will wreck me if I don’t. This woman is very intimidating. After seeing her fight, I would not want to mess with her.

She lifts Lightning Bug’s head and moves so I can scoot over to take her place. Gauntlet lady then goes over to the secret service looking guys. After a few words, she comes back. Instead of taking my place she sits next to me.

“What now?” I ask as I pet Lightning Bug’s head.

Gauntlet lady takes off her mask and sets it aside. She’s Native American with short, straight hair.
She looks like she’s in her late twenties . . . and she’s hot.

“Normally, we’d wipe your memory and any other civilians involved,” she says. “But since Lightning Bug tells me you’ve awakened we gotta run you through the program. Which basically just means we need to train you so you’re not a harm to yourself and others. Then we slap you on the ass and send you back out as a civilian. My demon hunter name is Lightning Keeper, by the way.” She holds out her hand.

“Tom Oak,” I say, shaking her hand. “What if I don’t want you to train me?”

“You don’t have a choice in the matter. It’s either that or we lock you up in our special prison in Alaska. Trust me, you definitely don’t want to go there,” Lightning Keeper replies. She has a commanding tone in her voice when she talks.

“You could try,” I say.

“Do you think you can take me on? By yourself?” she asks.

“Yes?” I say with a lot of uncertainty. She would easily destroy me.

Lightning Keeper laughs a little.

“Who are those guys?” I say referring to the work crew. I need to remember to keep asking questions. I gotta make sure not to blow my cover.

“They—” she lets out a sigh. “They are from my tribe. We’re called Dweal. If you couldn’t tell, we hunt demons.

They are cleaning up, planting evidence, staging the crime scene, taking pictures, and cleaning up again to make it look brand new. The public isn’t allowed to know about the existence of the supernatural.”
“Why?”
“A multitude of reasons. The main reason is mass fear. If you could go your whole life not worrying and not fearing demons wouldn’t you want that? If people found out they would lose their shit.”
“I could see that happening. My classmates would definitely freak out,” I say.
“Ignorance. It’s a beautiful gift that most don’t even know they have,” she murmurs with a little sadness in her voice.
“I want to be a demon hunter. Let me join Dweal,” I say.
Lightning Keeper looks at me, sizing me up. “You know this is about how bad it normally gets every time we go out on a hunt. We try but we can’t always save everyone. People die. Hunters die. You’ll most likely see more fucked up shit than this. Shit that you can’t un-see once you see it. PTSD-causing shit. Do you think you can handle that?” she asks.
“Yes, ma’am,” I say, resolute.
She looks at me like she’s still not quite sure of my resolve. “Well, you did kill three traders by yourself. That’s impressive for someone without training. Even with a spirit power. I’ll train you. Fair warning though, my training will be hard. It might break you. I don’t do kiddy gloves.”
“Ok. There’s a lot I still don’t understand about all this.” Which is partially true. I have talent but need training, according to ●●●●●.
“Don’t worry. It may seem like a lot, but you’ll get it.” Lightning Keeper looks over at the team working and says, “Now they have to figure out why that girl wanted revenge.”
“Her name was Karen. She was raped by Rock Vurner. He was clearly guilty, but he got off due to his
dad’s influence. The campus was outraged, it showed up on TV news networks, but nothing came of it,” I say, solemnly.

“So she turned to the only thing she could think of to seek out her justice: demons,” Lightning Keeper says.

“Unfortunately.”

“I assume Rock Vurner was the first victim, but who were the other four?” she asks.

Every time I say a person, I lift up a finger on my left hand. “The father, the judge, the lawyer, and the dean.”

“I see,” she says. “That saves us some time. I’ll tell my people. But, then again, they might have it all figured out by now. We still need to figure out who’s been passing around documents on demon summoning rituals. Due to intel from our Intelligence Division, we were able to determine this attack was going to happen sometime today on campus, but that’s it. We have a hunter with the spirit power to sense when bad things are going to happen, but it’s usually vague.” She picks up Lightning Bug in her arms before saying, “Go home, Tom. We’re heading out. We’ll be in contact tomorrow to work over the details. Do you need a ride?”

“No. I have a piece of shit but reliable car. How are you going to contact me, fam? You don’t know my address or my phone number,” I ask.

“We got people for that. Night, Fire Boy,” she says as she walks off.

02/03/2017 02:56 Dayton, Ohio

My desk is right beside my bed. I turn on the lamplight and sit in the desk chair as I check my phone. The text that I got earlier was sent from L and it says just one word: Library. L is an alias I made for
whom I am about to call.


A couple of rings go by before [Redacted] picks up. [Redacted] doesn’t answer, but I can hear [Redacted] breathe.

“It’s done. Infiltration into Dweal complete. Also, apparently I have developed a spirit power. I don’t know what my limits are yet, but I can control fire,” I say.

[Redacted] speaks.
I respond with, “Yea. The test I did says that it is a spirit power. I’m not sure if it’s accurate though, since it’s me we’re talking about.”

[Redacted] speaks again.
“I will. Ok. I still feel normal, but you should probably find that doctor soon,” I reply.
[Redacted] says something else.
“Ok. Bye.” I hang up.

I’m looking out the window. My back is to the door. I sense someone enter my room. I turn around quickly to dodge a water bottle being tossed at my head. I see that it’s my grandma who is standing in the doorway with her arms folded. She turns on the lights.

“What the fuck, Grandma!” I say.
She’s an old black lady with short, curly gray and black hair. She has a thin body.
“Boy, what did I tell you about calling me grandma,” she says.

I’m supposed to call her GG. She hates being called grandma. I do it to piss her off.
“Well, then, don’t throw shit at me,” I say, amused/ annoyed.

She throws another water bottle she had hidden at me. It hits me in the head. GG then says, “Watch your fucking mouth, kid.”

“You cuss all the time,” I say as I rub my head. “Do as I say, kid,” GG says. I glare at her.

“How did studying go?” she asks.

“It could have gone better,” I reply sadly.

“You know you can always switch majors, kid,” GG says.

“Yeah, I know. But I have to do this. And I want to.”

“I get why, kid, but don’t overexert yourself,” GG tells me.

“Yes, ma’am,” I say.

“Goodnight, kid.”

“Night.”

Tonight was my first encounter with demons and yet I wasn’t scared. I’d really thought I would be. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or bad. I hope it’s not a sign of what may come.
Chapter 2: Bonfire
Narrator: Tom Oak

So if you haven’t guessed it by now, I’m a hybrid. I got a mix of both demon and human DNA in me. I don’t really know what type of demon it is. I was just told that it was the result of a lab experiment; because of course it was. It was a demon cocktail that was a mix of a bunch of demons’ DNA. That cocktail was called Z72. GG told me that I was given to her by for safekeeping. GG isn’t my real grandma by the way.

told me that caught a Dweal hunter killing a fellow Dweal hunter. When confronted this hunter, the hunter admitted to doing it and tried to kill . killed this traitor. The traitor had a photo of Lightning Keeper with her name, a location, time, and date on the back. The traitor wasn’t able to make it, of course, but Lightning Keeper still showed up.

After questioning me too—just to be safe—asked me to join the tribe, Dweal, and to keep an eye on Lightning Keeper. We don’t know if she’s a traitor too or a target, but who better to keep an eye on her than a trainee who has to be around her all the time?

I told that if I did it then has to help me find a way to get rid of my demon DNA. agreed. I was going to join Dweal anyway, even if didn’t ask. I’m trying to become the best demon hunter out here, fam.

said if I was going to help , then I had to promise to do one thing: never take off my necklace.
Let me explain. The necklace I wear is a magic talisman. It’s supposed to keep my demon side from coming out. It’s a thin rectangular piece of wood with three symbols on it. The top symbol kind of looks like a fish hook. The symbol below that looks like the outline of an embryo, or maybe a six. The last symbol at the bottom looks like an upside-down outline of a head with horns. I’ve had the necklace since I was a little boy.

*** saying that was pointless. I already know better than to take off my necklace. There’s a huge possibility that if my demon side actually came out, it would take over my mind and I would be nothing more than a murderous demon. GG told me that when I was eleven.

I refuse to let that happen. Fuck that. I’m staying me.

02/03/2017  14:30  Columbus, Ohio

Lightning Keeper allowed me to sleep in due to last night’s events. I wake up in the afternoon to find her in my room going through my stuff. I pop up quick.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“Your abuela let me in,” she replies calmly, like it’s normal to pop up in a stranger’s room.

“GG!” I yell.

GG comes rolling around the corner of my doorframe. “Quit yelling, kid. Whatcha crying about?”

“Why are you letting people into my room while I sleep?” I say, slightly annoyed. I should be used to GG doing stuff like this by now given the fact that she’s been my guardian since before I can remember, but I’m still not.

“I figured you might get lucky. When’s the last time you been laid, kid?” GG asks.
“That’s not—last—I don’t know. Don’t worry about it,” I say, wishing we to change the subject.
“Chill out, kid. I know she’s your college advisor. You probably couldn’t get a woman of her class anyway,” GG jokes.
Lightning Keeper laughs a little.
“Show my boy a good time, will you?” GG says and winks at Lightning Keeper.
“Yes, ma’am,” Lightning Keeper answers.
GG makes a clicking noise with her tongue and does the old finger-guns gesture before disappearing.
“Your grandma seems cool,” Lightning Keeper says, amused.
“Oooh. Don’t call her that. She’ll attack you. Like, for real, though. She goes by GG,” I warn her.
“So are we starting training today?”
“If we have time. Today I’m going to show you around the facility and finish your transfer to Decklin University,” Lightning Keeper says.
“Wait, what? Will I have time with all of the demon hunting training?” I say. I already know the answer though.
“Yup. Especially with our accelerated learning program,” she says. “Our tribe is elite for a reason. Even dum-dums learn fast.”
Is she calling me dumb?

*****

Me and Lightning Keeper arrive in Columbus, Ohio, at Decklin University and start walking through the halls of the school.
“Hey, umm, Lightning Keeper?” I say.
“My real name is Nya. Nya Yahee,” she says.
“Nya,” I repeat like I don’t know that already.
"I can’t afford to go to this school. I ain’t got stacks."

Decklin University is expensive as fuck! It’s a very prestigious school.

“Don’t worry about it. You’re doing a work-study,” Nya says. “Dweal owns a lot of businesses. Decklin is just one of the many. That’s where we get most of our money. Demon hunting isn’t what keeps the lights on. Although one could make a fairly decent living off of it.”

Decklin, the company, owns so much shit. It’s a household name, like Disney. They sell pretty much everything. They’re mostly known for their technology and this university.

We stop at an office. Nya talks to the receptionist who gives her some papers. She signs some papers and hands them back to the receptionist. The receptionist hands her a folder with “Decklin” written on it and Nya motions for us to leave.

The campus is buzzing with students walking around. They wave at us as we go by. This place is giving off real good vibes so far.

As we walk down the hallway, Nya gives me the folder. “Here. That folder has all the basic information you will need like your apartment address which is in walking distance of the campus. Your class schedule is in there and a bunch of other stuff. Your apartment is already furnished so you don’t need to worry about any of that.”

“Question,” I say as I rifle through the folder, catching up to the speed-walking Nya. “Am I really only taking two classes a week?”

She sighs before answering. “Yes. We have an accelerated learning program catered to each and every students’ specific learning abilities. You’ll be in small classes with three students per professor. All of
our classes are like that. We don’t waste time making students taking electives they don’t want or need. We focus on teaching students in the most effective way possible. Our methods are unorthodox. We get you in and out as efficiently as possible.”

It’s also very secretive. Outside of the students and teachers, Decklin’s teaching methods remain a mystery to the outside world. Their graduation rate is incredible at ninety-nine percent. It’s also well-known that all graduates go on to work for Decklin. I’d been too intimidated to even apply to this elite school.

We continue walking until we are off campus. We keep walking for a mile or so [approximately two km]. To my right, which is north of the campus, I can see the beginning of the Yahee, Seirlock, and Rayseed Native American Reservation. We keep going until we enter the woods. Right at the entrance there’s a shack that Nya leads me into.

“What are we doing here?” I ask.
“You’ll see,” replies Nya.

Nya goes to a wall, knocks with her knuckles hitting the wall, knocks with the side of her fist, and then knocks with her knuckles again. A small, hidden computer panel opens up. It says, “Identification please.”

Nya pulls up her sleeve of her bare left forearm to the scanner. Seconds later a tattoo appears on her arm. There’s a circle with a rock-like symbol in it. To the right of the circle is an owl symbol with three leaves under it. To the right of the owl symbol, it says “L4” with two leaves under it. The tattoo is in all black ink. The scanner scans both her forearm and her hand. The computer says, “Cleared. Welcome back, Lightning Keeper.”

Her tattoo disappears.
“Hold out the palm of your left hand please and state your first and last name please,” the computer says to me.
“Tom Oak,” I say.
“Cleared. Welcome to the tribe, Tom Oak,” says the computer.
An ID card prints out of a side pocket, and a lanyard drops down beside it. The ID card has a symbol on it—there are five connecting circles that make a large circle, and within each circle there is a symbol. One of them is the same rock-like symbol on Nya’s left arm.
“Please wear this until you get a tattoo. Lightning Keeper, please see to it that Tom Oak promptly receives a tattoo,” the computer says before closing.
Nya smacks my back.
Once we walk outside the shack, we walk farther into the woods. After a few steps, the endless wood suddenly disappears to reveal a whole huge facility that was definitely not there a moment ago.
“What the fuck,” I say after I recover from my mind being blown away.
“Welcome to Dweal HQ, Fire Boy,” says Nya.
We continue walking. She continues talking. “Dweal HQ is protected by a strong magic barrier. To the outside, this just looks like a forest. If you try to enter in without a Dweal tattoo then you will unknowingly be teleported to the other side, so it just feels like just walking around a forest. Hand me your lanyard.”
I do as she says.
“Each of these symbols stands for the five divisions of Dweal. This is the Business and Peace Divi-
sion.” She goes clockwise starting with the top circle. The Business and Peace symbol is four curved rectangles forming a box around a small circle.

“This is the Intelligence Division.” It’s a water droplet with a smaller water droplet to the right of it.

“This is the Fighter Division.” It’s the same rock-like symbol on Nya’s left arm.

“This is the Technology Division.” It looks like blowing wind.

“And this is the Medical Division.” It’s four curved rectangles pointing outwards, surrounding a small circle. It kind of looks like a star.

As Nya talks, we walk towards a huge, thick tree probably about, I don’t know, about as tall as two average size houses stacked together and as wide as three cars. It’s at the center of their HQ with each of the five division buildings surrounding it, just like the Dweal symbol. All of its leafs are glowing brightly and in different colors: red, blue, yellow, white, and black.

I stop at the base of the tree, just staring up at it. It looks so dope.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” says the man next to me. He’s an old, white, fit male with gray hair. He’s probably in his fifties. “It’s referred to as The Great Tree. We use the ink that we get from it for a few things.”

He points to the five fountains surrounding the tree; they’re filled with colored ink that matches the leafs.

Nya walks up beside him to say, “This is Blake, the Chief Of Chiefs. COC for short. He’s, like, the president of Dweal.”

“Cool,” I say as I shake Blake’s hand. “I’m Tom Oak and I’m going to be one of the greatest demon hunters Dweal has ever seen! What it do?”
“That’s a bit much,” Nya says, amused. Then she sees someone and shouts, “Lootah!”

I turn around to see a handsome Native American male who looks like he is in his late thirties. He jogs over. “I’m kind of in a hurry. What do you need?”

Nya says, “Tom, this is Lootah Seirlock. Lootah, he’s the new recruit. Lootah is the COF—the Chief Of Fighters. He runs our division at Dweal.”

“This is him? The Fire Boy?” asks Lootah.

“Yes, sir,” says Nya.

“I’m running late. I’ll catch up with you some other time. Tribe is one!” Lootah says, already running off.

“Tribe is one,” Nya and Blake reply.

“Welp, I must be heading off too. Tom, it was nice to meet you,” Blake says. Then he leans in so that only I can hear, “I hope you can come to trust me, even if things seem shady.”

“Ditto,” I say, mugging him.

We shake hands. Right before leaving he says, “Her training is extremely intense. You might die. Good luck. Tribe is one.” He laughs as he leaves.

“Tribe is one,” Nya replies. “Speaking of training, let’s finally destroy that weak body of yours.”

Nya and I head over to the Fighter Division building. We hit the elevator and go down. The door opens up to a room probably as big as two or three football fields and it is a complete jungle.

“This is floor is called the jungle gym. Get it. Because it’s a gym that looks like a jungle,” she jokes.

“Oh yea. I would have never got that,” I say, facetiously.

“A lot of newbies get trained here. There’s probably people out there right now,” Nya says. “You
can leave your jacket and folder here.” She points to the lockers.

The first ten yards [approximately nine meters] of the room is covered in tile, with lockers and shelves lining the walls. In the area to the left, there’s a bathroom and showers. A dude and a chick come out of the shower naked, drying themselves.

The guy says to us, “Sup.”

“Sup,” I reply.

The chick says, “Tribe is one.”

“Tribe is one,” Nya repeats.

I’m already wearing sweats and a tank top, so I’m good to go. Nya is wearing workout gear too. Bruh, her butt looks so nice in those yoga pants. Mmhm. She goes into one of the lockers and pulls out a recurve bow and a quiver full of arrows.

“Start stretching,” Nya orders as she puts down the weapons and begins stretching herself.

I do what she says.

“The training session is simple. Avoid being hit by these arrows.” She pulls out an arrow from her quiver. Instead of a pointed tip, it has a small, soft-looking ball. Behind the soft ball is a plastic ball with holes in it.

“These arrows aren’t sharp, but they will hurt. Also, you will be able to hear them coming, because of this ball,” she says, pointing at the plastic ball with holes. “I used to use real arrows, but Blake said it was ‘too dangerous.’”

Thank you, Blake. I was definitely not trying to die today.

Nya continues. “There’s a penalty every time I hit you. Every time I hit you with an arrow, you have to stop and do whatever exercise I tell you to. Now go.”
I take off sprinting. I know I can’t show off too much since I was already trained, but the competitive side of me wants to beat Nya. Plus, I want to see how I match up with a level four hunter.

I hear a crazy whistling noise that I assume is from the arrow and dodge left. I turn around to see Lightning Keeper not far behind me. She shoots two arrows back to back. I dodge left and then dodge right. I barely evade the second one. For the record, I’m giving it my all. Damn she’s intense.

There’s a river coming up with a log that I can run across. I hear an arrow coming, so I jump straight up as high as I can. Surprisingly, I avoid that arrow. She must have anticipated my movements, though, because she hits me square in the back immediately with another arrow.

Damn. I messed up.

I slip on the landing and fall into the water. As soon as I come out of the water, Lightning Keeper orders, “One hundred push-ups. Go!”

I finish the push-ups in my wet clothes. I’m tired now. I wish I knew how long we’ll be training so I could plan how to conserve my energy.

“Here. Take a sip,” Lightning Keeper says, tossing a water bottle at me. I down that son of a bitch and give it back to her. She latches it on to her belt. “Start running. You have fifteen seconds.”

Again, I take off sprinting. Seventeen seconds later I hear an arrow whistle, but it goes past my head. Another arrow hits me a millisecond later.

“What?” I say. I didn’t hear the last one coming.

“I shot the second one quick to hide the sound of the second behind the first. The first arrow was so close to your ear you couldn’t hear the other one. You
have to distract your enemy before you can get the final blow in sometimes,” Lightning Keeper says. “Take about . . . ten seconds. Then do one hundred squats.” She takes off to fetch her arrow.

Damn, son. I’m fucking dead. Please let me take a long break soon.

Lightning Keeper comes back. “One hundred squats. Go!”

“Can I just do fifty this time?” I ask as I’m doing it.

“Quit bitching. Do one hundred fifteen now,” Lightning Keeper orders.

“Come on, man.”

“Do a hundred twenty-five now. What did I say about bitching? Demons won’t give you time to complain. They’ll just slit your throat and drink the blood that pours out,” Lightning Keeper says.

Jesus! That’s a fun visual for ya.

After that, she gives me a thirty-second break and we repeat the whole process. She hits me then I do one hundred sit-ups. Next time she hits me, she throws two workout rubber bands at me and tells me to tie them around a tree and start doing one hundred back-pulls. We do this four more times with different workouts before we stop. She did drop the reps for me down a little bit, but not by a lot. After that she takes me to a spot near the river.


“Am I training to be a Shaolin monk?” I ask, slightly annoyed.

“Sshhh. Close your eyes. Now . . . let your flames out!” she orders.
I inhale a deep breath and, when I exhale, the flames come out in full blaze. My eyes are closed, but I can feel the heat and undulation of my flames.

“Good. Now keep the fire up until I get back. Even if it hurts, keep it up,” she says. I hear her run off.

The training was just as hard as they said it would be. I’m spent and yet I have to keep going? I hope my classes aren’t this hard.

I have to remember to keep my guard up around her since I don’t know if she’s good or bad yet. That being said I have a feeling she’s not bad. She has to be a target, not a traitor. At least, I hope she is.

I’m struggling, but I realize I’ve been holding these flames for a good while now. They went out a couple of times and I had to concentrate real hard to make them come back. Now they’re starting to die out and I feel even more exhausted than before.

It’s weird, because this exhaustion is different from normal exhaustion. I can’t really describe it, but it feels different. Like I worked out a phantom limb or something, but it feels like that all over my body. I can even feel it in my fingertips and toes.

The fatigue starts to turn into intense pain. Once the pain starts, my flames fully die and I open my eyes. Lightning Keeper is standing in front of me, holding out a sports drink.

Lightning Keeper says, “You did really good for your first day.”

Nya is holding a torch. I just now notice that the jungle gym has gotten dark out. I couldn’t have been meditating for that long, right? I could barely bring out my flames. Then it dawned on me that the whole time we were working out that it had steadily
been getting darker. I just hadn’t been paying attention, because of the ridiculous workout I’d been doing.

“This place is crazy. The sun rises and sets in here. It’s even got its own moon,” I say.

“Yup. Tell me. Can you control fire that isn’t yours?” Nya asks before flipping on a lighter.

“I think so. Yeah,” I say as I hold out my hand to make the lighter’s flame dance. I stop, because of the intense pain.

“Is it easier to make the flames, or control flames that already exist?”

“Umm . . . the second one.”

“You should make better use of the fire around you then,” Nya says before throwing the lighter at me. She catches me off guard with that, but I catch it. I look at it. The lighter is pink with a Japanese cartoon cat design on it. It’s basically Hello Kitty.


“It’s Me-moo. My little sister loves that cat.”

“Umm . . . I’m good. I’ll just get my own,” I say. I ain’t using that shit. And it could have a tracking device.

“You’ve got no choice. This lighter has a demon hunter item in it that enhances your control of your flames. You don’t have to use the lighter for it to work. Just keep it on you. As your trainer I order you to carry around that lighter,” Nya says.

I begrudgingly bow and say, “Yes, sensei.”

Nya sighs. “Look if you don’t like it then give it back to me when you reach level five.”

“What?”

“What’s the matter? You said you wanted to be the strongest demon hunter. The elite of elites. Do that and you’ll be stronger than me, a two-leaf level four. Although I’m sure I’ll be a level five by then. I
just need to figure out how to push past my limits. You’ll at least be my equal.”

I clutch the Me-moo lighter. “Yes, sensei!” I say loud and determined. Damn I’m tired.

“Good. You have tomorrow off for recovery. Make sure you follow the meal plan in your folder. And get plenty of rest,” she commands.

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Tomorrow you’ll go to class and after that I will teach you the basics of demon hunting. This is how your schedule will be. One day you will train and the next day you will study. You get Sundays off. Can you still move?” Lightning Keeper asks.

“Barely,” I say.

“Good. Oh, shit I almost forgot.” She pulls out a small container with a brush attached to it. She loosens the brush from its holder and undoes the cap on the container. After dipping the brush in the container, she tells me to, “Hold out your left arm.”

I do. She starts wiping the black ink on my arm. She caps the lid, puts the brush back in its holder, and starts chanting, “Ma ka ne. Ma ka ne. Ma ka ne. Ma ka ne. Ma ka ne. Ma ka ne.”

When she’s done, the ink starts moving by itself and forms the Fighter Division symbol tattoo. Right next to that, a frog tattoo with one leaf under it appears.

“What kind of voodoo shit was that?” I ask, amazed.

“It’s not voodoo. This black ink is from The Great Tree. We use it to give our hunters their hunters ID. This symbol means you’re now officially a trainee for the Fighting Division. Note that this doesn’t make you a full-fledged demon hunter yet. Once you complete your training you’ll get a deer tattoo and
skill level tattoo. We use animal symbols for division rank, and a skill level tattoo is based on your fighting potential. Do you get it so far?"


“My ancestors wanted a ranking system designed to make them feel more in tune with nature. Thus, making you feel more like a hunter, which in turn makes you become a better hunter with a positive mindset. Don’t disrespect this wisdom of my ancestors,” Nya defends in a serious but playful way.

“Ok. Ok. Jeez. I get it. Me personally, I just would have made them different breeds of dogs and wolves but that’s just me. I am a dog person.”

Nya takes a gulp of water before saying, “I’m done with lessons for the day. Find your way home. Bye.”

She takes off running, leaving me alone—in the dark—deep in the Jungle Gym. Great.

Classes were brutal. The professors went so stupid fast! They talked so fast and barely stopped to breathe. The other two students in each of my two classes seemed fine. They were probably used to the pace. Me, on the other hand, I was freaking out.

Although they were moving at a lightning speed pace, the professors made sure to make sure I was keeping up. Somehow, I was keeping up. The professors explained concepts in such a way that everything they said made sense and was super easy to remember quickly. With that being said, it still felt like they were running at super speed and dragging me along like a kid carrying a teddy bear. It was mentally exhausting.

I thought it was interesting that the other two
kids in my class were training to be Dweal associates. They weren’t about that hunter life.

They also avoided me like everyone else in my life. It’s like people instinctively know that I’m a monster. I don’t get it.

Whatever.

Demon hunter study sessions with Nya went the same as the classes. Running at super speed, just dragging me along.

On Sundays I wouldn’t take the day off like I was supposed to. I used them to work out and study just a little bit. Although I already know the basics, there’s still a lot I could learn. For instance, trying to memorize all the demons recorded in the demonology book on my phone and how to defeat them. Not every demon can just be killed by hacking and slashing. Some take specific rituals.

Oh, they gave me an official Dweal hunter cellphone. It’s just a normal cellphone, except that it has Dweal apps, like the demonology book.

I haven’t forgotten my original mission. I’ve been doing what I can to investigate Nya without her noticing. If she’s not training me, she’s usually at the Yahee reservation. There’s no way I’m getting in there without getting caught. All of those hunters would easily destroy me. What I can say is that Nya hasn’t done anything suspicious around me at the very least.

The brutality of the training and the studying stayed the same all the way through. After two months, though, I got a little used to it. Nya would not let up on me. Once I started to get the hang of something, she would switch it up and make it harder. Take the arrow training for instance—once my listening and awareness skills got good enough to dodge all of the whistler arrows, she changed it to a game
of tag. And let me tell you, that chica is fast, boy. We eventually got around to martial arts and weapons training once my body was conditioned. I got so many bruises from her during that part of training.

It is required that every hunter is good at using the standard issue AD handgun and AD Bowie knife. After that you can specialize in whatever you want to. I chose the long sword; I still have the one from my first mission. I had it modified into an AD weapon since it was just a normal sword. I’ve gotten pretty good with it. I’m not the best shot though. I barely passed the handgun training.

02/05/2018   11:00   Cincinnati, Ohio

Finally, I’m a demon hunter! I passed my finals for school and graduated this year with a bachelor’s in criminology at age twenty; yes! Damn, it’s been a long and exhausting year. But I made it.

It’s the night after I officially became a demon hunter for Dweal, and I’m going on my first mission with Lightning Keeper. I haven’t come into contact with demons since the day I was recruited.

We drive into a forest.
“I got this, fam. I am an official Dweal demon hunter now. Deer rank,” I say, proudly.
“Don’t get cocky, kid,” Lightning Keeper says. I laugh a little. “You sound like GG.”
“She’s a wise woman,” she says.
“Well . . . that’s debatable,” I joke.

We are wearing standard-issue dark gray tactical vests that are bulletproof and, of course, have AD properties to it. The rest of our outfit is tactical clothing as well. Nya is wearing the same wooden tribal mask she wore the night I met her. I have my very own mask now.
Through my training, I’ve learned that masks are an integral part of demon hunter culture. If there’s a chance that a civilian will see you then you have to wear one. Most hunters have their own unique mask. The only restriction for Dweal hunter mask designs is that it has to have your division symbol on your forehead. There is a standard mask which is just the color of your division and it has the division symbol on the forehead. For some hunters the standard masks are fine. But not me!

My mask is a red lion’s head with a silver mane. Its mouth is open with a face mask on the inside of its mouth. The eye holes are open and there are flames where the mouth and nose should be. I know. It’s pretty dope.

“Hey, Lightning Keeper, when do I—”

“Shh!” she says, cutting me off. She points in front of us. I can see a yellow-orange light coming up ahead. We start to hear chanting the closer we get. As we come to the edge of the site, we see a cult of people in hooded robes around a bonfire, with three people already being burned alive.

“Dammit. Why do people have to keep summoning demons? Shit!” I whisper and clench my fist in anger as I deal with their dying screams.

Lightning Keeper grabs my arm and says, “Endure it. It’s too late for those people.”

“I know,” I say, shedding a few tears.

The fire fully engulfs the three victims and, as the fire dies down, a kete appears. A kete is a carsized crow demon with the upper half of a human torso attached to its belly. The human torso also has three pairs of arms.

Lightning Keeper fires a few shots at its head with her AD handgun. The hits land, causing it to
bleed, but it’s still alive. It caws and then flies off. Lightning Keeper takes off after the kete. As she is running after it, she tells me to, “Handle everything here. And don’t die.”

Really, Lightning Keeper? I know I’m sweet and all, but why do I have to take them out alone? Fuck it. I got this.

I wipe away my tears.

The cult members spot me. I hide behind the nearest tree just as they start blasting their guns.

Shit! Dweal’s policy is don’t kill humans unless it’s absolutely unavoidable. I would say this counts as unavoidable. Damn it. No, Tom. You can do better than that. No human dies tonight by my hands. I am not a demon. I am not a demon. I AM NOT A DEMON!

Take a deep breath. Calm down. Slow it down. Ok.

I can still barely use my flames, but I think I can use them today. Good thing I have this dumb Memoo lighter Lightning Keeper gave me.

Through my training, I’ve realized something about my spirit power. I can set things on fire, of course, but I can also control whether or not that fire actually burns the target. This is why my spirit power is named: selective fire.

“Fan out. Kill that damn hunter!” I hear one the cult members shout.

