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# Chapter 1

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## A Visit Gone Wrong

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### Scarlet Asger

The city is full of life today, just like it apparently always is in a Tier 1 city such as this.

A beautiful full moon hanging high in the sky, just *towering* over the massive skyscrapers that are blocking my view of the rest of the city, despite me already being nearly thirty floors up above the ground. What must be hundreds of magi-tech cars quickly flying through the air-streets between each building, not even mentioning the various magic-less cars driving by on the ground belonging mostly to city visitors. Like me. And dare I mention the lovely shimmer radiating off of each skyscraper's outside windows and walls, acting as a shield in case of a Demonic Assault occurring in the capital?

So much beauty. So much awe.

And yet...

"Are you listening to me?" the lady standing next to the comfortable chair I'm sitting on in the middle of the room asks in a rather disgruntled tone. And I so want to respond with 'no, not really'. But I don't. Because that won't help my situation in the slightest.

"Yes," I answer while turning my gaze away from the large window to see the lady in all her receptionist glory standing next to me. She's wearing relatively normal business attire, with a dress shirt and a plaid skirt, and her hair done up in a braid running down one of her shoulders.

I can't help but look up from my seat at her thanks to her annoying high heels. Something no one will ever find me wearing.

Just the thought of it gives me shivers.

"You can either sit there and wait for four more hours for the CEO to come back and kick you out, or you can leave now," she says, her voice relatively high pitch as she adjusts her glasses with a sneer sent my way.

I let out a sigh. One that seems to irritate her even further somehow before I turn my back to her to face the window where I see my own reflection in the mirrorlike surface. In it, I'm wearing my favorite red and black jacket over a random black shirt that I grabbed from my closet. One with the logo of my old high school on the chest. And to top it off, a pair of black pants and black boots.

A rather nice color scheme if I do say so myself. It even matches my black hair and incredibly grey eyes!

"I've already said this, but I'm here because-" I begin, only for the rude lady to cut me off.

"Yes, you've said it before." She says with a glare that I can see reflected in the window. "You're here because you *believe* that your old orphanage director-" she pauses here to scoff "-was the *CEO* of Silver Works." She scoffs again as if once wasn't enough. "Ridiculous."

Yeah, this isn't getting very far. But what can I do?

It does sound rather outlandish when you think about it, even if it *is* the truth. Not that I know why he was working as an orphanage director despite being the CEO of one of the richest companies in the world.

Nothing I can do but ignore the lady though, since she can't legally call the cops or the security officers in this building unless I'm being an actual problem for their office. And since they can't get in touch with Allen until he is done with his meeting, and I proved in some ways that I'm at least connected to him thanks to that little badge he gave me, I can sit here for as long as I want.

But I do wish he would get here sooner, because this lady is annoying. Or at least let someone else get here to take her attention away from me.

As if on cue, the phone over at her desk rings, saving me from the hell of sitting here with her constant discriminatory nagging.

It's not my fault I'm an orphan from a Tier 3 city. So please take that nasty face you're making at me and shove it in a pot somewhere.

Why a pot? Not sure.

Why not?

"I'm not done with you!" she says, still making that face before turning around and walking back across the empty reception room, past the many empty chairs towards her own desk where she sits down and grabs the phone. "Hello? You've reached the Silver Works upper reception. How may I help you?"

I try really hard not to scoff at the obvious difference in treatment.

It was like a switch flipped in her head the moment I mentioned 'orphan' and 'Tier 3'. Kind of sad, but not something I haven't grown at least a little bit used to now. After all, the number of times I've been turned away from the universities here in the capital city of the Terran Republic, Terra, is way too many to count. Which is surprising, considering that I didn't even realize they had that many universities to begin with.

Then again, they have a lot of stuff in a Tier 1 city that a Tier 3 doesn't have.

Flying cars for example.

I let out another sigh while focusing on the peace and not so quiet outside of the building. At the many people going about their day. The flying cars, the shields, everything else that this city has that we didn't have back home.

All of it makes it just how clear the world is.

In fact, if I had to describe the world in some way, then I'd say it were like a video game. One with handicaps depending on where you're born, rules set in place only for those who don't have the strength or backing to ignore them, and no clear cut way towards victory. Just one endless battle of wits, blood, luck, and a touch more blood in the case of Demonic Assaults that everyone has to navigate through every day of their lives.

And one where certain people-

I glance at the receptionist lady happily speaking away with too many platitudes to count towards whoever it is on the other side of the phone.

-have a fun little handicap boosting them far above others even at the start of the game.

I lean back in my chair while closing my eyes and facing forwards again.

Just the idea of moving up in the world to a Tier 1 city, where I can live a much better life without others bothering me. It's all I really want.

But I only have a few more months left to shoot for that goal. Just a few months. And then it's to a Tier 2 city I go instead.

Damnit.

What the h-

My thoughts are interrupted by the feeling of my phone – recently purchased – buzzing in my jacket pocket, making me practically jump out of my skin from surprise. I quickly reach into my pocket while opening my eyes, only to find a message from Belle, my best friend. Otherwise known as Arabellia Silvester. The CEO of this very company, Allen Silvester's daughter.

[Did you find dad yet?]

Following the message is some sort of emoji with a tanuki holding a sign with a question mark. Where she managed to find an emoji like that is beyond me, but I do have to admit that it is a little cute.

[No. Apparently he's in a business meeting right now in a different building, so I'm left listening to the nagging of a receptionist.]

Her response follows incredibly fast, making me wonder just what she's doing right now.

[Aww, just hold tight until he gets back, champ! And don't get yourself into trouble!]

I blink once, then twice at the text before narrowing my eyes.

Now why on earth would I get myself in trouble? I'm perfectly well behaved.

[You know very well that I'm not the one who gets into trouble all the time. That would be Arthur, your little sweetheart.]

I respond with a smirk.

She's had a crush on Arthur – our other best friend, and another orphan from the same orphanage I stayed at – for who knows how long. Even if neither of them have said anything about it to each other. So it certainly makes for fun teasing.

Before she can respond, I send another message as if as an afterthought.

[Also, stop treating me like a child just because you're three inches taller than me.]

I nod my head to myself, satisfied with my work, only for my mouth to drop open when she responds back to me.

[I'm four inches taller, and you know it. So you can go ahead and stop with your little teasing, because Arthur and I are already a thing!]

They're what?! How! When?!

I begin to type in response, ready to barrage both her and Arthur's phones with texts, only for a loud cracking sound to echo throughout the city, following which a shattering sound akin to glass comes from the skies. When I look out the window, I find myself staring at a blood red moon, with various cracks in space high above the skyscrapers.

A loud alarm begins blaring throughout the building, following which the power to the lights shuts off, leaving us in the dark with the only light being that of the emergency lights and the red light of the blood moon.

"Nonono no no noooooooo!!!" I faintly hear the receptionist screaming while dropping the phone and seemingly having a full blown panic attack. This snaps me out of the daze I had entered the moment I saw the blood moon.

I immediately get up from the chair, feeling slightly dizzy from getting up so quickly after being seated for a long time. Or at least, that's what I'm guessing it is. Then I rush over to the lady, where I try to shake her as I ask, "Do you know where the closest bunker is?"

But she's too deep in her panic attack to notice me. All she manages to do is mutter barely audible words, most of which make very little sense in the panic.

So I slap her in the face, snapping her out of it before shouting, "Do you know where the bunker is!?!?"

That gets her attention, and she finally blinks, sanity returning to her, followed closely by anger – likely at me slapping her. But fortunately, she has enough sense to drop it and get up, albeit shakily as she answers my question, "T-there's one on the other side of the f-floor."

I nod my head in appreciation before standing up straight again, feeling the dizziness growing stronger and stronger in the process.

Strange. Why isn't it going away? I'm pretty sure I've been standing for long enough now...

Deciding that it doesn't matter right now, I quickly focus on the receptionist who is still frowning at me.

"Are you just going to stand there and frown at me?" I ask her rather cynically with a frown of my own, snapping her out of it as she turns away and unlocks a door that was behind her desk and leads me through it to a point where the glowing red arrows are. I don't have to ask where they're pointing, considering all of the drills we've had back in high school in case a Fracture ever occurred there. Which it didn't.

I glance down at my phone as we're walking, noting that my internet connection has been severed before I look up again and massage my temples.

Just what's going on?

The original bout of dizziness is still growing stronger, but with a headache mixed in with it now.

At some point we begin running down the halls, mostly because of the lady rushing off after a loud crash sounds from somewhere nearby. Then, after a few minutes of running, I begin to hear a strange sound. Almost like a bug skittering across the ground.

"Miss, do you he-" I begin to ask her, only to cut off as a large, one meter long spider suddenly bursts through a door, smashing it in the process before landing on the lady, who is now screaming her head off. "Holy shit."

Finding that the demon – who I'm assuming is probably a Spawn, the weakest amongst all of the demons – has already pierced its incisors into the lady's face, killing her and cutting off her pained screams, I perform an about-face and run away as fast as my legs can carry me. But in the process of running so quickly, I only find that my headache and dizziness is growing worse. And to make matters worse, my eyes and the top of my head are beginning to hurt as well.

Shit shit shit, what the ever fliipping hell is going on!!!!

I glance back to find the original demon that had appeared snacking on the receptionist's body while two more of them make their way out of the door before noticing me.

And it just gets worse.

## Chapter 2

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### The Contract

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Scarlet Asger

The instant I meet the terrible gazes of the eight legged, eight eyed, black creatures, I speed up my running as fast as possible. Doors fly by me at a rapid pace as I ignore the arrows pointing me in the opposite direction to get as far away from those spiders – who of which I can hear following me – as possible. Eventually I make it to a dead end, so I choose a random door and enter through it, hoping against hope that I didn't choose incorrectly.

What I find on the other side of the door is a rather lavishly decorated office. It has a large desk made of wood in the back, with two comfortable chairs facing each other in front of it, and an office chair behind it. One that looks more comfortable than the chairs I have at my own apartment.

I carefully walk further into the room, onto the massive carpet laid out across most of the floor that I bet is a huge pain to vacuum before stumbling forward and catching myself on the table standing between the two chairs.

Seriously, what's wrong with me?

Out of nowhere, my vision begins to blur, only for everything to gain a red tint and then go back to normal. To get a red tint, and then go back to normal again. Over and over again as the pain in my head gets worse and worse, both around my eyes, and behind them.

I hear a growling sound, making me turn to the door, only to remember that the demons were spider subspecies Spawn if I had to guess. Not anything that could or should be able to growl.

If that's the case, then where did that sound come from?

The alternation of my vision repeats over and over again until I lose my strength and fall to the ground. I hear the sounds of spiderlike footsteps skittering into the room, only for the red tint in my eyes to suddenly flash really strongly, to the point that I feel like I see a bit of red light reflecting off of the floor.

Then the spiders make a panicked sounding hissing noise and rush out of the room.

Before I can so much as question their actions, I hear a masculine yet robotic sounding voice resonate in my ears.

**“Curious.”**

I barely manage to turn my head in the direction of the voice despite all of the pain that has now spread throughout my entire body instead of just my head, only to find some sort of... what? No, seriously. What?

Some sort of tanuki is just sitting in the air, floating in place. And-

**“Very curious.”**

-somehow talking to me?

I blink in surprise, somehow forgetting about the pain I'm in for just a single second. Just one.

Is a tanuki calling me strange?

**“Yes. I am. But I'm not a tanuki. I'm a fae.”**

Oh. Okay. Sorry about that... wait, what?

**“Your apology is accepted, mortal. The finding of a half demon is more than worth the trouble.”**

I groan as the pain grows even worse somehow, shaking me out of my shocked stupor.

**“Your demon half has been awakened and is attempting to swallow your human half.”**

The pain may be incredibly severe, but it doesn't stop the creature's words from registering in my mind.

Half demon?

**“If this continues as is, you will die.”**

I feel tears begin to build up in my eyes as the pain continues to grow, only to suddenly vanish again a second later leaving me to suck in a violent gasp of air before flopping on the ground in exhaustion.

What just happened?!

**“I have determined that a conversation will not be fruitful while you are feeling such pain. Therefore, I have numbed your nerves for the duration of our talk.”**

I blink in surprise. It did what?

Wait a second, never mind that. What is this tanu- err, fae, and how can it read my mind?!

The creature in question floats down to rest right on my chest as he – I'm assuming it's a he, considering its voice – says, **“I am of the fae, or as the non-contracted call us, a spirit. And I am here at the benevolence of his majesty to grant you a contract. You, the sole half demon to have ever been born.”**

My eyes shoot open in shock at that.

I'm a... half demon? How is that... how's that possible?

**“A demon and a human being-”**

Wait, wait, wait! I don't mean that! I mean why did it happen? Why would a human and a demon... you know!

**“You're asking why your mother and your father would get together instead of fight each other?”**

I nod my head repeatedly.

The fae – not tanuki – doesn't say anything for who knows how long. So I try to move my body, only to find that I have a lot of difficulty doing so.

**“The answer to your question is unknown. And I would suggest not moving, else you'll speed up your death.”**

My mouth drops open for a second before closing again.

Right. All he said was that he numbed my nerves somehow. Not that he fixed me.

How is it possible for a human and a-

**“Unless you would like to die in thirty five seconds, then I would advise you stop asking questions and form a contract with me.”**

Oh.

A vague feeling of fear sweeps through me at the thought of how close I am to death, but I sweep it away with a deep breath that likely doesn't help anything.

How do we form a contract?

**“Simply share our blood with each other.”**

I blink in surprise.

**“Do you agree to form a contract with me? To share a small portion of the life force you drain from any demons and humans you kill throughout your life?”**

Life... force?

Several seconds pass in silence as I stew over that thought. But after a little bit, the fae reminds me of the remaining time left.

**“Twenty seconds.”**

And I make a decision. Right here and now.

Whatever will happen after this, I don't know. But I want to be one of those players on the board game of life who have the power to be free. The power to make change. Or put simply, who have power.

So yes. I agree to this contract.

**“Very well. So shall it be done.”**

The tanuki raises its paw and chomps on it before lowering itself to my face and dripping its blood into my mouth. And as soon as the blood touches my tongue, I feel my eyes widening in shock as a strange yet not unpleasant feeling spreads through me, despite my nerves apparently being numbed.

It then scratches at my face, drawing only a tiny amount of blood that it quickly brings to its own mouth and swallows.

My eyes widen even further as I stare agape at what I know to be one of those System Notices that the Guardians always talk about on the news. And the only thing that comes to mind at the sight of it is that it really does look like a video game.

**SYSTEM INITIALIZATION IN PROGRESS**

**PLEASE WAIT...**

**“You are now awakening to the System. This process will stop your demon genes from obliterating your human side for the time being.”**



I stare at the notification for who knows how long, a feeling of hope spreading through my still numbed chest, only for me to blink in surprise as the fae’s words register in my mind.

For the time being? Actually, why are you helping me anyways? Aren’t the ‘fae’ supposed to be helping humanity against demons? So why are you helping a half demon in the first place?

I don’t really want to look a gift tanuki in the mouth, but it just doesn’t make sense. And that doesn’t sit well with me.

The spirits, or according to this one the fae – from what I’ve learned back in school – are mystical beings that come from who knows where to help humanity in its time of need against the demons. They first appeared about two centuries ago, only a few years after the first Demonic Assault, and have been contracting with Guardians, giving them access to the System ever since. And they only ever appear in the middle of a Fracture – an enclosed area being assaulted by demons during a Demonic Assault like the one I’m in now – to offer a contract to one of the humans stuck inside of the Fracture.

The fae just stares at me for a few seconds before snapping its little tanuki claws in a ridiculous display that immediately has me regretting questioning it as the pain returns to me.

**“I will tolerate your insolence this time because of how unique you are. But you are not to question us ever again. Do you understand me, mortal?”**

I hurriedly nod my head in agreement.

No questioning the fae, and especially no angering it. Got it.

The fae snaps its claws again – which I still question if that’s even possible in a tanuki form – before answering my question despite its rather arroga- err, benevolent display.

**“His majesty, King Oberon, Ruler of all of the Fae, believes that there must only be one sapient mortal race and has therefore ordered all fae to assist both sides of the war in forming contracts, answering limited questions, and granting their contracted initialization into the System.”**

My mouth drops open.

They’re... helping the demons too?

## Chapter 3

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### A Change and a Rush

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#### Scarlet Asger

Demons. The enemy of humanity. The harbingers of the apocalypse, and enders of the old world.

**“And your kin.”**

The fae's words strike something in me, making my mouth part in silent shock as the realization fully hits me. That I'm technically *part* of those harbingers. Those monstrous creatures.

What does that mean for me? Am I still a human? Can I still exist on earth? What'll happen if the demon genes fully obliterate my human genes? Will I die?

The fae seems to answer my last couple questions first with a rather shocking answer, **"You will not die. With the System in place, should your human genes be fully obliterated by the demon genes, you will simply become a full blooded demon instead. However, there are ways to stop your human genes from being obliterated."**

I let out a sigh of relief, not really sure what I was expecting to hear. The fact that death isn't in that sentence is a huge relief. But becoming a full demon?

That...

How do I stop my human genes from being obliterated? And is there a way to obliterate my demon genes instead?

The fae whose name I still do not know despite having a contract with him waits for a second before asking, **"Girl, do you not wish power? To have the ability to rule?"**

The question surprises me, and honestly, if he hadn't said it himself, then I probably wouldn't have thought about it.

I want the power to do what I want to do. To not be herded around like cattle by those Guardians and other wealthy people at the top of the human food chain.

**"Your demon blood is particularly pure to an incredible degree. With it, you may someday surpass the strongest of humans, even in this Tier 1 City of yours,"** the fae responds to my thoughts as if some sort of devil floating over my shoulder, whispering temptations to me.

And for once, I... might just agree. I never went with what others told me before.

When everyone told me to give up on advancing to a higher education because of my status as an orphan, I proved them wrong and became the top scoring student in our high school. When the Board of Education tried offering me a half paid scholarship to Rhettford University in the Tier 2 city of Rhettford, I managed to negotiate it – with Allen's help – to be a chance at joining a Tier 1 university in the capital of the Terran Republic, despite my lack of success in that particular department.

But now...

I feel heat begin to build up all over my body, with it being particularly strong around my eyes, the top of my head, my hands and feet, and my chest. But I ignore it as a burning desire to prove *everyone* that had ever mocked me and the other orphans wrong grows stronger and stronger in my head.

**"Very good. This may just be the most fun I've had in decades."**

Through the haze of warmth that I'm feeling, and through my current feelings, I hear the slightest hint of emotion in the fae's usually robotic tone of voice. And that has me smirking.

**“The best way for you to survive is to remain a half demon. And to do so, you must hunt. Whether human or demon, you must hunt. You must build up your lifeforce to a point where your genes will reach stability with themselves. Then your path will be set, young mortal girl.”**

The fae’s last words in that sentence feel almost as if it’s mocking me, what with how he paused for a split second between each of the last three words. But at the same time, I remember hearing in school that the ‘spirits’ cannot lie.

I narrow my eyes at the creature as the heat reaches a fever pitch throughout my body.

What is your name, fae?

The fae-professed-tanuki stares at me for several seconds without saying a word before it eventually answers me in a lower pitched tone than normal.

**“Tarankar Floorid Del Vaschmir Detra. As my contracted partner, our lives are now linked, and you deserve to know of my name.”**

The smirk on my face grows even wider.

I open my mouth, only to quickly tilt my head when I cough out blood onto the carpet before responding in kind, out loud this time, “I am Scarlet Asger.”

This fae is a tricky one. I better keep an eye on the thing.

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### **One block away from the building Scarlet is in**

Cipher stabs his hand straight through the head of a large demon fomorian – one of the weakest Class II demons often used as cannon fodder in a Class II Fracture. He then opens his other palm up and whispers, “Flame. Release,” making a geyser of flames burst straight out of a small opening in the armor covering his hand, burning another fomorian alive that was attempting to sneak up on him.

The Guardian is wearing a full set of cybernetic armor, colored with blue armor plating on his forearms, shoulders, torso, and other areas that are often used in combat to block a hit. These armor platings have veins of blue energy moving between them, serving as the magical conduits of the man’s armor which easily block the fireballs being sent at him by the demon acolyte as he blurs across the cafeteria he is in, his speed greater than the average uninitialized human eye can track. The tables in his way simply smash into the walls of the cafeteria in the process of his passing before his raised fist meets the chest of a demon wraith that was attempting to sneak around the cafeteria to chase one of the citizens that he had already let escape from the room.

*Damned thing probably already fixated on one of those survivors.*

After giving the wraith one more smash to the head, ensuring that it’ll never be getting up again, Cipher turns back to the acolyte, raises his hand, and activates a skill that sends a bolt of lightning made out of nanomachines straight at the creature. And before the bolt even strikes, the man turns to the rest of the demons, sending a wave of flames that turn them all into ash, following which he begins walking back to the exit of the cafeteria. All before the ash even gets the chance to hit the ground.



“Tenth floor is cleared,” he states into a device on his arm. One of which the Guardian uses in order to get past the signals of the shield that block other types of internet and telecoms.

It takes only a few seconds for a response to come through the coms before Cipher nods his head to himself and states while walking towards the door that the citizens hid behind, “I’ll get these citizens to safety before clearing the eleventh floor.”

A beep sounds from the device on his wrist, following which he lowers his arm. However, just a second after lowering it, another long and drawn out beep sounds from it, and he raises the arm again.

*Another call?*

The moment he sees the caller id on the small display shown on his arm, his eyes widen, and he immediately accepts the call.

“What is it, Belle?! Are you okay?!” he shouts into the device the moment his daughter’s face shows on the other side with a worried frown. The girl has the same amber eyes as her father, with long black hair, and is wearing a white blouse and black pants on the other side of the call, seemingly in a classroom of the university she goes to.

Belle immediately nods her head and says, “It’s not me you should be worried about! I can’t connect to Scarlet!!”

*Shit. That’s not good.*

Cipher, also known as Allen Silvester, frowns at that and asks, “Do you know where she was before this?”

At this, his daughter scowls at him and practically shouts into her device, “She was at *your* company headquarters to ask you for a favor!!! Have you not been looking at your emails over the past few days?!”

*She what?!*

The people hiding inside of the pantry room connected to the cafeteria send frightened looks at the door as the muffled sound of someone shouting makes its way through the steel doors.

Arabella ignores his outburst of not-so-quiet curses as she asks, “Are you able to go to her?!”

Cipher shakes his head slowly as he answers, “Not yet. My company’s building is, according to Sage, only a Class I Fracture. So the City Board is prioritizing the building I’m currently in, which is a Class II. Even if I asked, they wouldn’t be able to let me out. And even if I tried breaking out, it might destroy the entire building and kill everyone in it in the process of breaking the shield.”

*And all that would do is let the demons escape the building, leaving them unchecked in the streets.*

Arabella’s scowl grows deeper, only to soften slightly as she thinks of the many people trapped in the same building as her father.

“Just, please hurry. I can’t lose her too...” she says, a tear beginning to trail its way down her cheek as she no doubt thinks of her dead younger sister.

“As fast as I can,” Cipher answers with a quick nod before the call cuts out and he rushes over to the pantry door and proceeds to rip it open with his bare hands.

*Let’s see if I can’t speed this up. For Scarlet’s sake.*

## Chapter 4

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### Changes

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#### Scarlet Asger

The heat grows even stronger not too long after we exchange names until it reaches a point that’s damned near unbearable. But soon after that, it somehow vanishes in an instant to be replaced with extreme pain that has me silently screaming with nothing coming out of my mouth for what feels like forever. The pain this time is focused on each of the same areas as before, but for some reason, the top of my head feels even worse.