I climb the tree, using my fire to boost me, and wait patiently. I’ve got a plan now. I count eight cult members. They’re coming into the forest with flashlights. There’s one right below me. I drop down on top of her and put her to sleep.

I swiftly flick the lighter on, take the flame from the lighter, make the flame bigger, and set the
nearest cult member on selective fire by throwing a fireball at him. While he panics, thinking he’s on fire, I knock him out with a strong punch to the back of the head. Why is it so hard to not kill a human?

There are two others ahead, pointing their guns at me. I dodge their bullets and use my selective fire on them as well. Bullets are coming from behind me. My training with Lightning Keeper allows me to just barely predict and miss their bullets. Good thing it’s dark out.

I take out the two on fire before they had to realize that they aren’t burning. As soon as I’m done with them, I set the four behind me on selective fire and then sprint quickly to take them out with one devastating blow. I collect all of their guns and toss them near the fire just in case they wake up.

I check the area around the bonfire to see if anyone is still around. I don’t see anyone. As I’m turning to go back and collect the cult members, another hooded robe-wearing cult member emerges from the forest.

“Well, this will be easy. Damn, bruh. You should have stayed hidden. Now I’m going to have to knock you out,” I say, cracking my knuckles.

I create a fireball from my lighter’s flame and throw it at the cult member, but he dodges. The dude is quick. As he runs, he throws off his robe, revealing that he is not human. He’s a damn spikette! A spikette is hairless and genital-less humanoid demon with iron spikes now poking out from everywhere. That includes its face. It can pull and throw the iron spikes from its body— which it is doing right now. Shit!

I dodge right. After a few minutes the iron spikes that it pulled out replace themselves. According to the Dweal’s demonology book, this demon is killed
by anti-demon weapons, spirit powers, and by pulling out all of its iron spikes before they can regenerate. Which one should I do?

Let’s set this bitch on fire. Without using the lighter I blast fireballs at it, but the spikette keeps dodging my shots. With its quick movements, it closes the distance between us and decides it wants to engage in hand-to-hand combat. I dodge one, two, three of its swings before I unsheathe my AD long sword.

The spikette jumps back for a second, pulls iron spikes from its thighs with each hand, and then closes the distance again, stabbing at me. Through its powerful stabs, I can tell it’s as strong as a trader. On top of that, its defense is strong. The demon isn’t giving me any opening. Ok, I’ve got one move I can do. It’s dumb, but here goes.

I intentionally slow down my blocking just a little to let it stab my left arm. Before it can stab me with the other spike, I drop my sword, grab its left arm, and light both of us on fire. It jumps back and screams.

I turn up the intensity on my flames surrounding the spikette. It seems to be having a strong effect on it. The spikette tries putting out the fire by throwing dirt on itself. Once it sees it’s not working and realizes it’s going to die soon, the spikette decides it’s going to take me out with it by throwing a barrage of all its iron spikes.

Damn it. If there were time for my power to be fucking be monstrous this would be that time. Knowing I can’t dodge, I completely rely on my spirit power and force out a huge flamethrower from my right palm. The force of the flamethrower blows away most of the iron spikes. A decent number still manage to
graze me.

Once the flamethrower stops, the torched spikette falls to the ground. I drop too. Damn I’m tired.

“**I am the shit!**” I say, even though I know I got lucky as fuck.

That makes me think of one of GG’s favorite lines to say to me: “Kid, you got the Devil’s luck.”

“The Devil’s luck, huh?” I say. I grip my necklace and whisper, “I am not a demon.”

“Congrats, Fire Boy. You passed the final test. You are now officially a Dweal demon hunter,” Nya says right before appearing over my body with her hand out.

“What?” I say as I grab her hand.

Once I grab Nya’s hand, the world around us starts to change. The background changes colors until it’s completely white. Nya still looks the same. Then she turns all red, and then the background turns red too.

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I open my eyes to see I’m in one of those chairs that kind of look like they belong in a dentist’s operating room. Nya is in a chair beside me holding my hand and Lootah is standing to the other side. I got wires hooked up to my head and there are hospital machines to my left.

A Dweal Medical Division nurse says, “His vitals look stable.”

“That’s good. You may leave us. Thank you,” says Lootah.

“Did you just incept me?” I ask.

“Yes, sir. That we did. Well, I did at least,” explains Lootah.

They were playing around in my head. I hope
they didn’t hear me say, “I am not a demon.”

“Good movie,” I remark.

“I agree. Though, for a movie about dreams, their dreams were not all that imaginative. I mean, some of the scenes were imaginative, but like what would they do if someone started dreaming about an alien orgy, or robot dinosaurs?” says Lootah.

“Yo, I was thinking the same thing,” Tom says.

Nya clears her throat. “All right, you guys can go on a date later. Can we continue?”

Lootah then goes over to my left side and says, “Left arm please.” He grabs my left arm with his left arm. Our forearms are touching. He chants, “Ma ka ne. Ma ka ne. Ma ka ne.”

As he is doing that Nya says, “Every hunter takes some kind of final test to become a hunter. These tests always change to best test the individual’s skills. They always push the rookie to their limits spiritually, physically, and mentally. We get to see you at full power. This time I decided that, since you’re a spirit user, we should use Lootah’s spirit power to test you. Plus, Lootah personally wanted to see what you’ve got.”

Lootah says, “My spirit power is creating immersive illusions. Nya suggested the scenario. She was tough on you. Normally the trainer helps guide the trainee in these tests, but Nya said, ‘Nope. Let ‘em struggle.’”

“He was getting cocky. I had to take him down a peg,” Nya defends.

“Welp, I got some chief stuff to handle. I’ll leave you two to it. Text me his hunter name,” Lootah says as he makes way out.

“I finally get a hunter name! What is it?” I ask, sounding as excited as a little kid getting a brand-new
video game console.

“Settle down. First look at your arm,” she says. “You got a one leaf deer symbol and a one leaf level two symbol now. You have the lowest rank in the fighting division since you’re new.”

Finally, I’m an L2. Nya is L4. I’ve got a lot of climbing to do.

I’ve learned a lot about their level system in the last few months. The level system is what Dweal uses to measure how strong a demon or hunter is. They base this on intelligence, fighting skills, and spirit power. Level zero is the lowest and level five is the highest. Level zero consists of civilians. Level one consists of military, mercenaries, and the world’s top athletes. They can’t do much against demons, especially since they can’t see them. Level two is the base level for all demon hunters and typically the lowest level for demons. A being levels up by becoming five times stronger than their current level.

One leaf under your level means you can take on one to two beings of the same level. Two leaves means you can take on three to four beings of that same level. Most hunters and demons are only L2s and L3s. The strongest type a hunter would typically see is L4. L5 is extremely rare in the human world.

“Hunter names to Dweal are very important and ceremonious. They are a great honor. You only receive a hunter name when you actually become a hunter and your trainer is the one who names you,” Nya reminds me as she turns the lights out and lights five candles on the floor. The candles are placed in a wide circle; they’re red with the Fighting Division symbol on them.

“Tom, take your clothes off except for your underwear and sit in the middle of the circle,” Nya
orders.

“Um . . . okay. Are you making a move on me?” I ask hoping that she is.

“Shut up and just do it. It’s for the ritual. Here. Put this on,” Nya tells me in her scary commanding voice.

Nya hands me a— I don’t want to call it a skirt, but it’s basically a skirt. I wrap it around my waist and fasten the button. It’s just long enough to cover my boxer briefs. The thing is white but transparent. You can definitely still see my boxer briefs. She undresses, in front of me, and puts on a white transparent skirt along with a white transparent top that only covers her bra. We might as well be naked. Tradition is tradition I guess.

Nya sits down in front of me with a bottle in her hands.

“Fair warning, I may get a boner. Just ignore it. Or not,” I joke. Seriously though I’m gonna have to think of dead puppies the whole time.

“Shut up before I revoke your demon hunter status,” Nya threatens.

“Yes ma’am,” I say, straightening up.

Nya paints tribal patterns all over both of our bodies in white paint. She opens up the bottle with some kind of red drink and takes a swig. She then offers me the bottle. I take a swig. It tastes a little bitter. Is there alcohol in this? I hand the bottle back to her. She takes another swig. The room smells so amazing. There is a surprising amount of smoke filling the room from the candles. It’s a bit foggy in here now.

“The bond between trainer and trainee is a strong one at Dweal. Tom, do you remember how you said you often have this reoccurring dream about a
red lion?” Nya asks me.

“You looked at my psych evaluations?”

“Of course I did. It’s standard for a trainer to watch them. They tell you that the higher-ups may look at it. Or did you not pay attention to that detail?”

“Oh yeah. I remember.” I don’t.

She takes another swig and so do I.

“I was originally going to call you Fire Boy but that’s too plain,” Nya says.

Thank god! In my therapy sessions, I left out a lot of details, just in case. In one of my sessions I had talked about the time I was attacked by a mountain lion when I was a kid, which is why I hate cats. In this past year I’ve gotten over that . . . kind of.

My therapist said something about me seeing the mountain lion as the things I hate about myself since I see myself as a monster and I’m projecting my own insecurities, and blah blah blah. I don’t know. Maybe she’s right. All I know is that I’m not going to lose to the demon inside me!

She takes another swig and so do I. She takes one more swig before pouring some on her hands and sits the bottle in front of me. Her hands are out with her palms facing up.

“Tom, take a swig, pour the rest on your hands, and place your hands on top of mine.”

I do it. Nya looks me dead in the eyes and says, “Tom, your hunter name shall be Red Lion. Now repeat your name to become a hunter in our tribe. Claim your name.”

“Red Lion,” I say. It’s perfect.

The smoke in the room then turns into glowing red dust for a few seconds and then disappears.

Nya turns the light back on and says, “All right, now clean this shit up. And put your boner away.”
Chapter 3: Two Demon Hunters Walk into A Bar . . .
Narrator: Tom Oak

03/13/2018  14:30  Kyoto, Japan
I’m sitting in The Informant’s office. She’s a fifty-seven-year-old Asian woman.
“Why are you here, Red Lion?” The Informant asks me.
I fidget with my necklace for a moment. I know what I want to ask, but part of me doesn’t want to ask. I take a deep breath. “I need to know. Did I kill him?”

03/10/2018  21:47  San José, Costa Rica
“Your Spanish is good, right?” Nya asks. She’s wearing a nice pair of jeans and a tank top. I’m wearing jeans and a tank top too. We got concealed AD knives on us.
“I pretty much already knew Spanish before joining Dweal so I’m good,” I say. It is a requirement that all Dweal hunters speak English, Spanish, and Japanese.

[From this point on everyone is speaking in Spanish while in Costa Rica.]
Nya walks up to the door of the bar. A bouncer asks, “ID?”
Nya makes her Dweal tattoo appear on her arm so he can see it.
“And you?” the bouncer asks me. I follow suit. He then gives us a nod that lets us know it’s ok to pass.
Right when we get in, another bouncer says, “You know the deal. You got any weapons?” We hand over our knives and he gives us a
ticket with a number on it. “Use this to check out your weapons when you leave. Lose it and you don’t get your weapons back. No using spirit powers. You may proceed.”

Nya looks around the bar. She spots who she is looking for and we head on over to the booth. The man doesn’t see us walk up.


“Nya Yahee. Hunter name: Lightning Keeper. What brings you here?” asks Daniel. He’s a Costa Rican man who looks like he is in his late thirties. He has long hair and is wearing a fedora. He’s drinking a strong whiskey on the rocks.

There’s been an update to my secret mission. got a list from one of his people. This list is directly connected to the traitor that attacked . Just like the photo of Nya that the traitor had, we don’t know if this list contains targets and or members of their mysterious traitor group. It just so happens that Daniel Sala, hunter name: The Rocker, is on the list. The mission is the same as it is with Nya: watch and observe. I know that’s redundant, but it sounds cool.

“Don’t play. You know why we are here?” she says. “We’re here because of the succubus you got running around your city. You got all of these independent demon hunters here and none of you have been able to nab her?”

“What can I say? She’s elusive,” Daniel claims.

“And a knockout,” says Nya. All succubi are dime pieces. I kind of hope we don’t run into the succubus. “It’s because you’re a guy.”

“That’s sexist! You know they go after girls too,” Daniel says.
“Yeah, but it’s way harder for a succubus to steal a woman’s soul,” Nya says mostly to me. I already know though. I have most of the demonology memorized already.


A waiter comes over and asks, “Will you be drinking?”

“Give me a shot of The Deadly Kicker,” Nya says.

“And you?” the waiter asks me.

“Do you guys got any strawberry lemonade?” I ask.

Daniel and Nya give me a judgmental look that said, “Really, dude?”


“Hey. No judgment here,” Daniel claims.

The waiter laughs and says, “It just so happens that we do.”

“Whether you like it or not, we have to help. Lootah’s orders. Just because you aren’t a Dweal hunter anymore that doesn’t mean you can do what you want,” Nya says when the waiter leaves.

“That’s exactly what that means. I don’t even like Lootah. He seems like he’s always hiding something. Not that we would even know with his illusion-based spirit power,” Daniel says before taking a sip of his whiskey. “Fine. Who’s the deer?” he says referring to me.

“Tom Oak. Hunter name: Red Lion,” I say. We shake hands.

“What do you have?” asks Nya.

“I’ve been tracking this succubus for a while
now,” Daniel tells us as he pulls out his cellphone. He shows us multiple corpses; they have a faint orange substance on their lips.

“What’s the orange stuff?” I ask.

“It’s called the kiss of death,” Nya answers.

“Oh. I didn’t know they leave a mark,” I say.

The waiter comes back and hands us our drinks. This strawberry lemonade is the shit! They can drink their nasty ass alcohol; gross.

“Yea, a succubus has sex with you just for fun. When they’re done they give you a kiss that sucks out the core spirit energy that binds your soul to your body. Then they consume the soul. Without core spirit energy, the soul can’t bind to anything. Souls and core spirit energy are a succubus’ only sources of food,” Daniel explains.

“So I take it that you can’t see the orange lipstick unless you have second vision?” I ask. Second vision is the ability to see the supernatural.

“The deer gets a gold star,” Daniel mocks.

“With all of these bodies, you couldn’t figure out a commonality between each victim and track it that way?” Nya asks.

“I tried. She doesn’t have a type. Bad bitches are the only thing that she likes,” Daniel jokes.

“Really, bruh?” I say, annoyed and amused.

“Aw. And would you look at that. There’s a few women there. Huh,” Daniel gladly points out after showing us the corpses of some women.

“Ok, but how do you know it’s just one succubus? With this many dead there has to be at least two,” Nya muses.

“Because on a lot of these cases I’ve been only a few moments away from catching her in the act,” he says.
“How does she get away?” I ask.
“That I don’t know, young buck. She somehow teleports me about a kilometer [about half a mile] from the crime,” he answers.
“That’s odd. Succubi don’t normally have that kind of power. Or any power except for stealing souls and looking pretty,” Nya remarks. “They’re a relatively easy L2 to kill.”
“Which is why I’ve been having trouble,” Daniel says.
“With that kind of power, why doesn’t she just kill you?” I ask.
“See I don’t think she has control of where she’s sending me. Otherwise she would have done it,” he says. “Let’s continue this at my place. I know where she’s going to hit next.”

03/10/2018 22:52 San José, Costa Rica

The Rocker’s house is in the countryside. It’s a normal-sized house, nothing too fancy. More importantly, I’m not getting any sketchy vibes from it.

Daniel opens the door. A beautiful Latino woman comes running to the door. She is wearing a pink belly shirt, a long purple skirt, and has long flowy hair. “Danny! Oh— I see that . . . .”

“What—” Daniel yells. He quickly changes his tone to normal when he says, “What are you doing here, Rea? I thought you had to work a late shift at the restaurant tonight.”

“Oh, umm . . . they let me off early. I wanted to surprise you, but it looks like you have company. So I’ll just go. I wouldn’t to get in the way of your demon hunting,” Rea says.

“Demon hunting? Did you tell a civilian? Daniel, who is she?” Nya asks with her hand on her the hilt of her AD knife.
“Rea. She used to be an associate for Sacred Sword,” claims Daniel. Sacred Sword is the other well-known demon hunting organization that rivals Dweal.

“Oh. I see.” Nya relaxes. “Then if that’s the case why does she need to leave? Stay,” she says to Rea.

“Umm . . . okay. In that case, I just made fresh cookies,” Rea says.

“Yes!” I say. “I’m trying to bash on them.”

In the room there are three couches in the form of a U with a coffee table in the middle. We sit down and eat a few cookies.

“She’s going to attack, I believe, around this hotel tonight. I know it’s a bit questionable, but I set up cameras in every room and hallway of the hotel,” Daniel says.

“You still haven’t said how we are going to defeat her yet,” I remind him.

“I think all we need to do is rush all at once from different angles. Every time she teleports me she uses her left hand. If we avoid that we should be good. Hopefully. I’ve almost died numerous times because she keeps teleporting me in the middle of oncoming traffic. Be careful, comrades. She’s really good at avoiding cameras, too, so she’ll probably only be visible for a few seconds. When we see her, I’ll go into the room and try to distract her before she can kill the civilian.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Nya says.

“Yea. Let’s do this,” I say right before stuffing my mouth with another cookie.

“She’ll be arriving there around midnight, so we should go ahead and head out. Let me grab my AD pistols,” Daniel says.

“Hey, Rea, do you mind if I take the rest of
these cookies? They’re delicious.” I grin at her.
   “You already ate most of the plate. You’re going to get fat,” Nya says.
   “With these abs?” I say, lifting up my shirt revealing my sculpted abs, due to Nya’s hellish training.
   “Nah, I’m good. I’ll just do some extra sets when I work out tomorrow.”
   “Yes, it’s fine. I’m glad you liked them,” Rea says with a smile.
   “Yes!” I say.

*****

Me and Daniel are sitting in the back of the surveillance van, watching the cameras. Nya is doing a sweep of the perimeter.
   “Can I ask you a question? Why did you leave the tribe?” I ask.
   “’Cause this way I get all of the benefits and none of the issues. I like my freedom,” The Rocker says.
   “Hmm. What about your name? Who gave you your hunter name and why?” I ask.
   “You’re an inquisitive little deer, aren’t you?” He sighs before telling me, “I gave it to myself. I was trained by an independent hunter group.”
   I say, “Rea seems nice.” By that I mean she can get it. “How long have you two been dating?”
   “A year or so. She’s great. She comes with her own issues . . .” he says trailing off. He catches himself though. “But she’s worth it. Listen Red Lion, if you ever meet a woman who can peer into your soul with just one look, then she’s a keeper. Don’t ever let go,” The Rocker says.
   “Will do,” I say.
   “Or guy. Whatever you’re into,” he adds.
   “Woman. For sure women,” I say.
“Sexuality is on a spectrum,” he says, shrugging.

Lightning Keeper comes back in the van at that moment. “It looks good so far. What about your end?” “Nothing yet,” I say.

“We’ve been waiting forever. Are you sure she’s feasting tonight?” Lightning Keeper asks.

The succubus then appears on the camera, entering a hotel room on the sixth floor. She’s got a man with her.

“Shit!” The Rocker exclaims.

We bolt out of the van and head straight through the back entrance. We’re still in civilian clothes. Lightning Keeper has her Orerubo gauntlets and boots on. They’re the same ones she wore the night I first met her. The gauntlets are hidden by a hoodie that is too big for her. I’m carrying my long sword in a briefcase. The Rocker has his pistols concealed by his jacket.

After sprinting up the stairs, we make it up to the sixth floor. We all have our weapons ready. We’re not wearing masks on this op, because it would make us stand out too much.

“Ok, there. The cameras on the sixth floor are running on a looped video,” The Rocker says after locking his phone. He then starts taking all of his clothes off.

“Whoa what the hell, dude?” I say.

“Trust me,” he says right before unlocking the door to the room with his cellphone. He’s completely naked, but he’s still got his fedora on.

Lightning Keeper and I hide on opposite sides of the door. We watch what’s going on in the room on our phones via the cameras The Rocker had placed in the room, waiting on the opportunity to strike.
The succubus is naked and on top of the naked lifeless man she had lured into the room. She turns into her true demon form. She has a long devil tail with clawed hands and feet. Her forearms, hands, lower legs, and feet turn a lavender color. Black horns are coming out of her head. The rest of her still looks like her human Latino female form. The succubus turns her head and raises her left arm at The Rocker.

“No, wait! I have cancer,” he blurts out. That seems to stop her. He inches closer to the succubus as he speaks. “I’m dying soon, and I want to go out with style. So, have sex with me and then take my soul. I’m done chasing you.”

“Humans are so foolish. Let me see what’s under your hat,” she says. Her left hand is still up.

“Aww, baby, you don’t trust me?” The Rocker jokes. He does what she asks though. There’s nothing under the fedora.

“Fine. I’ll take on your request. It wouldn’t be the first time this has happened,” the succubus says. She gets off the dead man on the bed and tosses him to the side with her devil tail. The Rocker gets on the bed and he cautiously starts making out with her.

“Is he really trying to get some ass right now?” I ask.

“Just watch, Red Lion,” Lightning Keeper says. The Rocker then turns the succubus around and starts to kiss her neck, playing with a boob with one hand and a hand between her legs with the other. The succubus gently wraps her devil tail around one of his legs. With his left hand he reaches into his fedora and pulls out a tiny hidden brush so he could mark himself on the back of the neck.

The Rocker says, “Ascend,” and immediately red markings appear on his body. He gets his arms
under hers and wraps his hands behind her head so she can’t move.
  “Now,” he yells.
  Lightning Keeper and I come in, equipped with our weapons, and each of us slice off one of her hands. The Rocker lets the succubus go and Lightning Keeper slices its head clean off.
  “Nice. You know, for a second there I legit thought you were trying to get some booty bruh,” I say.

  “Hold up. What’s that?” Lightning Keeper says referring to the severed succubus hands, which are oozing a thick white liquid (not that kind). The white liquid turns into two small goblin-looking things with red eyes. They’re about two feet tall (about sixty-one centimeters). They shoot what looks like sound waves from their hands. We all dodge.

  The Rocker darts out to the hallway to get his weapons—and hopefully his clothes. Me and Lightning Keeper are doing battle with the white goblins. They keep jumping around. There’s barely any room to dodge, let alone attack. Lightning Keeper and I have to be sure not to hit each other. The Rocker comes back in. One of the goblins shoots a wave at him. I push him out of the way and take the hit instead.

  I pop up in an alley somewhere.
  “Oh, thank god it wasn’t oncoming traffic,” I mutter, putting a hand on my chest. “And why the fuck do I always get separated?”

  Seconds later, one of those red-eyed demons appears.

  “Why?” I complain.

  It shoots waves at me. I dodge and shoot some fireballs back at it. We go at it back and forth. The battle reaches a stalemate.
The damn thing jumps back for a second and just stares at me. It then starts shaking violently.
“What the fuck?” I say.
I shoot fireballs at it. It jumps up in the air and splits into eight individual red-eyed two-foot-tall white goblin demons (about sixty-one centimeters). When they land, they all come rushing forwards and surround me. I defend myself as they attack from all sides. I set my whole body on fire, yet they still attack. They manage to grab my sword and toss it towards the end of the alley.

As I’m getting my ass kicked, GG’s voice pops up in my head. “What are you doing, kid? I didn’t raise a weak ass kid. I guess you’re all talk, huh?”
“Like hell I am!” I yell. I intensify the heat of the flames surrounding my body, and it blows the red eyes back for a second, but then they come again.
I punch one with my right hand. Elbow one behind me with my left. I kick one with my right, then another with my left. I dip after hearing one attacking high from behind me. I start doing powerful open palm attacks and simultaneously blast them with fire. Then I jump and do a flaming kick that knocks two more backwards.

The fight continues like this with me mixing my flames with my attacks to intensify their strength. After going a few rounds, I manage to get them so worn out they fall to the ground. I finish them by setting them all on fire. It takes a second for them to start being affected by it, but eventually they all burn.

My phone rings.
“You still kicking, my baby deer?” asks Lightning Keeper.
“Of course. I’m too good to die, fam,” I say, ignoring her trying to play me.
“Yeah, yeah. I need you to collect the bodies. The medical division needs to examine and log them in the database,” she says.

“Yes, ma’am,” I say.

“Activate your GPS, too. We’ll pick you up,” she adds.

“Yup.” I hang up.

After gathering the demons, I pull out my phone and look at the list again.

1) Naomi Yahee
2) Nya Yahee
3) Blake
4) Billy
5) Victor
6) Lootah Seirlock
7) Daniel Sala
8) Kiego Nataga
9) Tom Oak

[Redacted] and Nya are probably targets the mysterious group plans on killing, since those two appeared on the list after being targeted the first time. At least that’s what [Redacted] thinks.

We don’t know why I’m on the list. Everyone else on there has either noteworthy achievements, skill, a powerful position, or a combination of all three. Me, albeit dope AF, I am a one-leaf deer, and a level two ranked demon hunter. I’m not special. No one besides GG and [Redacted] knows that I am a hybrid.

For now, though, we’re not going to focus on me. I’m supposed to be Nya’s guardian—more like back up—just in case the group makes a move on her. And if they come from me, she most likely will already be there. [Redacted] has someone on watch for him.

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“You should try to leave the demons more in-
tact next time, Fire Boy. The more intact the body, the better the pay,” Lightning Keeper says to me. We’re back at Daniel’s house, standing outside.

“Oh, I’m sorry Nya, I was more worried about not dying,” I say, facetiously. Most of my white goblin demons were burnt down to the skeleton. Nya’s demon corpses are, for the most part, intact. They’re in pieces, but not too damaged.

“Be easy on him. He did well under unforeseen circumstances,” Daniel defends.

“Thank you, Daniel. Senpai never praises me,” I say.

“Like your cocky ass needs praising,” Nya scoffs. “It is interesting, though, how the demons fused. That doesn’t happen often. That goblin must be a symbiote type. Anyway, Dweal will send you your pay. We’ll be heading out now. We got a plane meeting us at the airport.”

“As always it was a pleasure hunting with a Yahee, Lightning Keeper,” Daniel says, giving Nya the old tip of the hat.

“See ya,” Nya says. We take off. We drive for a good five to ten minutes before Nya pulls over. She hides the car among some trees.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Put your vest and mask on, and grab your long sword,” Nya orders in a serious tone.

“I’m confused.”

“I have a hunch about something. Hopefully I’m wrong.”

Her tone has me tense. Does she know about me? If she aims to kill me it won’t be much of a fight. There’s no way I can kill her in my current state. Plus, I wouldn’t want to kill her even if I could. She leads me deep in the dark woods. My hand is on my hilt.
I’m ready to hit and run. Maybe I can use the fire for cover so I can get away. Please don’t attack me, Nya. I fidget with my AD necklace.

After about thirty minutes of walking, we reach the edge of Daniel’s house. Now I’m definitely confused. Is she going to try to get Daniel’s help to kill me?

“Are you going to tell me what you plan to do?” I ask in a somber voice.

“Just watch,” Nya says.

We sneak up to the living room window. Daniel Sala is talking to Rea. The two seem to be laughing about something. They hug and kiss.

Rea then transforms into a succubus right before our eyes.

The two stop kissing for a second, look at each other smile, and start to kiss again.


We bust through the door. Daniel immediately takes a defensive martial arts stance.

“Daniel. That’s a succubus. She’s deceiving you,” Nya says. She’s got the blades of her Orerubo gauntlets out. My sword is drawn.

“Now, now, Nya. Calm down. She isn’t using me. I know this may be shocking, but we’re in love,” Daniel says.

What the fuck? A human in love with a demon? Genuinely in love?

“Daniel, you don’t know what you’re talking about. Don’t be a fool,” Nya says.

“It is true,” Rea says.

“Shut the hell up! You’ve been killing humans too. I knew it couldn’t only be one succubus,” Nya states.

Rea and Daniel stay quiet when she says that.
Daniel whistles. Rea then takes off running. Daniel kicks the coffee table at Nya to create some distance. He now has his pistols in hand.

"Tom, kill the succubus. I’ll handle Daniel," Nya orders.

I look down, sad at the situation, and reluctantly say, "Yes, ma’am."

I head out back. Rea is in a jeep about to peel off. I melt the tires so she can’t go anywhere.

"Please don’t make this harder than what it has to be," I plead.

Rea slowly steps out of the car. She’s still in her succubus form.

"You’re right," she says. She rushes me. I swing my sword. She deflects with her claws. We take a few swings at each other. I do a heavy swing which knocks her to the ground. I raise my sword for the finishing blow. Rea gets up quickly, dodges my sword, grabs my face with her hands, and then kisses me.

I drop my sword and feel my mind slipping away. I grab hold of her to draw her closer. Our tongues dance in our mouths. My hand slowly goes down to her backside to grab her ass. I’m barely aware of my actions right now. She’s taking away my will to fight.

"Just give in," Rea whispers seductively in my ear right before she nibbles on it.

With the little ounce of will I have left, I light my flames around our bodies. Rea screams. It’s not enough to burn her alive, but it’s enough to break the spell. She’s badly injured.

"That’s right. Go ahead, burn me. I was using that idiot human as a cover. It almost worked, too. If I ever escape hell I’m coming for you," Rea snaps.

"Don’t worry. I’ll probably be there right beside
you,” I say as I start burning her alive. My spirit energy is drained. I can feel SED (spiritual energy deprivation) starting. Today has taken a lot out of me.

Spirit energy deprivation is when a spirit user’s spirit energy is low. That’s also when the user feels pain all over their body.

I get back inside to see Nya finish tying up a badly beaten up Daniel. His hands are tied behind his back and his feet are tied together too.

“Did you kill her?” Nya asks. I nod yes right before falling over. My head feels dizzy and the room feels like it’s undulating. Was I drugged?

“Nya, I can’t feel my body,” I say, scared. “What did she do to you?” Nya asks.

Daniel laughs and spits up blood. “No need to worry, Lightning Keeper. Rea must have jammed one of my ‘special’ needles into him. It only makes the victim hallucinate and temporarily paralyzes them. Looks like you got the hard end of it. He’ll be fine in a few hours.” He laughs again. “Good girl.”

Lightning Keeper kicks Daniel hard in the leg. “You better hope he doesn’t die,” she threatens.

She picks me up, lays me on the couch, and puts a blanket over me. She grabs me a glass of water and makes me drink a few sips.

“Rest,” she says.

It feels good to have someone take care of you—though it’s kind of weird when that person is also super intimidating. I just want today to be over.

Nya goes out back to retrieve that succubus’s body, then lays it on the table in the next room. After that, she goes outside to make a call.

The hallucinations start to kick in. Everything keeps changing color. Everything still feels like it’s
moving in a wavy motion. The red lion from my dreams is walking around. It’s lying in the corner and glaring like it wants to attack me. I’m starting to see weird shapes and creatures too. I fight back the urge to vomit.

Daniel laughs and says, “For her to get that close to you, she must have given you the kiss of death. It’s usually an instant death after that. How did you beat her?”

I don’t respond. He looks over and says, “What’s up with the lion?”

“Leave me alone,” I groan. I still want to vomit and my head hurts. “She played you, bruh. How did you let her deceive you, man?”

“Deceive me?” Daniel says. I can tell he’s in pain and exhausted. “Let me guess. She told you she was using me, right? She lied. Even on the verge of death Rea was trying to protect me. Well, it doesn’t matter anymore. I should have known it would end like this.”

The red lion gets up to walk over to me. It growls at me before walking off.

“We were in love,” Daniel says softly. “She wasn’t like most demons. I was hunting her, but she was already on the verge of death. She said she didn’t want to be a killer anymore. I had a gun pointed at her head, yet I couldn’t shoot her. She just looked so frail and innocent. Which, I know, it is so weird to say a demon looks innocent. So instead I took her home with me; I took care of her for a few weeks. One day she told me it would probably be her last day. I couldn’t bear it. I went out, caught a couple of meth dealers, and fed them to her.”

“Shut up,” I say weakly.

“She didn’t want to kill. I convinced her that
if it gets rid of a few evil humans then why not? We only ever killed pieces of garbage that barely passed as human. Then that other fucking succubus came around and started putting too much attention on our activities. And now Rea is dead," he says as he silently cries.

"Take that knife there and kill me. Come on. Do it," Daniel taunts.
"Shut up," I say weakly.
"Come on. Dweal’s going to kill me anyway."
"Shut up."
"Come on, Red Lion. I’m a demon fucker. It’s your job. Do it!" he yells.
"Shut up!" I yell, then grab the knife and point it at him.

03/13/2018 14:34 Kyoto, Japan

"I blacked out after that," I say. "Nya said she walked back in with me passed out, Daniel’s zip ties were cut, and my knife through his heart. Both of our fingerprints are on the knife. Dweal understands that I was drugged, so even if I did kill him I won’t be held accountable. I still need to know whether he killed himself or not."

"Are you sure that’s what you want to ask? I only paid for one piece of information," The Informant asks. "Wouldn’t you rather learn more about your condition?"

I sit and ponder that for a second. "How much would I have to pay?"

"For you, I’ll give a discount. Two thousand US dollars," she says with a smile. She picks up her tea and then sips it.

"I just got my pay for this mission. Here," I agree solemnly. I pay her with my Dweal-issued cell-phone.
“Pleasure doing business with you, Red Lion,” The Informant says, smiling. She gets up off her couch, comes over to my couch, and sits next to me. She grabs my hands in hers and closes her eyes. Moments later she gets up and heads back over to the other couch.

“My spirit power is the ability to see one’s past and future by touch. On top of that, I can read the thoughts of the person I am touching,” she explains. “To answer your question: yes. Yes, you did kill Daniel Sala.”

I take a deep breath. I clench my fist, trying to stop my anger from swallowing me. My eyes start to water, but it’s not a full-on downpour.

“Would you like to continue?” she asks. I silently nod. “Right before you blacked out Daniel cut himself loose and you saw him do it. He taunted you, saying, ‘Your move, Red Lion.’ You then threw your knife at his heart. Daniel grabbed hold of the knife and plunged it farther into himself. Now, what bothers you the most is that you didn’t kill him out of self-defense. You killed him, because you hated that he fell in love with a demon. To you, that’s the worst thing anyone could do. It is also the reason why you don’t have any friends. No one should love a demon, even if they are a hybrid like you. The only person you allow to love you, and that’s just barely, is GG. And that’s only, because she knows what you are and used to hate you, and contemplated killing you herself.” Her eyebrows rose. “Wow, you actually tried to kill yourself a few times.”

“Now, for the sake of me wanting to keep you as a loyal customer, I prefer you change your attitude. Yes, demons are inherently evil, but as you have seen, in very rare cases, some can go against that
biological programing. That’s something Dweal and especially Sacred Sword won’t teach you.”

Her words calm me down. She’s completely right. She knows it all.

“You’re right. But if you know all that then you know that I’m trying to prove I’m not a demon by becoming the best demon hunter out there,” I say.

“I’m aware. What hunter doesn’t try to become the best? You’re unique in a lot of ways, but your goal isn’t. If you don’t accept the reality that—very rarely—demons can be good, and that you yourself are not evil, then it could set you down an unfavorable path. That’s a freebie,” she adds. “As for the second question, the answer is no. There isn’t a cure for your demon DNA.”

“Damn it.”

“I know you have more questions, but you are at your limit today. Go home, Tom,” The Informant says.

*****

The information from The Informant was disappointing. I’m choosing to not let it break me . . . at least, I’m trying to. I don’t know what to do about my condition now. There’s nothing I can do.

I told about what happened to Daniel. I completely missed all of the signs. Nya didn’t. She would be better at smoking out this mysterious group than me. Damn sensei shows me up again. I need to get better.

I also told that Nya can be trusted. There’s been too many chances where she could have killed me, or showed her true colors, but didn’t. That being said, I don’t think we can trust her with my secret. She might try to kill me.

Which I think is both good and bad.
Chapter 4: Cutting Ties
Narrator: Kiego Nataga

Kiego Nataga: Japanese male. Fit body. Twenty-four years old.

04/26/2018  22:40  Osaka, Japan

I remember the first time I saw a demon. It was seven or eight. My spirit power had recently awakened. Our driver was driving me and my brother and my sister somewhere. The car was at a red light; there was heavy traffic. I looked out the window of our limo . . . and then I saw it.

It had a monster face and monster hands, and it was wearing a suit. Then there were the corpses. Rotting kid corpses. They were dangling upside down above the demon’s head, just floating there with centipedes crawling around their peeling skin and flies swarming them.

People were just walking by it like nothing was wrong. Somehow it knew I could see it, because it turned its head and stared directly into my eyes. The demon knew I knew what it was. It had its demon hand on the shoulder of a dazed-out-of-her-mind woman. It gave me the creepiest smile while putting a finger up to its mouth, telling me, “Shhh.”

It then continued to lead the woman into a dark alley.

That shit gave me nightmares for months. I’ll never forget that day.

Even with all I do to avoid those motherfuckers, somehow I got two traders following me. They’re wearing human cloaks which makes them look like humans to humans who don’t have second vision. I’m
speed walking through the city trying to lose them.

I see an alley coming up. I take a hard right and start sprinting. I knock a few trash cans down to try to slow them down; it doesn’t work. I use my spirit power, which is controlling water, to blast me up to the roof of a building. I’m running and jumping from rooftop to rooftop but those two stay on my heels. I drop down to the alley below using my water to soften the landing. Another trader closes off the entrance of the alley. The first pair drop down behind me. Shit! I’m really not trying to fight them.

“Aye, I don’t know what I did to piss you guys off, but I’m sorry. I’m really not trying to fight you. Please let me go, man. What do I got to do? You want me to steal something for you?” I say in Japanese, trying not to seem scared.

[In this chapter everyone is speaking Japanese unless it says otherwise.]

The traders don’t respond. Well, they do, but not with words. Instead, they pull out some concealed, strange-ass bladed weapons.

“Do we got a deal or what? Come on, please don’t do this,” I say, tearing up.

In a last-ditch effort, I whip out my nine and unload the clip on two of them. It hurts them, but they don’t seem fazed by my bullets, like, at all.

Shit.

I’m dead.

Then a person drops down from the roof.

“Whoa, don’t start the party without me,” he says. He’s wearing tactical gear and a red lion mask with a mountain-looking symbol on it. He walks up beside me, puts a hand on my shoulder, and says, “Relax, man. We got this. Oh yeah, and this won’t burn you.”
The demons come charging from both sides. My whole body is suddenly set on fire, but it doesn’t burn.

The stranger shoots a fireball at the trader behind us. He starts fighting the two in front with the sword that was on his hip. He fire-punches one, dodges a slash from the other, fire-kicks the other’s knee out, cuts the other’s arm off and steals its knife, then stabs the one with the broken kneecap in the head, and finally slices the throat of the other.

The last one takes a swing at me. The masked guy steps in, blocking the slash with his long sword just in time to keep me from getting sliced. The trader does a bunch of thrusts with his blade while the masked guy defends. The masked guy slashes the trader once. The trader kicks the masked guy in return, sending him rolling backwards. The traders lunge in for the kill, but when the masked guy finally rolls back into an upright position, he cleanly slices the trader in half with his flaming sword. The demon’s blood splatters all over him.

That shit happened so fast. Who the hell is this guy? Damn he’s good.

“Bruh, I just killed that shit,” he boasts as he holds his abdomen, because of the pain.

Two trader bodies, with their heads severed, fall from the roof. A woman in tactical gear and a tribal mask drops down using a grappling hook.

“What did I tell you about getting cocky? These two had guns and could have taken both of you out. On top of that, you almost let the target die,” the woman yells at him. “Give me a quick twenty-five push-ups now!”

“Yes ma’am,” he says, dropping down and doing it.
The woman takes off her masks, showing that she’s a sexy, short-haired Native American female. “Hey, I’m Lightning Keeper. This is my partner, Red Lion,” she says, holding out her hand. We shake hands. “We are from a demon hunting organization called Dweal.”

Red Lion gets up and takes off his mask. “Nope. I’m not joining. Fuck that shit. You guys may be crazy enough to want that kind of trouble but I’m not,” I say, walking off.

Lightning Keeper places a hand on my shoulder. “That’s fine. The hunter life isn’t for everyone. Still, though, we’ve been ordered to bring you in for assessment. We need to make sure you have your spirit power under control and that you’re not a danger to human society.”

“That’s not happening,” I declare. I blast a bunch of pressurized water from my back which pushes Lightning Keeper off me. I take off sprinting.

“Let him go,” I hear Lightning Keeper say.

04/27/2018 03:23 Osaka, Japan

Me and my crew just made it back from a heist. We’re back at the chill spot. It’s an old, spacious warehouse in the city that’s been abandoned for years. My boy Lee did some hacking so the government would never come snooping around. We did some remodeling and this bitch looks pretty cozy now. There are four floors. The living room and kitchen are combined in one big space on the first. The second floor has Aki, Bunzo, and Bakin’s bedrooms. The third floor has Fujio, Heizo, and Giichi’s bedrooms. The top floor has mine and Lee’s bedrooms.

“Whoa. That was epic! We made it out with some sweet guns. Not only did we get our client’s request, but we got some extra toys too? Nice,” says
Lee.

Lee’s probably the second coolest one in the crew. I’m the first, of course. He’s not a smooth criminal like me though. We’re working on it.

“The security was less challenging than I had anticipated,” says Fujio. He’s the researcher.

“Yea, man. Getting away from them was a breeze,” says Giichi. He’s the driver.

“Yea. Damn. Why is there only one beer left?” Heizo asks. He’s the safecracker.

“Bunzo drank it all,” says Bakin. He’s the muscle.

“Bullshit. Hey, I already called dibs on that beer!” Bunzo exclaims. He’s also the muscle.

“Who cares about the beer? We just got a serious payday,” says Aki. He’s a stealth guy like me. We are like fucking Sly Cooper in this motherfucker, man. He’s also my second in command.

“Aye man, beer is a necessity,” says Bunzo.

“You’re right,” says Aki.

All of the guys are Japanese too.

“We especially deserve some beers after how we filled all those guards with holes,” says Bakin.

“What the fuck? You did what?” I shout, pissed.

“You heard them,” states Giichi.

“Aki gave the order,” says Bakin.

“They were in the way,” Aki claims.

“We have two rules: we only steal from the rich, and we don’t kill. You know that,” I tell them. I sigh before saying, “As punishment, you three will not get paid for this job. Your funds will be distributed evenly to Lee, Fujio, Heizo, me, and Giichi.”

“What?” Bunzo says.

“Come on man,” groans Bakin.
“That’s that bullshit yo,” says Aki.
“Bitch all you want. I don’t care,” I say.
“I like to see you try to take my pay,” dares Aki. He steps up to me.
I close the distance even more. I’m now centimeters from his face, looking him dead straight in the eye. “You know damn well you can’t take me.”
Aki backs down.
“That’s right,” I say.
Aki, Bunzo, and Bakin head out.
“Should we . . .?” says Lee.
“Let them cool off. Fujio, handle the drop,” I say referring to the spoils of today’s job.
“Alright, boss,” says Fujio.
I grab a pop from the fridge, and plop down on the couch, and turn on the TV. Fujio leaves to make the drop. Heizo and Giichi are playing poker.
Lee is tending to his exotic pet. It’s an alligator snapping turtle named Lucy. She’s got a decent-sized enclosure inside the building with its own small river. Part of it runs throughout the first floor, embedded in the ground with a thick pane of glass over it. It makes the place look dope as shit. It’s like we’re living in an aquarium, especially when the lights are out—there are lights on the side walls of the river, which make it look even doper when it’s dark.
Lee comes over and sits next to me with a pop and bag of chips.
“One of these days Lucy is going to bite your fingers off,” I joke.
“No way. She loves me,” Lee says.
I turn around to make sure the others are still playing poker before saying, “I think after this next mission we should get out.”
“Why so soon? I thought you wanted to wait a
while longer,” Lee asks.

“It’s just . . . I’m ready to leave man. We’ve got plenty of money saved up. And if need be”—I sigh—“we can join up with this other group I met to get clear of this one. These guys aren’t just going to let us go. They need us. Especially Aki. I can tell the rest of them would rather follow Aki than me anyways.”

“What other group are you talking about? I thought we were going to put the thieving life behind us and open that restaurant in America like we always talked about,” Lee says.

“I don’t really know much about them, but I got the feeling that they’re the type of group that, if they want you, they will find you. I don’t want to join them, but . . . I don’t know. I may not have a choice. I will try to fight that choice if I can help it.”

“Dude, are you going to tell me who?”

“It’s best if you don’t know, Lee. Trust me. God, I wish I didn’t.”

“Does it have to do something with your water power?” he asks.

I just give him a look and he understands what that means.

“Okay, man. Just tell me what’s the play. We’re bros. You know I’m down for the ride.”

We’re not related, but I know he’s got my back.

“I’m going to catch some z’s, man,” I say.


“Night,” I say back.

I make it to the third floor. I stop at my door for a second, because I notice something. I have a water ball ready. I step in my room to see both Lightning Keeper and Red Lion just chilling.
“Not a bad hideout,” Red Lion says.

“Don’t try to fight us. You’ll lose. We’re just here to talk,” Lightning Keeper claims.

I throw the water ball out the window. I take off my shirt and pants, and then throw some basketball shorts on right in front of them. “I’m going to bed. Go away,” I say, hopping into bed and throwing the covers over me.

“We will. As soon as you show me you have control of your abilities,” Lightning Keeper says, pulling the covers off me.

I let out a huge sigh before sitting up and saying, “Fine. Do I have to put clothes on?”

“No. Just show me your powers,” Lightning Keeper says. Red Lion fires up my Gamestation 4 and starts playing.

I get out of bed to form a water ball and start moving it around in the air. I say, “I can control water. I can surround stuff with water and pick it up. I can shoot it with a high pressure too.”

“Is that it?” Lightning Keeper asks. She comes over to touch the water ball.

“Yup,” I say.

“I lied,” she says before grabbing my left hand. She twists it, simultaneously putting her other hand on my chest, sweeping my left ankle from under me, and drops me to the floor in one quick motion. While I’m pinned she pulls out a syringe. I go night night.

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I wake up in a different warehouse with Lightning Keeper and Red Lion sitting in chairs looking at me.

“Sorry,” Lightning Keeper says. “I felt like you were going to make this difficult, so I drugged you. I’m just trying to get this job done.” She walks over
to a camera on a tripod and hits record. “Now show me how much pressure you can push onto that metal target over there.”

Even though I’m pissed, I do what she says. I’m not trying to get my ass kicked again by these demon killers. I blast the target with everything I got. The small screen on the top of the wall reads 1300 psi. I notice they’d put my shoes on for me.

“Well. Now hold that until you think you’re about at fifty percent of your power,” Lightning Keeper says. Accidentally, I think I stop at around sixty percent of my power. She types something on her tablet. “You can hold 1300 psi for about three minutes. After that it goes down quickly until you can’t blast anymore. Do you have enough to spirit power to surround things with water and lift them up?”


“Alright. Lift each of those three boulders up one at a time up past your eye level and then gently put them back down.”

“This better be the last thing,” I tell her. Water comes out of me and surrounds the smallest boulder. I raise my hand as I lift the boulder. I don’t need to use my hands, but it helps me focus. I lift it pretty easily. I don’t normally lift heavy objects with my water. This is new to me. The second one is heavy, but I can handle it. The third one is where I start to struggle. I can’t raise it to my eyes, but I do get it to come up off the ground.

“That last boulder weighs as much as a car. That’s your limit,” Lightning Keeper says. “One last question. Have you seen a teller?”

“Like a fortune-teller? Why would I?” I ask.

“No. A teller is someone with a spirit power to read the full potential of someone else’s spirit power.
A person may think they know their limit, but a teller can show you your true limit. We’ll send a teller to check you out at a later date. Keep that phone I let you steal from me. It will unlock for you now,” she says.

Damn, she noticed.

“We at Dweal don’t care what you do from here on out, so long as you abide by these rules: do not expose humans to the supernatural; do not cause mass terrorism with your powers; and, lastly, if we call you or ask you to do something, like see a teller for instance, you will do it. You break those rules and you will be imprisoned or, in extreme cases, be executed by us. Do you understand?” Lightning Keeper says.

This woman is so damn intimidating. “Yes ma’am,” I say, obediently.

“Good. Put this blindfold and earmuffs on,” she orders. I do what she says.

I hear Red Lion say, “You should reconsider joining us, bruh. I need a rival and you would be perfect with your water spirit power.”

“I probably won’t, man,” I say with the blindfold now on.

“Well, if you do, hit me up,” he says.

05/01/2018 02:05 Kyoto, Japan

“We got a minute until this operation is a go. We all good?” I ask over the headset. We’re stealing a few cars, some jewelry, and a pet tiger cub for the yakuza from the Russian mob. The mob has the goods at a shell company they own. This is a big job. Everyone says they’re ready. Then I say “All right, let’s make some coin.”

The average-looking office building was specifically designed for keeping things locked up. This bitch
is elaborate. It’s got secret rooms, different codes for almost every damn room, and secret stairwells that only lead to one room; it’s not an issue. Not for my team, at least.

Lee and Fujio are in the van monitoring us and are on standby to hack. The rest of us are split into three teams. Giichi, Bakin, and Bunzo are stealing the three sports cars in the garage. Aki and Heizo are going after the jewels. I’m going after the pet tiger cub. I got a crazy-looking caged backpack to throw it in. This will be fun. Apparently, the yakuza doesn’t really care about the cars, the jewels, or the tiger—they just want to piss off the Russian mob.

We’re on the second floor. The plan is for me, Aki, and Heizo to get pass this hallway and then we divide and conquer. I’m heading to the room past this hallway. The other two have a different route to take. The jewels are locked up in a safe on this floor, but they have to hit an elevator on the third floor to get access to the jewel room on the second floor. They did the most when they designed this place. Once they crack the safe they’ll leave through a ventilation system. The safe has money in it too so my team will probably pocket that. Scratch that—they better pocket that!

Getting past the few armed guards on the first floor was cake, thanks to Lee hacking the cameras.

Me, Aki, and Heizo are hiding behind some pillars at the beginning of the hallway. The hallway has four guards lining each side of the wall. On the other end of the hallway there are four more armed guards. If we get caught by these guards, we are instantly dead.

“Ready,” I say to Lee.
Seconds later, Lee responds with, “Go!”
The cameras have a looped video playing and the guards’ radios are temporarily jammed. The lights go off for a brief second and then come back on. Using my speed, I’m already at the third guard, knocking them each out with a sleep dart. I quickly toss the darts at the rest of the five in the hallway and run past them before they even hit the ground. I tuck roll into the end of the hall and throw two darts with my left and two with my right simultaneously at the last four guards. A bulky heavy-set guard armed with a badass shotgun is still standing.

“Damn,” I say before kicking the back of one of his knees, stabbing him with two more sleep darts, and then coming around to his front to knock him out with a hard right hook.

“Move,” says Fujio over the headset.

“Fourteen minutes and thirty-two seconds,” says Lee. That’s how long we have to get in and out before these guards are supposed to check in, which they won’t be able to do.

Aki and Heizo sprint to their next door. I bolt to my first door. Lee hacks the door remotely. Two guards are standing on the other side. I throw sleep darts at them and keep moving. I get to the next door and wait for Lee to hack it.

“Come on Lee, faster;” I say.

“Chill man. I’m doing several hacks at once;” Lee defends and then adds, “Twelve minutes left.”

The door opens, revealing ten armed guards. Damn. I don’t have any more sleep darts.

“Slip and slide?” Lee asks.

“Slip and slide,” I respond, tripping up all of the goons with my water. Gunfire accidentally goes off. None of the bullets hit me. As I run by, I knock them out with pressurized water.
“Nine minutes and thirty-two seconds. If I access the elevator right now it will alert the guard in the control room. I can unlock the door, but you’re going to have to climb,” Lee tells me.

“I got it,” I say. I form a ball of water, hop on, and start flying up. “I hope you switched to a private channel when you said slip and slide.”

“Come on, man. Of course,” Lee says.

“I had to ask. I don’t want that organization on my back again,” I say. “I’m at the door.”

“Alright. Opening now. Eight minutes and twelve seconds. Yeah, Fujio is already in the second van waiting on Aki and Heizo. The other three are already gone,” Lee says.

The door opens. I can see the narrow hallway. Eight turrets line the wall—four on top and four on the bottom. They’re constantly moving back and forth, scanning the room.

“Do these turrets have blind spots?” I ask.

“Nope. They cover each others’ blind spots. The top turrets shoot nine-millimeter bullets while the bottom ones shoot shotgun shells. There are also proximity mines in the floor that explodes with spikes every time you go by them,” Lee says.

“If I didn’t have a spirit power, I’d be sweating,” I say.

“Time to shine, superstar,” Lee says.

“How do you think I should go about this?” I ask.

“Well, the turrets respond to the sensors built into them, so why not form a water ball in front of each turret and make them fire at each other,” Lee suggests.

“Dude, you are a genius.”

“I try.”
Listening to my boy, I do just that. The turrets start going crazy on each other until they are all destroyed. I have a water ball floating in front of me, so the spiked proximity mines shoot before I come sprinting past them. I’m at the last heavy duty, very stylized door to the tiger cub’s den now.

“Aye man, we should get some doors like this at our next crib. But with way better security,” I joke.

Lee laughs. “Yeah, man. For sure. Six minutes and forty-eight seconds.”

The door opens up. I enter the room. There’s a caged door about half a meter away [about two feet]. Then I see it. The tiger cub comes walking around a big rock and glares at me.

“Dude, what the hell?” I exclaim.

“What man?” Lee asks.

“Lee we can’t take this thing. It’s not a tiger cub. I mean, it looks like a tiger cub, but it’s not,” I say, terrified. It has the shape of the tiger cub, but it’s hairless. It has ripples all over its body, no tail, one eye, sharp-bladed claws, and a circular mouth with sharp triangular teeth. It’s a demon. It’s a demon and it’s wearing a human cloak of a normal tiger.

The demon is growling at me.

“What are you talking about? I can see it through the cameras. It looks like a tiger cub to me,” he says.

“I ain’t doing this. I’m out,” I say as I leave the room.

“Dude, you know you can’t. The yakuza would never let this go,” he says.

I stop. I know he’s right. I’m just trying to not be in the same room as that thing.

“Look man, that cage backpack should be strong enough to contain whatever you are seeing.
Just surround it with water and throw in the cage-like we planned. If it gets too sketch, then drop that bitch and bang out,” he suggests.

I take a deep breath before saying, “Ok.” I’m still trembling. “Dude, when I get back, make sure I’m still me. I’m worried the demon might be able to fuck with my mind.”

“You got it, dude. Four minutes and one second.”

I turn around, put the backpack on the ground, and surround the demon with water. Lee unlocks the door. I get that thing in as quick as possible, shut the door, and lock it. I strap that bitch back on me.

The demon tiger cub slams itself against the cage and growls. I take a few deep breaths to calm myself.

“You can’t go the original route now. Too many guards that way,” Lee says.

“What about the roof? Can I get there through the elevator?” I ask.

“Hold up.” A few clicks later. “Yup. There are a few guards up there now. You should be able to sneak past them. You’ll be cutting it close, though.”

“Alright, see you in a few,” I say.

After getting to the roof, I jump off with my spirit energy running low. I can feel the SED creeping up.

“Times up, Kiego. Where’re you at?” asks Lee. I don’t respond. “Kiego, where are you at. Dude, we got to go. Kiego!”

“Chill man, I’m right behind you,” I say, scaring the shit out of Lee.

“How the hell . . . I hate it when you do that. Asshole,” he says.

I laugh before saying, “I’ll drive.” My mood
switches when I say, “And keep an eye on that fuck- ing thing. I’m not trying to have it sneak me.”

How the hell do I keep getting caught up in demon shit?

I text Lightning Keeper and let her know that the yakuza now have a demon in their possession. Though I doubt the yakuza realizes that.

05/02/2018 05:11 Osaka, Japan

“Yo Lee. Wake up man, it’s time to go,” I whisper to Lee. The day has come for us to bang out. The money from our last job has transferred and we are all set.

“It’s time already? I’m up, I’m up,” Lee says, still groggy.

“How the hell can you sleep in on today of all days, man?” I whisper.

“You wouldn’t want to wake either if you had three girls wanting pleasure you in a dream, bruh,” he says.

“Man, I had that in real life a few days ago. Let’s move it,” I whisper.

05/25/2018 13:30 Delhi, India

We managed to escape the crew. If they haven’t managed to find us yet, then we’re more than likely in the clear. Lee and I are lying low in a nice hotel in the city.

I’m hanging halfway off the balcony, just think- ing.

Lee comes up behind me and says, “You figure out our next move yet?”

“Not yet. Everything feels like the wrong move. I’m just trying to chill for a bit,” I say.

“I feel it,” Lee says.

“You still trying to stay with me? Even if I jump right back into some heavy shit?”
“Somebody’s gotta watch your back,” he says. We both laugh a little. “What’s up with all of the dates lately, man? Usually you’re a hit and quit it type a guy.”

“I don’t know, man. Trying something new. If I can get deep for second, I’ll admit that I feel . . . like I don’t know who I am anymore,” I say solemnly, looking out into the distance.

“Hmm. Sounds like nothing a good BJ couldn’t fix,” he says and then we start laughing.

“Yeah, maybe,” I say. “Speaking of which, I’m meeting Ayasha here soon. Then Jared later tonight. Ayasha’s a lawyer. Jared is studying abroad from the States for some type of fancy degree.”


“I’m not even thinking that far ahead. If I had to choose, then I would lean more towards Ayasha. That Indian booty is something else, boy, I tell ya,” I say with a grin.

*****

I’m having a late lunch with Ayasha at a fancy restaurant. She speaks English, thank Buddha, because that and Japanese are the only two languages I speak. She’s got nice long hair done in a single braid. She’s wearing this colorful embroidered dress [it’s called a salwar kameez]. She looks hot. Real hot. But right now, I’m not focused on what she is saying. I’m just spacing out.

I start thinking about what I am doing in life. Then I see a butterfly fly by. I watch as it lands on a chair. It slowly flaps its wings as it chills there. The thing starts to morph. The wings fall off. It grows bigger. Like big as a horse with fucking fungus coming
out of its body with poisonous-looking gas surrounding it. It looks at me and starts screeching.

“Kiego. Hey, where did you go?” Ayasha asks. “You’re drifting again.”


Ayasha gives me an annoyed-but-amused face before saying, “I said my parents keep asking whether or not you’re my boyfriend and every time I just shrug my shoulders.”

I love her accent. It’s hot. “Tell them we’re dating,” I say, taking a sip of my iced tea. “Really?” she says. “No,” I say, laughing. That was mean. “We talked about this. Why can’t we just have fun for now?”

“Because at the very least I want to be your main girl,” she says. “They’re already mad at me for not letting them set up an arranged marriage. You know that is highly unusual in India, right?”

I lean over the table, grab her face in my hands, and kiss her. “Okay,” I say as I get up and leave money on the table for the meal. “I’ll think about it.”

“Are you messing with me?” Ayasha asks. “Nope. I mean it this time. Catch you later.”

I disappear around the street corner.

*****

My eyes open to see Lee gagged and tied to a chair. I’m tied up too, but I’m not gagged. I feel woozy. I think I’ve been drugged. We’re out in an open field. Aki is standing behind Lee with a knife to his throat.
“Yo,” Aki says with a smile on his face. And then he slits Lee’s throat. It all happens so fast I don’t have time to react.

I grit my teeth and clench my fists so tight, dude, I could crush a rock to dust. “Why?” I ask. “You don’t even need us to steal shit.”

Aki kicks Lee’s body over. I can see the rest of the old crew is here and armed. Aki says, “We didn’t need him. He wasn’t that good of a hacker anyways. We already got a replacement for him. Now you on the other hand. We need you. As much I as hate to admit it, you steal shit in the most impossible circumstances and you sneak by people with such ease. I don’t know how you do it. You and Lee always had some secret plan to get shit done. I wish I was as good as you. Damn, man, I admire your work. Now, here’s what’s going to happen. You’re—”

I push out pressurized water in every direction around my hands so I can slip out of the rope ties. I get up and say, “You want to know how I did it?” I form water balls in my hands and say, “Like this!”

I blast each of them with a hit from my pressurized water. Shit. The shots only ring their bells a little. They’re still standing. Breaking out of those ropes took a lot more out of me than I’d thought. Or is it the drug in my system?

“What the— Did you guys see that?” asks Bunzo.

“He has to be using to be some kind of device. Fuck that magic trick. Quit being little bitches. Get him!” orders Aki.

This is going to be tough without my weapons and drained spirit power. Giichi and Fujio are wearing brass knuckles. Bunzo and Bakin don’t have any weapons. Heizo and Aki have knives on them.
Bunzo and Bakin come rushing me first. I throw the chair at them and sprint left towards Giichi and Heizo. Heizo tries slicing me. I dodge, get behind him; and fill his lungs, nose, and mouth with water so he drowns.

Giichi gets me with a blow to the ribs and the face. That makes me stumble backwards. He grabs Heizo’s knife. Giichi comes at me again, but I trip him with my water and he falls on his own knife, stabbing himself in the gut. I turn his body over and pull out the knife. Blood gushes out.