Eventually, I find the pain too much to tolerate and pass out, only to wake up again who knows how long later to find that all of the pain is gone. Almost as if it were all a nightmare.

After a brief bout of confusion, I look down to find Tar – I am not going to bother trying to pronounce his full name, much less his first one – lying down on my chest seemingly taking a nap. And the sight of him there draws conflicting feelings out of me.

For one, he’s adorable. But for two, it’s an entity who threatened me earlier and likely knows more about me than it’s telling.

In the end I decide to get up, letting the tanuki fall to the ground without catching it.

But no sooner than I reach my full height, I notice something off. Kind of like an extra weight on my head, along with some strange... sensation? Some sort of... mental switch.

What is this?

I frown before shrugging and mentally flipping the switch. And almost immediately, everything around me grows much louder and more detailed. To the point that I can hear the footsteps of a spider demon walking down the hall on the other side of the floor from here. I can even hear a freaking conversation going on within the shielded barrier of one of the bunkers on the floor. The very one I was going to with the receptionist lady.

May she be at peace with the souls of the fallen.

Oh, I also hear the tanuki, err, Tar waking up on the floor, somehow having not been woken up immediately by falling onto the ground. But then again, it was a comfortable carpet.

Anyways, what's up with my new hearing?

**"It's because you awakened. You're no longer human, and your appearance matches that."**

It takes a second for his words to register in my head. Just a second. Then I scramble for my pocket to find my phone to use as a mirror before showing my face in its reflection.

I blink in surprise at the sight of red eyes. Ones that seem to be glowing in the darkness of the office. But what catches my attention more and has me groaning is the sight of what look like black and red wolf ears with small bits of white fur on the inside on top of my head.

**"What's wrong? You don't like wolves?"**

Without even turning to the creature, I answer, expressing my depression with this turn of events rather clearly in how my ears somehow follow my mood and droop, "Do you know how much of a pain these'll be?!"

The tanuki, err, Tar. I need to stop doing that. Tar tilts his head and asks in a confused yet still robotic tone of voice, **"Physical appearance changes are common amongst awakened humans. You won't stand out. And creatures of the same race as you can't identify you, therefore no human can see your identi-"**

I cut him off as I turn to him and exclaim, "Now what do I do if people think I'm wearing a wolf ear headband wherever I go?!"

Tar just stares at me.

I glare back at him.

My pride is important, okay?! And animal headbands are not *cool*!

We continue our staring match for what feels like hours but is in all honesty probably just like ten or so seconds until he lets out a sigh.

I smile and give him a nod in triumph before going serious again as I ask, "You mentioned that the Guardians can't just identify me?"

Tar nods his little tanuki head.

That's good.

**"Is there anything else you would like to check before we move on to your status?"**

I blink in surprise at the question, wondering a little bit why he is actually being slightly considerate instead of the rudeness he was showing before. Either way though, I nod my head and ask, "Are there any other changes that I don't know about?"

Something I didn't notice before now thanks to my focus on my ears is that my eyesight seems to be improved a lot, and even has a bit of night vision. Although colors are a bit harder to make out. Whether that's just in the dark or not is something to figure out later.

I hope it's just like that in the dark though.

**"Besides the change in your eyes and ears, you also gained a second heart, and the tips of your canines were sharpened a little bit. Beyond that, your hands were prepared for the possibility of transformation occurring in the future through your skills."**

That's... okay, that's pretty cool.

I raise my phone up to my face again before opening my mouth to look, only to find that my canines really were sharpened. Albeit not by much. Not even enough to be noticeable if you aren't looking.

**"If you are finished looking at your changes, I would like to bring you up to speed on your status. However, something-"** he begins, only to cut off as I jerk my head towards the door at the sounds of that very same spider demon that I heard earlier approaching the door. **"You can hear it already. We need to hurry."**

I nod my head, only for my eyes to widen slightly as a notification appears in front of my vision.

**SYSTEM INITIALIZATION IS COMPLETE.  
WELCOME TO THE PATH OF ASCENSION.  
MAY YOUR RISE BE EVER FRUITFUL, LONE HALF DEMON.**

Out of the corner of my eye, I find Tar looking slightly surprised at something on the notification. But he simply ignores it immediately after.

Interesting.

"So Tar, all I have to say is status, right?" I ask, wanting to hurry it up, just to be surprised by the sight of something appearing in front of me in the place of the notification. Likely my status.

**"Correct. And we will speak later about you calling me Tar."**

"Yeah, yeah," I mutter while reading the status floating in front of me.

<b>NAME:</b>	<b>SPECIES:</b>	<b>AGE:</b>	<b>MAGIC:</b>	<b>LEVEL:</b>	<b>SP:</b>
Scarlet Asger	Human/Blood Lycan Hybrid	19	Blood	0	0

<b>STATS:</b>					
<b>Physical:</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>Mental:</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>Magical:</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Physical/Level:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Mental/Level:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Magical/Level:</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Free Points:</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Mana:</b>	<b>71.5/71.5</b>	<b>Free Points/Level:</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SKILLS:</b>					
<b>Blood Claws</b>	<b>Allows the user to coat their hands with claws of blood. The blood used in the skill is either created through the user's mana or drawn from the user's body if they are out of mana.</b>		<b>Skill Level:</b>	<b>1</b>	

**“Okay. Your first skill is called Blood Claws. Just think the skill’s name and it will activate. We do not have time to go over everything there right now, so close out of your status.”**

After very quickly reading the skill’s description, I close out of my status without bothering to check anything else.

#### **Blood Claws.**

I feel a sort of power connect to me from that word, even if it was just thought in my head. The power then draws on some sort of energy well inside of my chest that I never realized was there.

Mana.

I knew of the term from video games and the Guardian’s interviews I’ve watched from time to time, along with the status itself, but it still feels odd that I would have it myself.

As if straight from a movie or a video game, blood begins to form in the air around my hands, coating them and making them look more akin to the paws of a wolf mixed into the form of a human hand, with sharp claws to match. Kind of like a werewolf from the old horror movies in the old world.

Is that what I am? I didn’t think about checking my species while it was open. Assuming it even listed what type of demon one of my parents was.

Clearly some type of wolf though, considering my ears.

My thoughts are interrupted as I hear the spider getting incredibly close to the door. And somehow, it seems to be homing directly in on us.

Tar seems to understand my thoughts and answers before I even ask, **“You were releasing the aura of a noble demon the moment you began awakening. But now that you have awoken, you no longer have that aura on you, your human side having snuffed that noticeable effect out. So now the demons that were avoiding this area can smell you and are coming.”**

Oh. Wait a fucking second, did he just say a noble demon?!

The sharp leg of a certain spider demon suddenly pierces through the door, making me refocus my attention on the creature.



Kill demon now, question the tanuki later.

## Chapter 5

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### First Blood

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#### Scarlet Asger

Deciding that the best time to strike is when it still has its leg pierced through the door, I sprint forward and swipe my new blood claws straight at the leg. And my claws... don't actually do that much. All they manage to do is pierce nearly half an inch in, drawing some sort of ichor that is drained into my claws, changing their color to add a slight green tint before returning to the red of my own blood.

The spider demon lets out a pained screech before yanking back its leg and tearing the door off of its hinges in the process, revealing the rest of the demon in all of its spidery glory. And the moment my eyes latch onto it, I hear some sort of voice echo in the back of my head.

#### **| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Spider – Level 4 |**

It's level 4?! That explains why I barely did anything to it! At least, if video game logic applies in this situation.

**“Good luck and try not to die before I can at least explain your status.”**

My eye twitches at the sheer callousness of the tanuki whose name I won't even bother saying this time before I jump back, very nearly tripping over the carpet in the process to end up between one of the chairs and the table. Meanwhile the spider lets out another shriek as it tries – and fails – to fit through the door. Only to end up climbing the wall and then entering while sideways instead of upright.

Right as I'm expecting it to jump on the ground and chase after me, it instead begins climbing up the wall towards the ceiling.

Are you kidding me?

I jump out of the way right before it leaps from the ceiling straight at where I was just standing, destroying the table in its landing. And before it can gather its bearings, I swipe my claws at it again, still unused to having any sort of weapon, much less blood claws to use in the first place.

Once again, I don't manage to do much damage to it. But I do at least notice that this time it did a little bit more than the last time.

Does it have anything to do with its blood entering my claws?

**“Skill descriptions are not all there is to a skill. Remember this.”**

My eye twitches again as I notice the tanuki floating in the air close to the corner of the room, right beneath the ceiling while watching me fight for my life. But I take a deep breath to calm down again before jumping away when the spawn swipes two of its legs at me, barely missing my head in the process.

Unfortunately, in the process of dodging its claw tipped legs, I trip on the chair next to us, falling to one knee where the spider turns around and tries to snap at me with its incisors, taking a chunk out of my arm in the process as I raise it to block the strike.

I let out a scream of pain before gritting my teeth so hard that it feels like they might break.

“You Terran damned spider!” I shout at the thing as if that’ll help while trying to roll out of the way again. After I manage to make it to my feet a couple of meters away from the spider, I glance at my arm to find it leaking quite a bit of blood down from the wound. But surprisingly, the blood ends up mixing with my claws, making them grow slightly larger.

That might be useful.

Still gritting my teeth to ignore the pain, I raise my head to look around the room, my gaze narrowing on the chandelier that I hadn’t noticed when first entering the room. That’ll work.

Hopefully.

Right as the spider begins to charge at me again, I charge right back in its direction, seemingly surprising it for a second. And before it can get over that surprise, I climb up the chair and jump off of it, landing on the spider’s back, where I then jump to a bookcase not too far away. I barely miss landing on the bookcase and instead have to drag myself the rest of the way up with my legs dangling.

That could’ve gone better.

I turn back to find the spider looking around for a few seconds in confusion before turning to me. So I don’t miss the chance to jump again straight at the chandelier above it, where I climb up and swipe my claws at the chain holding it up.

**“Interesting.”**

Is the last word I hear before the chandelier comes crashing down on top of the spider, its chain having been shredded with relative ease by my claws.

The spawn makes a loud hissing sound that quickly deflates with the sound of its carapace being shattered by the chandelier, but it still tries to move even after the thing fell on its head. So I climb down from the chandelier that is still somehow intact and on top of it to walk over to its face, where I bring my fingers together with a grimace and dig them straight into one of the creature’s two largest eyes.

A rather unpleasant feeling follows as my hand digs into its head before I quickly rip it out and wipe it on the carpet beneath me.

Sorry whoever’s carpet this is. But you’re probably gonna need to replace it.

A ding sounds in my head, followed by another message by that same voice as earlier.

**{Level 4 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Ten Skill Point are awarded for killing your first Demon.}**

**{Five Skill Points are awarded for killing your first Demon Spawn.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 1 through killing your first demon. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

As soon as I hear that, I flop onto the ground with an exhausted grunt. And soon after, the tanuki flies over to me before landing on my chest again.

**“Your use of the name Tar aside, I will not be subjected to being called a tanu-”**

Before the tanuki can finish, I cut it off by barely saying through my exhaustion, “I don’t care. You’re a tanuki. Get over it.”

At first I was gonna be nice and call him Tar. But that was until he decided to watch me fight for my life as if I were some pawn or *thing* that didn’t matter.

The tanuki narrows his eyes at me and crawls up to my face before literally stomping its tiny foot on my cheek. Which, as expected, doesn’t exactly do much.

Why exactly was I afraid of this thing again?

Oh, right. Because it was numbing my pain earlier during the awakening. And it could’ve stopped at any moment.

I raise my arm slightly to look at it, where a large cut in my favorite jacket now lies revealing a bloody gash equal in size on my pale skinned arm beneath.

Seriously? That’s going to be a pain to sew up. Because I am *not* replacing this jacket.

I don’t really care about the shirt underneath though. That’ll just go in the trash later.

Several seconds pass in not-so-comfortable silence – considering the burning pain going through my arm – before I finally notice out of the corner of my eye that my hair now has red highlights that it didn’t have before.

Odd.

Doesn’t matter though.

Better red ones than yellow or some gross color like that.

The tanuki also kind of falls off of my face when I turn my head to look at my hair, but that’s a little inconsequential right now. Especially when he just floats back up to stop right above my head with a rather displeased expression on his face.

**“Open your status.”**

I blink in surprise at the fact that the usually arrogant and overbearing tanuki isn't actually saying anything in regard to my actions right now, only to mentally shrug and think, 'Status.'

<b>NAME:</b>	<b>SPECIES:</b>	<b>AGE:</b>	<b>MAGIC:</b>	<b>LEVEL:</b>	<b>SP:</b>
Scarlet Asger	Human/Blood Lycan Hybrid	19	Blood	1	16
<b>STATS:</b>					
<b>Physical:</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Mental:</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>Magical:</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Physical/Level:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Mental/Level:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>Magical/Level:</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Free Points:</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>Mana:</b>	<b>81/90</b>	<b>Free Points/Level:</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>SKILLS:</b>					
<b>Blood Claws</b>	<b>Allows the user to coat their hands with claws of blood. The blood used in the skill is either created through the user's mana or drawn from the user's body if they are out of mana.</b>		<b>Skill Level:</b>	<b>1</b>	

Oh, that's nice. Not really sure what's different from before, but I'm guessing my stats are higher since the voice – which I'm assuming is the System – said that I'd leveled up.

Wait.

I'm half Blood Lycan?

I stare at those words for who knows how long.

Oh.

## Chapter 6

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### Skills

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#### Scarlet Asger

So one of my parents is one of the strongest races of demons? A noble demon bordering on royalty?

What the hell was a Class V demon doing getting involved with a human anyways?

Judging by the fact that there are spawn in this Fracture, it is most likely a Class I Fracture. The weakest type of Fracture there is. And likely the only reason I'm alive right now.

As for my magic... well, considering that I'm half blood lycan, that makes sense.

“Let’s get this over with before anything else gets here,” the tanuki begins, drawing my attention back to it, “your listed magic is what determines the direction that your skills will go in terms of the power they’re based off of. It does not mean that it’s actual magic. Although in your case, it might just be that later on.”

Yeah, I already knew that part.

“Stats do not change your body at all. All they do is alter the way your body interacts with reality around you, making you stronger in the sense that your presence in reality is stronger and you therefore are physically, magically, and mentally more powerful than you were with lower stats, which is something a lot of humans don’t seem to understand,” he continues, making my eyebrow raise slightly at the indignant manner of which he spoke that last part. “The stats you get per level are decided by your species and your magic combined with what ‘Class’ as you humans call it, that you’re in. Levels 1 through 100 being Class I, 101-250 being Class II, 251-500 being Class III, 501-1000 being Class IV, and anything beyond that Class V.”

Wow. He’s really just going straight through it without wasting any time.

“What each stat does should be self-explanatory, and I’ll correct you in the case that you’re wrong. All I’ll say on that front now is that a 10 in each of the three main stats is the average for most unawakened humans,” he says, ignoring my thoughts. “Next up, we have Skill Points and Skill Levels. There are two types of skills. Inherent, which are what you get from leveling up, and purchased skills. You have to level up inherent skills through using the skills, whereas you have to level up purchased skills – and purchase them in the first place – using skill points. Now think, ‘Skill Store’.”

I blink in surprise, trying to register everything that he just said. Because while he’s right that the stats are rather self-explanatory. Mostly. I haven’t heard much talk about the specifics of skills.

Deciding to just go ahead and do as he says, I think ‘Skill Store.’

<b>SKILL NAME:</b>	<b>ACHIEVEMENT REQUIREMENTS:</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION:</b>	<b>TYPES:</b>	<b>RARITY:</b>	<b>SP PRICE:</b>
<u>Predator I</u>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a higher level than you by at least three levels.	The lowest rarity predator skill. It grants the user a 3% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.	Passive Static	Common	10
<u>Clean</u>	Unlocked through killing your first demon.	A basic utility skill used to clean the user and their equipment.	Active Static	Common	10
<u>Repair</u>	Unlocked through killing your first demon.	A basic utility skill used to repair non-magical clothing.	Active Static	Common	10
<u>Recharge</u>	Unlocked through killing your first demon.	A basic utility skill used to recharge magical equipment	Active Static	Common	10

		through the user's own mana.			
...					

**“Before you spend your skill points, I would like to advise you taking Predator I,”** Tar says as I read through the skills. **“At this point in the Fracture, there are far more likely to be more demons above your level than at or below your level, so any little bit will help. And the rest of the skills you have access to at level one with your achievements are simple utility skills. Ones not meant for battle.”**

After reading through the first two or so pages of skills, I quickly come to agree with the tanuki before reaching out and touching the words ‘Predator I’, making a confirmation message appear afterwards. So I touch the word Confirm, making a warm feeling spread through my body for a few seconds before vanishing again.

**“Now to explain. Skills are broken down into six rarities. Common, Uncommon, Rare, Epic, Legendary, and Mythical. Each of them costs a different amount of SP to purchase, and the skills get quite a bit stronger the rarer they are. But they’re also a lot harder to unlock through achievements. Suffice it to say, if you unlock a high rarity skill, you’re going to want to purchase it.”**

I glance at the tanuki before looking at the status I still have open next to my skills list, briefly noting that my SP dropped from 16 to 6. And that I have the new skill added to it already.

**“There are three different types of skills. Active, which are skills that must be used in order to activate, Passive, which are active all the time, and Static, which are skills that cannot level up. They will always be at level 1.”**

Literally every single skill I have unlocked right now is a static one. And only one of them has a requirement other than to slay my first demon.

Also, I find it weird how helpful the tanuki is being now considering how it treated me in the fight...

Hearing my thoughts, which is really getting annoying, the tanuki glances at me and says, **“Fae are not allowed to participate in the war between humans and demons beyond advisement to their contractor and granting them access to the System in the first place. Furthermore, I needed to be convinced that you were worth the trouble. That you wouldn’t just die in your first battle.”**

My eye twitches at his blatant admission that he would’ve just let me die.

So much for ‘our lives being bound together’.

The tanuki ignores my irritation to continue his explanation of skills, **“Unlike purchasable skills, inherent skills do not have a rarity. They simply come to you every five levels starting at level five. But they are always at least as strong as purchasable skills up to the Rare rarity. At the same time though, their strength varies depending on your magic and species.”**

I glare at him for a few seconds before sighing and focusing on the skills list again.

**“Many purchasable skills are locked behind achievement restrictions, as you already know by now. But some of them are also locked by magic restrictions, only allowing you to purchase them if you have the necessary magic amongst the listed magics they require,”** he says, pausing slightly as my wolf ear twitches at the sound of another spider spawn entering the floor from the stairs on the other

side of it. **“Most skills of any use in combat only become available after you reach level 10. So don’t bother searching through them for anything you can use to help you right now.”**

That explains why they’re almost all utility skills, except for Predator I. Also, considering that there’s an old world country number – I think it was called a roman numeral – after the name, there’s probably a higher rarity for the skill. Which makes me wonder what would happen if I bought that too? Would they stack? Or would one replace the other?

I’m distracted again by the spider that’s slowly approaching our room. At this rate it’ll likely get here in about five or so minutes.

Stupid spawn and their sense of smell.

How does a spider even smell in the first place?!

**“That should be everything. So you can go ahead and deal with that pest,”** Tar says, making me do a double take at him for calling the demon a pest.

Wasn’t he supposed to be a neutral party to our little war?

**“While I am considered a neutral party, after we sign a contract, most Fae end up rooting for the side that they signed the contract for. Besides. Even other demons consider spawn pests.”**

Oh. That... makes sense.

Also, isn’t that a little brutal? For demons to consider one of their own a pest?

Actually, don’t answer that.

Wait, what about the mana stat? How is that calculated?

The tanuki gives me a less than useful answer, **“Math.”**

I stare at him until he explains further.

**“You can figure out the exact formula when you leave this Fracture, just know that it is a combination of your Mental and Magical stat,”** he finally answers after a few seconds of staring.

That’s better at least.

I slowly get up from the ground again whilst cradling my arm, still feeling the blood lightly trailing down it from the wound. At some point the blood claws on my hands just kind of flickered out while I wasn’t paying attention, so I reactivate the skill by thinking its name in my head again.

**Blood Claws.**

Then I begin to slowly walk towards the door.

Maybe I can find a storage room somewhere on the floor that’ll have bandages after this fight. Or better yet, a bunker that hasn’t already been locked. But the chances of the latter are rather low, considering how it’s already been at least half an hour, maybe even an hour – who knows how long I was unconscious for – since the Demonic Assault began.

Here's to hope, I guess.

## Chapter 7

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### Healing Under the Moonlight

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#### Scarlet Asger

As I walk over to the door, I notice Tar vanishing out of the corner of my eye. And when I turn around to look, I don't see him anywhere in the room anymore.

Huh.

**"I've gone invisible now that we are leaving the room and may make contact with people,"** his voice resonates in my head, making me feel slightly uncomfortable in the process.

It's weird to hear someone talking and not know where the voice is coming from. At least with phone calls and stuff you know the voice is technically coming from the phone. But not in this case.

Neither me nor the tanuki speak for a little while as I walk out of the office and begin heading down the hall, occasionally checking doors along the way in the hopes of finding a storage room. Only to have no luck in that department.

By the time I make it halfway down the hall to where the door of the receptionist area that I was at when this all started is, I finally stop as the sound of the spider stops right outside of that very door. I then stare at the door for a few seconds, slowly spreading my claws outwards while tensing up ever so slightly.

Seconds pass by in silence with only the occasional chattering noise of creaking joints from the spider moving in place on the other side of the door.

Why is it waiting?

Unless the huntsman demons are too quiet for me to hear, there shouldn't be any more demons on this floor. Meaning it can't be waiting for anything.

Could it be going to sleep?

I wait another five or so seconds before my impatience gets the best of me and I barge right through the door to find the spider demon eating a corpse in absolute silence. One that I do not recognize.

The creature jerks its head up as it hears my entrance, but I've already swung my clawed hand at its side, tearing a much deeper gash through it than I was ever able to make on the other spider. And that's when the voice echoes in my head, telling me the demon's information.



## **| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Spider – Level 2 |**

That explains it.

The demon lets out a loud screech of pain before I follow up with another strike with my claws, albeit with my wounded arm this time. And the pain that comes along with it has me wincing.

I feel more blood pouring out of the wound, eventually leaving a trail to my claws on that arm before the claws themselves grow in size and opacity.

While I'm not sure how to drain my own blood to power the skill, or even how to enhance the skill with extra mana, I do at least know that my blood can enhance it even if it's just blood from a wound like this.

I hurriedly try to jump back, away from the spider as it sends a sharp limb straight at me, only for that very limb to get stuck in the wall in the process. So I take advantage of this to rush forwards again with my wounded arm, where I straight up grab at the back of its head, letting my claws dig deeper and deeper into it until the entire spider begins to convulse.

It sends another clawed limb at me, but I notice it getting slower and slower the closer it gets to me, all the way until it stops the instant I dig my other clawed hand straight through the spider's eye, trying very hard to avoid its incisors in the process.

**{Level 2 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

As soon as I hear the messages, I rip both of my hands out of its head with a very disgusted look on my face at the sight of green blood coating the ends of my jacket sleeves.

I'm going to get that cleaning skill. Absolutely going to get it.

**“All Guardians end up getting three of the utility skills that are pretty much a requirement unless they want to end up covered in demon gore with completely ravaged clothes, leaving them nearly half naked and filthy every time they leave a Fracture,”** Tar suddenly says, responding to my thoughts.

Hmm. Good to know.

Too bad I can't afford another skill right now.

Also, if I had to guess, you mean the clean, repair, and recharge utility skills?

**“Correct,”** he answers right away, his voice still slightly disconcerting me.

Thought so. The rest of the utility skills don't seem anywhere near as useful.

Since I don't have any magical items to recharge, that leaves me with either repair or clean. And right now, I only have a single cut on my clothes. So clean would probably be better. Especially if I want to avoid getting an infection in my wound.

I wipe the ichor from my jacket sleeves onto the chair, briefly glance at the spider limb still stuck in the wall, then glance at the window that I was just staring out of not too long ago, before this all started.

So much can change in just... however long it's been since it started changing. And while I might not have wanted to end up like this – I can't help but glance at the wolf ears on my head showing in the reflection of the window – it will make life a lot easier on me. Since no one should be able to tell that I'm not just a regular guardian.

Right, Tar?

The tanuki appears closer to the window for some reason before answering, **“You're correct. There should be no way for humans to know that you are not one of them. This is because no one can identify members of the same species, and since you're half human, you are considered the same species as them.”**

I nod my head with a smile.

That's good.

I walk over to the window before looking out it, through the shield that is likely there, invisible to those of us inside of it, at the blood moon hanging high in the air.

For some reason, the moon makes me feel calm. Relaxed even.

Is it because I'm half blood lycan?

As I stand here, basking in the red moonlight, I feel a strange tingling sensation arise from my wounded arm. And when I look down at it, I find the wound radiating a faint red light.

Huh?

**“You didn't know?”** the tanuki asks in a slightly mocking tone of voice that has me turning to look at him with a scowl on my face. **“Blood lycans heal in the direct light of the blood moon.”**



Oh. That's nice to know.

I pull my arm as carefully as I can out of the jacket sleeve so as to not irritate the wound or get any more blood than I have to on my jacket before going closer to the window. The tingling sensation grows stronger and stronger the closer I get to the window, and soon enough I can see the wound *very slowly* closing on its own.

Very slowly.

Seconds pass, and soon enough the seconds turn into minutes. Before long, I feel like I've just stood here for nearly five entire minutes before the wound is small enough that it's nothing more than a very faint scab. So I put my arm back through my sleeve, frowning slightly as I feel some blood along the way but otherwise ignoring it.

Guess I don't need any bandages anymore.

I smile at that thought before turning around and walking towards the stairs.

It sounds like there are a few demons on the floor beneath us, with more and more on each floor beneath that. Meaning that the Fracture's core is most likely closer to the bottom of the building. Quite a bit far away from us here on the thirtieth floor.

And – if I remember correctly from the drills and classes we had to take in high school about Demonic Assaults – the Fractures tend to appear close to large gatherings of humans, on a place close to a flat surface. Meaning that it's probably somewhere between the first through fifth floors, since those are the most populated.

The tanuki vanishes again as I make my way to the staircase down the hall from the receptionist area.

## Chapter 8

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### People

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#### Scarlet Asger

After a quick walk down the stairs, I find myself entering the twenty ninth floor through the open stairwell. But before I enter the rather large greeting room on the floor, I walk over to the edge of the stairwell's center to peek down at the lower floors. And as I suspected, I see quite the number of demons on the lower floors just moving through the stairs themselves.

What makes it even worse is that I can hear the occasional scream coming from the other floors now that I'm at the main stairwell – an area connected to every floor of the building.

I shake my head after a few seconds before going into the greeting room, which is basically just a massive room with a few areas full of comfortable chairs or couches meant for relaxation while people

wait here for something. What this floor is meant for, I'm not sure. But I do hear people on the floor. And none of them are in a bunker by the sounds of how loud their voices and movements are.

At the same time, none of the demons are near them either. So there's that at least.

From what I can hear, two of the demons are most likely more Spawn, while the third demon on the floor is something else. It clearly has only two legs, but at the same time, it has much lighter steps than anyone else on the floor, and is moving around through the floor rather slowly.

If I had to guess, then I'd put my money on it being a huntsman. Which is a type of demon that tends to narrow in on someone they mark as their 'prey' before chasing after them and beginning their hunt. It's also something I'll have to worry about, since they actually use a weapon. A crossbow.

To start things off, I head in the direction of the spawn closest to the humans on the floor. Since it may go after them while I'm dealing with the other two.

**"Look who's already getting into their role as a defender of humanity,"** I hear the tanuki's voice echoing in my head. But I can't help but frown at its words.

No, not really. While I do think it would be a shame for them to die, I'm not some superhero who'll run around killing demons all the time to save people's lives. After all, it's their lives to live. Not mine.

Life in a tier 3 city taught me how heroes end up in the end. Six feet under.

**"Oh?"** the tanuki mutters, sounding both slightly amused and interested. **"Tell me then, half demon. Why are you going after the one closest to the humans first, despite it being the furthest away from you?"**

Because the demons will be stronger if they kill the humans there. And that would make it a bigger problem both for me, and the other people on the floor below us if I don't manage to take the demons out.

Also, why not?

**"So it's a pragmatic choice of what would be better for the masses or for you, over what would be better for an individual other than you? That or a whim?"** Tar asks, sounding more and more curious as I continue making my way through the hall, getting closer and closer to the spawn in the process. Which also happens to be getting closer to the humans too.

Yeah, I guess. Call me selfish or cold all you want, but I'm not going to sacrifice my life for a stranger. And at the same time, if I can help people without it inconveniencing me too badly, then I will. After all, there's no reason not to.

The tanuki stays silent this time, not responding to my thoughts.

I continue running down the hall for a little bit longer before turning the corner and finding a wide open room, with what appears to be a bunker standing wide open on the other side of it, and a demon spawn in the middle of the room. The room itself looks like some sort of middle room area, with various doors branching off of it, some of them being wide open and showing an office on the other side. There are pots and plants located closer to the middle of the room, with even a large tree smack dab at the center.

My eyes move towards the open bunker to find a group of eleven people trying to close the bunker door but failing.

Is it broken?

No matter how many people they have trying to pull down the lever to close the door, it doesn't budge in the slightest. Which really shows a lack of care in this floor.

Maybe I should mention that to Allen the next time I see him?

I look directly at the spawn of which is moving closer to the people in the bunker before a light smile tugs at my lips.

### **| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Spider – Level 2 |**

Another level 2. This shouldn't be too hard. I think.

The instant the people in the bunker notice me, the terror on their faces is replaced with hope, and I even hear several of them muttering, "Guardian!"

I give them a brief nod before activating my **Blood Claws** skill again and leaping straight towards the spawn, landing on its back, and startling it in the process thanks to its attention having been focused solely on the people in the bunker. It lets out a loud screech that only grows louder as I dig the claws of both of my hands into its body. Then I-

A sudden flash of light makes me blink twice to clear the spots from my eyes before I glance towards the people to find two of them pointing their cameras at me while the others continue trying to close the door. The two being the youngest of the group. Just a couple of high school girls by the looks of it.

Seriously?

One of them even seems to be recording. Which'll be a pain.

Why are they here anyways?

I focus on the spawn again as I begin to climb its body closer to the head, only to notice out of the corner of my eye an incoming leg to which I move my arm up at the last moment, making the claw strike at its own back.

By the stars... that could've been painful.

The spawn lets out a high pitch screech showing off just how painful it thought it was before I finish making my way across its slightly-longer-than-a-meter body to grab onto and dig into its head, just like the last one. Then I finish it by dragging myself forward and stabbing my other hand into its biggest eye.

That's really turning out to be a good way of killing them.

Although it's rather gross every time I do it.

I turn my head towards the bunker again to find that the people are still staring at me.

Oh. Right.

## Chapter 9

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### Free Point Distribution

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#### Scarlet Asger

I get off of the demon's corpse right as the message plays in my head about the EXP.

**{Level 2 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

That should make eight Skill Points now. Just two more and I can get the cleaning skill.

After canceling my Blood Claws skill, I wipe my hands of the demon's ichor onto the very small amount of fur that the spider has before walking over to the bunker, grabbing the lever on the outside of it, and yanking it down with all of my strength. Just to find that this one is working perfectly fine.

A little awkward.

Guess I kind of assumed that if the inner lever wasn't working then the outer one wasn't too. But then again, they probably didn't think about the outer one since someone would have to be outside to pull it. And there's no way to open it or get inside after pulling it.

I glance at the now-shutting doors of the bunker to see a few more pictures being taken of me to my irritation, along with several people waving and expressing their appreciation towards me.

After the door finishes shutting, I find myself heaving a sigh of relief.

I really don't deal with large groups of people well.

**"You do realize those pictures and that video will likely be 'blown up' as you humans say on your internet by morning?"** I hear the annoying tanuki tell me something I already know and very much wish wouldn't happen.

**"You should've already known that this would happen. Guardians don't live in obscurity. It just doesn't happen,"** Tar says, amusement clear in his normally robotic tone. **"There are just too many ways for humans to record images and spread them around for you to--"**

I cut him off by saying, "Yeah, yeah, I know that already."

Such a pain. Despite how cute he looks, he's practically a devil on the inside.

"Why are you in the form of a tanuki anyways?" I ask out of curiosity as I walk back towards the hall I came from to head towards the other demons on the floor.

**“Whatever my appearance is, it’s your fault,”** he says, sounding ever so indignant in his response. But I stop walking at that with a confused expression on my face.

How’s it my fault?

**“We fae take on the appearance of whatever animal – not including humans – was last on the mind of the human we approach for a contract,”** the little tanuki says, making my eyes widen.

Oh. So, it’s Belle’s fault then.

I nod my head, satisfied with my shifting of the blame before I continue walking down the hall.

Somewhere in the back of my head, I hear a certain tanuki scoffing at my thoughts. But I ignore it.

It only takes me around another ten or fifteen minutes to navigate through the maze of a building to find the next demon spawn before I kill it simply by jumping down from a balcony of an upper deck in the room it was in to land on its back and proceeding to do the same thing I’ve done with the last few demon spawn.

**{Level 2 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 2. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

I let out a sigh as I feel a nice surge of something that feels almost like adrenaline rush through my body from the level-up. Then I open my status to check out the differences, only to pause and ask the tanuki out loud, “What do you think I should put my free points in?”

I kind of forgot to distribute those earlier.

Tar lets out a sigh of relief before answering, **“It’s about time you asked.”**

Oh? So you were waiting for me to say something about it to talk about free points?

That doesn’t sound like something a good *mentor* should be doing.

The tanuki appears in the air in front of me with a disgruntled look on his cute little face as he practically shouts in my mind, **“I am *not* your mentor! I am your contracted partner!!! Get it straight, girl!”**

I raise an amused eyebrow at his loss of composure.

Right. Keep telling yourself that.

Tar flies up to my face and literally punches me, to no affect. Then he floats up and lands on my head of all places and begins answering my question as if this interaction had never happened.

**“My thoughts are always to keep your stats relatively balanced, albeit with your species’ stronger stats with a little bit of a lead. So I’d suggest putting your free points into Mental to let it catch up a little bit with the other two stats before spreading the spare around wherever.”**

Hmm. Makes sense, I guess.

Don't want to leave one of your stats far behind the others, making a blatant weakness open up.

Although, what does the mental stat actually do?

**"It increases your ability to affect other people's minds through skills, to defend against others attempting to affect your mind, and lastly, your ability to process things."**

Right. So having a low mental stat compared to my other stats would leave me weak against mental attacks then.

Good to know.

<b>NAME:</b>	<b>SPECIES:</b>	<b>AGE:</b>	<b>MAGIC:</b>	<b>LEVEL:</b>	<b>SP:</b>
Scarlet Asger	Human/Blood Lycan Hybrid	19	Blood	2	9
<b>STATS:</b>					
<b>Physical:</b>	19	<b>Mental:</b>	16	<b>Magical:</b>	17
<b>Physical/Level:</b>	2	<b>Mental/Level:</b>	1	<b>Magical/Level:</b>	2
<b>Free Points:</b>	0	<b>Mana:</b>	121/136	<b>Free Points/Level:</b>	2
<b>ACTIVE SKILLS:</b>					
<b>Blood Claws</b>	Allows the user to coat their hands with claws of blood. The blood used in the skill is either created through the user's mana or drawn from the user's body if they are out of mana.		<b>Skill Level:</b>		1
<b>PASSIVE SKILLS:</b>					
<b>Predator I</b>	The lowest rarity predator skill. It grants the user a 3% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.		<b>Skill Level:</b>		Static

Alright. That should work.

**"You put three free points into mental and one into physical?"** Tar asks rhetorically before muttering, **"Not bad."**

I smirk at that before heading off to deal with the last demon on the floor. Which is currently standing in front of the sealed bunker.

Looks like I was right. It is a huntsman. And it's prey got inside of the bunker, leaving it unable to do anything to them.

Honestly, I could probably just leave it there and it would never move an inch. But I want its EXP. So back to that room I go.



## Chapter 10

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### New Instincts

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#### Scarlet Asger

I take one look at the huntsman before turning around and leaving.

**| Demon Huntsman – Subspecies: None – Level 15 |**

Good thing it already has a fixation.

**“You’re lucky this time, but you might not be the next time around,”** I hear the tanuki warn me.  
**“Be more careful.”**

Aww, is the little tanuki actually worried about little ol’ me?

Of course, he doesn’t respond to that.

Looks like the fae isn’t as bad as I’d thought. Still keeping my eye on you though.

And would very much appreciate some privacy in my own head too.

He stays silent to that as well.

Yeah, didn’t think so. But it was worth a try at least.

Anyways, my mind returns to that huntsman. The thing really did have a humanoid form, just with a pale gray skin tone, two odd stubs that look like the beginnings of wings, and a crossbow in its hands just aimed at the door. But despite it aiming at the door, it wasn’t moving an inch. Just sitting there.

I honestly had a small urge to go over and kill it while it was there despite its level, but I know the huntsman aren’t braindead. Even with its fixation, it would still attack me if I got close enough. And I can’t just throw it out the window or something, considering that the shield is a one way thing, blocking anyone from leaving the building during a Demonic Assault, but not blocking people from entering. So it’d just shatter the glass before being blocked by the shield.

Of course, I could try knocking its crossbow out of its hands, but that would be a risky plan. Especially considering that I don’t know if they’re able to fight without the crossbow or not. And if they are? Then that is a good way to end up dead.

If the shields protecting the outside of the building themselves were like the ones on the bunkers, then maybe. But a demon thirteen levels above me is too much to risk.

Such a scary creature.

Whoever its fixation was is lucky I got to them before it did.

I continue walking through the floor until I get to the stairwell before going down the stairs and entering the twenty-eighth floor, which seems to have a lot more demons than the other two I've been to. It has around eight or nine wandering around the floor. And there doesn't appear to be any people on this floor, unlike the last. Or at least, not any outside of a bunker. I hear some muffled sounds at one spot, along with the blaring of a shield, so I'm guessing the bunker on this floor is active and the people inside.

Meanwhile, of the demons on this floor, only four of them seem to be spawn. The other four or five sound like hounds. Which are the second weakest demons.

Thankful that there aren't any huntsmen on the floor, I walk into a simple office room, filled with dozens of cubicles before continuing on until I find the first demon spawn on the floor.

#### **| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Spider – Level 4 |**

It's a higher level again. Of course it is.

**“The demons will only continue to grow stronger as you get closer to the core of the Fractures. You should know this,”** Tar says in a slightly exasperated tone of voice.

Yeah, yeah. I know.

Doesn't change the fact that it's making this harder than it needs to be.

**“You could've gone upstairs instead of downstairs to find weaker demons instead, but you chose to go down,”** he mentions, making me stiffen up slightly at the realization.

He's... right.

Why did I go downstairs?

Because I barely heard any demons at all upstairs? Because the demons upstairs felt like they wouldn't be a challenge?

No... it's because they wouldn't make good prey.

I blink in surprise at that thought.

Prey?

When did I start thinking of demons as prey?

**“Ever since you awakened as a half blood lycan,”** Tar responds as if it's no big deal.

Shit. Changing species... wait... of course changing species, or awakening to a new one would alter my instincts a little.

Just the thought of going back upstairs to fight weaker demons and level up the easy way leaves me feeling appalled at myself. And I'm not sure how to feel about that.

But right now isn't the time, as the demon spawn hiding in the cubicle is likely to notice me any second now, and I don't have a moment to waste lest I lose my advantage of surprise. So I climb up the

wall of the cubicle before jumping straight onto the spawn and latching on with my claws into its carapace, which feels a lot easier than I was expecting.

Probably the free point I put into physical along with the level up.

Thanks to that, my claws sink into the demon's head just as easily as they would have sunk into a level 2 demon spawn's head before the update to my stats, making me grin slightly as the demon tries to shake me off of its back. I don't let it though, and its shaking ends up causing more damage to it thanks to my claws stuck in its head than to me. Until it begins trying to slam me into the walls of the cubicle, which doesn't really work all that well either considering that it's not an actual wall. So the cubicle simply collapses instead of me being knocked off.

I vaguely hear another of the demon spawn getting closer and nearing this room of cubicles, but I put it aside for the moment to focus on digging my claws deeper and deeper into the demon's skull. Meanwhile the creature continues letting out loud screeches throughout the process while flailing a few of its limbs at me in a poor attempt to cut me apart. And I say poor because most of those limbs are getting stuck in or straight up slicing through some of the furniture and appliances scattered in the fallen cubicle.

Eventually, the creature's struggle draws to a close and it falls silent, with the System giving me my message not too long after.

**{Level 4 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

I let out a sigh before smiling.

That's ten skill points.

Right as I'm about to open the Skill Store to purchase them, my mind returns to the other spawn as it enters the room from the opposite end of the cubicles. So I immediately duck down.

Shit.

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Spider – Level 5 |**

This one's even stronger.

**“I would suggest you purchase the skill. Now.”**

I frown at the urgency in his request before opening the Skill Store and purchasing the Clean skill. Then I quickly use it, making three points of mana drain away as all of the ichor and blood covering me magically disappears.

**“Now leave that body and hide in a cubicle if you still want your advantage of surprise,”** he continues, making me understand what he's doing.

The spawn might've been able to smell all of the ichor and blood covering me since I haven't been able to wash it off of my hands at one of the bathrooms like I did before entering the floor. At least, it might be able to if it got close enough. And it's heading to the body now.

I quickly do as the tanuki says and hide in the cubicle next to the destroyed one.

It's a little surprising that Tar is helping me though.

I wonder why?

## Chapter 11

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### Eavesdropping

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#### Scarlet Asger

A few seconds pass before I hear the spawn stopping right in front of the other spawn's corpse. So I wait a few more seconds, then climb up onto the desk and then onto the cubicle where I jump onto this spider as well, just like the other one. But unlike the other one, my claws don't manage to dig in as deeply into its head. They still enter it though, and that's all that matters in regard to the plan working as it lets me dig in and not fall off.

The spider tries to toss me off with a little bit more success than the other one, only in that my legs lose their hold on it and end up flying around to hit the floor with a rather painful smacking sound as my feet literally dig into the floor heels first. But after that my legs end up flying back up again when the creature jerks backwards again, so its struggle was in vain. Except for the pain in my feet, and the holes in the floor.

I continue worming my claws deeper, only for them to stop at some point.

Shit, is this thing's carapace just too strong for my claws to break through?!

In that case, how the hell do I enhance the claws?

I try various things including willing that strange sensation in me called mana towards my hands, to no avail. I try willing my blood in that direction, which obviously fails since I have no idea how to even begin trying that. And I even try reaching forward to bite my own arm and get my blood down to reach my claws, but that doesn't work since I can't lock onto my own arm with all of the spider's flailing.

Eventually, my hold on the creature begins to slip.

No no no, please don't-

**[Skill 'Blood Claws' has leveled up to level 2.]**

I blink in surprise, only to feel a surge of strength enter my claws from somewhere. Somewhere inside of the demon's own body.

My grip stabilizes rather quickly, and soon enough I find myself able to dig even deeper until I finally hit its brain. And with good timing too, because I don't think I would've been able to keep avoiding those legs that have been slicing at me throughout the battle for much longer.

**{Level 5 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{Three Skill Points are awarded for leveling an inherent skill for the first time.}**

**{Two Skill Points are awarded for leveling the inherent skill 'Blood Claws' for the first time.}**

I blink in surprise at the extra messages before pulling my hands out of the dead spawn's head and slumping onto the ground in exhaustion.

After a few seconds, I remember my Clean skill and use it to get rid of the ichor from my hands. Then I take a moment to listen for the other demons on the floor, finding each of them to be a safe distance away from me before I let out a groan.

Today has been a rough day.

I am absolutely skipping my workout tomorrow.

Actually, come to think of it, do I even really need to workout anymore? What with the reality altering stats thing?

I stare at the ceiling for a few seconds as that thought brews in my mind before I shrug, close my eyes, and focus on my hearing.

Let's see if I can't hear the conversations going on in the bunker. Because I'm pretty sure those bunkers have special technology in them to secure a connection past the shields. So they might have information on when backup will be arriving for this Fracture.

Although considering that it's a Class I Fracture, I doubt that'll be anytime soon.

After several seconds of focusing, I finally manage to barely hear some very quiet voices.

*"You think we'll be out of here by morning? I have a report that I have to finish before noon..."* a slightly higher pitched male voice half asks half complains.

I can't help but raise an eyebrow despite my eyes being closed.

Yes. Because a deadline is what you should be worried about right now.

*"Probably. The boss is only a few buildings down, in a Class II Fracture from what I've heard. He'll likely clean it up in a few hours,"* an older female voice responds, seemingly ignoring the complaint part of his statement.

Oh. Right. I almost forgot that Alen is a Guardian.

**"How do you forget someone is a Guardian?"** I hear Tar's voice intruding on my thoughts.

Well, I'm used to seeing him at the orphanage. Not with his armor equipped. So it was kind of hard to view him as some powerful Guardian when he was surrounded by little kids playing with them quite often.

The tanuki doesn't say anything for a few seconds before eventually responding with a short, **"Understandable then."**

*"Still, I find it hard to believe that a Demonic Assault in Terra only had Class I and Class II Fractures in it,"* another voice, this one sounding like it's from an older gentleman.

My eyes shoot open at that.

Huh.

That honestly is quite surprising.

Demonic Assaults in the capital almost always have at least one Class III Fracture in them.

So what's up with this one?

I stare up at the ceiling for a few seconds before beginning to get up with a grunt.

Guess it's better not to question a good thing. Especially when I have some more demons to hunt.

I check the floor again, focusing once more on the demons, only to find myself frowning as I find less on this floor than there should be. Did some of them leave the floor?

When I entered the floor, I estimated there to be nine demons total. Five hounds and four spawn. Now I've killed two of the spawn, and it looks like the other two have either died, gone still, or left the floor entirely.

But what catches my attention even more is that the hounds seem to be bunched up near the stairwell. And they don't appear to be leaving the floor.

**"Be careful with those hounds. They like to hunt as a pack, and they're generally stronger on average, albeit smaller than the spawn you've been fighting,"** Tar's voice suddenly echoes in my head, sending a shiver down my spine.

Well, this is a problem.

And to make matters worse, the hounds appear to have just started moving. Right in my direction.

Shit. They're hounds. Of course they'd be able to track like a blood hound!

## Chapter 12.1

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### The Hunter Becomes The Hunted Part I

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## Scarlet Asger

Okay, if these things are stronger on average than the spawn I've been dealing with, then there is no way I can take on a pack of five of them at once. At least, not without some help.