Bakin tries to kick me, but I dodge and stab him in the left calf. Aki and Fujio run to one of the three cars. Bunzo starts fighting me one on one. I’m not weak, but I’m definitely not strong enough to take a hit from Bunzo. Good thing I’m quick. I dodge his attacks and get a few slashes in. I see Bakin limping my way. Aki and Fujio come back and start firing at me with handguns.

I stab Bunzo in the heart and make him my shield. I grab Fujio’s gun with my water, but I can’t grab Aki’s. The handgun is in my right hand and the knife is in my left. I pop Bakin. I start shooting at Fujio and Aki. They both dodge opposite ways. I shoot a few shots at Fujio, killing him.

Like, what’s the word? Milliseconds? Milliseconds later, Aki fires more shots at me. I throw some water up to shield me and dodge left. I try firing at him as I’m dodging, but I miss him. I get up and both me and Aki fire at the same time, only to realize that we’re both out of ammo. We toss our guns to the side and both walk to a part of the field that has fewer dead bodies. My knife is still in my left hand. He pulls his knife out.

“Come on man. Let’s just call it quits and go
our separate ways,” suggests Aki.

“Are you fucking serious? You killed Lee! The only way this ends is with your blood soaking this grass. No forgiveness,” I say. My damn left eye is starting to swell from when Giichi hit me, making it harder to see. We start circling the area, our knives ready to cut the other down.

“Aye man, don’t put this on me. You two were the ones that left. We were brothers! FUCK-ING BROTHERS! And then you just left on us?” Aki shouts.

“Because me and Lee knew damn well you guys weren’t trying to leave that life. And you were starting to get bloodthirsty,” I say.

“Bullshit,” he says.

“Nah. Real shit,” I say.

“That still doesn’t change the fact that you left your fam. You don’t abandon family. You can’t quit a family. You said that,” he says aggressively, pointing his knife at me.

I say nothing. He’s right.

“I still remember when you came to that shit-ty orphanage and recruited us; best day of my life. I looked up to you. I tried so hard to be like you,” he says as he tries holding back tears, but some still come through. “Why didn’t you come talk to your brothers? We could have talked you out of leaving.”

“No. You couldn’t,” I say right before lunging at him to attack. We go at each other with our knives. I’d forgotten how good he’d gotten.

Aki swings his knife at me. I block it with my own knife and kick with my left leg. He blocks the kick and kicks back at me with his right on my blind spot. I jump back to get a little distance. I lunge at him and we start going at it with our knives again.
After a few seconds, I manage to knock his knife out of his hand. Aki grabs me to tackle me to the ground. I stab him in the back. He punches me in the face and bites my left forearm. That makes me let go of the knife. I cover my face to protect myself from his barrage of punches.

He tries to reach for the knife in his back, but I wrap my legs around him, then reach up and put him in a chokehold. He manages to grab the knife. He pulls it out and starts stabbing my arm. I kick him off me.

Aki looks down at me with the knife in his hand. I’m still on the ground. He starts to lunge at me again, letting out a battle cry, but I stop him by ignore SED and force the last bit of my spirit energy to surround his head in a ball of water.

Aki drops the knife and frantically tries to get rid of the water with his hands. I hold out my hand to focus my hold on the water prison around his head. Aki eventually falls to his knees and then flat on his face, motionless. I let go of the water prison around his head. I grab the knife he dropped and stab him in the head—just in case.

I sit there for a second to catch my breath. I’m trying really hard to block out what just happened.

I search Aki’s pockets for the car keys. I force my body over to and into the car and drive off.

It shouldn’t have ended like this.

06/01/2018 15:55 Delhi, India

Days pass. I’m still in India. When I got back to the hotel I found out they’d killed Lee’s alligator snapping turtle, Lucy. Just another tie that’s been cut. Speaking of which, I cut ties with Jared and Ayasha too, in such an asshole way. I told them both they weren’t and never would be good enough to tie me
down. I also said that I’ve never wanted nor will I ever want to be in a relationship. Then I insulted them, pointing out their insecurities, getting personal. I’m definitely an asshole. Anyways, it should keep them from asking questions.

I’m sitting on a bench in a park. Still, I can’t think of what to do next. That’s when I hear a man walk up behind me. My left hand goes to my knife and my right hand is on my gun. Both weapons are concealed.

“Damn. You already know I’m behind you, huh?” says the man in Japanese. He walks around to face me. He’s a tall, smooth-looking dark-skinned black man with a French accent. “How’s it hanging? My hunter name is Repulse. You can take your hands off your weapons. I’m not here for a fight.”

“I’m not so sure that’s true,” I say.

“You should thank me. There was a demon on its way here to kill you. No worries. I killed it. But I’m not here for thanks.”

“Are you with Dweal?” I ask, annoyed.

Repulse says, “That I am. But I’m not here to recruit you. I’m here to hire you.”
Chapter 5: Wishing Star
Narrator: Naomi Yahee

Naomi Yahee: Native American female, thin, yellow-eyed contacts, and has long hair. Twenty-one years old.

07/17/2018  16:30  Columbus, Ohio

“Nya. Nya! Nya, Nya, Nya!” I say to Nya as we walk down the halls of the Technology Division building at Dweal HQ.

“Leave me alone, Naomi,” she says.

“You haven’t even heard what I have to say yet!” I say, cheerily.

“I know what you want to say, and you also know the answer is no,” she says.

“Let me join your team,” I say.

“No. I will punch you if you keep asking.”

“No, you won’t. You love me too much.” She punches me in the arm. “Ow! I didn’t even ask again.”

“You doubted my resolve,” she says evenly.

“Jerk,” I mutter. “What do I got to do to get you to let me join you in the Fighting Division?”

Nya meets someone from the Technology Division and hands that person an envelope. Now we’re heading out towards the exit.

“You can join me when you can beat me,” Nya says.

“Like in a game of Uno?” I ask.

Nya laughs. “In a fight.”

“Can I get a realistic goal, please? That’s impossible. There’s only a handful of people who can beat you. Ah!” I say speaking fast. Well, faster than I normally do. I tend to speak extra fast when I’m
SUPER excited or SUPER mad.

We’re outside now. The Great Tree is shining bright and beautiful as usual. Tom Oak walks up beside Nya.

“There you are, sensei. I’ve been looking for you for a while now,” Tom says. “When are we—”

He stops when he looks at me. Or, should I say, stares at me. I can’t read his expression. I have trouble interacting with new people. Actually, I have trouble interacting with people, period. He must know about my past and hates me like everyone else.

“Is this the sister you always talk about?” he finally says.

“So you always talk about me, huh?” Well, that’s what I would say if Tom wasn’t here.

“You met her already. Remember? The night at the library. Her head was resting in your lap and you were petting her head as she slept?” Nya says, amused.

“Oh yea. That was adorable,” Tom says. “Didn’t recognize you without the mask.”

Sounds romantic, but gross since it was with him. That being said, I hope he doesn’t hate me. He probably hates me.

“Sounds creepy,” I mutter.

“Aye, I was just following your scary sister’s orders,” he says defensively.

“Whatever. Hey—” I look around. “She’s gone. I hate it when she does that. Rawr! I was this close to getting her to cave.”

“Yea, she hasn’t taught me that one yet,” Tom says.

“She’s probably taught you more than she’ll ever teach me,” I mutter. It’s sad but, true. All because of some stupid promise she’d made with our
parents that could easily be interpreted in another way if you ask me.

“Why? If I had an older sibling like her she wouldn’t have a choice but to teach me,” he says.

“Yea. That’s what you’d think being born into a demon hunting tribe,” I say. “I don’t feel like being around you anymore. I don’t like you. I’m going back to work.”

“Wow, that’s harsh,” Tom says, laughing. “You were way more chill the night we met.”

Yeah. I know.

“I need to talk to you, though. I promise it’s for work.”

I give an overexaggerated sigh before saying, “What?”

My reaction amuses him too! I’m having the opposite effect on this guy than I should.

“I want a custom long sword. Something real sweet looking. Something as BA as me, ya feel me?”

He’s also cocky.

I try to hold back my excitement. I love making weapons for people. Contain your excitement, Naomi.


Nice, Naomi. You failed. He probably didn’t get any of that.

“I want some type of lion design on it. I’m starting to like cats now. Especially big cats. Make it silver but go ahead and throw some red on there
since it’s in my name. I control fire. I’m a fire boy. You can freestyle as long as you put the things I want in there. My favorite animal is a wolf. Yes? It’s not my culture, but if you’re okay with it then sure. Nice movie reference. My spirit animal is probably Metapod,” he replies.

“Wow, you got all that? Most people can’t understand me when I talk fast,” I say after grabbing ahold of both his arms.

“Yea. Your mood changes drastically, you know that right?” Tom says, amused.

I let go of him immediately. “No, it doesn’t,” I say a little embarrassed. “There’s a certain part I want you to buy. It’s pretty pricey so you’ll need to save up for it. It’s about one hundred fifty.”

“That ain’t nothing. I got that.”

“Thousand.”

“Whoa, sweet Jeebus. I don’t got that kind of coin. That’s more than I make in a year,” Tom says.

“I told you,” I say, laughing. “But since I really want to make this weapon, just for the fun of it I will help you. Veda will probably have another shipment in a month or two. I’ll send you the address. Go there around then. Ask him to do me a favor. Tell him he owes me. Make sure you say my whole name: Naomi Yahee.”

“Nice. Does that make us friends?” he asks.

I wish.

“Nope,” I say heartlessly.

Tom laughs before saying, “You’ll come around.”

“I won’t,” I say as I leave.

*****

The workspace I have is cramped and far away from people. They have me doing work I’m over-
qualified to be doing. I do minor repairs on weapons and tech. I’m only a two-star deer so it makes some sense. Usually though, the associates do this kind of thing.

With my skills and experience I should be ranked higher. That’s not the case though since it’s me we’re talking about. There’s still residual animosity towards me at Dweal for what I did.

Cali Kal bursts in my room as I work on the design for Tom’s sword. Kal is a black female with green hair and her rank in the Technology Division is a one-star wolf.

“Hey Kal. What can I do for ya?” I say super cheery.

Kal has a cart with laptops and a phone on it. “You need to finish these today,” she says with an attitude.

“Sure thing Kal. What’s wrong with them?” I say keeping my super cheery tone.

“You’re in the Technology Division. Figure it out,” she snaps before leaving.

“Yes ma’am. I got it,” I say.

Cali Kal normally is the one who brings me my assignments—along with her attitude.

I grab the first thing on top which is the cell-phone. It looks like it might just be a cracked screen. That’s easy enough to replace. It will only take about five minutes. I turn on some music while I work. The xx is playing. I turn the candle warmers in my office on, because we stay fresh around here.

The screen is fixed and now I got the phone hooked up to my super-fast, custom-made, ultra-special computer that I personally built to run diagnostic tests on the phone just to be sure everything is on the up and up. I really don’t want to hear somebody
whining about how their stuff isn’t fixed even though I was never told what was wrong with it in the first place.

I pop two Fruitburst candy pieces in my mouth. The strawberry and lemon flavors are my favorites and I love to eat both at the same time. Fruitburst easily make my day.

“Oh look. It’s done. What the—” I say out loud. My program is telling me that this phone has detected an unauthorized program installed on it. Normally I report it immediately to my superior, which is Cali Kal, but first I want to have a little look-see. I switch my computer screen to the phone’s screen on my monitor.

“Project Z,” is what the program is named. “Open,” I say after clicking it. It’s asking for a username and password.

I hit the “Initiate hack” button. It takes about six minutes to crack it. In the meantime, I throw two more strawberry and lemon Fruitburst in my mouth.

Once it opens I see that there are a bunch of names in the left column. They’re probably code names. There are three names that I recognize on this list: Veda Hertzstrum, Vendraya Hertzstrum, and Tom Oak. What’s going on. What is this?

Next to the column is a mission statement: Locate the missing three test subjects.

There is some type of text app. I click it open. There is only one string of messages available. I click it. The first thing I notice is a pic of Tom and the Dweal hunter who owns this phone looking chummy. The message before the pic says “From S.” Deliver the package to Tom. Make sure no one else is around.

The phone’s owner had replied with another
pic of Tom and says, “This guy, right?”
“You didn’t want to look at my nudes first?” says a voice behind me.
I turn around immediately with my hand out, ready to shoot my lightning. I only have control over my lightning in my legs below the knee. I work a thin line up my body from my legs all the way to my wrist so I can shoot the lightning from my hands. I hate using my powers like this. I have way less control than when I use my lightning arrows.
He’s holding a gun in one hand and a small briefcase in the other. The man pointing a gun at me is the owner of the phone, Gregory Nikvitch. His demon hunter name is Silent Foot. He is white with light blue hair and eyes and he’s taller than me. His spirit power is to eliminate all sound that his body creates. His power is perfect for the division he is in, which is the Intelligence Division. His rank is a three-star deer and he’s an L2. I looked up all of this on his phone earlier.

Silent Foot drops his gun before saying, “I didn’t have time to get the good stuff. It takes a second before it kicks in.”

I am confused for a moment until I realize my body is feeling drowsy. I see an empty syringe on the floor. He must of have got me with some type of knockout drug. How did I not feel that? I slowly fall to the ground.

“I was going to kill you, but I know my boss would love a new human test subject with a spirit power. And you’re a Yahee, which makes it all the better,” he says.

It’s hard for me to keep my eyes open. No!
“Nya,” I whimper. Come on Naomi. What would
Nya do? She’d fight the drugs.

“Ahh!” I yell as I let the electricity flow wildly throughout my body to keep me awake. It’s working. I slowly rise to my feet.

“No way! That was a strong knock-out drug. It looks like you’re still that same monster you were all those years ago. The Yellow Demon has awakened,” Silent Foot says. That enrages me.

[Naomi doesn’t notice this man’s fear of her right now. He knows exactly how destructively powerful she is.]

“Shut up!” I yell. I shoot a powerful lightning strike at Silent Foot. He barely dodges.

“Crazy bitch. You got the devil’s luck,” he says before breaking an orange test tube on the floor. It creates a portal that he hops through with his small briefcase still in hand. Without thinking about it, I chase after the potential traitor, grabbing my bow and quiver before I hop through.

The portal drops me off in a warehouse filled with crates and boxes on racks. I spot Silent Foot. He’s about eighteen meters away [about twenty yards]. I’m still only a decent shot with normal arrows; a little worse when I use my lightning as arrows. I shoot three normal arrows at him. Only one of them grazes him—balls! He notices me and disappears behind the racks. Not good. Not good at all. Using his spirit power, he can either getaway or surprise attack me from anywhere.

I search for him. I’ve got a lightning arrow drawn on my compound bow and I’m ready for a fight. A small explosion goes off in the distance. I run to it. It’s only some boxes that exploded. Then I hear another explosion a little way behind me. I turn and start running towards it.
A knife kisses me in the leg, making me fall. I rapidly turn my body around with my bow drawn. There’s no one in sight. I get up.

The sound of bears roaring suddenly goes off to the right of me. The sound of coyotes howling to my left, the sound of deers grunting in front of me, and the sound of mountain lions roaring behind me. I felt the terror go up my spine. Demon hunter or not, a charging bear is still scary.

I calm down when I realize how ridiculous it would be for all of those animals to be in the warehouse. He must be using some kind of sound device, using distracting sounds to creep up on the enemy; smart. It goes to show that it doesn’t depend on how strong the spirit power is. It depends on the creativity of the user using the spirit power.

Good thing I’m smart too. I start running with a lightning arrow ready. Daggers come flying at me from multiple directions. I avoid the daggers and pay attention to where they are coming from. A few of them hit me in the arms and legs. I’m lucky they don’t hit a vital organ. I shoot back a couple of arrows in the direction of where the daggers are being thrown from.

One of my lightning arrows hits a barrel filled with flammable liquid and explodes. Wait are those . . . they are. These boxes have the Dweal Technology Division symbol on them. Is this a Dweal warehouse? Luckily nothing had caught fire after the explosion. Double lucky that the explosion destroyed the device making the bear sounds.

Silent Foot attacks with one dagger as I turn around. I deflect it at the last minute with a lightning strike from my hand. The dagger goes flying. Silent Foot jumps back, holding his wrist. I load my bow
with a lightning arrow and start shooting. He some-
how dodges some of the shots and starts throwing
daggers back. When he gets down to his last dagger, 
he charges. He throws a few flash bombs at me.

“Ah!” I yell while being blinded. I drop my bow 
and start shooting lightning from my hands in every 
direction.

A dagger pierces my right hand. I scream 
again, but I have ahold of him now and I’m not let-
ting him go. Instead I jab him with an open-palmed 
lightning strike and yell as I do it. He’s still moving, so 
I jab two more times. Silent Foot’s body goes limp. I 
hear him fall to the ground. The white light starts to 
fade and my vision returns to normal. I wipe the tears 
from my face with my left hand.

I’m ABSOLUTELY dreading taking this dagger 
out of my right hand. But I also don’t want to bleed 
out.

“Ok. You can do this Naomi. You are a Yahee,” 
I say. I take deep breath. “Ok. One, two— Ah, son-of-
a-bitch-eating-bullfrog!” I say after pulling the dagger 
out.

I cut a piece of cloth of Silent Foot’s shirt and 
wrap my right hand with it. I stare at him for a mo-
ment.

I didn’t want to kill him, but it was either him 
or me.

The exit is some steps away. When I get out-
side, I see that I’m in the city. The GPS on my phone 
says I’m in Utah.

“She’s going to be maaaad,” I say smiling at 
the thought. I dial her number.

“Hello,” she answers.

“Nya, Nya, Nya!” I say loud and fast. “Don’t be 
mad. It wasn’t my fault. I was fixing his phone and
then he tried to attack. Then I was like, ‘Oh no.’ Then he drugged me and was like, ‘I’m going to experiment with your body.’ It sounded sexual to me, so I was like, ‘Ew, gross.’ Then we went through a portal and had a physical conversation that didn’t end to well for him.” I whisper, “He’s dead.”

I speak super-fast again. “And now I got a dagger going through my hand! Well, it’s not in my hand anymore, but now I’m bleeding!” I’m so happy my sister understands me whenever I talk fast (which is damn near all of the time). I have no chill.


“No! Nya, you need to come here alone. Red lemons,” I say, using a code phrase. She’ll know what it means. We say it whenever the subject has to do with something that requires immediate and personal attention.

“Ok. Sit tight. I know a doctor in Germany. She’s discreet,” she says before hanging up.

I feel a little at ease now. The loss of blood is starting to make me a little dizzy. I walk back inside where it’s cooler. When I get in there, I notice that Silent Foot, with the last bit of life he had within him, dragged his body across the aisle, leaving a bloody streak on the ground. He is gripping his small briefcase.

This man had tried so hard until the very end to complete his mission. What the hell was he fighting for? Why would he betray the tribe? Either way, he is for sure dead now.

I open the briefcase and I can’t believe what I’m seeing. There are two shiny objects inside. One is a purple crystal star about as big as my hand. The other is a yellow orb with the Dweal Technology Divi-
sion symbol inside it. It’s about the same size as the purple star.

“No way. This can’t be real,” I say aloud. I pick up the yellow orb with my left hand and the purple star with my right hand.

There’s also a note in the briefcase. It reads, “Use spirit energy.” There is a picture of the yellow orb on it.

I think about it for a second before saying, “Let’s see if curiosity kills this cat.”

I run my lightning up from my legs to my wrist. The lightning flows and the orb glows with it. Seconds later, the orb turns into little yellow balls of light that swirl around and then fly into me.

“That felt weird,” I remark.

Moments later the purple star liquifies and moves into my right hand through the wound as if it had a mind of its own. There’s a crazy amount of pain in my right hand. My makeshift bandage falls off, revealing a purple star now embedded on the top of my right hand where the wound had been. The pain dwindles to a light throbbing, but it’s still there. I try picking at the star like that will make it come off; it doesn’t.

“I’m pretty sure I know what these two are, but why the hell did the star fuse with my hand?” I say to myself.

I feel sleepy. I text Nya to hurry. I sit down and rest my eyes for a bit.

*****

I open my eyes to find myself in a hotel room. “Thank goodness. I didn’t know whether to amputate your hand or not,” Nya says.

“I’m super glad you didn’t. I kind of need this hand,” I say. “Man, it still hurts.” I rub my right hand.
“How did this happen?” she asks.
“After I got off the phone with you, I saw these orbs in the briefcase next to Silent Foot. It looked like a trap, but I was willing to roll the dice,” I say, smiling.

“Dummy,” Nya says.
“It’s fine . . . I think. Do you remember the story about the Wishing Star and the five orbs?” I ask.
“You know I do,” she responds.

Ok. Storytime! Long, long ago—way before there was internet and super cool science videos—there was a great spirit user, Kogu Rayseed. She was a beautiful Native American woman who had the spirit power to tame demons. She mainly only used her giant demon eagle. It was like as big as a tepee and it gave Kogu the power to manipulate earth. Anywho, she and the Rayseed tribe sensed that there was a great war coming between demons and humans, so she gathered the two neighboring tribes, Seirlock and Yahee, and created Dweal. The Rayseed psychic elder told her to go across the world to gather four powerful spirit users. She did.

Number one was Zareb, from Africa. He was the master of water. Number two was Geneva, from France. She was the master of air. Number three was Jun, from China. He was the master of darkness. And number four was Iris, from mother Russia. She was the master of light. On Kogu’s travels, she also met the world’s strongest spirit user in recorded supernatural history. He was a Japanese man named Sanjuro and his spirit power was magic . . . at least, that’s the simplest way to describe it.

More on magic later.

The myth says that Sanjuro created the Wishing Star and the five orbs to help the five great spirit
users previously mentioned. These users also became the first chiefs of Dweal by the way. The orbs allowed the user to convert one weapon into spirit energy and store it within their body. The user doesn’t even need to be a spirit user to make the orb work. The orb converts weapons into spiritual data and stores it into the user’s body’s hard drive. That’s the easiest way I can describe it.

I wish I could make something as cool as this! Augh! I’m super jelly. I’m getting off track. Sorry. I didn’t take my meds today. Oops.

Oh yea, so nobody knows what the Wishing Star does. Everybody just assumes it grants wishes. You know . . . because of the name.

I know, I know. That was such a huge information dump. Just remember that Kogu is one of the five founders of the Dweal tribe and Sanjuro created the five orbs and the Wishing Star.

The creation of the orbs and the Wishing Star is viewed as a myth though. This is because, after the original owners of the orbs died, the orbs and the Wishing Star just disappeared without a trace.

“The legend is true Nya. It wasn’t a myth. Here. Give me my bow and quiver.” I sit up. Once the bow and quiver are in my hands I say, “Save.”

The bow turns into yellow light and then goes inside of me like the orb did. “See!”

I go back and forth between summoning my bow and then letting it go back into my body.

“How did you know how to do that?” Nya asks.

“I don’t know. I just know. You know? I think the orb just implanted the knowledge in my head. Same with the Wishing Star,” I say.

“Did it tell you we have to cut it out of your hand?” she says joking.
“No! It just tells me I’m supposed to keep it safe,” I say.
“That’s it?”
“That’s it,” I say. I stop summoning and returning my bow. “Nya, I have some legendary shit within me.”

I jump up and down on the bed like a kid. I’m super excited. I stop when I realize something. “Hey. If I have legendary items inside me then that automatically makes me legendary, right? Nya! I. Am. A. Legend! Will Smith ain’t got nothing on me. I need to change my name now. Something that sounds more legendary.”

“As long as it doesn’t harm you then I guess it’s ok. I still vote that we cut it out. There’s no telling what it will do to you,” Nya says.
“No.”
“Fine. I still don’t understand something, though. Why did Silent Foot try to kill you?”

I stop bouncing up and down on the bed to sit down, pretzel style. “I was fixing his phone and saw a text and pictures about delivering a package to Tom. They were all under a hidden folder titled Project Z. Also, there’s a list of names. I didn’t recognize most of them, but three names stood out: Tom Oak, Veda Hertzstrum, and Vendraya Hertzstrum.”

“No. I trained all of them. They’re all good people. Although Tom and Vendraya can be a bit . . . difficult at times. No, we need to figure out where it came from. Also, we need to figure out who Silent Foot was working for—what is their objective? What is his connection to my trainees?” Nya says.

“Nya. I like that guy and he seems nice, but Tom—and the other two—might be some type of evil spy with murderous intent. We have to watch out for
them.”

“I don’t think that they are, but then again, I was betrayed before,” Nya says. There’s a brief pause. I don’t know what I just reminded her of, but the memory seems painful. She tries to hide it from me.

Nya breaks the silence by saying, “I’ll take care of the body. Keep this between us. We’ll launch our own investigation. We don’t know who we can trust. Don’t even tell anyone from the Yahee clan. We will personally purify our tribe—even if that means taking out Veda, Vendraya, and Tom.”
Chapter 6: The Color Of A Soul  
Narrator: Veda Hertzstrum

Veda Hertzstrum: Half-Indian, half-German male. Thin. Shaggy black hair. Twenty years old.

I can see the color of your soul! That sounds ominous, right? Do not worry. I am a peaceful Muslim man. What does this mean? Seeing the color of an individual’s soul? It just means I can tell what type of person you are. My sister can do this too. Souls are usually varying levels of gray. The lighter the gray the more pure of heart you are. Unfortunately, I cannot see my own soul.

What is the color of my soul? What is the color or yours?

09/26/2018  16:38   New Delhi, Delhi, India

“With this we should be able to make our business go international. It’s time to expand Wolfwood. We have the resources, we have the money, and we have the talent. Our phones can compete with the big boys. This is our focus this year. Let’s make it happen people. This meeting is concluded. Dismissed. Oh, and great job everyone,” I say addressing my staff in Hindi. We’re all in the office conference room.

I’m wearing an expensive white suit with a gold trim, accompanied by a matching bowtie. Not enough people wear bowties. They’re so classy. I left the suit jacket in my office. I’m just sporting the vest.

“Stacey, darling,” I say.

“Yes, Mr. Hertzstrum?” she answers in Hindi. Stacey Wiltz is my assistant. She’s in her early twenties, she’s Caucasian, and was born in England. She started as an intern, but she has an impeccable work
“Send in the second committee please.”
“Yes, Mr. Hertzstrum.”
A magenta portal opens up inside the conference room and six of my employees step out.
“How are we doing people?” I ask.
In addition to making and selling the latest and greatest cellphones, we also sell demon hunting equipment. Whether it be guns, knives, traps, armor, etcetera, we have it all. I’m working on making us the biggest distributor of demon hunting equipment. We’re still small time for now, unfortunately. Dweal and Sacred Sword both manufacture their own equipment, so they don’t need my company. However, they do come to us from time to time. Mostly for small items or incredibly rare items like the bones of a goll snatch. The rest of our customers are independent demon hunters and small demon hunting organizations.

We finish up the meeting and then they leave through the portal. We can’t have the rest of the normal employees finding out about the supernatural side of the business now, can we? Stacey knows of course.

“Keep them coming Stacey Wiltz,” I say after opening the door.
“Yes sir,” she replies.
Another magenta portal opens up. Just one person steps out. It’s an independent demon hunter from Texas—white male, early forties, a beard, and he’s wearing a cowboy hat. His demon hunter name is Rustic Snake.

Rustic Snake has a normal human gray soul.
“Woo wee. Portals amaze me every single time, no matter how old I get,” he says loudly, speaking in
English with a Texas accent.

“Greetings, sir,” I say in English. I use a British accent; I can do an American accent, but I prefer the more formal British tone.

“Oh y’all speak English here too? Thank the lord. I thought we might need a translator for a second,” Rustic Snake says.

“Not all sir. We speak all languages here,” I say.

“This place fancy. Do ya got the goods?” he asks.

“Yes, sir. Stacey?” I say after pressing the intercom button.

Stacey wheels in the table with twenty pressure-triggered traps and four different high-class semi-automatic AD rifles. She also hands me a beverage in a cold perspiring glass.

“Thank you, Stacey. I love club sodas. It helps me stay healthy. Would you like one, Rustic Snake?” I ask.

“No thank you, sir. That ain’t my kinda drink. I would like a beer, but once I start drinking I can’t be stopped.” He chuckles. “It’s better if I don’t. Trust me.”

“Very well then. One moment. Stacey is that a new diamond necklace I see?” I ask her.

Rustic Snake looks at the necklace too.

“Yes, sir. My boyfriend bought it for me,” Stacey replies.

“It is nice would not you agree?” I ask Rustic.

“I’m a man so I wouldn’t know too much about that, but it does look nice, I reckon,” he says.

“You’re too kind. Thank you,” Stacey says before leaving.

“The twenty traps are three hundred each. The AD rifles seven thousand each. In total, thirty-four
thousand US dollars. Somebody is a big spender,” I say smiling.

“Oh, you know what they say. Gotta spend money to make money,” Rustic Snake says. “Plus, I reckon I can get that price to drop down some.”

“Now this is interesting. That must mean you have something of great value in your possession. Please share with the rest of the class,” I say. “Do you have the heart of a werewolf? I do need a few of those.”

“Fresh out of those. One moment there partner,” he says. Rustic Snake checks his flip phone. Who has a flip phone in this day and age? Especially since it seems like he can afford a smartphone.

Based on his phone and his continual amazement of the portals, I assume that this man is probably not familiar with technology and or he prefers the simpler things in life. He carries the faint scent of farm animals, but it is covered by a nice masculine aroma. He’s chubby but muscular. I’m guessing he is a heavy meat eater. Undoubtedly, he is a carnivore.

He has small scars everywhere. I take specific notice of the scars on his knuckles. The scars, coupled with the fact that he has calloused hands, reinforces my theory that he is a brawler and experienced in demon hunting. Some of those scars are from a specific demon. However, I already know that he is an experienced hunter, because of the products this man is buying.

He carries himself like a businessman, which means he has done a deal or two before. He is intelligent, probably at least has a college dropout level of education. He wears a wedding ring on a chain around his neck. I’m guessing she died—probably
killed by a demon. Going off the child-like Band-Aid on his right arm, he probably has children.

“Could I interest you in a new cellphone? We sell top of the line devices here,” I boast.

“Oh, no need to bother with all that. My daughters seem to think these retro babies are coming back into style. It does have a certain comfortable . . . what’s the word I’m looking for?”

“Aesthetic?” I help.

“Yeah, yeah, that’s it. All right. Here’s what I got. I got thirty trader corpses, four vasq, and one general trader. Now let me tell ye what. It took like six of my good buddies and me to get that sum’bitch down,” he says with a chuckle. “That thing had to be close to a level four.”

“What color is the skin of the traders?” I ask.

“Dark green,” he says proudly. The darker the green skin of a trader the stronger it is.

“Nice mate. Is the general trader the same color as well?”

“You betcha,” he says.

“You got yourself a nice haul there. Alright. For thirty traders with dark green skin, I’ll hand you $9,100 a piece, which totals to $273,000. For the four vasq, I’ll hand you $9,000 a piece, which totals to $36,000. Lastly, for the dark green general trader, I’ll give you $40,500,” I say.

“Now hold on there. The vasq are worth a bit more than that,” Rustic Snake protests.

“And I agree with you. However, I already have a surplus of vasq bodies and body parts. That being said, if I were going to purchase any more I would only accept if it were at a discounted price. You don’t have to sell them to me,” I say calmly.

He considers the offer for a moment. He folds
his arms and taps his lips with a finger while he ponders. "$10,000," he finally says. "$10,000 more and I’ll agree."

Time to play. I live for this. It is true what I said. I do have surplus of vasq corpses. However, I would still be willing to pay an additional $15,000. I’m getting this deal.

"$7,000," I say.
"$8,000," he says.
"$5,500."
"$6,500."
"$5,500."

Rustic Snake debates whether or not to take the deal before saying, "Deal."

"Brilliant. The final total will be $355,000. I will wire you the money once the product arrives. Oh, before you go, what would you say to becoming one of my personal suppliers? You would have benefits and get paid more," I offer.

"Thank you kindly, sir, but me and my guys prefer to stay independent," Rustic Snake says.
I knew he would say that. Watch this.
"Would you care to play a game?" I ask.
"That depends on the game," he replies.
"I do not have a name for this game, but it goes like this," I say as I grab a deck of cards from my desk. I pick three cards out and lay them on the desk.

"Where is that spade? Spades, spades, spades. Ah! There it is."
I show him all four of the queen cards and hand it to him.

"You shuffle them up, place them face down, in a line, and I guess each card, one at a time. I have to guess two out of three of them right in order to win.
If you win, you get one hundred thousand US dollars. If I win, your team has to come work for me,” I say.
   “I don’t know about that one partner,” Rustic Snake says.
   “How about I sweeten the deal by rewarding you with an extra one hundred thousand? That’s a one hundred percent increase on our previous deal.”
As anticipated, he hesitates. He examines the cards to make sure there’s no way to identify them faced down. Once he’s done studying, he says, “Ok. What the hell. I’ll play your game sir.”
He starts shuffling.
“You can turn around and shuffle them if you think that will help,” I say.
He takes my suggestion and turns to shuffle. When he turns back, Rustic Snake places them on the desk one at a time, moving from his left to his right. “Are you ready?” I ask. “Go for it.” “Alright my first guess is . . . ” I say, pretending not to know the order. I point to the card farthest to his right and say, “Queen Of Clubs.” “Are you sure?” he asks. “Always,” I say.
He sighs as he flips over the card. I was right. “Ooh, too bad mate. Keep going? The card next to it is . . . ” Should I get them all right or get one wrong intentionally? I decide to miss this one. “The next card is the Queen Of Hearts?” Rustic Snake flips it gleefully. “I might just get that money after all partner,” he says. The card is the Queen Of Diamonds.
“Maybe. Do not be cross with me if I win,” I say. Time to close this deal. “The one on the other end is the Queen Of Spades.”
“God bless it!” He shakes his head in acknowledgment and acceptance as he flips the Queen Of Spades card over. “God bless it,” he says again.

“I told you not to be cross,” I chuckle.

“A man has to accept his defeats. A loss is a loss,” Rustic Snake says as he extends his hand for a handshake.

We firmly shake each other’s hand.

“You knew somehow, didn’t you? You were too sure of yourself. How did you do it?” Rustic Snake asks.

“I did sir. And without cheating, I might add. I’ll only tell you if you let me take five thousand off your and your crew’s salary,” I negotiate.

“Nice try partner. My father taught me to know when to walk away.” He smiles.

“Okay. I respect that. Sounds like you had a smart old man.”

“Yes, sir. He was a smart manly man.”

Here is how I did it. It is real simple. I implanted the order of the cards in his head way before we even started the game. I use keywords throughout the meeting like club soda, diamond necklace, and a werewolf heart. Spades was the last one I had said. Since I can tell he is right-handed, I assumed he would lay the cards down in the reverse order of what I’d said, starting from the left.

I would know for sure what order he’d used depending on what the end cards were. There was a small possibility that he would not have remembered the order of the second and third keyword I had said, however that does not matter since I know the two end cards. Brilliantly simple.

“If you are worried you will not get paid appropriately, do not. You will. I get all of my supplies from
independent sellers. I wanted some suppliers of my own,” I admit.

“What about the distance? Won’t it be costly to keep shipping demon corpses from the US to India?” he asks.

“Good question. That has been thought through. I ship my phones to the US. They can hitch a ride on the way back,” I say.

I am standing at the giant window reading the Qur’an. I pause for a moment to look out at the scenery. It is a beautiful view.

Stacey knocks on my door twice before coming in. “Mr. Hertzstrum, your last appointment is here.”

“Thank you. You can go home for the day. Thank you for staying over tonight,” I say.

“Are you sure, sir? It isn’t any trouble at all.”

“Yeah. I can take it from here. Please be sure to take care of all the necessary preparations tomorrow if it comes to that.”

Stacey has a worried look on her face. “Everything will be fine. Go,” I try to convince her.

She leaves and then a man enters the room. I am busy looking at emails on my phone when he comes in.

“‘Sup. Are you Veda?” the man asks in English. “Yes, I am,” I reply in English with a welcoming smile. “It is Tom, I presume?”

[Before entering the room Stacey draws designs on Tom’s body with what looks like petroleum jelly. It soaks into his skin immediately. She then gives Tom a box with an expensive-looking necklace in it. She tells him, “Veda has some special AD barriers surrounding his office. This will protect you inside the
barriers. Also give him this necklace for me as a gift please. He’s weird about accepting presents from me and I very much want to express my extreme gratitude for working here.”]

“Yup,” Tom says, looking around my office. “What exactly did you want my friend? Naomi was very brief.” I finally look up from my phone and really see him now. What is this?

Through my spirit power, I also have the ability to see one’s race: human, demon, or, angel. There is a thin ring that appears around the gray soul, and the color of the ring indicates what the race is. White is for angels—which I have never seen myself, gray is for humans, and demons have a black ring. The color of Tom’s soul is light gray, however his outer ring is half gray and half black. In all of my life, I have never seen such an occurrence.

“I still don’t really know. I’ve been racking my brain on that one. This is my first time customizing a weapon. My spirit power is fire so I just need something that would enhance my abilities, like a fire charm or something. Plus, Naomi wanted me to grab some special part. Hey, why are your hands glowing?” Tom asks.

“It is just my spirit power,” I say, regaining my composure. I had not realized I was in flight or flight mode. Stay calm, Veda. I ask, “Have you heard of the Blessed Ones? The people who have the power of the angels.”

“My sensei, Nya, briefly talked about that,” Tom says.

“Every so often the angels grant two newborns the spirit power that emulates angel spirit power. One baby is bequeathed the power of light and one is bequeathed the power of darkness. The light heals,
and darkness turns beings undead for a short period of time. Both can shoot plasma beams and heal themselves. I have the light, if you could not tell,” I explain.

“Spirit powers are so dope. I love hearing about other people’s spirit powers. I’m a bit of a spirit power nerd . . . and weapon nerd. I’m so happy I got a spirit power,” Tom says.

“Yes, they can be exciting . . . and also troublesome.”

“Oh wait! Didn’t Nya train you?”

“That she did. Me and my sister.”

“That’s so cool that we had the same sensei,”

Tom says.

“Yes. Anyway, we have plenty of those fire charms,” I say almost curtly. I head over to my desk, turned on the television, and from the laptop I bring up my catalogue on the television.

“So are there a lot of people like you? Merchants, I mean,” Tom asks.

“You must be new. Alright my little fawn, listen up. In short—yes, there are a decent number of us out there. I would say about eighty percent of the people who are wise to the supernatural world are part of demon hunting groups. Not everyone plays well together, so the independent hunters will sometimes go to independent merchants like me. Even the big boy organizations will come to buy and sell from Wolfwood,” I say, regaining my polite composure.

Tom nods and says, “Does Naomi normally get her stuff from you?”

I flip through the pages in the catalogue, still looking for the perfect part for him. “No, this is the first time she has contacted me. She’s a Yahee so I had to take the call. I am hoping she starts coming to
me for parts, which is why I am giving her a discount on this first shipment. What she ordered is already ready to go. This one”—I stop searching when I land on a maroon stone demon hand—“is for you. It is from a level two stone flame demon. It should give you a small boost with fire attacks and it is cheap. I will sell it to you for $310. Do we have a deal?”

“Umm, yea. Sure. Sounds good. I’m definitely not trying to drop stacks,” he says.

“Well it would be at least a thousand US dollars if it wasn’t for Naomi Yahee,” I say, amused.

“As long as I save, that’s what’s up.”

“Alright. Let us head down to the storage area and snatch it. I will have my people drive you to the airport,” I say.

“Cool. Hey, before I forget, I know this is kind of weird, but umm . . . my sensei said I should offer you a gift, so I got you a necklace. I don’t know man, she’s weird. She’ll beat my ass if I don’t give it to you,” he says before offering the box.

“Oh, you didn’t have to trouble yourself, but cheers mate,” I say, opening the box. I put on the necklace.

“Yo I’m still tripping over the fact that we were trained by the same sensei. That kind of makes us brothers in a way. Wait. If you were trained by her then why are you not a Dweal hunter?”

“Dweal expressed that they greatly wanted us, my sister and me, to join the tribe. They trained us with no strings attached, expecting that it would make us more inclined to join of our own volition. It did not. My sister and I have no desire to become hunters. Everyone expects us to fight. It is not like we asked the angels to choose us,” I say.

We get in the elevator. I pull out the key that
allows us to go to the secret floor that the normal staff don’t have access to. I pause for a moment to contemplate whether or not I am doing the right thing. I have calculated and prayed over this many of times.

Be steadfast in your resolve, Veda.
I will accept whatever divine judgment that comes my way.

“You ok, bro?” Tom asks.
“Just looking for the right key,” I say, smiling.

We get down to the floor and I lead him to the large storage trailer. I unlock it and say, “After you.”

Inside the trailer, there is a plethora of illuminated neon blue designs all over the interior walls.

“Dope aesthetic, bro. I could easily see me converting this into my apartment,” he says commenting on the neon designs.

“They are AD symbols that protect the cargo from random supernatural events. The part you’re looking for is located in the corner over in those crates,” I say.

“Alright.” Tom looks inside the crates and says, “There’s nothing in here.”

I close the door behind me and say, “Burning bridges.”

Tom’s body freezes up. He struggles to say, “Veda, what the—”

“I had to pay a wizard an exuberant sum of money to set this all up for me. The markings I had Stacey draw on your body will keep your body petrified for as long as I like.”

“For what?”

“You shall see momentarily. I set this storage container up so that you can see him too. I am truly sorry,” I say to Tom. Then I raise my voice and say,
“Enik, come out. I have a proposal.”
A monstrous shadow figure comes through the wall, floating. This is the demon spirit, Enik.
“You never call me, Veda. This should be good,” he says, rubbing his two hands together.
“What the hell kind of demon is that?” Tom asks.

“Enik, I want to make a contract. I offer you both Tom’s body and my own. In exchange, I want you to limit your killing to one person every year—and they have to be a felon. Do you accept my terms?”
“Oh, hell nah! I don’t agree. Say no, Mr. Demon. Say no,” Tom pleads.

“Intriguing. Now, which one of you do I want to take over? Decisions decisions. Oh, who am I kidding? Come here, Veda, my boy,” Enik says before entering Veda’s body.

As soon as he enters my body I say, “Golden fences.”

This verbal command allows Tom to regain control of his body. I fall to the ground as I fight Enik from taking control of my body. I wince in pain. It feels like getting punched by a UFC fighter over and over.

I lean against the wall. “Tom, I am sincerely sorry. This demon kills dozens and dozens of people each year just to mess with me. I have hired hunters to eliminate him, yet it doesn’t work. Especially when he is watching my every move. The only way I could think to send this demon back to hell was by sacrificing both of our bodies. But good news, my boy, you do not have to die now.” I pull out a key and toss it towards him. “In ten minutes, the storage trailer will explode. This magical key will let you out.”

Tom picks up the key with an intense look on
his face. He then says, “Hey, Veda, what’s the color of my soul?”

“What are you doing? Get of here!” I say.

“It took a second, but I finally remembered. You can see what I really am. So what color is my soul, Veda?”

I pause for a moment before answering, “Your soul is light gray, however the ring around your soul is half gray, half black. I was unaware that hybrids even existed.”

I groan, still fighting off Enik.

“If you knew what I was then why wouldn’t you just offer my body up instead of both of ours? You could have just let me be blown up. Half of me is evil. So, for all you know, you could have been doing the right thing. Logically speaking that would be the best play.”

“Yes, that would have indeed been the logical choice, however my decision was not based on logic. It was based on a feeling. I felt like I could trust you. At the very least, I felt you were someone who didn’t deserve to die. That was all.”

Tom takes a moment to take in what I said. He then sits on the ground and says, “Welp, we got about five minutes left. Looks like your gonna have to beat Enik by then. I have faith in you.”

“You are insufferable,” I say, annoyed and amused.

“There are worse things to be—like a demon,” Tom says as he repeatedly tosses the key in the air.

I am relieved that I won’t have to die alone. Yet, at the same too, I feel incredibly awful about letting this man—a man who I believe to be innocent—die. Think. Perhaps I can exorcise Enik myself.

I sit down in a meditation position. I let my
white light spirit power emanate from my body. Hopefully this works.

Seconds later, a thud hits the door.

“What was that?” Tom says as he jumps up, his hands are now engulfed in flames.

One. Two. Three beeps sound off before the sound of an explosion goes off. I think the lock was blown off.

A tall Indian behemoth of man comes charging in. Tom is about to blast the behemoth with fire when the behemoth man throws two grenades that release a gas. Tom collapses, clearly unable to move. The behemoth comes running towards me and grabs my arm. I feel Enik transfer from my body to his. The behemoth takes off running.

I grab Tom, kick the door shut, and move as fast as I can out of the storage trailer right before it explodes. A loud boom goes off, but it does not escape the interior of the AD trailer. I had the trailer designed to self-contain the explosion. I didn’t want anyone to needlessly get hurt because of me.

I heal Tom with the last bit of spirit power I have left. He sits up slowly and says, “Who the hell was that?”

“I am not sure. Enik probably had this guy on standby just in case he did not come out of the trailer in time. I think he used one of our paralysis grenades. He’s always one step ahead of me,” I say.

“Thanks, by the way,” Tom says.

“You are welcome. Also, you are an imbecile. You probably would have been blown up if it was not for that behemoth.”

“Nah. I’m not crazy. I would’ve left right before it exploded. I was just trying to give you some motivation. I didn’t want to watch you die. So, what’s the
next move?”

I sit down next to him and say, “Whenever Enik fully possesses someone, he has to remain in that body for a little while. Possession is a draining process. I do not recommend that you try it. It is the reason why I feel like I am about to pass out. I will need to track down that man.”

“We’ll need to, you mean. We made it through a life or death situation. Like it or not we’re brothers now, fam,” Tom says, holding out his fist.

This man is truly odd. He wants be friends with someone who had contemplated his death. Odd indeed. That being said, I can’t help getting caught up by his charisma.

“Okay. I accept,” I say before shaking his fist.

“We’ll work on that,” Tom says, amused. “You see, we have a connection now. Can you feel it. Can you, Veda?” he says in a peculiar yet amusing way.

Tom then says, “But seriously, though. You are the first person without any prior knowledge to accept me for who I am. For the other two people it took some time, but for you it was instant. Thank you for that. It means a lot to me. More than you could know.”

“I don’t think I could call myself a Muslim if I didn’t give you chance to let me down before harshly judging you. You are welcome, my friend,” I say.

An alarm goes off on my phone. I check it to see what the situation is.

“What’s going on, broseph?” Tom asks.

“Somebody has broken into the weapons room on the floor below us,” I say.
Chapter 7: Hotel Degíro
Narrator: Vendraya Hertzstrum

Vendraya Hertzstrum: German female. Thin. Short white hair. Twenty years old.

There’s a female grim reaper with wings and she has a scythe leaning against her body. There are words above her in German that read, “The only thing that is absolutely fair in this world is Death.” That’s a tattoo that is located on the left side of my neck. There’s a tattoo on my right arm of a vein coming from my wrist that leads to a series of hearts—like an actual drawing of a heart, not the lovey-dovey kind—that are spaced and connected by a tattoo of a vein. Each heart has a name in it.


All of these people mean something to me.

[Everyone speaks in German this chapter unless stated otherwise.]

09/15/2018 19:33 Bremen, Germany

Listen up. I’m not known to be especially chatty. I abhor talking. I prefer to stay quiet unless I need to speak. Which is why I cut out my own tongue. Don’t worry, I’m not crazy. If I wanted to, I could grow it back in an hour or so. I’d much rather not though. It gives me a valid excuse to not talk. Don’t be mad if I’m not super descriptive. Figure it out.

I’m a supernatural doctor with my own small practice. I heal people from demon attacks mostly.
Currently I’m operating on an independent demon hunter. He’s got a poisonous barbed horn stuck in his leg. Honestly, I’m surprised he managed to drive himself here without passing out.

“Hurry up! Damn. Damn, it hurts!” the hunter wails. “How long is this going to take?”

Whenever I do need to talk, I make preparations beforehand. For instance, in the operating room, I have a pad on the floor with buttons on it. The pad is connected to the computer, which is connected to the speakers. Each button has a different phrase and I have memorized the location of each of the buttons. The lengths I will go to in order to not talk to people are great.

“Bitch, hurry it up,” the man says.

I squeeze the man’s leg with one hand and I point the scalpel at him with the other.

I press the button that says in a computerized voice, “Listen up, the less whining you do, the quicker I can move. Or I could strap you down and allow the poison to spread.”

I’d predicted I would need to say something along those lines. I despise patients like him.

He shuts up. I turn on some post-hardcore rock music while I work. It helps me focus. The hunter definitely looks annoyed. I give him a beer to keep him from talking again.

I have to be careful to cut out all of the poisonous parts with my scalpel. The whole process takes about fifteen minutes.

I turn off the music. My surgical tools make a ding as they hit the metal pan. The bloody gloves go in the trash. I walk over to my desk and toss a bottle of pills at the hunter. I hit a button on my computer keyboard that says, “Take one a day for seven days
and you will be fine.” I type in, “That will be six thousand Euro.”

“Pshh. I ain’t paying shit,” the hunter says. He grabs his jacket and starts heading to the door.

I press a button on the keyboard that drops a metal gate over the door.

“You bitch!” he says before pulling out his AD gun to shoot me.

From my hands, I shoot a lightless black beam that knocks the gun out of his hands. My black beam causes rapid decay. It sort of looks a thin, yet deep, dark black smoke if I don’t blast it out.

“Ow,” he says holding his hands. He then grabs an AD knife from its sheath and starts charging at me like a mindless animal.

I kick up the weapon on the floor next to me and it unfolds into long, badass black scythe. The scythe is named Stolen Innocence. I point her at the hunter, making him stop in his tracks.

I anticipated such a response—these hunters are not particularly original—which is why, when I hit a button on the computer keyboard, it says, “Pay up or die right here. Either way, I don’t care. This is your only warning.”

“Eat it, bitch,” says the demon hunter, right before I slice off the arm that is—was—holding the knife. He screams and then I knock him out with the other end of my scythe.

Using my spirit power, I put him in undead mode which means that no matter how serious the injury or the pain, it all stops. The injuries don’t get worse or better. The person stops aging as well. It basically makes them a zombie that doesn’t rot. That being said, blood still is dripping out of his body. I don’t feel like cleaning that up, but I will.
I pick the heavy hunter up and put him back in the operating chair. I give his face a few slaps to wake him up.

My foot hits the pad on the floor that makes my computer say, “I can put your arm back on for an extra seven thousand Euro.”

“Bitch—” he starts to say, but stops when I point my scythe. “That will damn near bankrupt me.”

“Then give me the original six thousand, plus the middle finger from your left hand,” the computer says.

“You can’t be serious?”
I say nothing. I just stare at him until he decides.

“What are you going to do with a finger?”
Still I don’t respond.

“Fine. Just do it. Why can’t I feel anything?”
I ignore his question. He should be happy that I didn’t kill him, because I definitely wanted to. But I’d made a promise to Veda to stop doing that . . . for now. Keep your promise, Vendraya, I scold myself.

If you are wondering what the finger is for, relax. I am not going to eat it or do something satanic with it. Human body parts can be used for rituals that save human lives. Although if I were forced to eat a human body part, it would probably be a leg.

I finish up with this bastard and send him on his way. What was his name? I don’t care. He doesn’t matter.

I pull a beer from the mini-fridge in the operating room and sit down at the computer desk. There is a list of supplies I need to order from Veda. I then look at my schedule to see who my next client is.
I wish beer had more of an effect on me. My body heals too quickly for it to do anything to me. I have to
force my spirit power to stop working if I want to feel anything, which is what I’m doing right now.

I put on music while I work. Thirty minutes pass.

“Where am I? Whoa. I’m floating!” a man’s voice says behind me.

I whip around quick to see him and I am ready to kill. My body relaxes when I see it’s just a ghost. He’s a white male with brown hair and blue eyes. He looks like he is—sorry, was—in his mid-twenties. Maybe if I turn around he’ll just leave.

“Don’t ignore me. I know you can see me. What’s going on? Did you do this to me? Hey!” the ghost says.

I ignore him by continuing my work. He tries pushing me, but instead falls right through me.

“What is going on?” he says again, right before he starts crying.

Damn it. We got a crier.

I type into my computer to make it say, “Go away.”

“Why can’t you talk? Am I dead?” he asks, still crying.

“Go away,” I type once again. Ugh, he is annoying me.

“Oh god, I’m dead! Why? I didn’t even get a chance to live!”

“You should help Gunther. It is your duty,” a new voice says.

The voice is delicate and powerful simultaneously. Her voice also reverberates when she talks. I’ve never seen one before, yet I know what it is. She looks humanoid with pure, marble-white skin. She has purple and green pinwheel eyes, & purple and green wings. Her hair matches the same color as her eyes
and wings. There is a small horn on her forehead. An all white halo floats above her head. She’s the most stunning thing I have ever seen but, at the same time, she looks scary. So, this is what an angel looks like?

Gunther, if that is his name, had stopped crying promptly once he saw the angel.

I snap out of my daze. I hit a button on the computer while looking directly at the angel. It said, “Go away.”

“My name is Gabriella. Gabby for short. I am the guiding angel for this generation’s Blessed Ones. Why can’t you talk, my child? Did you damage your voice box and it hasn’t healed yet? Here, let me heal you,” Gabriella says.

Gabriella stretches her hand towards me. I sidestep it.

“Wait a second. Do you not want to be healed? Quit being ridiculous, child.” She throws balls of light at me. I dodge them all, because I’ll be damned before she heals me against my will. I can’t attack a spirit by physical means, so I need to hit her with my black beam. I try blasting her a few times and miss. She’s elusive. Gunther hides in a corner while we battle. I stop blasting at Gabriella when I realize I’m damaging my own expensive medical equipment. Begrudgingly, I just let her hit me.

My tongue grows back and once it does, I use it to say, “You’re paying for the damage you made me cause.”

“I’m ethereal. How do you suppose I pay you with physical currency?” Gabriella says, amused.


“You are an odd duck, aren’t you?” Gabriella
says. I say nothing. She adds, “Stay, Gunther. This one here will help you.”

“No, I won’t. Go away,” I say as I start cleaning up.

“Vendraya, as one of the Blessed Ones it is your duty to protect humanity from demons,” Gabriella states. Again, I say nothing.

“Don’t ignore me, Vendraya,” she says, clearly getting angry.

“Hey, bitch. I don’t give a damn about your idiotic sense of duty. Just because the past Blessed Ones did it that doesn’t mean that I have to. I didn’t ask to have these powers, but I damn sure won’t be a slave to someone else’s plans. Plus, I am an atheist. Just because, angels and demons exist that doesn’t necessarily mean that God exists,” I say pissed.

“Don’t be foolish, child,” Gabriella says.

“Where was your god when I was being raped and beaten? What about the other guys and girls who were human trafficked? Huh? Or how about when I tried to kill myself? Speak up, Gabriella,” I say. Gabriella remains speechless. “That’s right, do nothing, once again. Now leave.”

Gabriella tries to console me by saying, “Vendraya, I’m so sorry. I wish it could have turn out differently for you. But—”

“No!” I interrupt, trying not to let my emotions flood through any more than they have. “GO AWAY.”

Gabriella disappears quietly. Gunther is still here for some reason. His eyes are watering. I’m not going to console him.

I quietly start cleaning up my operating room. Moments later multiple explosions go off, destroying the whole building with me in it.

*****
I wake up under some rubble. I’m alive. Just barely. At the last second, I’d shot blasts of black beams, which had destroyed some of the falling building. I hadn’t been able to destroy it fast enough, apparently, because I’d still been knocked out for a short amount of time. Luckily, my spirit power had kicked in by putting me in undead mode and the building had collapsed in just the right way.

The lower half of my body is crushed under some rubble. I’m so glad I can’t feel pain right now. “Vendraya! Vendraya!” I hear Gunther shout for me.

I blast off the rubble. Medically speaking, my legs are fucked. I know that if I want my legs to heal properly, I shouldn’t walk on them. Unfortunately, I have to. I finish blasting my way out of the mess.


“I’m Jesus,” I say, carefully walking down the pile of rubble down to the curbside and holding my scythe. I fold up my scythe so I won’t get asked any awkward questions. I hear sirens off in the distance. There are a few onlookers around what once was my practice. I don’t think anyone had seen me emerge from the rubble.

Gabriella appears again. “We have an angel who can see parts of the future. I was going to warn you, but you wouldn’t listen.”

“Gabriella, fuck off,” I say. I need to figure out how I am going to survive. My legs are smashed. I have a lot of internal bleeding. Once undead mode runs out I’m going to need surgery.

Gabriella disappears and reappears behind me. She starts healing me. It pisses me off that I need her help.

“Did you know that, a long time ago, angels
made a vow not to interfere with living humans’ affairs? Bad stuff happened when we did. That’s why we only fight the demon spirits. Please call me Gabby,” says Gabriella.

“Fascinating, Gabriella,” I say in a monotone voice.

When she is done healing me, she says, “What I am trying to say is that’s why we couldn’t help you and your brother. To be fair, you two had your spirit powers since birth. You were late bloomers.”

“Are you fucking— Leave my presence,” I say as I storm off with my folded-up scythe in hand.

A bystander comes up to me and asks, “Are you okay?”

Shit!

“I’m fine. I was behind the building. I wasn’t even inside,” I say still walking away.

The bystander starts to say, “But didn’t you come out—?”


“Well, that was kind of rude. They were only asking if you were okay,” Gunther says.

“Yeah, let us tell the public that I have a spirit power. Dweal and Sacred Sword would be on my ass so fast. Why are you still here?” I ask Gunther. I walk past a convenience store.

“Because he was murdered by someone who was after you. Although Gunther here doesn’t remember that,” Gabriella says.

That makes me stop to turn and face her. “What the hell are you talking about?” I ask.

“Maxoff Diggersun. Does the name ring a bell?” Gabriella asks.

“He’s a human trafficker. He was on my list
years ago back when . . . “I pause for a second. I’m not religious, but still I’m not sure if I want to let Gabriella know about my past sins. I still don’t think what I did was wrong, and there is a possibility that she already knows, of course. But still. I don’t know anything really about the angels. No one really does. “Yes. I know him.”

“You’ve angered him greatly. So much so that he somehow got in touch with a demon. That demon gave him an item that will give him demon spirit powers. To be clear, he is still human at present,” Gabriella says.

“If he wants me, why kill a guy I’ve never met?” I ask.

“I don’t know, Vendraya. We angels don’t know everything,” Gabriella says.

“I was murdered? Seriously?” Gunther asks.

“Fine. I’ll handle it.” I say in a monotone voice. “Gabriella, tell me something. How much about my past do you know?”

“I know it all, my child. All of it,” she replies, giving me a disapproving look. Shit. I don’t need angels watching my every move.

Gabriella disappears. I pull out my phone.

“How are you going to find Maxoff?” asks Gunther. I can hear how worried he is.

“Like this.”

The automated operator picks up saying in English, “You have reached Decklin. For general business-related inquiries press one. To contact the electronics department, press two. To contact the employee department, press three. To contact the—” I interrupt her by pressing three.

“Please enter your passcode.”

I type the number in.
An actual person picks up this time. She says in English, “Welcome back to Dweal, Vendraya Hertzstrum. How may I be of service to you?”

“I’m calling in a favor. I need surveillance footage around my practice from around ten pm to one am today,” I say in English, switching out of my usual German.

“Okay. Just a reminder that you will owe us a free doctor’s visit. Do you—”


“Alright. One moment please,” she says, politely annoyed.

A man picks up, saying, “Ayo wassup? This is the up and coming demon hunting legend Tom Oak. What’s good, fam? Whatcha need?”

Well that was unnecessary information I didn’t need. “I already told the other lady!” I sigh. “Fine. Give me the surveillance foot—”

“Tom, what are you doing?” I hear someone say in the background. “Get out of here!”

I can hear her more clearly now.

“This is Naomi Yahee,” she says, disgustingly and unnecessarily cheery.

Jesus Christ! “I need the surveillance footage from between ten pm to one am last night around my practice sent to my phone,” I say, barely hiding my disdain.

“They sent you to the wrong department, but I can help. Let me doing some hacking,” she says chirpily. Then she starts mumbling to herself rapidly.

She says rapidly again, “There! It should have sent. That was fun. It made me feel like a spy. Sometimes I wish I was a spy. But I love working on gadgets and weapons too much. Anyways, did you get it?”
“Yes,” I say before abruptly hanging up.
“Rude,” says Gunther.
I ignore him. I need to go buy some new clothes, because mine are covered in grime and dust and blood. I need a bath, and a hotel.

09/16/2018   12:41   Bremen, Germany
I’m sitting up in bed eating a German breakfast pancake while I watch at last night’s footage on a laptop I bought this morning.

The footage shows a man wearing a hat. He’s covered head-to-toe in clothes, so I can’t even tell what race he is. He’s planting what I assume to be the bombs all around the building and even manages to get up on the roof and plant some up there too.

“You can’t even see his face,” says Gunther. He’s doing push-ups in the air.

I really wish he would go away.

“If you can’t see him, how are you going to track him?” Gunther asks.

I follow all of the street cameras that show what direction the mystery man is going. If it wasn’t for Dweal setting up clandestine cameras, I wouldn’t have this footage. The man watches my building from across the street until it explodes. Then he takes a taxi and heads off to a hotel. It’s not this hotel. His hotel is way across town.

“Sweet. You can kill that asshole now, right?” Gunther asks.