But what might be on this floor that could help me deal with them? I don't know this building well enough to plan around it!

I stand frozen for several seconds before a thought comes to me.

The shields. Each bunker has their own miniature shield in place, and these shields are detrimental to demons but do not hurt humans. And they're set up to defend against anything Class III and below. At least, the basic ones are. The more advanced shields should be able to defend against Class IV demons too.

Each bunker shield has a layer of electricity around the barrier that will absolutely fry any demon that touches it. Which makes me a little hesitant to touch it my-

**"Don't worry about that. The shields will register you as human,"** Tar relieves my only worry about this plan.

I nod my head and immediately begin running in the direction of the shield.

Let's just hope that I manage to navigate this damned maze of a building before those hounds catch up with me.

As I run through the halls of the building, I eventually begin to hear the hounds begin howling and barking at the same time, some doing one some the other. As if they were enjoying themselves chasing prey.

My eyes narrow at that though.

I am not prey.

It takes me another few minutes of running to reach the bunker, which on this floor is located in the corner of another common area. The normal spot to put them. Where a lot of people congregate.

I quickly turn back to see the hounds turning the corner before slowing down as they enter the common room.

My eyes narrow at them, and I activate Blood Claws, spreading my hands out on either side of me to ready for battle.

Do or die time.

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**Inside of the Bunker next to Scarlet**  
*A few moments ago*

Jacob never really expected to be able to become a security officer for a building owned by Silver Works, nor did he believe himself to be worthy of the position. But despite that, he always hoped for it. And when he finally got it? He was over the moon with joy.

But now?

Now he wishes that he could be anywhere else *but* here.

“How the hell do you expect me to hide in here while she might be in danger?!” Abigail Young shouts while physically swinging her arms to her side and glaring directly at Jacob, not intimidated in the slightest by his large build. “Open the damned door and let me go, young man!”

The old lady appears to be in her sixties or seventies and has long grey hair running down her back. She’s wearing regular business attire for the company, along with a pair of glasses long since forgotten after falling off her face.

Jacob lets out a sigh before shaking his head and saying, “I’m sorry lady, but even if I *did* let you go, the shield around the building is unbreachable from the inside. And that’s assuming you even got there without being killed by the demons along the way.”

The other people inside of the bunker aren’t making things easier for Jacob either, with their obvious looks of ‘don’t open that door’ practically bleeding through their faces.

“I don’t *care!*” Abigail shouts, making some of the people flinch at the panic clearly on display in her voice. “I need to find my granddaughter! She’s all I have left!”

Jacob sends a glance to the other security guards in the room, only to be ignored by them as they each suddenly find the ceiling incredibly interesting to look at.

*Damned cowards!*

The man turns back to Abigail and breathes in deeply to begin speaking, only to breath out again and turn towards the bunker door when it starts beeping. Then his eyes, along with those of everyone else in the room shift to the screen that lowers from the ceiling, showing the events going on outside of the bunker.

Everyone goes silent as a girl, no older than Jacob’s own daughter, runs into the large room connecting dozens of offices with a large window scaling the wall on one end of the room and various other decorations scattered throughout it. The girl is obviously a Guardian, considering her wolf ears and glowing eyes, but some of the people in the room can tell a vast difference between her and their boss, who is always looking around for threats and practically stiff as a board unless he’s talking to his daughter.

*A new Guardian, maybe?*

This thought runs through many of the people’s heads in the room and soon enough, whispers begin to spread. And Jacob can’t help but frown as he hears some of them.

“Do you think one of our coworkers contracted a spirit?” “No, it can’t be. She’s clearly not wearing attire fit for our company.” “Yeah, she looks like she’s just in casual clothes. So she can’t be an employee



*here, can she?" "She looks like she's only recently graduated from high school or something! There's no way she could've gotten a job here so quickly!"*

Jacob focuses on the screen again to examine the girl more closely, taking in her attire of a black and red jacket over a black shirt with some sort of logo on it that he doesn't recognize, and a pair of regular black pants. Nothing extraordinary or anything. Outside of the red highlights in her black hair and her inhuman features that show her as a Guardian that is.

He can't help but stare at her ears.

*I wonder if they're as soft as they look?*

After a single moment, he realizes what he had just thought and shakes his head.

Then he hears the murmurs of the others grow in volume.

*"Look! There are demon hounds! Do you think she's gonna fight them?!" "Of course she is, you idiot! She's a Guardian!" "But isn't she just a new Guardian? Is she strong enough to fight off a pack of hounds?"*

Jacob looks over to the entrance that the girl had walked through before finding five demon hounds slowly prowling into the room like a pack of wolves. The creatures are clearly smaller than wolves, yet still larger than regular dogs, and have pitch black fur and eyes, with a few streaks of red going across the black.

*Shit. This might be bad if she's as new to being a Guardian as I think.*

## Chapter 12.2

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### The Hunter Becomes The Hunted Part II

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#### Inside of the Bunker next to Scarlet

Everyone goes silent as they watch what looks like blood materialize in the form of werewolf claws over the girl's hands, startling quite a few of them in the process. But Jacob continues watching with his eyes narrowed despite that.

*Looks like she's planning on fighting. But does she really think she can deal with that many hounds at once? As a newly contracted Guardian?*

Ignorant of the man's thoughts, the girl raises one hand up and beckons the hounds to come after her, surprising the people in the bunker even more with her confidence. But the moment the hounds do leap towards her, she backs up and runs over to the bunker doors, making the camera recording her switch to another one in the process as the beeping grows louder from the hounds' proximity.

*"What's she doing?" "Is she baiting them or something?" "But for what?"*

Jacob tries to block out the sounds of the other occupants of the bunker as he glances at Abigail who is silent as she watches the screen, then looks up at the screen again himself. And what he sees on it has his frown growing deeper.

*That girl can't be older than twenty, and she's kiting those hounds around in circles like that? Sure she's making a lot of mistakes, but jeez. I didn't realize becoming a Guardian changed so much about a person's fighting capabilities right away.*

On the screen, the girl continues barely avoiding each hound's attack as they continue trying to leap and attack her from all sides. But eventually, after she backs up close enough to the shield, the one behind her fans out slightly to avoid it, leaving her back to the shield itself.

Jacob's eyes widen in realization right before the hound directly in front of her leaps at her, and she ducks right under the attack, letting the hound strike the shield face first. The shield then lets out a horrifying shrieking sound as what must be millions of jolts of electricity burst into the hound, making it fall limp to the ground while smoke rises off of its body while the girl flinches slightly at the same time.

Silence fills the bunker as everyone watches the girl quickly duck down and slash out the hound's throat with a smug look on her face after it's no longer being electrified, ignoring the fact that she'd just flinched. She then looks up at the other hounds with a grin and asks, "Who's next?"

*"Holy shit!! Holy shit holy shit holy shiiiiit!"*

Jacob hears someone shouting out his joy, making him turn around to find a teenage boy with his phone pointed at the screen as if he were recording the fight.

*Seriously?*

"Put that away," Jacob says while glaring at the kid. But the kid just looks up at the security guard then ignores him to continue recording.

And while this pisses Jacob off enough that he clenches his fists, he doesn't do anything and simply turns his attention back to the screen. Because after all, there are no laws against recording a Guardian at work. No matter how badly Jacob thinks there should be.

Because while there are the occasional few Guardians who are against popularity, the majority of them love it. Fame. Glory. The wealth that comes along with it.

*But democracy isn't for the few. It's for the many.*

Jacob thinks as he returns his attention to the screen, just to see the girl covering a bloody wound on her leg where one of the hounds clearly bit her rather hard before getting its neck torn out in kind. He then watches as the three remaining hounds back away from her ever so slightly, showing clear caution now.

Surprisingly, the girl rushes at the closest one out of nowhere, paying no heed to her injury despite the clear signs that she's feeling it. And once she reaches the startled hound, she physically grabs it, digging her claws in at the same time before tossing it straight at the shield and shocking it just like the first one. Then the other two hounds sprint off, leaving the room and the girl behind in their retreat.

*"Huh? Why did they run?" "Where are they going?"*

Most of the people in the bunker clearly don't remember their lessons on the lower ranking demons.

"Demon hounds are pack creatures, and once their pack reduces down to two members remaining, they will always run away and avoid combat," Jacob answers the confused looking people staring at the screen.

*"Oh, that makes sense." "Right!"*

Jacob watches the screen for a few seconds as cheers begin to rise from the other people in the bunker, just waiting for it to happen. And then, after nearly ten whole seconds, it does.

The girl collapses onto the ground with her eyes closed while breathing heavily, exhausted from the battle. This causes some of the cheers to lower in intensity as the people show concern for the girl, but most of them still continue.

*Should I open the door for her and close it again right after? She's a Guardian, but she's also only a teenager, fresh out of high school by the looks of it. So...*

Before he can think much further on the question, the girl opens her eyes and stares directly at the camera, a slight blush creeping onto her face as she likely realizes that everything was streaming to the people in the bunker live. She then climbs to her feet in a sluggish hurry and begins leaving the room, taking the decision out of Jacob's hands.

Everyone in the room quietly chatters about the new Guardian, many of whom – mostly the women in the room – seem to wish that they could touch her ears, just like Jacob's first thoughts on seeing them. But eventually, everything returns full circle, and Abigail begins complaining to Jacob again.

"Well?! Are you going to let me out or not?!" she asks, tapping her foot in a rhythmic pattern. But this time, no one is watching them, everyone's attention still on the hot topic of a new Guardian.

Jacob lets out a sigh.

*Why did I want to be here again?*

## Chapter 13

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### Risk and Reward

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#### Scarlet

As soon as the hounds completely leave my sight, turning a corner, I collapse onto the ground in a sweaty heap. Meanwhile the pain from the bite in my leg just keeps throbbing and throbbing, reminding me constantly of the mistake I made during the fight in turning my attention solely on the ones in front of me, leaving myself wide open to the last one. Which did at least give me an opening to kill that one

without the help of the shield, but the price I paid for that opening will take who knows how long to heal from the moonlight.

**{Level 5 Demon Hound defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Level 5 Demon Hound defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Level 4 Demon Hound defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Ten Skill Points are awarded for killing ten or more demons above your level.}**

**{Five Skill Points are awarded for killing your first Demon Hound.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 3. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

A very faint smile comes to my face at the constant flood of messages from the System.

Now that's nice.

I lie in place for several seconds in silence before Tar suddenly says, **"You might want to switch back to using your lycan ears."**

My brows furrow for a second, only for me to mentally shrug a second later and switch back to my lycan ears, wincing slightly as the noise of the shield enters my ears. The very reason I switched to my human ears again in the first place, despite it feeling rather uncomfortable for some reason.

*"Her ear twitched! Did you see that?! I want to touch her eaaarsss!!"*

My eyes shoot open as soon as I hear that before focusing on the security camera that I now see above the bunker.

What the fuck?!

**"You would've noticed if you hadn't switched your hearing to your *inferior* human ears, but the humans in the bunker have been watching you this entire battle,"** the tanuki says, satisfaction and smugness practically oozing through his words in the process.

I feel my cheeks heat up before I quickly try to get up, ignoring the throbbing pain from my leg to limp out of the room as quickly as I can, if for no other reason than to get away from those cameras.

*"Aww, she's gone!"*

I feel a shiver run down my spine at the disappointment I hear in that little girl's voice. As if she has lost a toy she had wanted to play with.

Children are scary.

Also, why is there a kid in here anyways?

I continue limping through the hall until I find an office with a window and lie down against the wall next to it, just letting the moonlight from the blood moon soak through my wound. But unlike with my arm wound from before, I don't roll up my pants, because they're too tight to do that. And the wound is much worse this time.

Then I lean up against the wall with a sigh of relief.

That hurt.

But it was worth it in the end.

A tense smile stretches across my face, tainted only by the pain in my leg as I open my status.

<b>NAME:</b>	<b>SPECIES:</b>	<b>AGE:</b>	<b>MAGIC:</b>	<b>LEVEL:</b>	<b>SP:</b>
Scarlet Asger	Human/Blood Lycan Hybrid	19	Blood	3	24
<b>STATS:</b>					
<b>Physical:</b>	21	<b>Mental:</b>	17	<b>Magical:</b>	19
<b>Physical/Level:</b>	2	<b>Mental/Level:</b>	1	<b>Magical/Level:</b>	2
<b>Free Points:</b>	2	<b>Mana:</b>	101/161.5	<b>Free Points/Level:</b>	2
<b>ACTIVE SKILLS:</b>					
<b>Blood Claws</b>	Allows the user to coat their hands with claws of blood. The blood used in the skill is either created through the user's mana, drained from the body of whatever the user has their claws in, or drawn from the user's body if they are out of mana.	<b>Skill Level:</b>		2	
<b>Clean</b>	A basic utility skill used to clean the user and their equipment.	<b>Skill Level:</b>		Static	
<b>PASSIVE SKILLS:</b>					
<b>Predator I</b>	The lowest rarity predator skill. It grants the user a 3% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.	<b>Skill Level:</b>		Static	

Okay. That's enough SP for two more common skills.

I quickly allocate the two free points to Mental, just to keep it up with the other two stats, before I close out of my status and open the Skill Store.

<b>SKILL NAME:</b>	<b>ACHIEVEMENT REQUIREMENTS:</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION:</b>	<b>TYPES:</b>	<b>RARITY:</b>	<b>SP PRICE:</b>
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<u>Predator II</u>	Unlocked by killing at least ten demons whose level is higher than your own. Predator I is required to purchase this.	It grants the user a 7% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.	Passive Static	Uncommon	15
<u>Repair</u>	Unlocked through killing your first demon.	A basic utility skill used to repair non-magical clothing.	Active Static	Common	10
<u>Recharge</u>	Unlocked through killing your first demon.	A basic utility skill used to recharge magical equipment through the user's own mana.	Active Static	Common	10
<u>Echo</u>	Unlocked through killing your first demon.	A basic utility skill used to infuse the user's voice with mana, amplifying the sound of their voice.	Active Static	Common	10
...					

Wait, an uncommon skill? That's a welcome sight.

Predator II.

**"I'd get it,"** Tar says while appearing out of thin air and floating up to the window. **"It should set you close to even with the demons a level or so above you in terms of stats."**

I nod in agreement before purchasing the skill and finding it replacing my Predator I skill.

It's likely that anything I face in this place will be a higher level than me.

Although it's unfortunate that I don't have enough SP to buy Repair anymore. But that can wait. It's not like I'm planning on tearing this jacket to shreds or anything.

After purchasing the skill, I close out of both my status and the skill store before looking out the window. The moonlight isn't as strong on this side of the building as opposed to the last time I stopped to heal. But that's because it's the other side of the building, facing the opposite direction of the moon.

Rather bad luck there, but nothing I can do about that.

Because there's no way I'm getting up again with this leg.

I close my eyes to listen for demons, blatantly ignoring the small voices I hear belonging to the people in that bunker. And fortunately for me, the two hounds seem to have gone upstairs if the whimpering I hear coming from the stairs leading up is anything to go by.

So I should be able to deal with them after my leg is back to full strength.

I just hope it doesn't take too long for that to happen.

## Chapter 14

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### Fright and Education

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#### Scarlet

“Stop giving me that look,” I tell Tar after nearly an hour has passed, and my wound has healed up almost all the way. “I am never going to let anyone touch my ears. Period.”

Tar just gives me an amused look from his place sitting in my lap. A look that only grows even more amused after I hear the next thing said by the people in the bunker.

*“I heard from my friend who was able to touch the tail of Panther once that it was as soft as silk! Do you think that girl’s ears are the same?”*

Why won’t they just drop it already? Is there nothing else to talk about but me in there?

If it’s not my ears they’re talking about, it’s who am I, why I was in this building, how old I am, and so on and so on.

But a lot of them just seem to want to touch my ears. Which, as it turns out, are incredibly sensitive to touch.

I tried it myself.

Which only makes me double down on the ‘no touching’ rule.

Anyways, I finally begin to get up from the floor, not bothering to warn the tanuki who falls onto the ground from my lap. I stretch a little bit with a faint smile on my face at the sight of the tanuki glaring at me from the floor before heading out towards the stairwell again.

It’s time to hunt those hounds above us.

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So as it turns out, the hounds had already gone up three more floors judging by the faint scents and rather dirty pawprints they left behind on the stairs. And after going to the thirty-first floor to check things out? I simply find them both growling at me directly in the entry chamber.

I wonder why they didn’t...

My thoughts trail off as I hear some strange cracking sounds from further into the floor. Similar to that of an egg hatching.

**“Get out of that floor. Now!”** Tar’s voice shouts in my head, and I don’t question it, just turning around and rushing down the stairs. Meanwhile, I hear the two hounds following after me. So once I get back down to the thirtieth floor, I spin around in a circle before catching a leaping hound, to which I use its own leverage to throw it down the stairs where it falls with a loud yelp.

I turn my attention to the other hound to find it having stopped at the edge of the stairs midway between the thirtieth and thirty-first floor with clear hesitation.

We stare at each other for several seconds, only breaking away once I get the message about the other hounds death prompting me to jump up the stairs again with a very large amount of force that sends me straight to the top of this half of the staircase. The hound quickly scoots back in fright despite being a higher level than me, but I continue flying through the air towards it until I land directly on top of it, where I then dig the claws of both of my hands, blood claws having activated on my flight up, into its neck.

After hearing the death message for this hound, I let go of its body and begin walking down the stairs again while using my clean skill.

“Tar, what was that?” I ask, a small amount of fear entering my voice.

**“That,”** the tanuki says, a hint of fear in his own voice surprising me, **“was a breeder. Why it was so high up in the building, I don’t know. But you need to avoid that floor at all costs.”**

I shiver at the mention of a breeder.

I don’t remember what the creature was described as in the textbooks, but I do remember this. Not only do they constantly breed new spawn, but they’re defended by demon knights. Three of them.

Just a single demon knight could split me in half with ease. There is no way I am ever entering that floor again during this Fracture.

A few seconds of silence pass before Tar seems to calm down and asks me a surprising question, **“You seem to know a lot about the demons despite only becoming a ‘Guardian’ a few hours ago.”**

Or rather, implied a question.

I shrug in response.

You probably read my mind earlier about the ‘me graduating at the top of my class thing for a scholarship’, so...

The tanuki just stares at me.

Of course, it’d ignore the important part.

“Well,” I begin by speaking out loud as I walk down the stairs, since thinking my answers still feels weird – like I’m talking to myself in my head, but not, “I was an orphan in a Tier 3 city. Which basically meant that I had very few prospects in life. The most I could hope for was a job that might be able to pay my bills paycheck to paycheck with a home living below what most people would consider good.”

I jump down the last few steps of the stairs to the twenty-eighth floor.

“So I devoted myself to studying as hard as I could, even going to the trouble of asking Belle – my best friend and the daughter of the orphanage director – to lend me her own textbooks from her higher level school as an extra boost,” I continue while walking over to the staircase down to the twenty-seventh floor, where I hear nearly half a dozen voices from people who are obviously not in a bunker.



“Thanks to that, I managed to become the top graduate in my year, earning me a scholarship which I then negotiated into the chance to come here. To a Tier 1 city.”

Tar just slowly follows me through the air as I talk, not saying a word in the process.

“And that’s about it. I learned all about a lot of the demons through the textbooks for history class and demonology class,” I finally get around to answering his implied question. Right as I reach the halfway point of the staircase.

After several seconds, the tanuki finally responds, “**Okay.**”

I blink in surprise at the rather lackluster answer.

Just okay?

I stare at the tanuki for a few seconds.

Huh.

Just okay.

Why am I spilling my life story to a tanuki, anyways?

I jump the rest of the way down the stairs to the twenty-seventh floor before focusing on the conversations I’m hearing on the floor itself.

## Chapter 15

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### Survivors

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#### Scarlet

*“Do you think these are enough?”* a low pitched male voice asks, worry clear in his tone.

*“I doubt it. They went down there with two magi-tech pulse rifles from the lab and still didn’t come back up,”* a woman answers him with just as much worry in her voice as the man.

My eyebrows rise at the mention of pulse rifles.

Those things should be strong enough to obliterate up to a level twenty-five demon, if I remember correctly from my research on Allen’s company. And if the people who went down there didn’t come back even with them...

Although, I wonder why they aren’t just hiding in their bunker?

I begin to walk through the floor in the direction of the voices. And as I walk, I open my skill store and purchase the repair skill, which I can now afford thanks to those demon hounds that I killed up above. Then I immediately use it on my jacket and other clothes, reveling in the sight of the holes and

cuts and whatnot on them closing themselves up for only the small price of a couple points of mana each article of clothing.

My jacket's finally whole again! Yippee!!!

I can't help the smile that blooms on my face at that, only for it to fade after I hear the continued conversation of the people on the floor.

*"Damnit, why did the generator have to break down now!"*

Oh. That explains why they're not in the bunker.

Not sure where the generator is for this floor, but most generators tend to support more than one shield. Meaning it's probably not on this floor, judging by their conversation.

If there's no generator, there's no shield for the bunker. And if there's no shield, there's no purpose for the bunker.

Not when any demon can just break through the door.

Or most demons at least. I don't think spawn can break through a solid steel door. Probably.

Also, why aren't there any demons on this floor?

I walk through the strangely silent floor, outside of the humans on it of course, for nearly five minutes, just slowly navigating towards them as their conversation continues on and on, going round and round in circles with no decision in sight. Eventually, I finally make it to the door that sounds like it opens up into the room they're in. So I grab the knob and open the door, startling over a dozen people in the process.

Three of them immediately raise pistols to point at me, only to lower it again at the sight of me. Meanwhile the rest all jump backwards, many of them tripping over stuff in the process.

A few seconds pass in silence as we stare at each other.

Of the fourteen people I find in the room, one is a little kid just playing in the corner as if nothing had happened, ten are adults at the very least in their early thirties, one is an old man, and the other two are both teenagers.

Why are there so many teenagers in this building?

The people in front of me look even more surprised for some reason before sharing a glance with each other. Then one of them – who, judging by his voice, is one of the ones I heard talking on my way here – answers the question I had asked in my head, "Well, today was a day that the possible interns from the nearby high schools were visiting to see the office, ma'am."

I blink in surprise.

Wait, did I ask that out loud?!

Also, did a man over ten years my senior call me ma'am?

**“It’s because you’re a ‘Guardian’,”** a certain tanuki’s voice echoes in my head, answering my question.

Oh. Right. That.

“No need to call me ma’am,” I tell them with a shake of my head, which somehow draws their attention to my ears. “It makes me feel old.”

“Right,” the guy responds, his eyes quickly returning to my face, unlike some of the other members of their little group who continue to stare at my ears. “Is there some way we can assist you?”

I stare at him for a few seconds, a little surprised by his words.

**“Guardians are given the authority of a major in the military during Demonic Assaults, making you the equivalent of a military officer in his eyes,”** Tar answers my unasked question again, finally proving his worth beyond just his cuteness as a tanuki.

He snorts at that thought.

“Actually, I had heard you all talking from the stairs and was wondering what had happened?” I sort of half ask, half state with a frown. Because in all honesty, I’m not sure why I came over here to them. Maybe out of pure curiosity?

The man looks surprised for a second before straightening himself out, which seems to snap the others out of their little ‘wolf ear staring’ stupor as he asks, “Um, if I may ask, are you a new Guardian to this Fracture?”

I hesitantly nod my head at that.

This makes the looks of hope that I had seen blooming on his face ever since his eyes landed on me begin to fade away. But the woman and other man next to him – likely the people I heard him talking to about the situation – push him forwards anyways, to his obvious chagrin.

Oh. He wants me to help with their situation.

I look around the group, most of which don’t seem to know how to react to me – except the two teens of course, who are still staring at my ears for some reason.

Why is it that every teenage girl in this building that I’ve heard or seen wants to touch my ears?! I mean, I understand they’re soft, but seriously!

Then there’s the little kid who can’t be any older than five years old. They’re just playing with some toy as if nothing was happening.

Someone’s kid, I guess?

“I- no, we would like to ask if you could help us, miss Guardian,” the man who was speaking to me asks, bringing my attention back to him as he uses an even more awkward title to call me than before.

Should I help?

I stare at him for a few seconds as I think of the benefits and drawbacks.

It's likely only going to be an hour or two longer before a Guardian or two arrives to quell the Fracture, so I can't see these people being in *too* much danger outside of a bunker. Not with me hunting the demons around here, and there not being any on this floor in the first place. Likely due to those pulse rifles now that I think about it.

But at the same time, I'm heading downstairs anyways. I might as well help them out.

"Sure," I answer with a shrug. "And call me Scarlet."

## Chapter 16

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### Assistance

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#### Scarlet

Some of the tension seems to leave the man's body while at the same time the two teens finally stop focusing on my ears.

"Thank you, miss Scarlet!" the man seems overjoyed, but despite that he still has himself well composed. Unlike the other two next to him, one of whom seems to be from across the ocean to the east judging by appearance and how he's bowing towards me, whereas the other one is just staring up at the ceiling with quiet tears flowing down her face.

Rather odd.

And he's still calling me miss Scarlet. But I guess there's no breaking that. The guy looks like he has some sort of disciplinary training, like the military or the police or something.

As if reading my mind, the man suddenly introduces himself, "My name is Jacob Winslow, and I'm a police officer who was here in order to meet with the CEO. But then everything else happened, and that kind of went out the wayside." He reaches his hand towards me with a polite smile on his face and adds, "It's nice to meet you, miss Scarlet."

I shake his hand, feeling like this is a bit more normal. Much better than the awkwardness of our initial greeting.

"Now, according to my compatriot here," the man pauses as he waves at the woman next to him, who simply waves at me in response, "the generator for this floor's bunker is located in the bunker directly beneath us, and considering that it's not on, something bad must have happened down there. So we sent down my partner and one of the security officers on this floor, each armed with some of Cipher's patented pulse rifles, to investigate."

"And they never came back," I finish for him before crossing my arms and glancing at the other man of the three who are standing up front. The guy just waves at me and smiles at my look though, so I turn back to Officer Winslow, who is nodding his head in confirmation of my words.

“Correct,” he says before glancing behind him at a few of the men who are wearing security officer uniforms, “we only have one pulse rifle remaining, but these three have pistols with them as well.” He turns back to me with a hopeful look. “Will you consider helping them get down to the twenty-sixth floor?”

I look between the men for a few seconds before considering the help that a pulse rifle could give me in hunting demons. Which is a lot of help.

“Sure,” I answer with a shrug. “Was headed down there anyways.”

A wave of relief passes through everyone in the room. Except the kid. Even the teens look relieved at my answer.

I blink in surprise at that, only to shrug it off a second later before turning around and walking towards the door.

“Well, I’ll be at the stairs when you’re ready,” I tell them, waving my hand over my shoulder. Eager to get away from the group of people.

The people in the room – many of them being the ones who hadn’t said a word throughout that whole exchange – practically smother me in thanks and appreciative words until I close the door behind me with a sigh of relief. And not even a second later, I hear the tanuki start talking.

**“You really don’t like dealing with people, do you?”**

It’s that obvious?

**“Yes, it is.”**

Stupid furball. That was a rhetorical question.

**“Yes. That it was.”**

My eye twitches as I walk through the hall towards the stairs.

The stupid furball is becoming sassy. Didn’t know a ‘spirit’, or rather a fae could do that.

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It only takes me three minutes to make it to the stairs this time, since I had already made it through the maze of a floor once. And only another two minutes before the others arrive to join me.

Unsurprisingly, one of the people is the police officer, whereas the other two are security guards, leaving one of the guards behind likely as a protective measure for the other people on the floor. Meanwhile, the one holding the pulse rifle, which I recognize from tv, is one of the security guards. Not sure if it’s because they didn’t trust an outsider with the tech, or if this security guard is just better at using it. Either way, it doesn’t really matter to me.

Not really sure what the point of telling me they had three pistols was if they were only bringing two though.

“Scarlet,” Officer Winslow says with a nod. “Shall we be off?”

I nod back and begin walking down the stairs.

We shall.

The three of us walk until the mid-point on the stairs, where I stop and close my eyes, just listening to the sounds on the floor.

“Scarl-” I cut him off by raising a finger.

After listening for a few seconds, a frown develops on my face, and I open my eyes.

“Sounds like there aren’t any spawn on the floor. Just hounds and bipedal demons,” I tell the three, a slight fear building at the back of my mind at the thought. But I quench that fear just as quickly as it comes. Because if we have a pulse rifle, then they can take care of the huntsmen. And if it’s a knight, then we can just run. They’re pure defenders who assign themselves to guard something or someone, and never leave that charge. “That means we could be dealing with either huntsmen, or knights.”

I immediately see the three tensing up at the word knights. And I can’t blame them.

The things are terrifying from what I’ve read. But they aren’t all that hard to escape, otherwise there would be a lot more casualties in Class I Fractures.

Although it’s possible they could be in a place blocking the others from passing. I don’t know the building’s layout after all.

In which case I’ll figure out what to do when the time comes.

“You,” I point at the guy with the pulse rifle – a rather large man with a thick beard and long brown hair – making him open his mouth in surprise before pointing at himself. “Yes, you. I want you right next to me with that pulse rifle of yours.”

He nods, not saying a word in response.

Likely because I show a hint of confusion at that, the officer explains, “Sorry, Carl is mute.”

Oh.

Okay.

Carl walks up next to me and nods again, but this time with a slightly sad look on his face.

Poor Carl.

“You two, just stay behind us and try not to get hurt,” I tell them, albeit maybe a bit more callously than I meant to.

I turn around again and continue walking down the stairs.

“Let’s go.”

## Chapter 17

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## Questions

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### Scarlet

It must look rather odd for a young woman like me to be giving orders to a bunch of thirty year old men armed with guns and a magic weapon. But there's no other choice, considering that they're only human, and they can't hear what I can.

Once we reach the bottom of the stairs at the twenty-sixth floor, my eyes immediately locks onto several demon hounds. All of which are between levels five and seven.

The sound of the pulse rifle going off echoes in my ears, making me wince slightly before I rush forwards. But out of the corner of my eye, I see one of the hounds getting completely vaporized by the pulse rifle, leaving nothing left.

I grimace at just how loud that thing is, much louder than I'd expected, but still continue forwards, taking advantage of the hounds' distraction given to me by Carl and his pulse rifle to activate my blood claws and slice straight through the neck of one of the hounds. This – along with the sounds of bullets being fired from the other two pistols – snaps the remaining five hounds out of their stupor, leading to one of them quite close to me attempting to take a bite out of my leg. But once again, I hear the blast of the pulse rifle, following which the hound vanishes, having been vaporized as well.

The other hounds begin cautiously backing up, having realized the predicament they're in. But I don't make it easy on them by rushing forwards again, my claws empowered now by the blood of that first demon hound I killed in the fight.

Another bullet from a pistol fires forth, not really doing much damage beyond a small wound to the hound it hit as I rush forward to tear straight through the jaw of a hound that tried to match my claws with its mouth, with little success. And now, with only three of the seven hounds remaining, one of which being injured, the hounds quickly begin to make a full-on retreat from the room.

But not before another loud noise echoes from the pulse rifle, making me reach up to cover my ears this time as another hound is vaporized.

The other two hounds manage to escape down the hall, so I relax ever so slightly, letting my hands lower down from my head again. I turn to look at the other three to find them all safe and sound near the stairs, each with a smile on their faces.

Guess they're happy with how that went.

**{Level 6 Demon Hound defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Level 6 Demon Hound defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

I open my status to glance at my SP before looking at the pulse rifle.

Maybe I should consider buying the recharge skill just for that rifle? After I have enough SP, of course.

It'll take another seven kills to get enough SP for that skill. Which shouldn't be too much in the long-run.

Also, it looks like those killed by the others don't give me any EXP or SP. Or at least those killed by the pulse rifle didn't. Since the other two didn't manage to kill anything.

I just wish their guns were quieter.

"Wow," Officer Winslow says with a wide grin splitting across his face. "That was amazing!"

The other security officer – the one who hasn't actually said anything or even given me his name yet – nods his head in agreement and says, "Very amazing."

Carl just gives a thumbs-up to go along with his grin.

I return Carl's thumbs-up before turning around and closing my eyes to focus on my hearing again. The others go silent during this, likely understanding that I need silence whenever I do this.

After a second of focusing, I manage to make out several shouting voices, the sounds of quite a few guns shooting off, one of them being a pulse rifle judging by the familiar sound its making, and lastly, some strange noises akin to that of something hitting metal and bouncing off. Which leads me to believe that they're all fighting a knight for some reason instead of just running away from it.

I open my eyes again while turning to Officer Winslow and saying, "At the center of the floor, there are several people shouting and shooting guns, one pulse rifle included, along with a knight by the sounds of the battle."

The grins are instantly wiped from their faces as they turn serious.

"Do you know the way?" the officer asks me while visibly tightening his grip on his pistol.

"Yes," I answer, surprising all three of them.

Normally I wouldn't know where they are, at least judging by my past experience on the upper floors. But this floor's layout is different. There really isn't much on it beyond a few really large rooms, and at most a couple of small hallways judging by how clear the noises are. So it's rather easy to track this time.

Not really sure why they'd even need me to help them navigate their way through such a small floor like this anyways. Or, simple, rather than small.

"Alright, let's go save them then," he says with a look of determination replacing the fear I had seen flash in his eyes at the mention of a knight. Which also makes me wonder just what that knight is protecting. Since I clearly don't sense any breeders – thankfully – and the captain is obviously not going to be down here. It'll be with the core as it's the commander of the Fracture.

But that still leaves the question of just what is the knight protecting if it's not another demon?



Also, why is it that Tar sounds especially quiet right now?

A few seconds pass as we all begin rushing into the floor, through the door into the entry room, which looks like some sort of equipment room. And even after we reach the halfway point in the room, the tanuki still hasn't said anything. Which leads me to wonder something.

Can a fae leave its contracted partner during its contract, or is it required to stay next to them all the time?

## Chapter 18.1

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### The Biggest Hunt Yet Part I

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#### Scarlet

I can't help but ponder over the question as we run through the hallway. But my attention is immediately taken away from that subject the moment we enter the large room where the people on this floor are gathered as my eyes focus on a large demon. One seemingly wearing a set of pitch black armor with a glowing red sword in its hand, and a red visor in the horned helmet on its head.

"A knight!" I hear Officer Winslow shout, bringing the attention of some of the people in the room fighting it to us before they return their attention to the fight. Albeit not until after a brief glance at me.

My mind almost blanks the moment my eyes reach the demon knight's head and I hear the message from the System playing out in my head.

**| Demon Knight – Subspecies: None – Level 53 |**



The demon doesn't make a single sound outside of its footsteps as it swings its massive sword around like some sort of stick. And every time it does, the people around it move far back, avoiding the

blade whose path makes a whistling sound just from splitting the air as it passes right in front of them, sending a small blast of air in their direction and pushing them back even further. Meanwhile, I also see a few huntsmen around the edges of the large room, which looks to be some sort of chamber meant for experimenting with weapons or something, because while a large portion of the room is a common area like space, there's also a lower level that has targets, along with what looks to be a disabled shield over it that would act as a platform for people to walk on.

I also can't help but notice that the hounds we were just fighting are dead, seemingly at the hands of the knight itself for some reason.

Maybe by accident? The thing is rather clumsy. Which is really the only reason why I'm considering staying to fight it.

"Jackson!" Officer Winslow shouts, looking in the direction of the security officer holding the pulse rifle fighting alongside the seven other people against the knight.

The guy returns his look with a nod before firing his pulse rifle at the demon knight, only for it to barely leave a small burn on the armor.

Shit. It's way too strong for the pulse rifle to be enough!

Damage or not though, it does serve to distract the knight for a moment, leaving the others to fire at the huntsman scattered in the corners of the room, aiming directly at their crossbows.

I nod my head in agreement with that decision. Because they're not likely to be able to do much with the knight here without their crossbows even if they can fight without them. And the guns won't do much to the huntsmen either. Considering that they're all between levels fifteen and twenty.

"Does the shield generator for the experimental chamber down there still run!" I shout at the people fighting, seemingly confusing them for a moment before one of them answers, "Yes!"

Without wasting anymore time, I lightly drag my blood claws against my own arm to pull in more blood, grimacing slightly as I cut open my skin before rushing in with the strengthened claws towards the knight while it's distracted.

Let's hope this works.

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### ***The other side of the room***

Arnold Fraught wasn't sure how today could've gone any worse. First he was late for work. Then he found that the shield generator used for the experimental testing chamber was jammed and needed to be fixed, making his job a lot harder until someone finally managed to fix the damned thing. And not even a few minutes after that?

A Demonic Assault began, with a Fracture smack dab in the middle of the company building. Even if it's only a Class I Fracture.

And that was fine. The first thought that went through his head when he saw the spawn was that maybe this could be considered some sort of offhanded luck that they managed to finish right before it happened instead of being stuck working on it while it was happening.

That is, until he went to the bunker with the other researchers and found the generator in there just as busted as the generator for the experimental field. And by the time they reached the main chamber of the floor where the field was, they already found that a demon knight had taken up residence in the area for some reason.

And the thing seemed absolutely against anyone trying to enter the experimental field.

After seeing that, he'd lost all hope he had of surviving. Because no uninitiated human can survive a knight unless they run. And there wasn't anywhere to run with the knight blocking the path.

Arnold can't help but glance at the pulse rifle the security guard from the floor above them is holding before turning his gaze towards the girl who is obviously a Guardian as she runs towards the knight.

*Now though... there's hope at least.*

Then he sees her cutting her own arm with her bloody claws and begins to question whether that hope is a false one or not. Until he sees her rushing at the demon knight who is still stepping towards the security officer who is waiting for his pulse rifle to cool down to fire again before the girl leaps into the air and lands on the demon's back.

At this point he wonders if she's entirely sane, or if she's just too powerful a Guardian to care.

Either way, he continues firing his own pistol at the knight while being extra careful not to shoot the Guardian girl as she tries to dig her claws into the creature's armor-appearing scales with no success. She then frowns at this before glancing at the security officer and shouting, "Try to hit the same spot as before on the knight!" and jumping off of the knight in the process. The entire time the knight didn't even bother acknowledging her presence thanks to the greater threat of the pulse rifle.

Arnold's eyes widen slightly in understanding, and apparently the security guard seems to understand as well, because as soon as the rifle is ready to fire again, he aims at the exact same spot on the knight and fires out another pulse of blue energy that burns ever so slightly deeper into the creature's scales.

"Everyone!" Arnold shouts at the others around him, "Shoot at the huntsmen to keep them distracted and give the others time to deal with the knight!"

Arnold's research team – all not experienced in any form of combat – manage to give out shaky answers of agreement before firing at the huntsmen who are all hiding in the shadows. But before Arnold can join them to do the same, the girl runs up to him and quickly says, "Can you turn on the shield for the experimental chamber down there?"

After a brief moment of surprise, Arnold nods his head and answers, "If it'll help."

He then runs off to the shield while the knight is busy with the girl and the security officer.

*Let's just hope that whatever she's planning works.*

## Chapter 18.2

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### The Biggest Hunt Yet Part II

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#### Scarlet

I watch for a second as the man who had answered my question earlier runs off while the knight is focused on Jackson before turning around and going back to the knight myself.

These things aren't very intelligent from what I remember in my lessons. They have incredibly durable scales that for some reason take on the appearance of armor but are singularly obsessed with defending whatever their charge is and will almost always singularly attack a single target. The one it sees as the biggest threat to it and its charge.

Which right now is that pulse rifle in its eyes, meaning it sees me as nothing more than a gnat flying around the room. No matter how insulting that may be.

"Carl!" I shout at him, "Can you help Jackson in shooting that one spot?!"

I see the mute man giving me a thumbs up before attempting to go around the knight to shoot it in the same spot that Jackson just did.

Okay. This plan may be a rushed one, and also may or may not take in the fact that it lets me finish the thing off to get the EXP, but it should work.

Probably.

It also hinges on them not, ya know, shooting me. Because that would kill me. But I know the security guards here are trained to shoot well, even with these rifles. Something about Allen requiring it.

I rush in towards the knight again right after it swings and misses Jackson once again, showing off its rather slow speed. Or is it a slow reaction speed?

**"That's one of the things that can happen when your stats aren't evenly balanced."** Tar suddenly says, having returned who knows when from who knows where. **"If your mental stat isn't high enough, your thoughts may not be able to always keep up with your body's enhanced physical capabilities. And demon knights are notorious for how low their mental stat is compared to their physical."**

Putting aside where you've been till after this fight, that sounds incredibly unbalanced.

**"That it does. These knights aren't meant to do anything besides act as living shields for their charges after all,"** the tanuki responds, ignoring my comment about his having been missing.

Okay, that's kind of sad.

For it that is.

The creature continues to ignore me as I rush up to and even slash at its legs, ducking as it finally decides to attack me, only for the attack to be disrupted by another pulse shot to its chest that goes frighteningly close to my head.

“Please don’t hit me!” I shout back before going around the creature and deciding to attack it from the other side.

Surprisingly, the knight finally lets out a groan after another shot hits it from Carl, just a few seconds after the one from Jackson. And after that, it begins to shake slightly, simply stopping in place.

Just in case it’s about to do something big, I jump back, creating a large amount of distance between myself and it. And I quickly find myself to be ecstatic that I decided to do so. Because not even a few seconds later, the knight stomps one of its feet on the ground, sending a strange red shockwave outward in a circle around itself that barely misses me as I jump over it at the last second. The shockwave continues for several meters in each direction, only stopping right after it hits one of the researchers who is busy distracting the huntsmen for us.

My eyes widen in shock as the man lets out a hoarse scream while his body seemingly liquifies below his calves.

What. The. Fuck?!

And that almost hit me too? Would have if I hadn’t jumped.

Almost everyone stops to stare at the wounded man who is now sobbing almost nonstop, no longer firing his gun – likely too overwhelmed by the pain to do so. But after only a couple seconds of this, the man who I had talked to earlier shouts, “You’re in no situation to stare right now!!!”

His words snap both me and the others out of our stupor before I hear two pulse rifles firing at the same time, both at the knight’s armor. And once the smoke clears, I find that the scales have been completely melted, with some of the flesh beneath burnt.

“Leave this part to me!” I shout at Carl and Jackson. “You two help the others deal with the huntsmen now!”

The huntsmen are annoying in that they like to hide and shoot a bolt out at random. But these haven’t been doing much thanks to the bullets that keep being shot at their crossbows.

Despite that though, they’re still a problem that needs to be dealt with.

I can’t help but send a slightly fearful glance towards the researcher whose legs are now nothing more than a pile of goo before shaking my head and rushing towards the knight.

No time to be afraid right now.

I glance at the experimental chamber to find the man who broke everyone out of their shock tinkering with some sort of machine that was hidden behind a panel in the wall.

“How much longer until the shield is-” I begin to shout, only to cut off as I hear the sound of the shield starting up, followed by a large blue barrier appearing over the experimental chamber. “Never mind.”

The man gives a half-hearted grin at that, to which I try to return before focusing on the knight again as it begins moving towards Jackson at a slightly faster speed than before. Which honestly works out, since Jackson is closer to the edge of the floor overlooking the experimental chamber.

I run up to the railing before grabbing it and breaking part of it off, following which I run over to the knight.

Please let this work. Oh *pleeease* let this work!!!

Without a second to spare, I run around it on its side closer to the railing right after it swings its sword again, only barely missing Jackson in the process and slicing straight through the railing a little further down from me. Then I jump onto the railing and kick off straight towards the creature with a pipe in one hand and my claws stretched out in the other.

## Chapter 18.3

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### The Biggest Hunt Yet Final

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#### Scarlet

While the creature is still recovering from swinging its large sword, I stab my claws straight into the gap in its scales, making my hand dig nearly two inches deep. But my momentum, along with the creature's blood joining my claws, allows my hand to dig just a little bit deeper. Meanwhile the pipe remains unused in my left hand as the knight lets out a roar of pain that has me grinning.

Looks like I finally got its attention.

I rip my hand out of its body, sending a spray of greyish black blood out to cover my jacket and Jackson behind me before I kick off of its body into the air. The creature tries to reach for me but is too slow and barely misses. Whether that's because of its low mental stat making its reaction time terrible, or the wound I just gave it slowing it down, I'm not sure. But either way, I land nearly four meters in front of the thing, with its back facing the shield and railing.

A surge of pride runs through me as I feel the hunt reaching its climax at the sight of the knight raising its sword with a bit more difficulty than before, only to then pause at the top of its climb and instead raise a foot.

"Shit, run!" I shout while leaping backwards, vaguely noticing Jackson already having started running immediately after getting splashed by the blood.

I let out a sigh of relief at seeing the wave barely miss me before I take advantage of the little period of rest I noticed it had after using that particular skill by rushing at it with the pipe of the railing held up like a javelin. Then, the moment I get within one meter of it, I pull back, jump up, and send it

shooting forward with my momentum, right into the knight's chest. And while it doesn't really dig very deep, it still goes nearly four inches in.

But that's not the main reason for my doing this.

I jump off of the creature as it falls backwards, topples over the railing, and straight onto the shield that ends up making a loud shrieking sound as bolts of electricity fly off of the creature's body, ravaging it from both inside and out, with many of the bolts latching onto the pipe and being driven into the creature's body through it.

After a few seconds, the pain in my own ears from the combined noise of the creature's roars and the shield make me switch to my human ears just for some relief.

The electricity continues shocking the knight for over five seconds before the bolts begin to grow even larger, some of them even striking through the pipe away from the field, barely missing me and making me back up a few feet.

Wow.

That's... beautiful.

After watching the electric show for a couple more seconds, I look down at my hands in front of me with a frown before using my Clean skill.

Then a bolt from a crossbow punctures straight through my arm and into my stomach.

I turn to stare at it for a few seconds, briefly wondering where it came from before looking up and finding one of the huntsmen with its head and crossbow peaking out from behind a pillar. Only for said huntsmen to get that very same head vaporized by a pulse shot from one of the pulse rifles.

Whether it's from shock, adrenaline, or what, I don't really feel the wound. All I see when I turn back to look at it is a thick black crossbow bolt going straight through my arm. In one way and out the other, with the head of the crossbow going into my gut only by an inch or so.

But that doesn't last long before the pain really arrives. And it's so great that it has me falling to my knees while silent tears leak out of my eyes practically nonstop.

The pain is so much worse than a hound simply chomping on my leg a little. So much worse than anything I've felt before.

After a few seconds, the pain becomes too much and I fall onto the ground with one last thought going through my mind.

Didn't the huntsmen already have fixations here?

Then a ding echoes in my head, and everything goes black.