I put aside my plate and close my laptop. On my way to the bathroom, I grab the kitchen scissors I bought this morning.

Gunther follows me into the bathroom. “You know you can’t cut your hair properly with those. My cousin was a hairdresser. I know.”

I look in the mirror and take a long look at
myself. I hear Gunther talking in the background, but I am not listening. With no emotion, I grab my tongue and cut it with the kitchen scissors. My severed tongue falls into the sink. Blood fills my mouth. I spit out some blood. The sink is covered in it. Some of the blood splashes on the mirror. The pain is intense, but I do nothing to stop it. I want to feel pain. I grip the sink as I endure the pain and spit up blood.

“What the fuck is wrong with you‽” Gunther shouts before disappearing.

I look in the mirror and smile a blood-filled smile. The smile quickly fades when I remember my brother Veda’s words.

“Your soul is turning dark. Promise me you will stop,” he had said.

“I promise,” I’d said back then, and repeat the promise now in my head.

Damn. I forgot the hot coal and tongs in the bedroom. I go grab them real fast and cauterize the wound.

09/16/2018 18:10 Bremen, Germany

The Uber drops me off in front of the hotel. Hotel Degíro is the name. I don’t think I’ve seen this place before. The hotel looks like it is about thirteen floors high. The place looks fancy from the outside.

I’m wearing a brunette wig, baseball cap, and glasses as a disguise. Carrying my folded-up scythe in a briefcase, I step past the threshold. Instantly I get a crazy weird vibe from this place. Almost everywhere I look in the main lobby there are demons wearing a human cloak. The black aura flowing all around them is strong.

I speed-walk right back out before any of the demons notice me. It suddenly becomes hard to breathe as I try to catch my breath. My heart won’t
stop pounding. I stop in an alley across the street.

“Hotel Degíro. It’s a demon hot spot where all kinds of demons congregate to do unspeakable, insidious acts,” Gabriella says with disgust, appearing out of nowhere. Gunther is back too.

I use a speech app on my phone to say, “How long has this been here?”

“Why must you do that to yourself?” Gabriella asks, probably referring to my newly cut tongue. “Answer the damn question,” I make my phone say.

“Years, young one. Years.” “You mean to tell me you fucking good-for-nothing angels knew about this and did nothing?” I frantically type.

“Angels can’t pass the threshold. In addition to that, you are forgetting that we angels made a vow not to interfere with the physical world,” Gabriella claims.

I glare at her.

Gabriella says, “This is why we have you and your brother; the Blessed Ones.”

“Just tell me whether or not Maxoff is in there,” my phone says.

“Yes, my child. Yes. He’s in room 1305.” “Good. Gunther stay out here. Demons can see you and they may try to eat your soul,” my phone says.

“If it scares you then I’m for sure not going in there,” says Gunther.

“I can’t heal you anymore. I already broke the rules twice,” Gabriella tells me.

“Of course you can’t,” I say, annoyed by the stupid angel rules.

“Please be careful. Remember, you can’t kill
him. He’s human. You’ll slip back into your old murderous habit. Remember your promise to Veda,” Gabriella says.

“Fuck off. Don’t tell me what to do,” my phone says as I walk off.

I take a deep breath before entering Hotel Degíro. I walk past the lobby, not making eye contact with anyone. When I hit the elevator, I sigh in relief. None of the demons had stopped me. Whether they had noticed me or not, I do not know.

I exit the elevator on the thirteenth floor. I see a demon wearing a human cloak and a brown leather jacket escort a drunk man into a room with a sinister smile.

Let it go, Vendraya. If you try to exterminate all of the demons here today, you will surely die, I tell myself.

When the demon closes the door, two more demons wearing human cloaks pass me, going the opposite direction. I stare straight ahead with an apathetic look on my face.

“Hello, miss,” one of the demons says with a smile.

I give them a nod to say hello and keep moving. I stop at room 1305 and look towards the elevator to make sure the demons aren’t there waiting to jump me.

They’ve used the elevator. Good.

Room 1305. The door handle rapidly decays with a touch of my black smoke. My hand presses the door open slowly as I start to—

Boom!

The door is smashed by a huge brown-orange snake with a black line pattern. It bites my left arm and slams me against the wall in the hallway. The
other hotel room doors open and demons come out to see what’s going on.

“How is this bitch still alive?” Maxoff asks. The huge brown-orange snake is in the place where his right arm should be. The snake arm shrinks the closer he gets to me, yet it still has me pinned against the wall. I check the color of his soul. Gabriella was right. He’s still human. Fuck!

I grab the snake’s head and use my black smoke to rapid decay it. Maxoff detaches his snake arm and grows back a normal right arm.

Maxoff is a white man with brown hair and he’s in his forties. He is wearing a moss green turtleneck sweater-vest with a matching moss green alpine fedora. Yeah, yeah, I know I said wouldn’t be descriptive. Shut up.

“Get her, boys,” Maxoff says before walking back into the room. Seven normal-looking German thugs come rushing out of the room wearing human cloaks. They’re all demons. Wait, these guys are demons, but he’s not?

“Hey, remember any damage you do, you have to pay for,” says the human-cloaked demon that had lured the human into the room.

The hallway is wide. The seven demons surround me. They all have spiked gloves. I take out and unfold my scythe to prepare myself for combat. I’ve never fought this many demons at once. I’ve never fought a demon before, period.

I do a spinning swing with my scythe. All of the human-cloaked demons dodge it and close in on me. I make one of the demons’ hands decay and fall off. Two of the thugs punch me with those spiked gloves and I can feel every centimeter of those spikes dig into my back.
They knock my scythe out of my hands. My body goes into undead mode. A spiked fist comes for my face which I just barely dodge. I need to get my scythe back. This is going to take a lot out of me, but I have to do it. Non-lethal black smoke emanates from my body. The smoke completely fills and blacks out the hallway. It’s like entering a dark void. I can see them clearly through the darkness, though.

I maneuver around the thugs to grab my scythe. While I’m still low to the ground I cut two of the demons’ legs. They wail as they fall. Once they land I bring the scythe down into their chests, one at a time. I slice the two approaching me from behind. The last three are swinging randomly in the hope that they will hit me. With two slices I cut the heads off two of the damn demons. The last still swings randomly. I raise my scythe up in the air and bring it straight down, splitting its skull. At that moment the black smoke dissipates.

The demon bystanders clap their hands like it’s a fucking live rock concert. The demon bystanders then go back into the room, except for the demon with the brown leather jacket. He says, “He slipped by you with some human girls through the other door and went to the roof.” He points to the stairwell on the opposite side.

This is just a fucking game for them.

I rush into the room, panting. The demon was right. Maxoff isn’t in the living room or either of the two bedrooms. I come back out of the room to see that fucking demon grinning at me. I ignore him as I walk past him with my scythe on my right shoulder.

“If you were fighting me, you would be dead. I bet you’re a level two hunter,” he says. His human
cloak form is a middle-aged brown-haired white man. My scythe that was faced down I now twist it up to prepare to swing it.

“I don’t want to fight. Just pointing out that you’re most likely going to die. Using the power of the angels takes some decent amount of concentration and you have just enough stamina to walk. That guy is only a little stronger than his freshly made henchmen. He probably has a getaway plan. You probably can’t beat him. But I can,” he says, shooting me a sinister grin. “Give me your spirit power and I’ll kill that troublesome wimp upstairs. To be clear, you will no longer have your spirit power ever again.”

I keep walking. I hear the demon laughing before he goes back in his room. I clench my scythe in anger. One of these days I’m going to destroy Hotel Degíro and all the demons in it!

I’m going to destroy them.
I’m going to destroy them.
I’m going to destroy them.
I will kill them all!

The locked roof door is sliced diagonally by my scythe. Maxoff is standing in the middle of the helipad with a remote in his hands and his back to me. Five handcuffed, scared-shitless women line the far edge of the roof. Instinctively I run towards them. Maxoff presses a button on the remote which causes a bright blue, but transparent, tall barrier to go up. I bang on it, trying to get through. The barrier doesn’t give, and I can’t get around it.

“I was really hoping that the helicopter would be here, so I wouldn’t have to use that barrier. This item cost me a pretty penny,” Maxoff says. “At least I get to fuck with you now. Do you remember these five whores? These are the bitches you saved when
you busted out of the whorehouse and killed my brother.”

He walks over to one of the girls. All of the girls are tied up against flimsy poles connected to flimsy stands. “We had a good operation going. We sell these bitches and make good money. The human trafficking biz hasn’t been the same since your little killing spree.” Maxoff aggressively grabs one of the girls’ head and shakes it violently before letting go. “I get it, though. I get it. It probably felt real good to get revenge,” he says, nodding.

“Let me try it out,” he says right before he kicks the first girl off the roof.

If I could have screamed, “No!”, I probably would have. Instead, a horrible noise comes out.

“Oh. That did feel good,” he says, then walks up to each girl and kicks them all off the roof. He walks over to the barrier with a self-satisfied grin as he looks at me.

I take a swing at the barrier again and again in anger even though I know it won’t do anything.

“Yeah, bitch. I heard a rumor that the reason you stopped your vigilante killing spree was because you made a promise to your brother to stop. Is that true?” Maxoff asks.

I just glare at him. If looks could kill, this piece of human garbage would be dead ten times over.

He continues. “Yeah, I can tell by that funny glare that it’s true. Uh, oh, but if that’s true, then that means you can’t do anything to me. Well, you could, but how would you be able to stop? That monster of revenge inside you won’t let you!”

The barrier starts to flicker. Maxoff backs up and gets into a fighting stance. He turns his right arm into a brown-orange snake again. Then his left arm
transforms, which makes it look like the front left leg of a bear. The claws are sharper and longer than a normal bear’s claws. They are more like knives.

I get into my fighting stance. I’m slightly crouched with my left arm free and open. I hold the scythe with my right and have it tilted across my back with the scythe blade facing forward.

The barrier keeps flickering on and off rapidly. The speed of the flickering increases.

The barrier drops.

I spin forward, pivoting on my right foot which increases the power of the swing of my scythe and closes the distance between me and this asshole. Simultaneously, Maxoff extends his snake arm in my direction. My scythe splits the front half of his snake arm and I continue the momentum of the spin to try to slice Maxoff in half.

He detaches his snake arm and jumps back. He just barely avoids my swing. He extends his bear arm by about a meter. I dodge it. Fuck, he can extend that one too?

When I dodge, he surprises me by catching me with the now re-grown snake arm. The snake’s mouth grabs me in the same place on my left side. He then raises me up high in the air and slams me down on the roof with great force.

The jolt makes me drop my scythe. If I weren’t in undead mode, I would be hurting pretty bad right now. If I receive any more damage I won’t be able to recover after undead mode runs out. I need to end this now.

I decay the snake head again with the touch of my hand and make a dash to the right for my scythe. My hand-to-hand combat skills are abysmal. My spirit power is getting low. SED is setting in. I can’t feel
physical pain in undead mode, but I can still feel spiritual energy deprivation. I’m going to die if I don’t get my scythe.

Maxoff extends his bear-claw arm, blocking the path to my scythe. He closes the distance between us and then punches me in the face with his normal human right arm. I grab his bear-claw arm and decay it right before he swings at me. My head is spinning.

He jumps back to grow a new bear claw arm. I’ve got my hands on my knees as I try to keep myself from falling over. I still keep my eyes on Maxoff. I fall out of undead mode for a second. That means my spirit energy is almost up. I can’t attack with my spirit energy anymore or else I’ll die from these wounds. My body needs time to heal in undead mode.

Why isn’t he using the brown-orange snake arm? He’s probably almost at his physical and spiritual limits too. If his bear arms have the same limitations, then that means he can regenerate it one more time.

We glare at each other for a moment. Both of us are waiting to see what the other will do.

“I can go all night, baby. Let’s hurry up and get this over with so I can make you my bitch again,” Maxoff says. He’s clearly lying about his stamina.

I charge at him with my right palm cocked back as if I’m going use my death touch. Maxoff jumps and dodges to my left while sending his bear arm at me. Idiot. I roll forward and grab my scythe.

“Fuck!” Maxoff says.

Damn right, you’re fucked! I charge at him again.

He sends his bear arm at me, but I cut it in half. He detaches it quickly and grows back another bear claw arm. As he does, I close the distance, with my scythe angled diagonally and the bottom of the
curved blade facing Maxoff’s body. I take a swing. He blocks it with the claws of his bear arm.

I use the momentum of his block to turn my scythe to the opposite end and stab him with the pointed metal tip in the abdomen. Damn, I missed his heart. Still, though, I continue to drive the metal end of my scythe in a little, then pull it out and gain some distance as he tries to swipe at me with his bear-claw arm. He extends it again and I cut it in half once more.

However, this time—instead of detaching the arm—he continues to swing his bloody bear arm madly. The blood gets in my eyes and blinds me temporally. He uses that time to smack me in the head. Although I can’t feel pain, the force of the blow is enough to bring me to the ground and knock the scythe out my hands.

I’d punctured one of his lungs earlier. He should be on the ground, fighting for air. Whatever is giving him demon spirit powers must be boosting him. Maxoff runs over, gets on top of me, and starts swinging with his normal human arms. He gets five punches in before I resort to using the smallest amount of my spirit power to decay a small hole into his abdomen with the aggressive poke of a finger. He jumps off me. I use that chance to grab my scythe and position the blade around his neck.

“Come on, bitch. Do it!” says Maxoff.

I clench the scythe in anger. I pull out a zip tie and throw it at his feet.

I pull out my phone and type in the speech program, “I can’t kill a human. I’m turning you in to Dweal. Hopefully they come slow enough that you bleed out first. Put them on slowly.”

“No way, bitch. The only way this ends is with
a bloody corpse on the ground,” Maxoff says.

I move the blade of the scythe close enough to his neck to break skin.

“Like I said, bitch, this only ends in death. Come on. You know damn well you want to do it. No one will know. Give in.”

I say nothing. I just wait for him to pick up the zip tie.

“Here, let me help you. After this is over, I’ll break me out of whatever jail you throw me in. And then I’m going to track down the rest of the whores that you rescued and put them right back on the market . . . or kill them. I’ll decide when I get them. And then I’ll find a necrophiliac to fuck all of those—”

I interrupt him by slicing off his head, then slicing through the side of his chest, and, finally, slicing through the side of his waist.

*Garbage like you doesn’t deserve to breathe*, I say in my head.

I send a text message to Dweal’s emergency squad to come and get me at Hotel Degíro. They said they can’t come in. It would be too much of a battle for Dweal. I would be dead by the time they got in. And that’s if they got in. I can’t risk going back down. They might try to kill me now that I’d caused a commotion.

I walk over to the edge of the roof and look down. Shit. This will be fun. I text them back and tell them to meet me in the alleyway. I’m going to need extensive surgery. I tell them to bring five extra body bags for the human women. I look over the rooftop, on a section where the girls weren’t dropped.

I’ve got one leg hanging over the edge as I look down. It reminds me of the time I tried to commit suicide. My body had healed after I jumped. I was
too much of a coward to go through with it. But this isn’t that.

And, with that thought, I jump.

09/17/2018  20:20  Somewhere in Germany

My body aches all over. I’m no longer in un-dead mode. They have me in a hospital gown in a room with a nice view. My body is going to need the rest of the day and perhaps a scintilla of tomorrow before I can function properly. The Dweal Medical Division already knows the deal—stitch me up, put everything in its right place, and just let me heal.

The hospital bill will probably be expensive. I am surprised that they brought me to a public hospital and not some private facility. They must have people who are a part of the tribe here.

I look through the window from my bed. I don’t think I am in Bremen anymore.

A nurse walks in. He places five small steel containers on the bed-stand along with a piece of paper. “Here’s your bill. Have your healing abilities kicked in?”

I nod. That’s when I realize my fucking tongue has grown back. I am going to have to cut that out again later.

“Good. You know, if you join the tribe we would cover those expenses,” he says.

My response to that is an apathetic stare.

“All right then. The partial remains of the five dead women are in the containers. Can I ask what you plan to do with them?”

I’m going mix their ashes into tattoo ink and add six more hearts to my arm. I’m including Gunther. I couldn’t get any partial remains for him since his body is already in the ground. Instead of telling the nurse that, though, I just turn my head and look out
the window.

“Okay . . . bye then,” he says and walks out.
He’s probably annoyed by me. Oh well.
It’s weird being the patient. I’m usually on
the other side. Maybe it’s just me but I feel like you
should never see a doctor on this side.

09/18/2018  20:21  Bremen, Germany

I stare at my burned-down practice. I’m wear-
ing a black winter vest with a dark gray T-shirt under-
neath and black jeans. Gunther appears right next to
me.

“Sorry about your building,” Gunther says.
I wave my hand, indicating that it’s okay. It’s
just a building. It can be rebuilt. I’ve cut my tongue
out already, so I couldn’t verbally answer even if I’d
wanted to.

“Is that my name on your arm?” Gunther asks.
I nod. I pull out my phone to have it say, “Ev-
ery one of those hearts are people I failed to save.”

“Well, there was nothing you could have done
about my death. Either way, you got the bastard who
killed me. I’m sorry you had to break your no-killing
streak,” he says.

I wave my hand again to suggest that it is
okay.

“I’m at peace now. Thank you,” he says.
A shining door appears in the air above my
burned-down building.

“Is that . . . ?” Gunther asks.
Gabriella appears and says, “That’s your door.
Take it.”

“Does that mean heaven is real?” asks Gunther.
“Probably. Go, before you miss it. This is a
good thing,” Gabriella says, smiling, and she gives him
gentle push.
Gunther opens the door to a luminous bright light. He walks through. Then Gunther and the door disappear.

I type on my phone. “What do you mean ‘probably.’ You don’t know if heaven is real? Aren’t angels supposed to know that kind of thing.”

“I know humans think that heaven is real because we angels exist but, in reality, we ourselves don’t know if God, heaven, or hell actually exist. That’s why we call the place after we all die ‘The Beyond,’” Gabriella says.

I angrily type on my phone, “Yet you’re okay with continuing to let people believe that there’s something better than this?”

“It’s not that simple. Why do you care, anyway? You’re an atheist. If letting people believe there is a heaven so that they go through their door is what I have to do to ease that person’s mind, then so be it. That’s the job of an angel. For all we know, heaven is real. Human spirits can’t stay on this plane too long, in any case. If they do, they turn into poltergeists and sometimes demons,” Gabriella claims.

“The truth is always better than the lie. Ignorance is not bliss,” I say, using my phone.

I quickly position my left hand around Gabriella’s neck. My hand is emitting my black smoke and is centimeters away from her neck. I can see the surprise and sudden terror in her eyes.

Using my right hand, I type on my phone. “The more you talk, the more you piss me off. Angels shouldn’t lie. They are one the creature that should never lie. I don’t trust you angels. You may think you’re doing good for humanity, but I’m not so sure that you are. I don’t like your version of what’s good and what’s evil. Stay away from me and especially
stay away from my brother, Veda. He’s a good man who doesn’t need to be corrupted by your misguided ideals. I will kill you if you ever come around again.” I say this with the apathetic look of a killer so she gets the message.

I let go her and she immediately disappears. I’m still not sure what happens to a spirit if it’s destroyed. Perhaps they just go to The Beyond. Who knows? Either way, the threat of destruction had worked to keep her away.

Sorry, Veda, I had to break my promise. But I would much rather blacken my soul than allow good people like you or our moms or anyone else I care about to be corrupted by the darkness. It’s fine for me, because I know the darkness.

I am the darkness.
Chapter 8: Hospital
Narrator: Yavod

Yavod: Tall black man. Toned body. Bald with a trimmed beard. He looks like he is in his forties.

09/26/2018  15:30  Cincinnati, Ohio
We are sitting in a dimly lit office.
“Is everything set-up?” I ask. I’m wearing a nice suit.
Samantha replies, “Yes, sir. There are about ten to fifteen cops in the building. Also, I made sure that were a few marines just for good measure.”
She’s holding her Decklin tablet. She’s wearing a dress suit with a lab coat over the top. Her hair is in a bun and glasses sit neatly on her nose.
“I like the initiative, Samantha. What’s the time I have to beat?”
“After factoring in the difference in the last hospital’s parameters, body count, and your time, the time you’re trying to beat is ten minutes and thirty-six seconds.” Samantha shows me her calculations on her tablet.
“Alright,” I say stretching as I get up. I go to the big black case and unzip it. Samantha walks over with me. My long, thick sword waits for me; it pulses at the touch of my hand. The great sword is as tall as me, the blade and the hilt are gold; and the hand-guard is silver. There’s also a silver beating heart at the base of the blade. The silver heart bleeds silver blood periodically. I secure this magnificent sword behind my back, and my right hand rests on the hilt. I put the earpiece in.
Samantha says, “Three, two, one . . . go!”
I sprint outside and slice down the first three people I see. I manage to slice down two more before the screams start. No sign of any guards or the police yet. I quickly take out another twelve people. Some are in wheelchairs. Some are in hospital beds.

“Code black, I repeat, code black,” a female nurse says as calm as she can on the speaker. Code black is what they say when a killer, criminal, or crazy person is on the loose and they don’t want everyone to freak out. It won’t help them.

I see the nurse who just made the announcement. She sees me. I smile as I throw my sword across the room—it cuts through her and a few others who were behind her. Blood sprays everywhere. I slay as many as I can until the only thing left on this floor are bodies swimming in a pool of blood.

I sit on the receptionist desk and wait.

“What’s my time?” I ask.

“Five minutes and six seconds,” Samantha replies into my earpiece.

“They all should be on the first level by now, right?” I ask.

“Mostly. A few were left behind on the second,” says Samantha.

“Shit,” I say. I strap my sword to my back by manipulating the element silver with my spirit energy. Then I start melting the floor with highly pressurized and very hot liquid gold. I reach the second floor quickly. I sense their heartbeats. The humans who were left behind are hooked up to machines. I eliminate them as fast as possible.

Now for the fun part.

I can hear the panic from everyone on the first floor. I reach them by melting a hole in the floor near my feet. When I drop in through their ceiling, every-
one goes silent. They can finally put a face to the killer. I, not trying to waste any time, blast my opponents with hot liquid silver and slice those I missed in my first sweep into pieces with my sword. Kids, women, men, the elderly, the injured and disabled, I kill them all indiscriminately.

I sit in a chair and proudly gaze upon my work. So many detached heads and partial silver-and-gold corpses. So much blood.

Samantha comes walking over to me with the same cold and indifferent look on her face.

“Your time was eleven minutes and one second, sir,” Samantha tells me.

“Shit. Looks like ten minutes is the best I can do in my human form,” I say. “Samantha, you should enjoy life more.”

“I’ll try, sir,” she responds.

I sigh, because she’s killing my buzz. “Are the police and emergency vehicles here yet?” I ask.

“Yes, sir. Should I open the portal and set the charges?” she asks.

“Would you kindly?”

While she is doing that I dig into the body of a dead marine and write a message on the wall with his blood.

Samantha pulls out the tape recorder and presses play. A female voice starts chanting. A portal opens up in front of us. She sets the charges using her tablet and we walk through the portal to safety. We watch on Samantha’s tablet as all of the doors unlock and police start coming in cautiously. Moments later the charges go off and the hospital explodes, killing the cops inside and a few people who were around standing outside of it.
“If we’re doing this job, I need to know that you can handle yourself. We’ll likely be fighting some former Dweal hunters. Some of them are ranked level three. You’re barely a level two, as far as I can tell,” says Repulse.

We’re both speaking in Japanese, but Repulse has a French accent, and the words sound slightly off. We’re in an old and beat-up mansion. The room is big with old furniture and junk lying around. Apparently, It’s a Dweal safe house according to Repulse.

“Oh yeah?” I say, annoyed. “Then what are you? A level two?”

“I’m a level four . . . for now,” Repulse claims. As he takes off his jacket he says, “Don’t use your spirit power.”

“What?” I ask, confused, right before Repulse starts throwing the hands. He throws a series of four alternating punches that I manage to deflect. He then throws a right punch that I try to catch with my left hand. He moves his arm in a small but quick circle to escape my grasp, but gives up on the punch. Within that same motion, though, he pushes me about a half a meter backwards.

I come at him with a roundhouse kick to the head; he dodges. I try kicking him in the chest with my other leg; he dodges it. Repulse lands two punches to my chest and hits me with an open palm thrust that sends me flying backwards, all but knocking the life out of me.

We keep fighting like this for a few minutes.
“You’re not used to fighting for this long, are you?” Repulse asks.

“What are you talking about? Just let me wobble back to my corner and catch my breath,” I say jokingly.

“Alright, McGregor,” Repulse says, amused. “I bet you’ve trained yourself to knock the opponent out quick, so you can move on with whatever heist you’re doing.”

“I’m going tell you what I tell the guys and girls I sleep with. I can go all night, baby. This boy ain’t got no quit in ‘im,” I say.

“Let the flood gates open. Use your spirit power. Don’t hold back,” Repulse tells me, like he’s confident that he can stop anything thrown at him.

“Ok then, bitch,” I say before summoning and unleashing a tidal wave to drown him. He jumps up and is now hanging from the ceiling, upside down, with his arms folded. The water leaves the room.

“Your aim is a little off,” he says. He points his left hand forward. When he does, a chair hits me from behind. That same chair slides around to the front of me. Repulse comes down from the ceiling and sits in it. Two more chairs come moving to either side of him.

“Ow, damn it. Quit playing musical chairs and fight me, bruh,” I say.

“You’re the one who can’t hit me,” Repulse taunts, amused.

“Ok,” I say, stretching out my arms. The next blast of water from my hands curves and targets both sides of Repulse. I then shoot two quick blasts of water to target the front of him.

Repulse somehow makes the chairs on either side of him come up and block the water coming from
the sides. He gets up and jumps behind the chair he was sitting in, ducks, and quickly raises that same chair to block the two blasts coming from the front. While he’s ducked, he points his right hand forward and a loveseat hits me from behind.

“Be aware of your surroundings. Everything is a weapon,” Repulse says as he runs up on me.

I try blasting him with water, but he dodges left and then forward. He starts throwing the hands again, connecting with every hit. He kicks me one good time and points a hand behind him, which sends me flying to the wall.

“What is my spirit power?” he asks as he moves a hand in multiple directions, magically making the chair position itself in the middle of the room so it faces me.

Right now, my body is stuck against the wall. I can barely move it. It feels like there is a lot of force holding me in place.

“I don’t know. That thing where you can move stuff with your mind? What’s it called . . . telekinesis?” I answer.

“Close, but wrong,” Repulse says. “This is your goal for this training. Figure out my spirit power and figure out a way to either defeat it or avoid it.” He releases his spirit power and I fall to the ground. Two beers fly into his hands and he tosses me one. “Come on. Let’s go watch some football.”

“Where the hell did you get these beers from?” I ask.

*****

Two French football (soccer) teams are playing. I’m more of a baseball man myself, but football is cool too, I guess. The living room we’re watching the game in is organized, but a little dusty.
“I probably should have finished my lesson. Okay. So, at Dweal the Fighting Division is the squad that does most of demon hunting. Now you see, me?” Repulse says before pulling up his left sleeve to reveal his Dweal tattoo.

There’s a water symbol with a circle around it, to the right there’s a bear symbol with a leaf under it, and to the right of that is an L4 with a leaf under it. Damn. He really is a level four hunter.

“I’m with the Intelligence Division. We mainly just gather information and go on spy ops. My point is that— There you go, Leon! Whoa!”—One of the teams made a dope ass score.—“What was I saying . . . ? Right. The Intelligence hunters find out what the enemy can do as quick as possible and get out. Like I said, most of the time we don’t do the fighting unless we have to. And I say ‘enemy’ because we sometimes have to go after humans and other hunters. It’s always the same, though—collect the information and get out. That’s what you should always be thinking as an Intelligence hunter. I know you’re not a part of the tribe, but for these few jobs I need you to think like one.”

06/28/2018 23:23 East China Sea

Repulse and I finish putting on our wetsuits. We’re on a speed boat.

“Are you ready for this?” Repulse asks me.

“Yeah,” I say, taking in a deep breath.

“Remember to try to conserve your spirit energy. We may need you to get us back to this boat.”

“Come on, man, I know. Aye, dude, I better not get chewed up by a shark,” I say, only half-joking.

“You’ve got nothing to worry about with your sensory skills,” Repulse says.

I can sense movement in the water up to a
certain distance—only when the object is surrounded by water though.

Low key, I’m scared of the ocean. Yeah, I know, dude. I shouldn’t be with my spirit powers, but that’s exactly why I’m scared. I’ve seen Animal Planet. Shit gets wild out here! Dude, I don’t care if it’s a fucking koi fish I’m fucking gone if I sense anything come by me.

Repulse and I jump in the ocean. Oh boy. We use those underwater scooter thingys that divers use—I don’t know what they’re called—and we zoom to the freighter. So far so good for the first few minutes. I’m leading the way. We make it to the ship with no problems. Nice.

The plan is that Repulse will use his spirit power so we can climb the side of the freighter. He can change the gravitational pull of himself and two other objects at a time. To make an object go in one direction he has to point in the opposite direction with his hand. During training, he was obvious with his spirit power, but in a real fight, he says he is more discrete with the finger pointing.

Yea, it took me a second to figure that out. I’d said his power had something to do with gravity, and that’s as far as I got. I figured it out when I realized it felt like I was falling every time he sent me to the ceiling. He can’t do anything with most liquids, though.

We take off our diving equipment and tie it to the underwater scooters. We then put on black masks with the sad face design you see on theater masks. It also has the Dweal Intelligence Division symbol on it. Repulse uses his gravity powers to have us run up the side of the freighter.

The goal of this job is to take back a demon
weapon that these independent hunters took from Dweal. The demon weapon is called Hulx. It creates an invisible shield all the way around the body that can withstand the force of about four handgun bullets. It takes blood from the user for it to work. An average human can only regenerate the shield about three times a day depending on the person’s size. If Repulse wasn’t here I would grab that shit for myself.

As soon as we get on the ship we start sprinting right, towards the stairs. In between the gaps of the trailers, there are guards patrolling. I take them out while running by, throwing sleep darts surrounded by a thin layer of my water. It helps my accuracy and increases the power of my throw. That’s something Repulse made sure I had down during training.

I take out a few more guards as we silently sprint pass. There’s also a guard upstairs outside of the bridge. I hit him with a sleep dart and he falls over. Repulse catches the guard with his spirit power by decreasing the gravitational pull, which lets him land softly.

“Nice catch,” I say.
“Be careful,” he replies.
“I am,” I defend.

There are lights on in certain areas of the boat. We hide the guy’s body under the stairs to the bridge, behind some crates. A few steps from the stairs to the bridge is the stairwell, which leads to the storage room below. That’s where our intel says Hulx will be.