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### ***The Experiment Hall***

*Holy shit! She did it! She fucking did it!!! The girl actually killed the knight!!*

Arnold can't help but let out a *whoop* of excitement as he stands up from his spot kneeling next to the generator and watches as the knight is pumped full of electricity from the shield. But his excitement dies just as quickly as it had started when he sees the crossbow bolt enter straight through the girl's arm and into her stomach.

"Oh *hell no!*" the man shouts before breaking off into a sprint to get to her as fast as possible, uncaring of the remaining two huntsmen who are still being shot at by the two pulse rifle bearers.

*She did not just save our lives to die herself!*

As soon as he gets to the girl, he touches her wrist to feel for a pulse before nodding at finding one and reaching for the bolt stuck in her arm. Only for a tanuki to suddenly appear in between his hand and the bolt, startling him into falling onto his rear.

"**Do not take the bolt out until she is in the moonlight,**" the tanuki talks to him, making him wonder for a very brief moment if he's losing his mind. But after a few seconds later, and the sounds of more pulse rifle shots followed by the vaporization of the remaining huntsmen, he realizes he's not.

Then one of the men that had accompanied the girl here – one he recognizes as the head of security for the floor above this one – walks up and stares at the tanuki before muttering, "A spirit?"

Arnold – having heard his muttered words – jerks his head to look at the tanuki again and asks, "Wait, are you her contracted spirit?"

The tanuki just nods its head and answers, "**Bring her to the moonlight before you take out the arrow.**" Then it vanishes again without a trace.

Silence passes for a mere two seconds after the tanuki's disappearance before Arnold and the man gently begin picking the girl up and moving her over to the room connected to this one that has a window.

## Intermission

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### **One block away from the building Scarlet is in *A couple hours later***

At first, she was just a part of a contract. He was asked to raise her in return for permission to set up his own Association.

But after a few years, she began to grow on him. Her more than any of the other orphans in the orphanage he had set up as a cover for the contract. And by the time she got old enough to argue with him? To question him on his inventions? He couldn't help but admit that he was starting to care for her as he did his own daughter.

Of course, it didn't hurt that Scarlet was quickly becoming best buds with his actual daughter. So when Allen heard that there was a Fracture near the orphanage several years back, he didn't hesitate to drop everything and rush over to the city from the capital – arriving there in less than half an hour



thanks to one of his skills. Only to find that he had overreacted, and the kids weren't even in the Fracture.

But now she's in actual danger. Now she's in a Fracture.

This thought echoes through Cipher's mind as he throws a punch straight at the core of the Class II Fracture, bolts of electricity created by nanomachines wrapping around his fist in the process before the core shatters in a matter of seconds. He then sends a wave of flames through the room, torching alive all of the demons in it including the level 250 Demon Commander in charge of the Class II Fracture.

Without a hint of hesitation, Cipher rushes out of the room, all of the demons in the building beginning to lose their connection to the world of Earth now that the core is gone. And by the time the Guardian gets to the front door of the building, every last demon is gone from it, already sent back to their home world of Tartarus, with the shield automatically coming down around the building now that they're gone.

Cipher summons his magi-tech, skill enhanced hover pack and breaks the sound barrier as he bursts through the air in the direction of his company building, ignoring the shocked looks he's getting along the way from the few people still on the streets. He then lands on the ground right in front of the main doors, spreads his hands, and lets a large stream of nanomachines fly out to surround the entire building as his eyes close.

If there were any people near this building, they would see his eyes constantly moving beneath his eyelids as he uses the nanomachines to get a layout of every floor in terms of both people and demons. But once the nanomachines reach the twenty-sixth floor, he pauses, his mouth parting open slightly as they find something rather surprising.

His eyes open and a scowl appears on his face.

*She signed a contract.*

He listens in on the conversations held by the people in the room, which amount to about ten, two of which are armed with his own pulse rifles. And after just a few minutes of listening, he understands what happened, his focus briefly shifting to the dead demon knight located in the middle of the shield in the experimental field.

*That damned idiot! Of all the foolish, moronic, and arrogant things you could've done and have ever done in your life, this takes the fucking cake!*

Despite his thoughts, the man doesn't hesitate to have his nanomachines scan her body from outside of the building. And what he finds is that she isn't in critical condition, only with a very light wound to her stomach and a very strange and seemingly impossible – possibly already partially healed? – wound on her arm, along with the crossbow bolt lying next to her unconscious form.

He lets out a sigh of relief at that before his scowl grows even larger, this time more out of anger directed towards her recklessness than anything else. Anger that he quickly begins to dish out towards all of the demons on the first floor the moment he steps inside, incinerating every last one of them with ease.

*Considering who told me to raise her in the first place, it's not surprising that she was chosen for a contract. But the sheer recklessness of fighting – and somehow defeating – a demon knight in the very same Fracture you contracted in is mind boggling.*

Cipher doesn't even pay attention as he simply goes from floor to floor, incinerating the demons while not touching any of the humans – the Class I demons not being anything more than simple bugs in the face of his power.

*Maybe this will teach her not to be so reckless. First it's trying to teach Arthur's bullies a lesson when they were twice her size by filling their lockers full of worms – Tartarus knows where she got them – then it was trying to negotiate with the fucking board of education for the ability to apply for Tier 1 Universities. And now it's taking on demon knights while only being a newly contracted Guardian?!*

As the man's irritation rises, so does the death count of the demons he kills through the floors. All the way until he reaches the sixth floor and finds the core situated there with a level 100 Demon Captain guarding it, along with two level 75 demon knights stationed next to the core. But none of them so much as slow the man down as he simply walks in, turns each of them into barbecue, then grabs and shatters the core in his bare palm.

Space begins to warp around them ever so slightly before stabilizing again as the demons filling the building all begin to fade away, each being sent back to Tartarus with regret. Meanwhile all of the humans in the building let out cheers of excitement, relief, and pure joy as the man saves their lives while simply taking out his irritation on the core and the demons.

Cipher doesn't even stop moving after dealing with the demon core. He just continues walking up the stairs in his path towards the twenty-sixth floor, not even bothering with answering the calls he is getting from Sage and the other Guardians of his Association now that the Fracture has been dealt with.

But as he is stepping onto the eleventh floor, he pauses as he sees through his nanomachines the very source of his current stress, anger, and anxiety waking up.

Then his eyes narrow as he sees the faint smile that makes its way across her face, likely at seeing the System's message of her killing a demon knight, and whatever achievements that comes along with at her level. Which are most likely quite a lot.

*Of course, she doesn't regret it. Because all the System is going to do is reward her for it.*

And so, the man's irritation rises again as he continues climbing the stairs to go meet his wayward ward.

## Chapter 19

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**Awake**

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## Scarlet

The moment I wake up, I suck in a breath through my teeth at the pain of my injuries. But they're nowhere near as bad as they were before I lost consciousness, judging by the pain. So I slowly open my eyes to look at my surroundings, only to find myself in an office next to a window, with only a couple of people in the room. Although by the sounds of it, there are several more on the other side of the door.

I also find that I can hear a lot of joyous cries throughout the building without any of the regular noise that I have come to associate with demons. Which means that the Fracture's core was probably destroyed while I was out.

With that relieving thought in mind, I glance at my wounds to find that they have managed to heal a decent amount. Which leaves me wondering if Tar said-

**"They don't know what was going on. All I said was for them to put you next to the window where moonlight was shining through and they obliged, so it's most likely that they believe you have some sort of skill that lets you heal in moonlight,"** the tanuki says in my mind, sounding just as robotic as ever. But despite that, I can't help but feel like he was worried about me for some reason.

**"Preposterous,"** the tanuki in question responds to my thoughts. But then the System's messages suddenly play out in my mind before I can say anything in retort. **"Just listen to your messages and don't bother me."**

I raise an eyebrow as I begin listening to them, a wide smile spreading across my face in the process.

**{Level 53 Demon Knight defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature fifty levels or more above you. An EXP penalty has been extracted for getting assistance in the kill}**

**{Twenty-five Skill Points are awarded for killing a demon fifty or more levels above you. With risk comes reward. And you drown yourself with risk, gathering all of the reward you deserve. But beware the price you may one day pay for that reward.}**

**{Fifteen Skill Points are awarded for killing a demon twenty-five or more levels above you.}**

**{Ten Skill Points are awarded for killing a demon ten or more levels above you.}**

**{Ten Skill Points are awarded for killing a demon knight while under level ten.}**

**{Five Skill Points are awarded for killing your first Demon Knight.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 4. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

...

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 10. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**{You have earned the inherent skill, 'Blood Siphon'.}**

Alright, now *that's* a nice set of messages. Although I could've done without the cryptic warning, thank you very much. I get enough of that from Allen as it is. I don't need the System joining in on criticizing my recklessness.

Speaking of Allen, I should try convincing the people here to not blab about me taking on a demon knight so early. Because it would be a pain if he found out.

Now then.

Time to check out my gains!

<b>NAME:</b>	<b>SPECIES:</b>	<b>AGE:</b>	<b>MAGIC:</b>	<b>LEVEL:</b>	<b>SP:</b>
Scarlet Asger	Human/Blood Lycan Hybrid	19	Blood	10	67
<b>STATS:</b>					
<b>Physical:</b>	35	<b>Mental:</b>	24	<b>Magical:</b>	33
<b>Physical/Level:</b>	2	<b>Mental/Level:</b>	1	<b>Magical/Level:</b>	2
<b>Free Points:</b>	14	<b>Mana:</b>	396/396	<b>Free Points/Level:</b>	2
<b>ACTIVE SKILLS:</b>					
<b>Blood Claws</b>	Allows the user to coat their hands with claws of blood. The blood used in the skill is either created through the user's mana, drained from the body of whatever the user has their claws in, or drawn from the user's body if they are out of mana.	<b>Skill Level:</b>		2	
<b>Blood Siphon</b>	Allows the user to drain the blood of nearby creatures and use it for various purposes, including transfusing the user's or others blood or infusing the blood into the blood claws skill and other possible skills.	<b>Skill Level:</b>		1	
<b>Clean</b>	A basic utility skill used to clean the user and their equipment.	<b>Skill Level:</b>		Static	
...					
<b>PASSIVE SKILLS</b>					
<b>Predator II</b>	It grants the user a 7% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.	<b>Skill Level:</b>		Static	

I smile with glee at the changes and the new skill before immediately investing nine free points into my Mental stat, then another four into Physical, and two into Magical. Then I take another look at my

status, only for a severe mixture of pain and pleasure to sweep through my body, leaving me grunting and losing my balance to fall back flat onto the ground.

The hell was that?

Officer Winslow – who was sitting in the corner of the room without having realized that I was awake – quickly gets up and moves over to me as I groan before shouting, “Scarlet! You’re awake!!!” He then assaults me with questions such as ‘am I okay’, ‘do I feel sick’, ‘do I feel any pain’, and so on.

I just groan in response as the pain and pleasure continue moving through my body until eventually stopping who knows how long later. And by then, the officer has already gone to get the others.

Oops.

**“It’s recommended not to use more than five free points at once as the changes can prove... severe... on the nerves of the Guardian,”** I hear Tar mentioning long after the information would’ve been useful for me.

I just grunt in response, feeling too weak right now to give a proper retort.

After a couple minutes of silence, my ears twitch as I finally notice the slight buzzing sound coming from outside the building. But when I look outside, I don’t find anything.

What is that noise?

It also sounds like there are a lot of people going up and down the stairs now, likely checking on if everyone’s alright. Or maybe just checking their things. Who knows.

Then there’s the set of footsteps that sound much heavier than everyone else’s, despite being a lot faster. And they’re quickly approaching the twenty-first floor.

Not sure why they’re in such a big hurry to climb up.

Maybe they had family in here?

But if that were the case, I can’t imagine someone who clearly has some sort of magi-tech equipment with them to just stand by when their loved one is in danger just several floors higher in the same building.

Although it’s also possible that the footsteps belong to the Guardian who destroyed the core, and they’re now heading here because they sensed Tar.

I listen to the footsteps for a few seconds before mentally shrugging right as others begin to flood into the room, making me feel awkward.

“I’m fine,” I tell them, stopping them from asking anything, “was just using my free points. Do you know what that knight was protecting?”

They look surprised for a second before the officer answers, “We’re... actually not sure about that ourselves. The shield turned out to still be busted, so it wouldn’t turn off to let us in and see. And then the Guardian destroyed the core, so whatever it was, it’s not likely there anymore.”

I narrow my eyes at that before sighing. Guess it doesn't really matter with the core being destroyed.

So with that thought in mind, I open my Skill Store. Because I *have* to have unlocked something good after all of those achievements. Not to mention the massive amount of SP I have now.

So it's shopping time! Then I can focus on figuring out that new inherent skill.

## Chapter 20

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### New Skills

#### Scarlet

After seeing me focusing on what looks like air to the others, Arnold – who it turns out is the person who turned on the shield for me before – and officer Winslow shoo the others out, leaving me in silence to focus on my newly unlocked skill.

And good they are. Very, very good.

<b>SKILL NAME:</b>	<b>ACHIEVEMENT REQUIREMENTS:</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION:</b>	<b>TYPES:</b>	<b>RARITY:</b>	<b>SP PRICE:</b>
<b><u>Predator III</u></b>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a higher level than you by at least ten levels. <b><u>Predator II is required to purchase this.</u></b>	It grants the user a 12% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.	Passive Static	Rare	20
<b><u>Predator IV</u></b>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a higher level than you by at least fifty levels. <b><u>Predator III is required to purchase this.</u></b>	It grants the user a 20% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.	Active Static	Epic	30
<b><u>Blood Boil</u></b>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a higher level than you by at least ten levels, by killing a demon knight while below level ten, by being level ten or above, and by having blood magic.	An attack skill that slowly makes the blood of the target begin to boil, causing slow internal damage that builds up while slowing down the reaction speed of the target.	Active	Rare	20
<b><u>Blood Sacrifice</u></b>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a	A sacrificial skill that allows the user to burn	Active	Rare	20

	<p><b>higher level than you by at least ten levels, by being level ten or above, by almost dying once, by hurting yourself to enhance a blood skill, and by having blood magic.</b></p>	<p><b>their own blood in order to get a temporary boost in their physical capabilities.</b></p>			
<p>...</p>					

I stare at the skills, unsure how I should proceed in my shopping spree.

**“You need combat skills,”** Tar suggests while appearing in front of me and then floating down to lie in my lap. **“I’d suggest getting Blood Boil for a ranged combat skill, Predator III for obvious reasons, and the rest you can choose from there. Either wait for a few more SP to get Predator IV, or go ahead and get Blood Sacrifice.”**

Not a bad idea, but just in case, I search through the rest of the skills in the store. But none of them are as good as the top ones, which leads me to believe that the System automatically puts the highest rarity skills closest to the top.

**“You could also just use the excess to level Blood Boil if you choose to purchase that one, since it’s not a static skill,”** Tar suddenly adds as an afterthought.

Oh. That’s right.

I stare at the skills store for a few more seconds before deciding to just go ahead and purchase Predator III and Blood Boil, then turn to my status go down to the Blood Boil skill to level it up. Which only ends up taking three SP.

A lot cheaper than I expected.

**[Skill ‘Blood Boil’ has leveled up to level 2.]**

I look back at my status to see if the skill has changed or not, but it hasn’t. Not in the slightest.

Huh.

**“Purchased skills have less of a difference with each level than inherent ones do,”** Tar answers my unasked question for me. **“It’s-”**

I look down at him after he cuts off to find him staring in the direction of the other room with a blank expression on his face.

What’s wro-

He vanishes.

I blink in confusion before trying to get up, only to wince and fail at that as the pain from my injuries grows more severe with the movement.

Why did you disappear and stop responding?

Several seconds pass with no response.

Right when I'm about to repeat myself, I pause as a familiar voice enters my ear from the other side of the floor, at the staircase where that same person from before – the one equipped with what's most likely magi-tech gear – enters the floor.

Oh shit.

Why is... oh, right. This is his building. And he was only a few buildings away.

Why didn't I think about that earlier?!

I try to get up again, only to wince at the pain and fall back down. Then I try to look out the window.

Could I survive a fall from this height? Maybe. Would there be a point? Not really. Then I'd just be in even worse shape on the ground where he would just go find me instead of up here.

What about breaking the window and going into a different room on a different floor?

Not likely with my injuries.

After thinking of several other possible methods of escape, I come up blank.

So I close my eyes and try to fake being asleep.

While doing that, I also listen in on the conversation that Allen is having with the people on the floor. Or rather, by conversation, I mean him asking where I am.

*"You want to know where Scarlet is?"* the voice of Arnold asks in confusion before saying, *"Oh, you're probably here because she's a new Guardian. Right, she's just over here."*

I don't like Arnold anymore.

After a few seconds, I hear the door to the office opening, followed by footsteps entering it as I keep my eyes closed and pretend to be asleep. Because maybe he might-

"I know you're not asleep. I've had my nanomachines watching you since I got to this building," Allen says, crushing the hope I had of avoiding a conversation with him for a bit longer.

I open my eyes and fake a smile through the pain of my arm and stomach.

"Hey Allen, how's it going?" I ask, acting as if nothing's wrong.

He just stares at me.

Yeah, didn't expect that to work either. But it was worth a try.

"We're going to be having a nice long chat, young lady," he says, a scowl plastered across his face that shows just how mad he is right now.

## Chapter 21



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## 'The Talk'

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### Scarlet

Wait. Maybe I can stall this conversation after all?

"Um, could we wait for my injuries to—" I begin, only for him to cut me off without a shred of care. "No."

So much for that.

And I can't call Belle for help because all that'd do would make them team up on me instead of only dealing with him.

Also, speaking of Belle, I think my phone's ringing.

Too bad I can't take it out right now, what with my arm having a hole in it. Albeit a small one now that it's healed for who knows how long.

"What the *hell* were you thinking, Scarlet!?" he shouts, his voice echoing through the room and the room next to it, startling the workers that I had saved in the process. "You could've gotten yourself *killed*! You know that, right?!"

I let out a sigh.

"Yeah, but it's not like you're any different," I tell him with an eyebrow raised. "You're a Guardian after all. And now I am too." Sort of. "Not to mention that being a Guardian will be a much better job for me than trying and failing at finding a Tier 1 university that'll take in an orphan."

He actually winces at that.

"That doesn't change the fact that you put yourself in danger needlessly," he pushes on. "You didn't have to fight that demon knight. You could've just left and stayed safe. But nope. You had to go in, fighting a demon knight just hours after awakening as a Guardian yourself. Maybe not even that long, depending on when you were contracted during all this."

"It was at the start of the Fracture," I whisper, making him raise a brow.

I take the hint and stop talking.

The phone stops ringing after I fail to pick it up.

"Just a single wrong move and that knight would've killed you. It must've been, what, level thirty? Just one misstep. One mistake. And it would've been over," he says, his worry finally bleeding through the anger a little bit. "Do you understand that Scarlet?"

I try really hard not to wince as I hear him severely underestimate the demon knight's level. And fortunately, I don't think he's noticed.

“Yes, but *Cipher*,” I use his Guardian title just to drive my point, “you’ve done much riskier things in your time as a Guardian than I have.”

The guy hates it when I call him Cipher. In fact, I don’t think he even likes me calling him Allen, wanting instead for me to call him dad or something. But I refuse.

If he isn’t my biological father, then I won’t call him that. Simple as that. Even if he’s like a father to me.

Allen opens his mouth to speak, but I cut him off by saying, “Look, I’ll try as best as I can to keep myself alive. But taking risks is part of the job I signed up for when I became a Guardian. And if I’m being honest? It’s what I enjoy.”

The last part seems to surprise him.

I glance past him at the people staring at us in shock. People that are more than just the ones who were on this floor, including people I don’t even recognize. Meaning some people must’ve followed Allen to this floor.

“You’re not going to listen, are you?” Allen finally says after a few seconds of silence. But he doesn’t even wait for my answer as he sighs and mutters, “What am I saying? You never do...”

Nope. Never will either, most likely. After all, every risk I’ve ever taken has given me quite the reward afterwards.

“Just know that I wouldn’t have taken the risk if I didn’t think it was possible to win,” I tell him with a reassuring smile. Or at least, what I hope is a reassuring smile, considering that my canines were lengthened at some point. And I’m also still in a decent chunk of pain right now.

Although the pain has lessened a bit more thanks to it healing as we’re talking.

Allen lets out a sigh before kneeling down and giving me a light hug that has me stiffening up for more than one reason.

“I know you don’t like physical contact, but please. Just let me have this,” he says, emotion practically bleeding through his words.

I let out a sigh before patting his back once with my non-injured arm.

At least he is trying to avoid my injured arm.

Out of nowhere, a blue light shines from said arm, making me look to see that he has some sort of machine floating next to it. Then I watch as the remainder of the wound closes up.

“Nice,” I say, a grin forming on my face as he lets go and stands up straight again.

He chuckles at that.

I stand up as well, discreetly motioning for him to look at the hall, which is where the little popcorn gallery has gathered. He then raises a hand and flips it, making several nanomachines shut the door in front of our viewers.

“There we go,” he says before turning back to me and asking, “so where’s your fae?”

I frown at the question.

“That’s a good question,” I answer. “The bastard vanished the moment he noticed you coming.”

Allen’s eyebrows rise at that, and he glances towards a corner where some sort of fluffy panda appears floating in the air.

“Okay, just why is it that all of you fae have to appear in the form of cute animals on Earth?” I can’t help but ask, making the panda blink in surprise. Even Allen looks surprised for a second before he bursts out into laughter.

The panda glances between me and Allen for a few seconds and only answers after realizing that I’m actually serious, “Tis’ because a cute animal would look more trustworthy for someone in a dangerous situation.”

I blink in confusion as I hear its voice.

Um. Why is its voice so different from Tar’s?

Tar’s has always had this ethereal intensity. Like every word he says has major importance or something.

But this fae just has a regular voice. Like a human. In the form of a cute panda.

“Okay, that makes sense,” I answer, getting over the difference in voice. “But I still don’t know where Tar went.”

They both look surprised at hearing the name Tar for some reason.

## Chapter 22

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### Names and Calls

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#### Scarlet

The two share a glance for some reason before turning back to me.

“Is that your contracted fae’s actual name or one you gave him as a nickname?” Allen asks, his tone sounding serious.

I blink in confusion before tilting my head slightly and annoyingly enough noticing Allen’s eyes flicker to my ears and back to my face again as I answer, “It’s a nickname I gave him to shorten his really long name.”

The two share another glance.

“Okay, why are you being so secretive all of the sudden?” I ask while using my clean and repair skills to fix up my clothes and clean up the blood on my jacket before putting my hands in my pockets. “It’s just weird.”

They turn to look at me again as Allen carefully says, “Look, the fae are special in that their names have importance. Meaning that most fae tend to keep their names hidden, only letting those they trust know them.”

I stare at the two for a few seconds before the realization hits me.

Tar... trusts me? That... what?

“How’s that possible?” I ask with a frown, seemingly confusing them even more, “Tar literally threatened me when we first met! How could *that* translate to trust?!”

Now *that* surprises the two.

“That’s not possible. We fae are not capable of harming humans or demons by decree of the royal family of the fae,” the panda says, surprising me back in the process.

I frown.

“Does taking away my pain and then giving it back when I don’t listen to him count as threatening me?”

The two share another glance. Which is really starting to annoy me.

When they look back at me again, Allen says, “Technically, it does. But it doesn’t count as harming you. So your fae just sounds... like an oddball amongst the fae.”

His panda fae nods its little head in agreement with that.

Oh.

“Also, you mentioned that his name was long? How long is it? Two words? Three?” Allen asks seemingly out of nowhere. “The length of a fae’s name can generally be used to determine how high up the fae court they are.”

Wait, so that’s why his name is so long?

“He has five names,” I answer them, surprising them once again. But this time it’s enough to make Allen almost lose his footing and fall after leaning too far to one side if it weren’t for the panda catching him.

“Five?!” he shouts, a mixture of disbelief and shock in his tone. He then lowers his head to look at his fae as he asks, “Only members of the royal family have that many names, right?”

My mouth drops open.

“Yes, you’re correct,” the fae answers, also seemingly in shock. “And that means a royal fae has contracted with a human and given them his full name.” The panda then looks directly at me and says, “If you care for your contracted partner at all, do not tell anyone his full name.”

I unconsciously nod my head.

“Thank you,” the panda says before vanishing.

Huh.

Both Allen and I just stare at where the panda was in silence for who knows how long before we’re interrupted by the sound of beeping coming from Allen’s wrist. And unlike when I was called, he answers it, making Belle’s livid face show up on the screen.

“Belle?” Allen asks, slightly surprised, and still a little stunned from the revelation we both just had.

She immediately opens her mouth to speak, only to close it the moment she sees me through the camera feed. Then the anger on her face vanishes in an instant, replaced almost immediately by a flood of tears as she shouts, “Scarlet! You’re okay!!!”

After a second though, her joy takes on a slightly confused tone as she sees my ears and adds, “And you have... wolf ears? Wait, you became a Guardian?!”

I nod my head, slightly amused at her reaction. At least, until she adds, “Can I touch you-”

“No.” I shut that down immediately before she can even finish asking.

Meanwhile I can hear Allen trying to hold himself back from laughing. So I scowl at him for a second before turning back to the screen as I ask, “So how are you doing? Are there any Fractures near you? And what about Arthur?”

She looks confused for a second before muttering, “Pretty sure I’m supposed to be the one asking you if you’re alright, but, yeah. I’m okay. And so is Arthur. There was one Fracture near me-” Allen’s head jerks to stare at the screen at the mention of this “-but it was only a Class I. And the Guardians attending the university took care of it quickly enough.”

Allen lets out a sigh of relief after hearing that last part.

Ignoring the protective parent in the room, I nod my head with a smile, “I’m glad you’re both safe then.”

Before either of us can say anything else, another beeping sound comes from Allen’s device, following which a second call opens up, showing a screen next to the one of Belle. This screen has a woman with a rather blank face simply staring through the screen, giving me an incredibly unnerving feeling in the process. Almost like she can tell everything about me just from a single glance, which I know isn’t true.

Sage. Allen’s information gatherer and communicator. The one who brings him intelligence and spreads it around his people.

“We have been trying to call you for nearly ten minutes now, sir,” she says, her voice just as blank sounding as her face. Kind of like a robot. “But I now see that it was because of the young miss.” Sage pauses for a second as she looks at me and adds, “Congratulations on becoming a Guardian. I will be looking forward to working with you if that is what you decide.”

Then the call cuts off without us being able to say a word.

None of us say anything for a few seconds before I look at Allen and ask, "Did she just hack your suit's terminal?"

He nods his head without a word.

Wow.

## Chapter 23

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### A Job

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#### Scarlet

Putting aside the illegal actions of his own subordinate for the moment, Allen simply turns to me and asks, "I'm a little bit curious as to what your magic is. Because while seeing bodily modifications is rather common, I don't think I've seen one that's given something similar to some sort of animalistic blood magic, assuming your ears and the claws are anything to judge by."

"Oh? Do tell," Belle says from the other side of the call while leaning forwards with a slight grin on her face.

I roll my eyes at the two before answering, "I have blood magic."

"Really?" Allen asks, a little surprised at first only to shrug his shoulders a second later and add, "Guess there isn't really a logic behind the changes, so I shouldn't be so surprised." He pauses for a second. "You're sure there's no bestial aspect to the magic?"

I raise an eyebrow at him, "I just got a skill that can boil the blood of a living being. Do you think that has any bestial aspects to it?"

He raises both hands in a placating gesture as Belle laughs at our interaction.

I'm a little surprised by how accepting they both are with all of this. But then again, Allen is a Class IV Guardian if I remember correctly. So he's probably used to dealing with new Guardians. And it makes sense that his daughter would take it well too.

That aside, I take in Allen's attire.

It's not very often that I actually see him wearing his magi-tech armor outside of the news and on the internet. But it really does look pretty cool.

I'm not a fan of the idea of wearing armor myself though. Maybe I could get some way to enhance my jacket?

Allen seems to notice me checking out his gear and suggests, "If you want, I can make you some armor. Of course, you'd have to pay it off."

I blink in surprise before smiling.

"I might just take you up on that. But only if it's possible to upgrade my jacket, or at least make an energy armor that goes over it," I say, making the man roll his eyes at my attachment with my jacket.

Hey. You're the one who said it was the only thing that I had when you found me.

Also, I get the feeling he only added the 'I'd have to pay him' because he knew I wouldn't accept it if I didn't pay him back.

I hate owing people debts.

The only reason I got his help with the negotiation for the universities was because I didn't think there was any other choice. So if I do have a choice, I'll avoid it like the plague.

"Yeah, I can do that," he answers with a grin on his face. But the grin fades away as he turns serious and asks, "Would you like to work for my Association?"

I turn serious as well as I seriously consider his question.

An Association is a group of Guardians who work together during Demonic Assaults. They have a lot of power in the Republic, and even more during a Demonic Assault, practically being able to command even the ruling Council of Governors as long as they have reason to. Although the exact amount of power each Association has is generally linked to the number of Guardians they have in them, and how powerful each of those Guardians are.

Most new Guardians end up joining the Society of Humanities' Guardians, which is a rather blunt name. This Association basically accepts every Guardian in existence, no matter their strength or personality. And they're one of the top Associations purely because of the massive number of Guardians in it. But at the same time, it's one of the weaker of the top Associations purely because it has quantity over quality.

Meanwhile, Allen's Association – if I remember correctly – is a newer one despite being one of the most powerful. Although its strength and draw for powerful Guardians lie almost entirely with its leader. Allen Sylvester. Otherwise known as Cipher. The current CEO of Silver Works, the first company to invent magi-tech.

Allen sees me hesitating over the decision and he adds, "Remember, you can leave any time you wish. Just say the word."

I look up at him again from the floor to find that he really seems to want me in his Association.

Neptotism at its best there, I guess.

I turn to look out the window, briefly glancing at the call that's still open to see Belle staying silent in the process. And what I find when I look down is the sight of a bunch of people all leaving the building at once.

Guess Allen's letting everyone off early for the day. For good reason.

After several seconds pass in silence, I let out a sigh and turn to look at Allen again.

"Look, I really don't like accepting handouts."

He interrupts right away and says, "You won't be! We could really use a blood magic user in our numbers!"

My eyebrows rise at that.

"Really?" I ask incredulously.

Allen nods his head, "Yeah. Blood magic is one of the more desired magics. After all, it can both heal and attack, act as support, and can even be used as a berserker. There are all kinds of ways a blood magic user can go!"

I stare at him for a few seconds before realizing that he actually means it.

So maybe not nepotism after all.

Seemingly sensing my change in attitude, Allen presses on the attack, "If you join now, I'll even let you go with a couple of the others to attack a Class I Fracture."

My eyes immediately lock on his and I feel my heart start racing at the thought of more prey. Only to blink in confusion at that thought, then shrug and stare at him anyways.

Guess there's nothing to do about those new instincts but accept them.

That said, I don't work well with oth-

"You'll also be able to split off from them *while under surveillance* to fight the weaker demons on the outskirts of the Fracture," he adds a cherry on top that has me immediately saying, "We have a deal. As long as I can still leave whenever I want."

Belle breaks out into a laugh at the ridiculousness of this negotiation, meanwhile Allen just grins at me.

He's probably going to stick more nanomachines on my metaphorical tail than I can count. But at least it means I can try out my new skills, and continue gaining more EXP and SP.

And I have a job now.

Which reminds me.

"Now let's talk about my pay."

My statement wipes the smirk off of his face rather quickly.

## Chapter 24

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## Royal Fae

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### Scarlet

We end up settling on a pretty decent pay at about eight credits an hour that I'm not on the job, just to let them use my face in their little sponsorships, and a flat eleven credits per hour that I am on the job under their name. Not too much that it's nepotism, but still a lot more than I would've ever dreamed of getting before becoming a Guardian.

That's far above the average living person in a Tier 1 city. And leagues above a Tier 2 or 3 city's average wages.

Definitely goes to show why Guardians are always rich. Like, swimming in bathtubs of money rich.

Not that that would be comfortable, just considering all the paper cuts.

Allen suddenly bursts out into laughter from his spot next to me as we walk down the stairs of the building towards the entrance. And when I turn to look at what has him so amused, my eyes practically bulge out of their sockets at the sight of the video he's watching.

A video of some random guy commentating over a video of me fighting with a bunch of demons. One that consistently shifts from one scene of me fighting demons to another.

"There's no way there were that many people able to record me fighting," I whisper to him, punching his arm as I ask, "you didn't do anything you're gonna regret later, did you?"

He just continues watching the video while giving me a thumbs up, making my eyebrow twitch in my irritation.

He did. He totally sold the security camera footage of me fighting to people online.

"Don't worry, you'll get your cut," he says, brushing the issue aside.

I'm gonna kill him.

**"That would be difficult,"** a certain tanuki's voice echoes in my head out of nowhere, making me stiffen up for a second before my anger shifts from Allen to the tanuki.

What's this about you being a member of the fae's royal family?!

Tar doesn't say anything for a few seconds before his voice once again returns, albeit with a hint of embarrassment in it, **"Well, you never asked."**

My mind blanks out at that answer.

Are you fucking kidding me?

**"Yes, I'm sorry,"** he answers, and I almost snap back at him, only to pause as I realize what he'd just done.

Did... did Tar really just apologize? He can do that?

**“Yes, and there’s no need to be rude about it,”** he says, making me blink in confusion.

How did this get turned around on me?

**“I haven’t been entirely truthful with you, Scarlet. And I would like to fix that,”** he says, making me suspicious. **“First off, yes. I am the eighteenth son of King Oberon, and am the second from last currently in line for the throne should he ever pass on.”**

Oh. Well, that’s... wait, eighteenth? Just how many siblings do you have?!

**“A lot,”** he says, not specifying an amount. **“And the way the king and our people decide on who is most fit to be the heir is by the contracted partner of the princes and princesses.”**

I blankly stare ahead for a few seconds, stopping in place and seemingly confusing Allen for a few seconds before a look of understanding dawns on his face and he just stands in place to watch the stupid video.

And you’re telling me...

**“Yes. The reason I picked you was because you’re the current most unique individual out there, and I thought you might be able to win me the throne,”** he says, unabashed about doing it but seemingly a little embarrassed about hiding that he did it.

A few seconds pass in relative silence as I stand there, the only noise being that of the ridiculous video still playing from Allen’s terminal.

He used me, but wasn’t I kind of using him as well? For his knowledge, and, well, the contract? For the System?

Even if I was upfront about it.

Actually, maybe that’s why he’s not ashamed about him using me in the first place?

Ya know what, Tarankar, I think this might actually work better than if you had no use for me at all. Because I hate not paying back my favors. And despite how much of a pain in the ass you’ve been sometimes, you are really the only reason I’m alive right now. Even if you do kind of abandon me out of nowhere sometimes.

Please stop doing that, by the way.

The tanuki appears in the air in front of me, startling a lot of the people around us, and to be honest, me as well, since I wasn’t expecting him to ever show his face in front of others. Even Allen looks rather startled.

**“You would accept our contract even after knowing?”** he asks, his voice still using telepathy despite being out in the open.

I nod my head.

Honestly, this contract feels easier to accept now that I know what I’m getting into more clearly.

Although I would like to know how it is your king and people recognize which Guardian is doing the 'best'.

The tanuki stares at me for a few seconds before answering in a single word, "**Power.**"

Power?

He nods his head. "**Power.**"

Oh. So do you mean pure levels? Or fighting ability including levels and skills?

Tar floats around me in a circle for a few seconds before answering, "**Level is what determines a prince's place in the heritage, but the only real deciding factor is the contracted Guardian's fighting power by the time the tournament comes around.**"

A tournament? To decide who will become the next king?

Isn't it odd to have it decided by a proxy?

Tar nods his head, "**But odd or not, it's the king's decision. Therefore no one else has a say.**"

Interesting.

Anyways, glad we understand each other better now.

Although, is there any chance you can delete that video he's watching?

The tanuki glances at Allen's arm, where I'm pointing, only to turn back to me and shake his head.

A pity.

I continue walking down the stairs, with Allen following shortly after me a second later.

## Chapter 25

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### News

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#### Scarlet

I repeatedly tap the door of the air car as we fly through the sky in the direction of the closest Class I Fracture, my attention solely focused on the video in front of me, with my ear buds present in both of my ears. But no matter how much I tap, I can't get rid of this uncomfortable feeling that I get from seeing my image plastered across the video.

**[Hello, folks! Today we have with us some very interesting news!]**

The commentator's voice is that of a typical video streamer on the internet – intense, jolly beyond reason, and interesting enough to hold people's attention. They have a webcam showing over the video,

covering most of it up as it's paused, but even at this point, I can still see my ears poking out above the webcam. Which I'm pretty sure was done like that on purpose.

**[We've received word of a brand new Guardian to this Demonic Assault, originating in the main headquarters of Cipher's company, Silver Works. But that's not all! They've already become a bit of a hero, saving the folks in the building many times over and fighting off the demon scourge!]**

At this point in the video, the webcam vanishes entirely, revealing the frozen image of me in midair with my blood claws outstretched ready to strike at a demon hound.

**[We bring to you, the Scarlet Wolf!!!]** my mouth drops open at that unoriginal name **[She's the new star of the Silver Association, and a hero to many of the people in Silver Works! The hero managed to take down who knows how many demons-]** he pauses as the image frozen on the screen that I realize isn't actually a video yet changes to show various other images like a slideshow, each of me fighting different demons until it pauses again on the demon knight **[-and even a single Demon Knight on her very first day as a Guardian!]**

I can't help but grimace as the video and commentator rub on my nerves in the wrong way.

The frozen image showing the demon knight at around the time I enter the room unfreezes and begins to play through the whole fight as a video.

**[While most would have run, she stood her ground and leapt into the fray to save the people!]** the man says, getting rather enthusiastic in his entirely inaccurate assumptions **[She lead the officers and researchers in battle, took down the demon knight, and even gave a sacrifice to do it! Just like the best heroes in the city!]**

My grimace turns into a frown at that last line.

What are Guardians to this guy? Some sort of cannon fodder against the demons? Or maybe just cannon fodder to make his videos more popular?

That's sickening.

The video suddenly switches after showing the bolt strike through my arm, making me flinch at the reminder, to show me and Allen walking down the stairs unharmed. **[But don't worry! Our brave hero with the amazing looking wolf ears is perfectly safe and is even planning on heading to another Fracture any moment now! Just stayed tuned, and you'll be more than happy with what you see of our new, brave, heroine!]**

Not sure why he switched to heroine for the last line when he was just using the gender neutral term every other time, but whatever.

Also, what was with that comment about my ears?

The video ends on a rather cool looking scene showing me standing back looking out over the demon knight as it's being electrified by the shield, before the bolt strikes me in the arm.

I stare at my phone for a few seconds before leaning back and resting my head on the cushion of the chair within the air car.

I'm gonna kill Allen.

The misunderstandings in that video aside – or rather, the clear propagation – it's going to make it annoying to walk around unaccosted now.

Although at least I shouldn't have to worry about people thinking my ears are an animal headband or something now. Since a lot of people will likely recognize me and understand I'm a Guardian, assuming my eyes aren't already a clear giveaway.

Which I probably should've thought about when I first saw my ears, but whatever.

At least there aren't as many people seemingly wanting to touch them outside of the building.

Not really sure why there were so many there that did.

I glance at the front of the vehicle that's driving itself before looking out the window at the buildings simply flying by, very few of which are actually undergoing a Fracture right now. Fortunately.

After looking out the window for a few minutes, I turn my attention back to the video to read the comments. Only to immediately regret it.

**Johny1234 – [She's so young!]**

- **DarkShadow27 – [There've been younger Guardians before. I'm pretty sure Goldenheart is only fifteen years old, so a young college student isn't really that surprising.]**
- **Johny1234 – [Really? She still looks young enough to be my daughter!]**

**DocAr15 – [Why do all of the Guardians look so beautiful or handsome? What, is there some sort of cutoff in looks for someone to be offered a contract? Are the spirits biased?]**

- **RainbowNinja87 – [Not all of them are top tier in looks. I know of a couple who I won't name that only look about average.]**
- **SavageSwan42 – [What about REDACTED? He's rather ugly.]**
- **GalacticGiraffe7 – [Savage, that's just rude.]**
- ...

**StellarSeahorse – [Awwww!! She's so cute! And I want to touch her ears!!!]**

- **EnchantedEmu11 – [Agreed.]**
- **StealthPenguin42 – [So I'm not the only one?]**

**Frosty13 – [She doesn't look like she's used to fighting. But I have to say, her ears look really soft.]**

**ElectricLioness22 – [It's always nice to see new Guardians 😊]**

**MysticPhoenix33 – [I wonder why she's actually fighting? Because I doubt it's purely to save people. She doesn't really look like the type. She scowls too much for that.]**

- **LuminousLlama23 – [I bet she's fighting for the EXP. I would do the same if I were in her position.]**

...

I frown after reading some of the comments.

This is why I don't have social media.

## Chapter 26

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### A Bloodthirsty Hunt Part I

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#### Scarlet

I sigh.

At least there doesn't seem to be any antagonistic comments towards me. Most of them seem to be positive, even if some are a little antagonistic towards the spirit's choice in Guardians or mention my obvious lack of experience and apparent habit of scowling.

"I don't scowl that much, do I?" I mutter.

**"You're scowling right now,"** a certain tanuki's voice echoes in my mind before he appears in the air car before landing on my lap.

No idea what you're talking about.

Out of boredom more than any form of interest, I continue reading through the comments for a little bit until we arrive at our destination. But most of the comments appear to be around the topic of my appearance, whether it's because of my young age where quite a few are trying to guess how old I am, or my apparent good looks. Which I've never really put much thought into, since most people don't bother looking past the fact that I'm an orphan.

And quite a few comments about my ears, unfortunately.

Surprisingly, there're only a few about my glowing red eyes. Most of which think they're rather cool.

There were a couple though that mentioned that my eyes were scary and that that effect was only enhanced by my scowl.

As soon as the air car pulls over in front of a large building spanning only about half the size of Allen's, which was already about fifty floors, I close out of the video and its comments before putting my phone in my pocket and getting out of the vehicle. And the first thing I see is the man standing next to the entrance tapping his foot in his obvious impatience. The man is actually about the same age as me, with silver hair and blue eyes. He's wearing a fancy suit similar but also slightly worse than Cipher's, with it being a magi-tech suit with a silver core on the center of the chest.

**“Try sensing for his mana,”** Tar suddenly suggests, making me raise my eyebrows before I give a mental shrug, close my eyes, and focus on my senses. And after a few seconds, I begin to feel *something* emanating from him. **“That’s his mana. It’s one of the ways a Guardian judges the strength of another Guardian. Or at least, for magic focused Guardians.”**

He pauses for a second as I open my eyes to find the man’s own eyes having locked onto me.

**“It’s not always accurate, since physical focused Guardians might not have as much mana as they do physical stats. Or they might also just have a skill that helps hide their mana.”**

Makes sense.

That aside, the man – who I feel like I vaguely recognize but can’t place his name – only briefly glances at my ears before focusing on my face and giving me a nod. “You’re finally here.” He then turns around and says, “Let’s go.”

Guess we’re not introducing ourselves.

**“His mana is quite a bit stronger than your own, but also far, *far* weaker than that Cipher guy. I’d place his level at around the the bottom of Class II.”**

Oh, okay. Guess he probably considers this some sort of babysitting job then. Looking after the newbie as he works on clearing out the Fracture.

I follow after him into the building, entering past the shield and into the entrance hall to find quite the number of high level demons inside.

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Imp – Level 31 |**

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Imp – Level 30 |**

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Imp – Level 31 |**

**| Demon Huntsmen – Level 51 |**

**| Demon Huntsmen – Level 56 |**

Holy shit. And at the back of the room, near the stairs, I can even see a couple of demon knights.

**| Demon Knight – Level 61 |**

**| Demon Knight – Level 67 |**

“Stay back here and watch,” the man says, his eyes flashing with a bright silver glow, “maybe you can learn from this. After the floor is cleared, go to the higher floors for opponents at your level.”

I nod in acceptance with that before watching as the man slowly steps into the floor, bolts of silver lightning beginning to build around his body, just dancing across his skin in a brilliant display. And the sight of this finally makes me remember where I recognize him from. He was in one of those posters I saw hanging up across the Silver Works headquarters.

Sylver was his title, and I believe he used some sort of strange silver lightning that has the effect of being able to move even without a conductor? Or something like that at least.

It does feel odd to be taking orders from someone who's the same age as me. Even if he did become a Guardian about four years ago. At least, assuming the fliers are accurate.

The man continues stepping forward before raising one hand and directing all of the lightning dancing across his body towards that hand, where it then bursts out from his palm and envelopes dozens of demons at once. And after just a few seconds, I can tell the demons are already beginning to die from the lightning. Even the two knights.

An idea comes to me, and I use my Blood Boil skill on several of the demons, giving me a slight headache from using it so many times. And while it doesn't really do much to them, what with the level difference between us, I do notice a couple tiny boils appearing around their already badly burnt skin before popping.

Sylver glances at me for a second before focusing on the demons again while taking a single step forward, sending another surge of lightning through the air, frying every last demon on the floor, including the ones I used blood boil on. And just as I'd hoped, the ones I used the skill on do end up giving me EXP. Albeit with a major reduction.

**{Level 61 Demon Knight assist. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature fifty levels or more above you. An extreme EXP penalty has been extracted for barely assisting in the kill}**

**{Level 61 Demon Knight assist. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature fifty levels or more above you. An extreme EXP penalty has been extracted for barely assisting in the kill}**

**{Level 51 Demon Huntsmen assist. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature ten levels or more above you. An extreme EXP penalty has been extracted for barely assisting in the kill}**

**{Level 56 Demon Huntsmen assist. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature ten levels or more above you. An extreme EXP penalty has been extracted for barely assisting in the kill}**

**{Level 30 Demon Knight assist. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature ten levels or more above you. An extreme EXP penalty has been extracted for barely assisting in the kill}**

**{Level 31 Demon Knight assist. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature ten levels or more above you. An extreme EXP penalty has been extracted for barely assisting in the kill}**

**{Level 31 Demon Knight assist. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature ten levels or more above you. An extreme EXP penalty has been extracted for barely assisting in the kill}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 11. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

Ouch. The System means it when it says a large penalty.

I look away from my messages to find Sylver staring at me with an incomprehensible look on his face.

Is he mad that I didn't just sit back and watch?

Whether he is or not, he doesn't show it as he just turns around and says, "The way to the stairs is clear. Leave me to my business."



I blink in surprise before shrugging and heading over to the stairs.

Works for me.