There’s not a lot of crates for a room they call the storage room. There’s only, like, maybe ten crates. I crack open the small crate that has the Hulx with my dagger. The Hulx looks like a bracelet, with a round center that has a sharp needle in the center that’s supposed to bury itself in your body. I hear it’s pain-
ful.

“Would you be mad if I tried it out?” I ask, smiling.

“You really wouldn’t want to unless your life was in danger. Even then you still might not, depending on how much blood you have left,” Repulse says.

“A genie blessed me with an infinite supply of blood when I was a kid. I’ll be all right. Wait, are genies a thing?” I ask.

Repulse shrugs and says, “I don’t know. Probably.”

“She’s cute,” I say, pointing at the chick who just walked in the room.

She’s mixed and has her long hair in a ponytail. She’s wearing an orange sports bra with blue skinny jeans. One belt is wrapped normally around her waist, but she has two other belts hanging loose around her waist as well. Oh, and she has an eye patch around her right eye.

“Damn, shawty,” I say in English.

Too-many-belts walks down the steps and says in English, “I was wondering why it was so quiet.”

She holds out her right hand with the palm down. A circle appears on the ground and a huge hammer comes up out of it. She grabs the hammer with both hands and the circle goes away. The damn thing looks like a giant-sized meat tenderizer. The handle is as tall as she is and the hammer part is as big as a car engine. How is she handling that thing?

Repulse points left to make the Hulx fly—or should I say fall?—right out of my hands and into his. He then gravity shifts to walk on the ceiling and heads towards the exit.

“Where are you going? You’re not going to help me take her out?” I yell in Japanese.
“Nope. It would be unfair if I fought too. I’m going to take out everyone topside. You need the practice anyways,” he says before disappearing through the door.

The chick starts to run after him. I send a blast of water her way. She turns around and smacks it away with the oversized hammer.

“I guess I have to deal with your soft little ass, pretty boy,” she says in English.

“Oh, kinky,” I say in English as I act like I’m going to unzip my wetsuit.

She takes a swing at me and says, “You wish.” I dodge and say, “Aye, well, dye my skin blue and call me Genie, because I can make that wish come true.”

I throw my last two sleep darts at her with my water. She destroys both of them with two swings. I blast her with high pressurized water while moving forward with my dagger out in my left hand. She dodges and then I hit her with another blast. She dodges and tries to move backwards at the same time, but it doesn’t work. My dagger connects with her giant hammer. I swing for her shoulder with the dagger. She stops me by hitting my ribs with the handle and then swings the meat tenderizer. I tuck and roll behind her and kick her in the butt before she has the chance to swing at me.

“So, your name is Ahmi, huh? Am I saying that right?” I say, holding her smartphone.

Ahmi swings at me again with her hammer. I jump and blast water at her. I did that to attack her, but also to blow myself backwards. I land and roll backwards. Once I’m right side up and crouched, I throw three curving water balls from each hand. She smacks all of them away.
Damn, she’s good. I might be in trouble here. “You got some cute photos in here,” I say scrolling through them. She’s got some nice bikini pics. She’s got a nice butt. “I’m just going to send that one to myself.”

Ahmi jumps up in the air and tries to bring the hammer down on me with some power behind it. I blast her in the stomach. She falls to the ground and slowly tries to get up. I try hitting her with quick, curving water balls. She dodges some of them and smacks some of them away.

“After I defeat you assholes, Dweal better let me join the tribe,” she says, leaning on her giant hammer.

“What are you talking about? You stole these weapons from a Dweal supplier. I’ve seen the reports,” I say.

“Don’t bullshit me,” she says, right before slamming the hammer down on the ground. Light blue crack lines form around the impact area of the hammer and then start heading towards me at a fast pace. Since I don’t know what the crack lines are, I try dodging, but they keep following me wherever I move. Eventually they hit me and there’s an explosion.

“How?” she says.

“That was close AF,” I say. I’d surrounded my body with fast and constantly moving water which, thankfully, had been enough to stop the explosion from fucking me up. Repulse’s training taught me well.

The blast had still blown me back on my ass. My legs hurt a little. Shit, I didn’t even know I could do that. Repulse did tell me to always be flexible on the battlefield and to not be afraid to get creative.
“Aye, let me show you the report. I’d rather not fight a cute chick,” I say.

She gets up and starts charging at me anyways.

“Well, I guess we’re getting physical then. I just wish it was the good kind of physical— Whoa!” I say while dodging her fast swing of that ridiculous-sized hammer.

I try cutting her with my dagger, but she dodges it by jumping backwards and then swings at me immediately. She hits me on my right side. Luckily, I’d managed to pull up some water on that side just in time to soften the blow. That swing still sends me flying. She slams the giant meat tenderizer on the ground and the blue lines start chasing me again.

Alright, now’s a good time. I take off my shoes quickly so I can form a water pillar under me that will shoot me up without using my hands. My hands are busy working on a big surprise for Ahmi.

“No way,” she says when she looks up to see all of the water on the ceiling.

During the fight, I’d slowly kept gathering up more and more water from the ocean. I can’t summon too much at once, so I had to do it like this. Now I rain down hundreds of water bullets on her. They won’t pierce her skin, but they will leave some big, nasty bruises. They probably would have killed her if I’d aimed for her head—just like one good knockout punch by professional boxer.

Ahmi is lying on the ground, barely conscious after the attack. I walk over to her and say, “It was just a job. Don’t be mad. I’ll call you sometime after you stop being mad, ok? Peace!”

I start walking and say to myself, “Damn, I’m gonna bruise later.”
When I meet Repulse back on the deck, he says, “Took you long enough.”
“Shut up. She was really good,” I say.
“Yeah, she did look tough. But I knew you could do it,” he says and rubs my head. He puts his arm around me and adds, “Let’s get out of here.”
“You’re in a good mood today,” I say.
“I’m always excited when my trainees do well,” Repulse says.
“I’m your trainee now?” I ask.
“Of course you are. I trained you, right?”
A loud eerie horn noise goes off. “Is that the ship?” I ask.
I don’t have to wait long for my answer. I realize that the sound wasn’t coming from the ship. It was coming from the water. Terror runs through my body when I feel what lies beneath. I grab Repulse’s arm to keep myself up. Before he could ask what was going on, we hear water falling—and the sound of something rising from beneath the waves. We see huge, glowing olive eyes. I can see the thing because of the moonlight and the lights from the boat. It looks like a cross between a squid and a crab. A huge tentacle comes up from the side of the boat and slams down on the water, causing a huge wave to splash onto the boat.
“The Kraken is real? I thought that was a legend?” Repulse says, terrified as well.
Ahmi pops up next to us. She summons her hammer. “I’ll kill this demon and Dweal will have to let me join the tribe,” she says in English before running towards the demon.
“Ahmi, don’t!” I yell in English.
I am about to pull her back with my water when Repulse says in Japanese, “Don’t! Conserve
your spirit energy. You’re probably close to SED any-
way.” He looks over the side of the ship to look at
something. “Shit. It destroyed the scooters.” He looks
around some more. “Lucky. They got a spare speed
boat. Come on.”

As we run towards it he throws his knife at the
cables holding up the boat. He calls back the knife
with his gravity powers and we jump on the boat as
it falls. I shoot up some water to slow our descent. I
hot-wire the boat and we take off.

I look back to see if the Kraken is chasing us.
Instead, I see the demon raise the freighter—that’s
got to weigh at least three ton—in the air and snap it
half like it’s a twig. The sound of it snapping was un-
real and intense. To see destruction like that on such
a large fucking scale is crazy to witness, my dude. I
highly doubt Ahmi made it out of that alive.

You see, that shit right there is exactly why I
don’t fuck with that demon shit.

09/25/2018 23:00 New Delhi, Delhi, India

We’ve done a bunch of jobs since that night we
saw the Kraken.

I’ve convinced Repulse that, instead of prepping
for tomorrow’s job, we should go out to a club
and grab a drink. Plus, I’ve never been to an Indian
club. I have to see if it’s dope.

We head up to the bar, have a couple of drinks,
and talk a little bit.

“Yeah, man, that was the craziest threesome
I’ve ever had. I damn near lost my dick that night,”
Repulse says in English.

“Okay yea. You topped me,” I reply, laughing.

“Bartender, another round of Devolution please!”

Devolution is my whiskey of choice. If I’m
drinking I gotta have at least a glass or two.
“What do you have planned for yourself after this last job,” Repulse asks.
“Um . . .” I say and then start laughing.
“I . . . don’t . . . know. I’m a day-by-day kind of guy. I’ve just been going with the flow. I was supposed to move to the States and start a restaurant with my dude Lee, but he, uh . . . he died,” I finish solemnly.
I down the full glass of Devolution and say, “Whoa! That’s my shit.”
“Sorry about your friend. Dweal’s always looking for young talent,” Repulse says.
“And so is the porn industry,” I say and then we laugh. “My sister is a bitch, but there is one thing we agree on: we don’t fuck with that demon shit. There was this one time my asshole brother wanted to summon a demon for fun on some Charlie Charlie shit. Neither of them has second sight, by the way. My sister shuts it down immediately before I can even nope my way out of the situation. She was not having it. Just the possibility that it might be real terrified her.” I laugh again.
“You came from a rich family, yes? Why leave all that comfort and become a thief? Everyone from your old crew were orphans and or runaways. You were the only one who ran from money. It must have been pretty bad at home,” Repulse says.
“That’s a story for another time,” I say, smiling and trying to avoid talking about my past.
“The rich kid turned into a thief,” Repulse says before taking another drink.
A demon wearing a human cloak walks across the room.
“Shit,” I say, turning around quick to face the bar so the fucker doesn’t see me.
“What is this, the 1950s in the US? No one says that anymore. No, there’s a demon over there. Let’s go. We’re noping out of here.”

“No way. It looks weak. I’ll handle this,” Re-pulse says as he gets up. He places a hand on my shoulder and leans in to say, “You have nothing to fear from them. You’re way stronger than you think. Believe that.”

He pats my shoulder before heading in the demon’s direction.

F*ck that. I’ll let the demon hunters handle that shit. That life’s not for me.

I stop mid-sip of my Devolution whiskey when I see this beautiful Indian chick eyeing me on the dance floor.

“Now that’s the mood changer I’m looking for,” I say. I down the drink real fast and begin the hunt.

“Hey there,” I yell in English because of the music.

She seems to understand because she turns around then starts grinding on me. We dance with each other for at least a song and a half, just getting it in. She then turns back around and we start making out.

“Do you want to get out of here?” I ask.
“Yeah,” she whispers in my ear in English before sensually nibbling on it.

“Yup. You’re wet. Let’s go!” I yell, guiding her out of the club.

On our way out the door, we get stopped by this dude who looks pissed. He starts yelling at me in Hindi . . . I think.

I say in English, “Dude, I don’t know what you’re saying. Do you know English?”

“That’s my fucking girl,” the strong Indian man
says in English, with an accent, I might add. 
I turn to her and ask, “Is that true?”
The beautiful Indian chick who is definitely as 
tipsy as I am says, “Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes! He is mine and 
so are you.”
She wraps herself around me and then gives 
me a quick peck on the cheek. Well, that’s not good. 
The man cocks his arm and I say, “Whoa, 
whoa, whoa! Let’s talk this out. I didn’t even know—
What’s your name, darling?
“Pyka.”
“Pyka had a boyfriend,” I defend.
“I’m her husband, asshole,” he says, getting 
more pissed.
“Ok, buddy. What’s your name?” I ask.
“David.”
“David? That’s pretty American for an Indian 
man,” I say.
“I’m from the States,” David says—sorry, yells.
“Ok, David-from-the-States. This is your girl. 
I get that. But let me ask you this. Haven’t you ever 
wanted a three-way? Have you ever had one? Look,” I 
say, putting my arms around him now, with Pyka still 
holding onto me. “You never wanted to brag to your 
boys, ‘I’ve had three-way, bitches?’”
I can see him calming down and actually think-
ing about it. Watch me work.
“You do, don’t you?” I say smiling. “You got a 
little bit of freak in you. I can see it. Come on, man. 
Live a little. Nah, fuck that. Live a lot!”
“Please, David-poo. Pike me like a roasted pig,” 
Pyka says, running her finger down his chest to his 
Little David.
“See, David. She wants it. I want it. You want. 
What’s the problem?” I say. “Come on man. Let’s
“Squad on your girl.”

“Mmhh, you smell so good,” Pyka says throwing herself at me.

“You do smell nice,” David agrees.

“All right then! It’s settled. Let’s go,” I say, guiding them out with my arms around both of them.

On the way out, I see Repulse chatting up a chick. We point at each other to non-verbally say, “I see you. Good shit fam.”

09/26/2018 05:00 New Delhi, Delhi, India

The view is nice out here on the balcony of my hotel room. I’m in a chair, shirtless, but with a jacket and pants on. I roll up weed in a blunt and light up. I take a puff and then take a sip of my green tea and just sit for a moment.

I’ve been having trouble sleeping for a while. This is my usual routine for these situations. Blaze one.

“Hey, Lee. What do I do after this? Where’s the destination?” I say out loud, as if Lee was here. “The restaurant just seems to . . . not fit now that you’re gone. Sorry about your turtle by the way.”

Moments later, David slides open the door and comes out looking groggy.

“Whatcha doing out here, man?” David says.

“Uhh, I can’t sleep. Smoking a blunt. Care to partake in this cannabis?” I offer.

“Nah. Come back to bed when you’re done. Pyka wants to cuddle or whatever,” he says before going back in.

My eyes start watering for a moment and I’m not really sure why. I wipe the tears and say, “Till next time then, Lee.”

I put out the blunt, chuck the rest of the tea, and head in.
This job has us taking a weapon that Dweal has already paid for. When it came time to collect, the seller had tried to add additional charges on the already paid-for product. So, we’ve come to collect it anyway, covertly. We’re wearing a Dweal-standard op outfit according to Repulse, which consists of light durable pants, a thin long-sleeved shirt, a light combat vest, and combat boots. We have the same sad face masks with the Intelligence Division symbol on it.

“We’re climbing the side of the building, breaking into the room holding the weapon with stealth, and then getting the hell out of there. Simple,” Repulse says in Japanese.

“Sounds good to me. That’s real high up, though.”

“What are you worried about? Even if I do drop you, you can use your water to soften the landing,” Repulse remarks.

“Oh, I’m not worried. I’m excited. Out of all the heists I’ve done, I have yet to scale a building. I can check that off my bucket list now,” I say. “Let’s Mission Impossible this bitch!”

“One more thing. Roll up your sleeve on your left arm,” Repulse orders.

“You going to give me your digits? That’s gross, old man. You’re old enough to be my dad,” I joke.

He smirks. “For my plan to work you need to become a Dweal hunter temporarily. Don’t worry. It will probably go away after this job.”

“It’d better,” I say.

We make our way to the far side of the building that people won’t be able to see casually. I had to take out a few cameras out with my water gun.
me Squirtle, bruh.

While we are still running towards the building, Repulse says, “Jump.”

We jump at the same time. Repulse points a finger behind him and our gravity shifts mid-air. We continue running once we land on the building. He points a finger up while we run to keep me on the building.

“This is wild,” I say.

“It was crazy the first time I did this too,” Repulse says.

I look back—which is down—while I run to see how far we are off the ground. It is terrifying and crazy cool at the same damn time.

When we reach the floor, I use a pocket mirror to peer around the edge.

“We’re good,” I say.

Repulse pulls out a small package of something from his vest pocket. He unwraps it, revealing a lumpy clay-looking thing. It’s dark out so I can’t tell, but it looks lime green. He sticks the lump on the window. He turns to face the ground and says, “Put your back against mine.”

I do it. My gravity shifts to normal. Repulse’s body is holding me up. He pulls out a small tape recorder and presses play.

“Raye taye curtz. Raye taye curtz,” the recording says.

There’s a sizzle as the lump and the glass it’s on melts away, leaving a hole big enough for us to climb through.

“What the hell is that snazzy thing called?” I ask in amazement.

“It’s a magic item made by a natural-born wizard. Don’t ask for her or his name, because I don’t
know it. Plus, the wizard is my special contact,” he says, bragging.

“I need to get one them,” I say.

“Good luck with that,” Repulse says as we climb through the hole. “Natural-born wizards are scarce and the wizards in the League of Wizards normally only work with Sacred Sword and Dweal—and they barely work with them as it is.”

“Why?” I ask.

“They have to help Dweal because of Sanjuro’s decree when he established the League of Wizards. Since Sacred Sword started from a civil dispute within Dweal they work with them as well, though they don’t have to. Enough history lessons. Focus on the mission.”

There are cameras in the hallway but they’d been taken care of beforehand. Repulse had planted a device that would run the computers on a looped video at the time of the heist. Now why he couldn’t do that for the outside cameras, I don’t know. So far, this job is going as easy as the other jobs.

“This is where we part like the Red Sea, my boy,” Repulse says. “I’m heading to a closet that will give me access to all of the cameras on this floor. I couldn’t access the rest of them without being here. They’re connected to a more protected system. I have to do some hacking to get you past these doors too. Here, take this and this.”

Repulse hands me some high-tech makeshift scanner, a small recorder, and a toy car.

“We set up a toy race track and racing?” I say jokingly.


He heads down the hallway to the right, breaks
the lock on the door, and goes in.

That’s weird, dude. That was a sudden mood shift. We usually joke around all the time. It’s probably nothing. I head straight ahead to the first door.

“You can use the scanner to access the door now,” Repulse says through my earpiece.

“Roger that, Captain,” I say. I press the only button on the side and hold it up to the hand-print scanner that’s right next to the keypad. It takes a second, but it goes through and the door opens. I run past the next door, heading to the next one. This room has a bunch of empty desks, computers, and file cabinets.

“You’re good to use the next two,” Repulse informs me.

The next door unlocks with the scanner and leads me into a small in-between room with one last door I have to pass. The last door only unlocks after the door behind me locks. This next room contains a bunch of demon weapons, tools, armor, etcetera on shelves, all neatly arranged.

“Where’s it at?” I ask.

“Go all the way to the right and keep going down until you see a door. Take that door,” he answers.

I make it to the door. There’s a lock system on it, but I can tell by the green light above the keypad that it’s unlocked. I head straight in. There are countertops along the walls on both sides of me. Above them are plexiglass cases, and shelves filled with all kinds of sick-looking gadgets and weapons I would love to play with. I can see that the plexiglass cases have alarms attached to the inside walls, along with some type of gas that may or may not be poisonous. There are cameras in the room.
"These cameras are on a loop, right?" I ask. "No, umm . . . yeah, no, I need them so I can guide you. Don’t worry, I’ll take care of the footage," Repulse says.

"Are you good?" I ask. "You sound like something is up."

"I was just thinking about my wife and kids," he says.

"You have kids? Really? You don’t seem like the father type," I say.

"Well I am," he says defensively, sounding pissed.

"Damn, dude. I was joking."

"Right. Take out the toy car, place it on the floor and back away from the toy. Then take out the recorder and press play."

I do. The voice chants, "Raye taye curtz. Raye taye curtz."

A lime green and white swirling portal opens up. Before I can ask any questions, a trader wearing human clothes comes out, holding a handgun. Then two tall, light green bodybuilder-looking demons wearing no shirts or shoes walk through. These two giants are probably about 215 centimeters tall [approximately seven foot]. Like the trader, they have no visible eyes, nose, or ears. They just have a mouth with razor-sharp teeth. These giant beasts are called general traders. I only know this because Repulse briefly showed me a picture of them during training.

The general traders didn’t come through empty-handed, either. One carried a huge roll of a plastic tarp and the other carried a basket of cleaning supplies. I hear the door lock a second later.

"You should move out of the way so they can lay down the tarp," Repulse says plainly.
“What the fuck, dude!” I yell, right before backing up to the farthest wall away from the demons.

“I know you are confused. You deserve an explanation for all of this. Unfortunately, . . . you have to die.”

“What? Let me out of here right now, you fucking bitch ass old man,” I say.

The door is right next to me. I try furiously to open it, but it won’t budge.

“You’re the fall guy. Tonight’s job will look like you, a Dweal hunter, attempted to steal from one of their suppliers. Lately, this particular supplier has been subjugated to a series of robberies. Those robberies are all of the jobs we’ve been doing. This job will cause turmoil between the supplier and Dweal, which is what my boss wants.”

My stomach sinks.

“There’s no evidence that I was here. The same will be true for the demons and your corpse. The demons will kill you in five minutes, then they’ll clean up in five minutes, and then they’ll be gone. We have to kill you. I tried to convince my boss that you could join us, but she doesn’t trust you to be loyal to the cause.”

“What fucking cause? Tell your boss I’ll do it.”

“It can’t be changed.”

“Whatever it is. Anything. I don’t care. I’ll do it,” I plead.

“Sorry,” Repulse says. The general traders have finished laying down the tarp. “You know it hurts me to do this. Believe it or not, you were like the son I never had. To be honest, I don’t know if I chose the right path. In the end, it may turn out that I was wrong. Hopefully, I did choose the right path. Only time will tell.”
“Come on, man,” I whisper. “On the minute chance that you do happen to survive, come find me—and then come kill me. You’ve got ten minutes until the alarm goes off.” “Repulse? Repulse!” I yell. I can’t move. I am stuck. Frozen. I’m face-to-face with my greatest fear and, on top of that, I know I’m pretty much powerless against these demons. I don’t know much about demon hunting, but what I do know is that general traders are always at least level three. Sometimes higher. And there’s two of them, plus another demon. I’m no mathematician, but according to my level two deer tattoo, I’m fucked. Everything seems to be moving in slow motion. I can hear my heartbeat. My vision begins to blur. The trader then cocks the gun and takes aim. “Move, dumbass!” I hear a voice say. Suddenly I’m thrown back in time. ***** Me and Lee are both on the couch playing Tekken, a fighting video game. Lee just kicked my ass . . . again. “You suck, bruh,” Lee said. “Well you’re always using Kazuma and you know of I’m terrified of that demon shit,” I said. Lee gave me a look that said, Really, dude? Then he actually said, “Really, dude? This is a video game.” “Look, if you ever did have to fight one, which you probably won’t, then just accept it.” “Bitch, what?” “Yeah,” he says, chuckling. “You’re fucked
anyway, so why not just say, ‘Fuck it,’ and not go out like a bitch. Although I’m not one to talk since I’m so weak.” Lee lit a blunt, took a long hit and then passed it.

I take a hit and then say, “You’re so serious right now.”

“Serious as Tiberius,” he says in English.


He waves a hand dismissively. “Some Roman emperor fucker. I don’t know. Yeah, though. You don’t want to be up in heaven or wherever the fuck is next and be like, ‘Yeah, I just pissed myself,’” he says in a mocking macho voice. “You’d better be able to say, ‘Yeah, they worked me, but I at least I got a leg!’ Right?”

*****

I use my water to create a whip that reaches the trader, wraps around his handgun, and whips it into my hand, all while avoiding the hits of rushing general traders.

Now with the handgun, I pull out my dagger and start defending myself with my dagger and handgun style. Repulse helped me improve on this style a lot. Speaking of which, fuck that bitch! I can’t worry about that fucker right now. If I can last ten minutes the alarm system will go off and the security will come waltzing in.

“I’m going to last the whole ten minutes, you bastards. And when I get out of here I’m going to kick Repulse’s ass,” I declare. I say it even though I don’t know if I believe it myself. Stop! Focus.

I’m slicing, shooting, and dodging the general traders, but it is not slowing them down. Most of my cuts are shallow and the normal bullets from this normal gun I stole from the trader are not really helping
me right now. I’m not even trying to attack them. I’m only countering to avoid getting hit.

The trader is sitting back holding some bizarre-looking knife. I blast water in between the general traders to hit the trader with pressurized water. This hit knocks it on its ass. The general traders charge me. Immediately, I turn around, surround my body with water, run up the wall, kick off it, and use my water to blast off and spin myself like a water bullet past the heads of the general traders, so they can’t grab me. While the trader is on the ground, I land on top of it, stab it in the throat at least four or five times, and yell while I do it.

I hear the general traders running up on me quick from behind, so I turn around, put away my weapons, throw up a shield of water, and then shoot water from my other hand at a downwards angle, which sends me flying backwards. I just miss being hit by a huge fist which leaves craters in the floor. I blast off the wall to get behind them. The trader I’d maniacally stabbed is slowly getting up.

“Stay down, you stupid bitch,” I yell.

I empty the whole clip of my handgun into its chest and head. The trader is dead now, but I don’t know how I’m going to keep avoiding these huge fucking demons in this small place. I wish I hadn’t listened to Repulse when he’d told me to leave my cellphone.

I’ve been bouncing around off the walls and ceiling using my water now for a few minutes. I take off my shoes so I can blast water from my feet too.

A fun idea pops into my head. I don’t know how long I can do it for, this will probably drain me, but I can’t think of anything else.

Once again I gain some distance. I quickly
slide into a kneeling position on the floor. I form huge balls of water from my hands. Before the general traders can punch holes through my body, I hit them with the huge water balls. The water now completely surrounds their bodies and I have them levitating in the air.

That’s it. That’s my plan. Hold the bitches until time is up . . . or until I’m dead. I don’t know how long it’s been since I started this fight. If I had to guess, I’d say it’s been about five, maybe seven minutes, if I’m lucky. My body is trembling and that’s not just because I’m concentrating and can feel my spirit energy draining. No, it’s because the fear is coming back. I’m no doctor or whatever, but I think the initial adrenaline I had is starting to go away. My fight is turning into flight.

The demons keep fighting to get out of the water bubble.

“Come on, just die already,” I say. I knew they didn’t need to breathe air, but I was still hoping I could drown the bitches. I have to concentrate even harder to keep them from bursting out of the bubble.

“Hey, Lee. Lee?” I call. “If you haven’t crossed over or reincarnated or whatever yet, then help me out, will ya?”

I know that most likely Lee is not there, but it helps me concentrate.

“Hey, do you remember when Aki got Bunzo and Bakin high off their asses on mushrooms? Aki thought it would be funny to spike their food and watch them trip. Instead they were partying in his room and destroyed all his stuff, because they somehow thought they were ‘throwing pebbles down a stream,’ when really, they were just launching all of his shit across the room—including his huge 80-inch
TV. Yeah, Aki was pissed. Me and you, we thought it was hilarious.”

I grit my teeth against the strain of using so much power.

“Then there was that was the time that Giichi managed to get us into a sorority party. Who was there, again? Fujio . . . Heizo, me . . . and you. Yeah. We played strip poker and you managed to get all the girls naked, you sly dog. Dude, that was the night you lost your virginity, wasn’t it? When was that . . . we’re the same age, so twenty, I’m pretty sure. That wasn’t that long ago. They might have been assholes at the end there, but they were still our brothers,” I say with tears forming in the corners of my eyes. “Killing them . . . that fucking sucked. Make sure you yell at them and make them apologize to you. If they don’t, I damn sure will when I make it up there.”

The SED is hitting hard now. I can’t hold this much longer. My body is shaking a lot. “That ten minutes needs to be up already,” I say.

The water ball prisons holding the general traders fall apart on the floor. I try getting up but fall back to the ground. It hurts to move. It takes my whole everything to dodge the charging general traders with just enough water to push me around them and to the opposite side of the room. I lose control and crash into the wall. I yell in pain. The general traders’ backs are facing the door.

The lights turn red and an alarm goes off. The door unlocks. Six turrets come out the walls. Three on each side pointing at the general traders.

“Demons detected. Permission to fire granted,” a computerized voice says.

AD lasers come beaming at the general traders from the turrets. The general traders cover their
heads like that will help. It takes a minute, but the demons die.

Once they finish the demons off, the turrets take aim at me. It just occurred to me that they could kill me without asking any questions. I hadn’t thought about that. Damn.

“Human detected. Unauthorized entry. Permission to fire granted,” the computerized voice says.

The doors open. Six people wearing combat gear come flooding in, aiming their AD rifles at me.

“Hold your fire,” I hear a voice say in English. A man in a fancy suit comes through the crowd of hunters who are pointing guns at me. The guy rips off my mask. He then says, in Japanese now, “Who are you?”

I’m sitting on the ground, leaning against the shelf when I say, “The guy who slept with your sister last night.”

“Extremely unlikely, my friend,” Fancy Suit says.

“Kiego? What up fam?” Tom says, popping up next to Fancy Suit.

*****

“Why would they, whoever ‘they’ are, want to cause trouble between Dweal and Wolfwood? That doesn’t make sense,” Tom says in English.

I’d told him everything. I don’t know why, but I get the same vibes from him that I used to get from Lee. I feel like I can trust him. If Tom wasn’t here I probably wouldn’t have said shit and just accepted my fate.

“You tell me. You’re the Dweal hunter,” I say. We’re in Veda’s office. Apparently, he can heal, but not right now. He looks a bit banged up. Tom does too. I’m handcuffed to a chair.
“You are, too,” Tom says amused and, I think, excited. “Looks like we found a traitor. Repulse, huh? Hopefully he’s the only one.”

“You believe him?” Veda says, clearly skeptical. “You’re not lying, are you?” Tom asks.

“Nope,” I say tiredly.

“See?” Tom says, like that was indisputable evidence.

“Tom, he could easily be lying,” Veda says with an expressionless face.

“But he’s not. Look,” Tom says, putting a hand on his shoulder. “You trust me now, right?”

“Yes,” Veda says hesitantly.

“Then trust me. We can trust him. He gives off good vibes,” Tom says.

Veda stares at him for a long moment before saying, “Okay, my friend.”

“If he acts up, I will kick his ass,” Tom says.

“You’ll lose,” I say.

“Bet,” he says.

“Bet,” I say back.

Tom’s phone goes off. He steps aside to answer it. “Yeah. What? Yeah, umm, hold up.” He takes his ear away from the phone and asks Veda, “Hey, Veda, you got a portal that can drop me off in Cincinnati, Ohio?”

“No, but I have one that can send you to Columbus,” Veda says.

“Close enough,” Tom says before turning his attention back to the phone. “Columbus. Yeah, sorry. Okay.” He hangs up.

Tom seems to takes a second to process what he heard. He says in a numb tone, “Hey, I gotta go. Terrorist attack on a hospital suspected to be caused by demons.” He looks at Veda and adds, “Dweal will
pay you for the portal.”

Veda goes to his desk and grabs a glowing stone that keeps changing colors. He says some magic words and tosses the stone in the air. The stone turns into a portal.

Tom cuts my handcuffs with my knife. He’s about to hop through the portal when Veda says, “What are we going to do about the Kiego situation?”

Tom looks at me and says, “Stay here with Veda. I’ll contact my superior and tell him what’s up. Don’t talk to anyone from Dweal besides me. Ok?”

I nod.

“I need to hear you say it. I know your instincts will tell you to bang out,” Tom says.

“I will stay, man. Go and deal with that,” I say.

“Please give him someplace he can lay low. Don’t let anyone know he’s here,” Tom says to Veda before disappearing through the portal.

I like how he assumes that Veda will do it.

Now it’s just me and Veda. We look at each other. It’s was starting to get awkward, so I say the first thing I think of.

“You got some weed?”
Chapter 10: Little Monster
Narrator: Naomi Yahee

09/26/2018  17:30  Cincinnati, Ohio

I’ve seen people brutally slaughtered. I’ve seen people sacrificing themselves to a demon for revenge. But this . . . this is too much.

Standing in front of the hospital, what I see is something completely different. A huge pile of rubble that should be a functional hospital. A huge pile of cement, drywall, installation, glass, marble, and everything else. All of those innocent human lives under that pile of rubble.

Why?
Why?
Why?
Why?
WHY?

THE DEMONS THAT DID THIS WILL DIE!

My fist are clasped so tight I feel like I could punch a hole through the moon. I can feel the rivers of tears falling down my face. My lightning is visibly starting to flow through my body.

“There she goes again, losing control,” I hear a Dweal hunter say.

“Just like that day all those years ago,” another hunter says.

“They should lock her up. Her being a Yahee shouldn’t give her immunity,” a voice says.

“Yup. Along with all the other high-risk spirit users,” someone else agrees.

These people are all Dweal Intelligence Division hunters.

A powerful grip clamps down on my shoulder.
The pain brings me to my knees. The electricity fades away.

“What did I tell you about controlling your emotions?” I hear my angry sister say. “Cool it, little sis. There are civilians around. Take your medicine, Naomi,” she adds, now sad and disappointed.

No! I’ve let my emotions get the best of me—again. I shamed Nya and my family name, once again. I start crying as I take the medicine out of my vest and pop a pill. It’s a special calming medicine made by a well-known reclusive supernatural doctor.

I wipe the tears and stand up.

“Sorry, big sis. I just . . . ”

“I know. This is truly a terrible sight to see,” Nya says. She pets my head. It always puts me at ease when she does that.

“Did any normal humans see?” I ask.

“No. The tribe has got them blocked off pretty far back behind the caution tape, along with the local authorities,” she responds.

“They’ve got a tent set up over there with some destroyed cameras, computer equipment and cellphones. See if you can find any clues about where this demon and demon sympathizer might have portaled to,” Nya orders.

“Yes, ma’am,” I say.

At least we knew who we were looking for. The demon had sent the video footage of the massacre to Dweal via VHS tape. The footage had the demon in full view. He’d left a message in a marine’s blood that read, My name is Yavod and, yes, I am a demon. He’d even smiled into the camera before disappearing.

Yavod is mocking Dweal. I really despise demons. I wish Nya would let me join the Fighting Division, so I could kill them all. I still need more training,
though. I’m not that skilled as a fighter.

Thirty minutes pass as I search.

“Sup, Lightning Bug?” I hear someone say right next to my ear.

My reflexes kick in and I hit him with an electric slap. Turns out it was just Tom.

“Damn, tsundere mode activated,” Tom says, rubbing his cheek.

“How many times do I have to tell you to not sneak up on me?” I say.

“But it’s so fun,” Tom says, smiling. He’s been coming around my office a lot lately to bug me. Tom’s smile quickly fades when he says, “This is a terrible sight to see.”

“Yeah,” I say solemnly. I turn around and go back to work. A moment passes as we share in the sadness of the situation.

“It’s weird not seeing you as your usual extremely energetic self,” Tom says with a smile.

“Don’t bug her about it, Red Lion,” Nya says, coming into the tent.

“It’s ok, Nya. I had a bit of an episode earlier, Tom, so I had to take my crazies to calm myself," I say to Tom with a forced smile.

Truthfully, I’d rather him not to know, but this is my punishment: to fill this shame. Losing control is not an option. This is one reason why I can’t have friends.

Tom stares at me for a moment before saying, “That’s all right. All my friends are little weird. Including me.” He turns to ask Nya, “What exactly am I supposed to being doing, sensei?”

“You and I are on guard duty. Plus, I’m leading this op. We’ve already swept the area to see if the demon is here and for more planted bombs. There are
no more bombs and Yavod is nowhere to be found. There are a few other sites that intel says Yavod has been to in the past. Other Dweal hunter teams are searching and/or surveying them right now. Stay close to my baby sister. I’m going to boss people around some more,” Nya says and then walks out of the tent.

“I don’t need a babysitter,” I say, yelling after her.

“Sounds like the start of a porno, if you ask me,” Tom says, laughing.

“Tom, you’re gross. Eat shit and die, perv,” I say right before throwing lightning from my hand at him.

Tom dodges and says with a smile, “All right. Ok. No sex jokes. I am learning the ways of Naomi Yahee.”

I try not to smile, but I think I must be, because it seems like Tom notices it. Even in this situation, he can make dealing with this tragedy bearable. I like that about him.

I turn around and go back to work. Some time passes as he sits quietly in the chair next to me, which is not normal for him. Like I said, he’s usually constantly bugging me. I glance over to see him studying the demonology app that has all of the most common demons. I’m surprised he hasn’t said anything about my glove on my right hand. I designed it so that there is a hump covering the embedded star on my right hand, so that it doesn’t look too conspicuous.

This op requires us to blend in with the normal humans. All of the demon hunters are dressed in suits and coats. That includes Nya and Tom. I’m wearing a long purple dress that artfully cuts off at the knees in
the front, but is long in the back. I’m also wearing a brown leather jacket. We try to make it look like we’re law enforcement when we can’t wear our masks. That also means we can’t carry around our crazy-looking AD weapons unless they’re easily concealed.

After about ten minutes or so, Tom breaks the silence by saying, “You ready to admit that we’re friends yet?”

“Jahrahdahkah,” I say. My four silver cell-phone-sized lightning bug drones fly up from the desk. The low buzzing from the flapping wings on my drones fills my tent.

“Yo, we got drones? Dope,” Tom says, excited.

“I have drones. Not you,” I say to correct him.

“Sweet. What can they do?”

“They absorb the lightning from my body and can shoot beams of lightning. It’s my way of trying to fully utilize my powers since Nya won’t help me master them any further. That one is Jah. That one is Rah. That one is Dah. And that one is Kah. All together they’re what I just said. Jahrahdahkah.”

“How do you tell them apart?”

“That’s a secret. Anyway, the software update has finished. These drones are still in the prototype phase,” I admit.

“We can work out together sometime if you want,” Tom says.

I look at him and then up while I consider that offer. I still don’t know if he is the traitor or not. But, then again, if he is the traitor then this will allow me to get close to him and figure out the truth.

Tom says, “I need to reach level five. I was told that there aren’t a lot of level five hunters. I’m working on becoming the best demon hunter there is. It seems like reaching level five is the best way to do
“Why are you working so hard to be the best? Reaching level five, even for hunters with spirit powers, is incredibly hard. Unless they’re like Sanjuro, with a ridiculously strong spirit power.”

Tom looks at me, confused. He says, “Isn’t that the goal of every Fighter Division hunter? It isn’t that special of a goal.”

“Not every hunter feels that way. As long as they are good enough to win and come back alive that’s all they care about. Survival. Now, the three clans are different. Especially the Yahee clan,” I say.

“Maybe we need to change that then,” Tom says, smiling. “I’ve been wondering. Why only one glove?”

“It’s just my style,” I lie.

“Cool. I’ll be back.”

Minutes later he returns holding two cups of coffee.

“Caramel cappuccino or chocolate cappuccino?” Tom asks.

“My therapist says I’m not supposed to drink caffeinated beverages,” I reply, shamefully salivating.

“Oh. I’ll be right back.”

“No, no, no, no, no. Give me caramel. Gimme!” I say like a junkie needing a fix. “Nya’s going to be mad at me again.”

I take baby sips, trying to hold myself back from just dumping it into my mouth hole.

“I’ll keep a lookout for her,” Tom says, amused.

He pulls out three granola bars and says, “I didn’t know what kind to get you. Chocolate chip, oatmeal raisin, or peanut butter?”

“Oatmeal raisin.”

Tom sips his cappuccino and demolishes his
two granola bars.

“Thank you,” I say quietly. I’m still trying to recover data from all of the broken devices from the wreckage.

“Hakuna matata,” he says. For those of you who don’t know, it means no worries. “I was starving anyways.”

Tom takes another sip. I do too but I burn my tongue because I drink it too fast. Tom doesn’t notice. I play it cool. It’s been a while since I had caffeine. Historically, it makes me way too energetic, but since I took my crazies it should be alright—right? Hopefully.

“So you really are crazy, huh? Got a therapist and everything?” Tom asks.

I am about to snap back at him because it sounds like an insult. Yet, when I turn to look at him, he is leaning against my desk, facing the opposite side of the tent. He has a solemn look on his face that disarms me.

“That’s nice. You’ve got someone to keep your crazy in check. I miss that,” he says, sounding envious. I think it’s envy. I don’t have much experience with people.

“Just out of curiosity, if I joined the Technology Division would I get some sweet drones too?” Tom asks, trying to change the mood.

“Not really. I made them,” I say.

“Wait, seriously? I thought you were still in school. How old are you?” Tom asks.

“Twenty-one.”

“Back up. When I asked you to make me a weapon, does that mean you were going to make it yourself?”

“I told you I was going to,” I say, a little an-
noyed. “I’ve been trained as an anti-demon weapon maker and I’ve had a master’s in engineering since I was eighteen.”

“Whoa. I didn’t realize I was in the presence of a genius,” Tom says.

“I’m not a genius. I just studied really, really, really hard until I was on the same level as one. I spent most of my childhood studying my ass off. I rarely did anything else, and I don’t have friends so that made it a lot easier to get to where I am today,” I admit. Damn. I’d said more than I wanted to share for some reason. Oops.

“You keep saying that. I told you, we’re friends,” he says.

“I can’t have friends,” I say.

An alarm notification on my laptop goes off before he can reply.

“What’s that?” Tom asks.

I minimize the current window on my laptop and open up another. “My equipment has been scanning the surrounding area for devices that aren’t ours and it just picked up on something,” I say.

“What’s that red blinking light?” Tom asks, looking out at the pile of rubble.

“The computer says it’s a cellphone, but it’s not registered to our tribe.”

“I’ll go check it out,” Tom says. He grabs his sword out from his suitcase and straps it on his hip before leaving.

“I’m right behind you,” I say. I shoot a quick text to Nya. I grab my weapon suitcase and my cellphone.

“Jahrahdahkah, follow,” I order. My lightning bugs start buzzing as they fly around me.

I reach Tom who is holding his cellphone with
the flashlight on. The flashing red light comes from a different, cracked cellphone on top of the rubble. Tom picks up the flashing, cracked cellphone.

“It’s just flashing red. I can’t unlock it,” Tom says.

“Get away from it,” we hear Nya yell from a distance.

Too late.

The red light emitting from the phone glows intensely red until red is all I see. Seconds later, we’re somewhere new. Tom and I are standing in a huge fancy room—a room that looks like it was meant for holding fancy royal parties. A lot of the decorations are gold—or at least they are colored gold. But, most notably, there are streaks of blood almost everywhere I look.

Bodies are piled in the far corner. All of the tables, which still have unfinished food on them, have been pushed aside. A well-dressed, tall black man is sitting at the one table that hasn’t been pushed aside and is maliciously smiling at us. He’s wearing a maroon and brown argyle sweater with a white dress shirt and tie underneath, along with brown dress pants. Next to him, leaning against the table, is the same massive sword that he had used to murder everyone at the hospital. It’s Yavod!

“Greetings. I’m glad the plan worked out. Excellent. It looks like you’re dressed for the occasion as well,” Yavod says with a smile.

An Asian woman with some samurai armor but no chest plate carries and drops a body onto the already huge mountain of corpses of well-dressed men and women. She then folds her arms and leans against the table Yavod is sitting at. They don’t have human cloak around them. They must have an actual
human form. I hate it when demons have that. They are harder to detect.

"Demons!" I growl.

"I’m anxious to start. Just so there’s no confusion, we are both demons. Let me formally introduce myself. I am Yavod. The only thing I want in this world is to fight. There’s nothing like the thrill of battle," Yavod says, enthusiastically.

"Is that why you killed all of those innocent people at the hospital? For the thrill?" I ask, not even trying to cover up my disdain.

"That is correct. I had to see how fast I could kill off a whole hospital of people. It was about eleven minutes, by the way," Yavod answers.

"You evil bastard," I say.

"I don’t concern myself on what’s good or evil. The only thing that matters is the fight," Yavod explains.

"I’ll kill you," I say with venom.

Tom puts a hand on my shoulder. "Easy, Lightning Bug. He’s at least a level five. On top of that, he has that other demon. We have to play this smart," Tom says, oddly calm.

"Oh, no need to fret," Yavod says. "I’m merely a spectator this evening. You two will be battling this one." He points to the samurai demon next to him. "If you can beat Kim then I will let you live. Damn, I wish I had some popcorn. Kim."

"Yes?"

"Go."

"Sir," Kim says. She darts across the room with crazy speed. In seconds she appears right in front of Tom and kicks him about nine meters [about ten yards] before he even has a chance to draw his long sword.
Then Kim is standing to my right side with a hand on the sheath of her katana. She glances at me without moving her head.

“You should draw your weapon too,” she says. She starts running towards Tom and draws her blade.

I take off my coat and my dress, revealing my yellow compression shorts and a compression tank top that have the Technology Division symbol all over them. Tom takes off his coat, but he’s still wearing his suit.

“Jahrahdahkah, attack,” I yell right before throwing my quiver over my shoulder. I take my bow out of my suitcase too.

Tom’s long sword and Kim’s katana clash. Jahrahdahkah starts shooting at her. She senses the shots and does a backflip. She shoots two fast balls of lava that melt away my Rah and Kah drones. I shoot a poison arrow at her while Jah and Dah are still shooting. Kim dodges all the lightning beams from my drones, catches my poison arrow in midair, and snaps it.

Tom pulls out his lighter, lights up his hand, and tries hitting her with a flamethrower. I try hitting her with all of my arrows. Kim dodges, cuts, and blasts her balls of lava at us to avoid all of the hits.

Jah and Dah return to the specially made charging pads on each side of my shoulders. The pads connect directly to my skin. I run the lightning up from my shins all the way to my wrists so I can start using lightning arrows. These lines of lightning also charges my drones.

Tom slices at Kim. She dodges and counters with a slash to Tom’s side. Tom blocks the hit. I send three lightning arrows Kim’s way. Kim dodges and comes sprinting towards me. She blasts three lava
balls at Tom and slices my lightning arrows. Her blade closes in on my neck. Dah flies in the way to take the blow for me while I move to safety. That move had given Tom just enough time to sprint across the room and attack Kim from behind.

Kim senses the pending attack, so she kicks me as hard she kicked Tom earlier and blocks Tom’s long sword with her own sword, without even turning around. The sound of the two swords clashing is intense. My lower back hits the ground hard. It hurts to even try to move. I try to catch my breath.

Tom and Kim go at it with their swords. Tom is taking some cuts, but nothing too severe. Kim is unscathed and is smiling like she has everything completely under control.

The realization starts to set in.
Kim is toying with us.
We cannot beat her and we are going to die.
My hatred for all demons is endless, but it’s not enough to kill these two. There’s only one thing left to do. I have to use the lightning bomb. No one is around except for Tom. Tom might be a traitor anyway. No, he is a traitor! He’s like everyone else at Dweal. He despises me. All of them do. They still hate me for what I did all of those years ago.

They hate me. THEY HATE ME. THEY HATE ME. THEY HATE ME. THEY HATE ME.

Tom is just pretending to be my friend. He’s my watchdog. No, he’s a traitor.

KILL THE DEMONS. KILL THE DEMONS. KILL THE DEMONS. KILL THE DEMONS!

I shoot lightning arrows at Kim. She blocks my hits and still manages to block Tom’s, too. Then two of my lightning arrows hit Tom’s shoulder, leaving a painful-looking burn mark.
Oh well.

Jah and I shoot as many lightning arrows as possible at Kim. I don’t even care if they hit Tom at this point. Kim rushes over, sending three lava balls at Jah. Jah tries its best to avoid the lava balls, but they are too fast and well placed to avoid. My last drone falls, melting to the ground.

Kim stands in front of me. She raises her katana and brings it down with great force. I barely see it happen. Tom uses his fire to blast himself over to me to block the hit. But instead of his sword blocking the swing, it’s his left arm instead. He hadn’t been fast enough to get in position and use his sword so he did the next best thing. Tom didn’t even flinch when he lost his arm.

Kim was clearly surprised to see that Tom was able to get over here in time. So was I. He shouldn’t have done that. Not for me.

“There may be hope for you yet,” Kim says. “Too bad you’re going to die here.”

“Naomi,” Tom says, serious and focused. “Nya told me you had the power of a level five. Set off the lightning bomb.”

“You don’t know what you’re asking,” I say. “You will die.”

“Stop talking and just do it,” Tom yells. Still using his sword, he starts fighting Kim with only one arm. He’s ignoring the urgency of the fact that he is losing a fatal amount of blood. It seems he does know that, at least, because he gains some distance between Kim and him and cauterizes his left arm to stop the bleeding.
It’s almost as if he’d forgotten he lost an arm for a moment.
I feel the electricity building within me.
Why? Why is he so ready to die?
The electricity increases.
He can’t be the traitor. He gave up his arm for me.

Now my whole body is glowing yellow.
*And now he’s giving up his life for me. Tom . . . I’m sorry.*

The lightning comes bursting out of me like a bomb. There’s a huge cracking noise. Normally whenever this happens I lose consciousness. This time I can see it all. Or rather, I can only see the yellow lightning all around me. I hear light bulbs and other electrical devices exploding. Tom screams out in pain. It will be the last time I hear his voice. I can hear Kim screaming in pain too, but soon her voice dies out as well. The screams stop.

The lightning bomb goes on for a few more minutes. It then slowly starts to fade and my vision becomes more and more clear.

The room is damaged and on fire. I see Tom and Kim’s corpses on the ground. SED is hitting, and it’s getting harder and harder to keep my eyes open. I crawl to Tom’s body. The body of the friend I just killed. The body of the friend I’d wrongfully accused of being a traitor. The body of the friend who gave his life to protect me.

I’m a piece of shit. Those hunters were right about me earlier. I am a monster.

I make it just far enough to reach his hand. I take hold of it.

“That was an astonishing performance, Lightning Bug. They should change your name to Lightning
Storm or Power Plant or Lady Thor or something,” Yavod says, amused. He walks into the room, unharmed. “If I hadn’t left the room, I would have been heavily damaged myself—or killed! Dweal has such a powerful spirit user like you and they’re letting you go to waste. That’s sinful. They’re the real demons, if you ask me.”

“Shut up. Dweal may not be perfect, but I will not let anyone bash on my tribe. Especially a damn demon,” I say, barely able to speak. I glare at him with a killer intent. By the way he looks at me I can tell he feels my animosity.

Kim’s body moves! She yells a terrible yell. Her body is badly charred, and she looks like a lizard person now. This must be her true demon form.

“No,” I say, barely able to get the word out. Damn it. I’m pathetic. I gave it my all and killed my friend, only to fail miserably. Both of the demons are still alive!

Kim limps over to me with her sword in her hand and she is pissed. After a few steps, though, she falls down hard. Her leg snaps loudly. She’s not really moving now, but she’s still breathing. Kim looks like she shouldn’t have even been able to move from all of the burns on her body. But, then again, she should be way more damaged than that. She should be dead. Had she blocked my lightning somehow?

“I told you not to underestimate them. You’ll have to make it out of this burning building alive all on your own if you want to leave. Prove that you’re not weak. Or die,” Yavod says to Kim.

Kim grits her teeth as she forces herself to crawl out the burning mansion. She stares directly at me when she does it.

Yavod walks over to me with his huge sword
strapped to his back.

Yavod picks up Tom with one hand. Instinctively I hold up my hand like I’m prepared to shoot lightning even though I know I can’t.

Yavod smacks my hand out of the way and picks me up with his free hand.

“Killing you today would be an incredible waste of talent. I want you to reach your full potential before I cut you down with my own hands,” Yavod says with a dark look on his face.

I try squirming, but I quickly lose the energy to fight. My body hurts so much right now I am in tears.

Lamp lights line the front yard as Yavod carries us out of the burning mansion. There are also a ton of trader corpses sprawled across the yard, along with my very pissed sister.

Lightning Keeper jets up the steps. Yavod drops both Tom and me, steps forward, and whips out that giant sword just in time to block Lightning Keeper’s bladed gauntlet.

Kim has managed to crawl all the way outside and is lying on the front porch.

Lightning Keeper’s gauntlet blades and Yavod’s sword are still connected, each one trying to overpower the other. Yavod wins the struggle and sends her falling down the steps.

She catches herself.

Yavod jumps down the steps to meet her. She runs to get behind him and slashes several times. Each time, Yavod blocks the hit. Lightning Keeper then throws a series of stabs, moving faster Floyd “Money” Mayweather. Yavod, surprisingly, blocks each stab with a slash.

It always amazes me whenever I see my sister go all out. They are moving so fast I can barely see
their movements.
Yavod swings his sword heavy horizontally. Lightning Keeper jumps up, spinning sideways. While in the air, she counters, using the right shin blade on her boot to swipe a diagonal slash across the left side of Yavod’s chest and right arm. When Lightning Keeper lands, she quickly grabs his right arm with her left. Using her right hand she stabs Yavod and then there’s a loud ding sound. Lightning Keeper jumps back.

Yavod starts laughing while he takes off his damaged sweater, tie, and dress shirt. Lightning Keeper looks confused.

“That would have worked if I didn’t armor up,” Yavod says. His abdomen is covered in gold metal. He stabs his sword into the ground. “It looks I was giving you too much of a handicap. Let me use about fifty percent of my power.”

Yavod raises his hand. Three long silver spears rise from the earth on his right side and three long gold spears rise from the earth on his left side. He points his right hand at a vertical angle towards the ground. One of the silver spears melts and wraps around his right hand into a sliver spiked glove. The same happens with his left, but with one of the gold spears. He then gets into a battle stance. His body turns sideways with his legs spread and bent, his left arm is straight out, and his right arm is bent upwards. He twitches his hands and the four spears, two silver and two gold, go flying at Lightning Keeper with incredible speed.

Lightning Keeper runs at Yavod. She does a sideways flip to the left to avoid one spear and jumps to avoid another, lands, does a backwards bend, and then twists like she’s Neo in The Matrix to avoid the next. She continues twisting that way until she does a
sideways roll on the ground to avoid the last spear.

Yavod, grinning like a manic, steps up and punches down at her while she is still bent over. Lightning Keeper quickly puts her left hand on the ground behind her and kicks up with her right leg, the shin blade out. Unfortunately she only makes contact with the silver glove. After that, they trade a series of kicks, punches, and blocks.

Yavod pushes Lightning Keeper backwards and twitches his hands while saying, “Don’t forget about my spears.”

Lightning Keeper jumps high in the air, about ten feet, doing a backflip over the four spears.

Yavod commands the spears to attach themselves to a glove. Two for each glove.

“Kim,” Yavod says before lunging at Lightning Keeper. Lightning Keeper lunges right back at him. Kim pulls something out and starts chanting. I try to stop her, but I can’t move. Before Lightning Keeper and Yavod have a chance to collide, a portal swallows up Kim and another starts to swallow up Yavod. Inches before they collide, Yavod says, “Sayonara.”

And with that, the two demons disappear. The threat is over.

Lightning Keeper walks over to us. I crawl over to Tom and put his head in my lap. I start crying again for the death of my friend.

Then I feel it.

I can feel the subtle electric flow running through his body. I see his chest move up and down. He’s alive!

“Oh, thank goodness,” I say, bent over and crying into his chest.

“You undersold how stupid strong she is,” Tom says, looking at Nya.
“Tom!” I say.
“Yeah. My baby sister is pretty OP,” Nya says, patting my head.
“How?” I ask Tom. He knew what I was asking. How did he survive the lightning bomb?
“What do you mean, how? You did it,” Tom replies.
“I don’t understand.”
“You bent the lightning away from my body. It was actually pretty cool to watch. To see all that energy come from one small Native American girl was something. And then you accidentally let a little shock me. I passed out after that,” Tom explains. “You really don’t remember doing that?”
I start talking, super fast and super emotional, “Not at all. I thought you were dead. I thought I was dead. I was worried I would have to tell poor old GG the news. By the way, is she your grandma, your mom, or your foster mom? Either way, I would have had to tell her the bad news. She would have killed me after hearing what happened. Wait. I can’t tell a civilian about the supernatural world. I’m rambling again. You lost your arm! Now you have to be a one-armed swordsman. I was so worried. I—”
I stop talking when Tom puts a fist up and gently bumps my chest, right over my heart.
“Don’t be. We’re too strong to die. We got goals to accomplish,” Tom says. He tries to wipe my tears, but the river keeps coming.

09/27/2018 12:00 Columbus, Ohio

Nya and I walk into Tom’s hospital room. The hospital is at the Medical Division building. They have Tom in a hospital gown. He looks very satisfied as he eats his steak and fries while watching *Cowboy Bebop.*
“What up, though?” Tom says before going
back to his steak.

“You’re in good spirits,” Nya remarks.

“I got some good steak, some good fries, A1, and some good anime. We all good over here, B!” Tom says.

“That’s good to hear,” Nya says. She goes over to steal a fry . . . or two . . . or three.

“Here,” Nya says, putting a plate of cookies on Tom’s nightstand. “GG sent these. And these.” She puts a pack of cigarettes and a lighter on the nightstand too.

Tom rolls his eyes. “She knows I don’t smoke. I hate it when she does that. And this is a hospital. I can’t smoke those in here.”

“At least she made you cookies. GG sounds like a really kind person,” I say.

“You haven’t met her,” Tom says plainly. “She yells . . . a lot.”

“What did they say about your arm?” Nya asks.

“Ah, don’t worry about that. I already hit up my boy, Veda. He’ll heal me as soon as he rests up. He’s staying at some guest wing at HQ right now,” Tom says.

“Really? I was working on designs for a cyborg arm for you,” I say, disappointed.

“Seriously? You can do that too?” Tom says. He means in addition to making drones and weapons.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you still want it?” I say, looking at him starry-eyed. “It can have missiles and lasers and everything.”

Tom deliberates my offer. “Nah. Although that would be dope AF, I think I’m going to stick with the good ol’ flesh and blood. If I had that cyborg arm yesterday I would probably be dead,” he says, laughing.

I try to hide my sadness about the fact that I’d
almost killed him. And that I’d wrongfully wanted to kill him.


Nya leaves. Me and Tom are alone now. He pats at a spot on the bed next to him and attempts a British accent when he says, “Have a seat and partake in these delightful biscuits with me.”

“Well, don’t mind if I do,” I say, trying to sound like Emma Watson. I fail.

I take one of the cookies and Tom does too. They’re oatmeal raisin! They’re not the normal kind, however. They’re oatmeal raspberry raisin. OMG, GG.

“I don’t believe I’ve ever had raspberry raisin before. They’re quite delectable,” I say, continuing the British accent.

“Nice. You’re killing it with that accent,” Tom claims. He stops doing it.

“I must get the recipe from your GG. It has the right amount of salt and sugar.”


_Never say that out loud, Naomi. Cool people don’t say that_, I berate myself.

Then I remember what happened to the last friend I had and why I’d told myself I couldn’t have friends. Only Nya.

“Tom.”

“Yeah, what up, fam?”

“Nya didn’t tell you about that night all those years ago. The first time I truly discovered my powers. The first time I used the lightning bomb.”
Tom pauses the show. He waits for me to continue. He patiently gives me time. A long—too long—moment passes before I speak again.

“My parents were demon hunters, of course. My mom was a Yahee and my dad married into the family. They were both in the Fighting Division. My dad mainly used AD guns. He was a level three. My mom was a level four. She had an amazing spirit power. She could send small object flying up in the air and send them raining down, almost with the speed of a bullet. She called her power _Objective Rainfall_. I really admired them both."

I pause. My eyes start watering up. _Come on, damn it. You can do this_, I tell myself.

Tom starts rubbing my back. “You don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to,” he says.

I continue, “I was ten years old when it happened. The adults in the Yahee family were taking the children on a tour of the Technology Division building. A hunter pulled one of the adults aside to tell them something. Then the adults pulled me and my sister aside. They told us that our parents had been killed on their latest mission. The news hit me pretty hard. I took off running and crying. I don’t know where I was running to. I just ran. As I was running I could feel the lightning start to flow out of my body. Although I could feel it, I just wasn’t thinking about it. All I could think about was my parents’ death and how much I wished that wasn’t true,” I say as I cry, barely able to breathe. “My vision started to blur as I went from running, to walking, to not moving at all. That’s when I blacked out and the lightning bomb went off.

I was told that all of the buildings at HQ lost power. The electronics in the Technology Division overloaded and exploded—some of these devices and
systems housed dangerous chemicals. Not only that, but my powers knocked out the system that kept the prisoner’s cells locked. They opened up, letting out all of the human and demon prisoners. There were a lot of injured and dead between the explosion and the escaped prisoners.

When I came to, the lightning had stopped and Nya was holding me in her arms. When kids experience SED it’s way worse. I was screaming in pain. Nya kept saying, ‘It will be okay. The pain will go away.’

There were angry hunters all around us. Their weapons were aimed at me. Even though they knew it was an accident, they still wanted to throw me in Dweal’s prison in Antarctica. They were so angry. Nya managed to convince them that she could teach me how to control my powers and that it would never happen again. Dweal’s COC at the time gave Nya, a fourteen-year-old kid who wasn’t a spirit user or a hunter, just three months to teach me to control my powers. Three months is not enough for a kid—especially a kid with a crazy amount of spirit energy like me—to learn how to control their power. Yet somehow, she did. Two years later, she became the youngest hunter at Dweal. The point is that I can’t have friends, because of what I did all those years ago. Plus, I’m a little crazy. This is my punishment,” I finish.

Tom stares at me for a second.
Tom sighs and then says, “Hey, Naomi.”
“Yeah?”
“That’s dumb.”
“What?”
“You heard me. It’s dumb. I don’t know how
many times I gotta say it, Naomi. *We. Are. Friends.* Stop punishing yourself for something you couldn’t control at the time. You were just a sad little girl who lost her parents and really needed a hug. The adults should have known. Even a guy like me who didn’t have a whole lot of love growing up knows that. Looks like I’m gonna have to become Chief of Fighters, just so I can make some changes around here. The tribe should be better than that.” Tom gently bumps a fist over my heart and holds it there. “I got you, fam.”

Damn it! I can’t win against him. He’s so stubborn.

I start crying, like a lot, and put a fist over his heart in return.

“Tribe is one,” Tom says.

“Tribe is one,” I say.