## Chapter 27

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### A Bloodthirsty Hunt Part II

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#### The Bottom Floor, After Scarlet Leaves

When Collin was told that he'd have to babysit a newly contracted Guardian who had only just joined the Association a couple of hours ago, he was pissed. Extremely pissed.

After all, this was his first Demonic Assault since reaching Class II, and he's stuck fighting in a Class I Fracture still with a newbie?

Not what he was hoping for in the slightest.

And his first impression of the girl wasn't exactly a good one either, considering that she arrived at the Fracture wearing a pair of regular pants, a shirt that looks like it's from some random school, and a black and red jacket that you could find pretty much anywhere. Not a single piece of defensive equipment. No armor, no magi-tech, no nothing. Not even a weapon.

But now that he's seen her using some sort of blood magic on the demons despite having been told to sit back and watch? Collin isn't sure what to think anymore.

*Is she a kid who deserves babysitting?*

He can't help but wonder this as he watches the girl quickly enter the stairwell before climbing the stairs without a hint of fear.

After a few seconds of silently watching her until she vanishes from sight, he thinks back to what he was told when Sage had assigned him to this task.

*"You are assigned to watch over the new recruit as you both clear out Class I Fractures. This job is of the utmost importance, and if you're caught slacking and she gets hurt badly, you will be fired. But you are not to let her know you are watching. Nor are you to baby her. Let her do her thing while you do your own." Sage's eyes on the call narrow as she pauses and adds, "Beware of treating her poorly, as she will be someone to fear in the future."*

Sylver shakes his head after a second, deciding not to put too much thought into it. After all, the girl's only now being contracted despite being the same age as him. There's no way she could become strong enough to make him worry even the slightest bit in the future.

*But... Sage's warnings have always been pretty accurate...*

After a second, Sylver ignores the demons in the first floor to send a bolt of silver lightning straight to one of the security cameras, giving him the ability to see through every camera in the building. But he focuses solely on the stairwell where the girl is before she stops leaping straight up the stairs at around the twentieth floor and heads in.

*She's stopping on the twentieth floor? Shouldn't that still be too close to the Fracture Core for a brand new Guardian?*

Sylver tenses slightly in case he needs to save her as he watches her enter the floor before facing off against the demons inside. And what he sees after that has him reevaluating the girl entirely.

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## Scarlet

This prickling sensation in the back of my neck is really getting annoying. Just how long is he going to watch me?

When the sensation first appeared while climbing the stairs, Tar mentioned that it was some sort of instinctual feeling that lycans have when they're being watched by something stronger than themselves. Which was nice to know, but the sensation constantly being there is just a little unnerving, to say the least.

It's obviously Sylver watching me, seeing as Allen already headed off to another Class II Fracture a while ago, but how is he doing it? Doesn't his power control simple lightning that ignores physics? Or is it something more?

I let out a sigh as I walk into the main room of a gym full of workout equipment and demons. A strange combination.

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Imp – Level 11 |**

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Imp – Level 10 |**

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Imp – Level 11 |**

**| Demon Hound – Level 15 |**

The hound looks just like the hounds from the other Fracture, but the imps look rather odd. They are about three feet tall and are somehow flying through the air on red wings that are only a foot in length.

Is it the red glow emanating from the wings that's allowing them to fly?

Some sort of magic?

Putting aside the imp's breaking of the laws of physics for a second, the things have completely pitch black bodies except their wings, with incredibly long and sharp talons on the ends of their four fingers. And for some reason they don't have a mouth.

Doesn't stop them from shrieking the moment they lay eyes on me though.

**“You shouldn’t expect demons to follow humans’ sense of normalcy,”** Tar suddenly says, his voice echoing in my head as I activate blood claws.

Yeah, but that doesn’t change how unnerving it looks.

I try to test out blood siphon on them, but my control over the blood in their body is too weak to even break past their skin. So I switch over to blood boil instead, which has an immediate effect unlike how it affected the demons on the first floor.

The four demons all slow down immediately with small red spots beginning to appear all over their skin as they let out low groans of pain.

Interesting.

I rush forwards while they’re distracted by my skill before tearing my claws straight into the hound’s side, tearing a trail of blood through its fur. And without wasting a second, I use blood siphon on the hound’s blood now that it has an open wound, drawing it out of the wound and into my claws with a grin.

This I can get used to.

Although the mana cost on keeping all three skills active at once is pretty harsh compared to any of the mana usage I’ve had before now. To the degree that I don’t think I’ll be able to keep this particular strategy up for long.

But while I have it active, might as well take advantage of it!

## Chapter 28

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### A Bloodthirsty Hunt Part III

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#### Scarlet

**{Level 11 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Level 10 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Level 11 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Level 15 Demon Hound defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.}**

It takes a surprisingly short amount of time to deal with all four of the demons. Although I'm kind of disappointed that I didn't get a level from them.

But then again, I only just used the free points from the level I got on the first floor while climbing the stairs. So who knows how much EXP I need between levels.

I quickly open my status before focusing on the SP and closing it again.

With those four Skill Points, I have twenty eight skill points right now. Which leaves two more left before I can buy Predator IV.

Right as I'm about to begin hunting the other demons on the floor, I remember my mana, which is sitting at about three quarters full simply from fighting those four demons. Although I think a sizable chunk of that was also taken when I used blood boil on the demons on the first floor.

Seems as if the higher the level of the demon you use the skill on, the more mana it takes to do it.

I glance at my claws before then glancing at the demon corpses on the floor and grinning.

This could work.

**"Before you go off on a killing spree, I wanted to ask if you wish for your notifications to be delayed until you call them up or if you just want them to continue appearing as you kill demons,"** Tar suddenly asks as I begin drawing the blood from the corpses and stuffing it all into my claws, making the blood claws turn a deep crimson in color.

Wait, is that possible?

**"Yes,"** he answers rather calmly.

Then by all means, go ahead! Those messages are rather annoying.

**"Alright,"** Tar says before pausing a second and saying, **"It's done. Now all you need to do is will for your messages to appear and they will."**

Convenient.

Now then.

To the hunt.

---

## The Second Floor of the Building

Sylver can't help but gawk as he watches Scarlet tear through the demons on the twentieth floor with crimson claws made of their own blood.

Despite knowing that he can easily take her on, he feels slightly unnerved watching her charge straight through the floor of mostly workout rooms, some private, most public, with one of two expressions on her face. Either a scowl, or a faint grin.

*And the blood...*

A shiver runs down Sylver's spine as he watches what a new Guardian with blood magic is able to do.

Every time her bloody claws strike at a demon, they burn just a little bit of the blood inside them, only to transfer it out for the blood inside of the demon itself as the girl somehow drains the blood from their bodies and charges her claws with them. And this process only continues on and on with every demon she kills.

Until, of course, she runs out of mana. At which point she begins to hunt a lot more carefully.

*I can't believe a rookie Guardian is hunting demons as if they were game... and she probably got a pretty good new skill at some point early on in this hunt, considering how her attacks randomly started doing a lot more damage. More than just a level-up would justify.*

Sylver shakes his head and focuses on the demons on the second floor again, deciding that he shouldn't slack just because it's a Class I Fracture.

But despite that, his mind can't help but constantly wander back towards that girl. Because now he is convinced of Sage's words.

She will be someone to fear one day.

*Are all blood magic users like that? Or is it just her?*

Sylver ponders this as he electrocutes all of the demons on the second floor with his silver lightning as he passes by them.

*Then again, her style of fighting – if one could even call it that – is incredibly reckless. She's constantly putting herself in danger for a chance to attack. Almost like she doesn't have all that much care about her own safety.*

The Guardian continues slaughtering the demons on the second floor for a few minutes before shaking his head and tapping on the terminal on his arm.

After a few seconds of the terminal beeping, a louder beep sounds out, followed by Allen's voice, "Hello. Cipher here. What is it, Sylver?"

Sylver glances at the girl again as she takes a break from hunting the demons next to a window, likely to go over her gains from her hunting spree. But after a few seconds, he notices that some of the many wounds she's gathered are beginning to heal.

*A healing skill as well?*

He turns his attention back to the screen as he asks, "Has the girl ever been trained, or even prepared for combat before?"

Cipher looks surprised for a second that Sylver is even paying attention to her before shaking his head and answering, "No. She was an orphan at the orphanage I ran in Rothwell City. So she hasn't had any preparation for combat of any kind. Unless you count studying the demons for class."

*I thought so.*

After Sylver doesn't say anything back in response, Cipher asks, "How is she doing?"

"She's incredibly reckless and constantly endangering herself," Sylver answers bluntly before adding, "but she's also almost cleared an entire floor by herself in just fifteen minutes."

Cipher stares at Sylver for a few seconds in silence. Then he lets out a sigh.

"Of course, she is."

## Chapter 29

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### A Bloodthirsty Hunt Finale

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#### Scarlet

As soon as I will the messages forward, they all come flooding at me like a tidal wave.

**{Level 12 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

...

**{Level 12 Demon Spawn defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

**{Level 15 Demon Hound defeated. Bonus EXP is awarded for killing a creature above your level.}**

...

**{Level 15 Demon Hound defeated.}**

**{Ten Skill Points are awarded for killing over fifty demons total.}**

**{Ten Skill Points are awarded for killing over fifty demons above your own level.}**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.} x26**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 12. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 13. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 14. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 15. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**{You have earned the inherent skill, 'Life Drain'.}**

**[Skill 'Blood Claws' has leveled up to level 3.]**

**[Skill 'Blood Siphon' has leveled up to level 2.]**

I grin as I watch my levels go up, and especially at the sight of the new skill. Now, of course, they were technically going up when I killed the demons. But still.

There's just a certain satisfaction at seeing them shoot up at once.

Although somewhere during this I started getting less EXP as I passed the demons in level.

I shift slightly in my position lying up against the window, wincing a little at the pain.

At this point, my entire body is covered in wounds. And my clothes were pretty badly shredded since I was trying to avoid using repair to save mana.

Doesn't help that the moonlight can't reach them if I have clothes covering the wounds. So I'm stuck with sleeves and pant legs left in tatters as I lie next to the window enjoying the healing glow from the moonlight.

Something I realized at some point during my hunt was that I could siphon the demon's blood to use as a replacement for my own, making the small injuries not really matter beyond the pain. As long as I kept from getting any major and life-threatening injuries, I could just heal from the moonlight at a later time.

Quite convenient when trying to rush through a floor of demons.

**"I still say you shouldn't be doing that,"** Tar says with a huff as he appears in the air and floats down to lean up against the side of my leg, not going to my lap because of my injuries. **"It creates bad habits."**

Says the one who entered me into a tournament for him that has me competing against people far beyond my level.

If I'm going to survive that, then I need to level up.

He stays silent for several seconds before saying, **"Okay, understandable. But you do have to remember that the tournament isn't for at the very least a century. Maybe even more than one."**

I know. But you also said that it could technically happen any day now as well. That the king can start the tournament whenever he wants. Just that he will most likely wait until each royal has a contracted Guardian deemed 'fit for combat' in the tournament.

And I really don't like the idea of having a possible axe hanging over my head. So I'm going to give it all I can to level up. Especially considering that the System seems to reward taking risks.

Now then.

I open my status before distributing my free points and looking at my skills.

Let's just hope Life Drain is a healing skill...

**NAME:**

**SPECIES:**

**AGE:**

**MAGIC:**

**LEVEL:**

**SP:**

Scarlet Asger	Human/Blood Lycan Hybrid	19	Blood	15	44
<b>STATS:</b>					
Physical:	45	Mental:	39	Magical:	43
Physical/Level:	2	Mental/Level:	1	Magical/Level:	2
Free Points:	0	Mana:	31/838.5	Free Points/Level:	2
<b>ACTIVE SKILLS:</b>					
Blood Claws	Allows the user to coat their hands with claws of blood. The blood used in the skill is either created through the user's mana, drained from the body of whatever the user has their claws in, or drawn from the user's body.	Skill Level:		3	
Blood Siphon	Allows the user to drain the blood of nearby creatures and use it for various purposes, including transfusing the user's or others blood or infusing the blood into the blood claws skill and other possible skills.	Skill Level:		2	
Life Drain	Allows the user to drain the life energy of nearby creatures into themselves, healing them in the process. Costs mana to use.	Skill Level:		1	
...					
<b>PASSIVE SKILLS</b>					
Predator IV	It grants the user a 20% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.	Skill Level:		Static	

Yes! Finally!

"Congratulations," Tar says, slightly amused by my enthusiasm.

I finally have a healing skill that doesn't have me sitting for hours in front of a window.

Also, why is the System set up as it is anyways, with the statistics? What with balancing them out being the only real way to safely go forward.

"Was wondering when you'd ask that," Tar says immediately, making me raise a brow from my spot lying on the floor. "There are a couple of reasons. The first being that there are some people – incredibly few – that do not require one of the stats. At all. Such as a ghost, which has no need for a physical stat with its body being ethereal."

Oh. That makes sense.



And the other reason?

**“A trap,”** Tar answers, surprising me for a moment, **“or at least, that’s what we believe. Because most species need all three stats to be balanced, even if one is higher than the others. So when someone who is initiated into the System decides to go with an unbalanced build? They fall into that trap and most of the time end up dead rather early in life.”**

That’s brutal.

**“Yes. It is,”** he responds, his tone sounding rather dark. Making me wonder if he has a history with that.

Come to think of it, you probably had a different contracted Guardian before me, didn’t you?

He stiffens up at that.

An awkward silence falls over the room lasting for who knows how long.

Eventually he says, **“I would rather not talk about that.”**

Oh.

Okay.

And so, the awkward silence continues until I eventually hear a light tinker sound, kind of like the sound of a very, very thin piece of glass shattering. Then all of the demon sounds I hear from the other floors begin to vanish.

Guess Sylver will probably be coming over here soon.

## Chapter 30

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### Plans

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### Scarlet

As expected, Sylver arrives nearly fifteen minutes later, only a couple of minutes after Tar vanishes again. And the Guardian has the terminal on his suit pointed towards me, showing the screen where Allen is currently glaring at me.

Probably to be expected.

What’s unexpected is that the first words out of his mouth aren’t to yell.

“You’re grounded from fighting in Fractures until you have proper combat training,” he says, the glare never leaving his face as he talks.

I blink in surprise before staring at him.

Is he even technically able to ground me? I'm a full grown adult after all...

"And before you try to argue, yes, I can do this," he continues as if reading my mind. "As long as you are working under me, you will be *trained* for combat. You will not be recklessly endangering yourself without even the combat ability and experience to at least back it up."

Oh.

I open my mouth to speak, but he just cuts me off again, "And if you don't agree with that, then I wish you luck with finding an Association that'll accept you."

My eyes narrow as I turn my own scowl on the man in the screen.

"You're willing to go that far?" I ask, my displeasure with his decision clear in my cold tone of voice.

He doesn't even hesitate for a second before nodding his head, "Yes. Your safety is too important to be squandered for mere System rewards. And if you're still going to risk your life despite my warnings, I want you to at least be as prepared as possible for it. Is that really too much to ask?"

I stare at him. He stares back.

Sylver awkwardly shifts in place, likely wanting to be somewhere else right now.

But we both ignore the guy as we continue staring.

Eventually I let out a sigh and mutter, "Fine. Have it your way."

Allen grins like he'd just won the lottery before immediately saying, "Thank you!" and ending the call.

I blink in surprise at the abruptness of the exit, only to frown at Sylver, who clearly told him what happened. Unless Allen had nanomachines stalking me?

He just shrugs and says, "In all honesty, your father was correct. Because while I do admit that you're incredibly strong for a new Guardian, you are far too reckless."

My mouth drops open in surprise at his actually speaking to me more than necessary. Not to mention the compliment, criticism aside.

But then one particular part of that statement registers in my mind and I find myself saying, "He's not my father."

Sylver just stares at me for a few seconds before shrugging and turning around, calling out over his shoulder, "Your family drama not mine. We're headed back to base. I'll be waiting outside for you to finish healing."

"I'm serious! He's not my..." I trail off as he enters the stairwell, "and he's gone."

I lean back against the window with a sigh.

Damnit.

Tar appears in the air with a smug expression somehow planted on his tanuki face.

Don't. Say. A word.

**"Okay, I won't say that,"** he says, equally as smugly as he looks.

I just groan while lying flat on my back next to the window.

My injuries weren't all that serious, so most of them have healed to the point of scabbing by now. But I really don't want to go down there, so I'll give it another ten minutes to let them finish.

But just five minutes later, I'm interrupted from the impromptu nap that I ended up taking by my phone buzzing in my jacket pocket, which is lying next to me on the ground. And when I reach over to grab it, I find that it's a text from Allen. One with a message at the beginning that makes it clear he really is watching me with his nanomachines.

**[I can see that you're mostly healed by now, so go head to the base with Sylvester. You can rest in the room that I've assigned to you. All night long and even into the morning if that's what you wish. But don't keep him waiting to get a head-start on that sleep. Your schedule for the next few days will be sent through email after this message.]**

Ugh.

A few seconds later my phone buzzes again and I find an email from Sage showing what Allen has planned for me in the next few days. Which basically includes rest for the night and however long I sleep in, a tour of the Association base after I wake up, introductions to the currently present Guardians of the Association, enrollment in the Lion's Heart Guardians University – which I guess plays well with my entire reason for going to the Tier 1 city in the first place – and lastly, my combat training.

My arm flops on the ground with my phone in hand as I let out a slow groan.

This is going to be a busy next few days.

Although if I remember correctly, the Lion's Heart Guardians University is the only Guardian University at the capital city and is the hardest one to get into in all of the Terran Republic, and even harder to stay in it. Not only do the Guardians there have to keep up really good grades, but they also need to participate in a certain number of Demonic Assaults each semester and have to compete in the Interschool Tournaments.

But I guess that's just another thing to tag onto my list of things to do.

Probably gonna have to take an entrance exam as well, so I better start brushing up on the history of the Guardian Universities in general.

A few more seconds pass in silence before I get up with a grunt, putting my jacket back on and using repair on all of my clothes. Then I use clean after that and begin to walk towards the stairs.

**"By the way, when using your blood siphon skill to transfuse blood into people other than you, make sure you pull the blood out of their body before you're done,"** Tar suddenly says, making me frown. **"The only reason it's safe for you to keep the blood in your body is because you're half demon. Any other human would have a problem if it stayed in their bodies for too long."**

Oh. Okay.

Thanks for the heads-up.

He bobs up and down once before vanishing.

Time to see their base. And then to take a nap.

## Chapter 31

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### New Home Part I

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#### Scarlet

As it turns out, Sylver doesn't have a car and is using a magi-tech motorcycle instead. So the ride there ends up being a tad awkward and unpleasant for me due to my dislike of physical contact, but nonetheless short and quiet. And by the time we reach the base, I realize that it's not actually in the city proper, but in one of those large, wide open areas that – while still inside the city dome – is surrounded by open land. Or, open in the sense that it's filled with training grounds, areas where I find people testing new magi-tech gear despite it still being the middle of a Demonic Assault, and even some areas where they're for some reason raising cattle.

Several of the people around the base stop what they're doing and wave at us, not even showing any surprise at my presence. Guess they were already notified ahead of time?

Sylver doesn't bother waving back as he continues driving the hoverbike past them and into a garage that opens up the moment he gets near before closing again after we're inside. He then drives a little bit further in and stops near a bunch of other bikes. And the moment he does, I jump off of the vehicle, handing him back his helmet to build distance between us.

The guy doesn't say anything, although he does look vaguely surprised as he turns off the engine and gets off of the vehicle himself.

I ignore his surprise to look around at the large garage. In it are a couple dozen expensive looking vehicles. Some of which are similar to the one Sylver was riding, and others are magi-tech cars. There is even one magi-tech artillery vehicle for some reason.

But then again, the Silver Association does have a leader who is one of the current leading inventors and innovators of magi-tech. So it makes some sense they'd have random artillery.

Aside from that, the garage itself has a very high tech feeling to it, with smooth metal walls, each a neon blue line of mana flowing through them powering the shields defending the walls. Meanwhile, the entryway we went through vanished the moment we passed through and it closed, the door so well hidden that it's nearly impossible to tell just where it is anymore. And the door on the other side of the garage that leads further into the base has the blue lines from both sides of the door converging into a large blue circle.

It's also opening right now to reveal Sage, who is walking through in a simple white business suit. Not really something you'd expect to see a Guardian wearing. She has hair as white as the fallen snow back in Rothwell City, with it put up in a single braid that goes over her shoulder.

In fact, basically everything about her appearance is just white. Which kind of makes sense considering I believe her magic is related to seers or something? Sensing the future, or foreknowledge?

No one seems to know the exact specifics. Just that she creeps people out.

Sage nods her head at Sylver and says, "You're free to go now," before turning to me and saying, "Follow me to find your quarters." She then performs an about-face like what you'd see in a tv show and walks back through the door, clearly expecting me to follow her.

I shake my head, mostly expecting this behavior from having dealt with her a couple of times in the past before following after her into a hallway. The hallway has the same type of walls and shields as the garage did, with several doors scattered throughout it, and the occasional person. Each of whom welcomes me in their own way, and some of whom I think I recognize from tv.

Some of them greet me with a simple way, others say hi, others try to introduce themselves only to be scared off by Sage who seems to be in a rush, and others ignore us altogether.

Eventually we reach an area of the base that seems to be slightly different in that the shields are stronger on the walls, but the walls themselves vary in color as the hallway goes on. Which looks rather odd, but after passing by an open door, I realize these are all bedrooms. Or suites of rooms to be exact. Each and every door leading to a different one.

I pause for a second before continuing on.

That explains why the doors are so spread out in this area of the base.

Sage continues leading me through the hall until we eventually stop at one door and she presses her palm against the panel next to the door. This causes it to light up with a palmprint scanner, following which she presses some buttons, types in a couple of things that I'm not gonna risk angering her to look over her shoulder and peek at. Then, finally, another palm print scanner appears and she takes a step back while saying, "Place your palm there."

I do as she says, making a glowing bar of light pass back and forth across the scanner, following which the screen changes to say, "New owner assigned."

"This is your suite of rooms. Do be careful not to disturb your neighbors as some of them do bite," Sage says with a warning before turning around and leaving me behind right as the door to my new suite opens up.

Some of the neighbors... bite? What?

I frown as I try to figure out what she meant, only to shrug and enter the suite. And soon enough, I find myself smiling at the large entry room meant just for me.

This will be a very nice change of pace from the hotels I've been staying in. Even if the hotels aren't that bad.

I go around the suite for a bit, checking out the rooms to find that there is a bathroom with a tub and a shower separate from each other, an entry room, a bedroom, a workout room with a notice that there's also a public gym, and a rather large living area.

Whoever chose my suite for me looks like they knew my favorite colors, since there's a lot of reds and blacks everywhere.

But after a brief glimpse through the rooms, I walk up to the door to the suite, close it with my handprint, then head straight to the bedroom and collapse on the very comfortable mattress, falling asleep almost the instant my head hits the pillow after a brief glance at my reflection in the screen of the clock sitting next to the bed.



## Chapter 32

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### New Home Part II

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#### Scarlet

I wake up to the sound of my door opening, making me straight up jump out of bed before turning to find a robot walking into my bedroom with a basket full of... my stuff? Oh. They brought my stuff from the hotel I was staying at.

The robot ignores me as it places the basket on the ground and walks out of my room.

I stare at the door for a few seconds, only to pause as I realize that I don't hear anything from the neighboring suites.

Soundproofing! Yes!!!

I'm guessing it's because of my instincts, but it just feels *wrong* to switch back to using my human ears. Just really, *really* wrong. And the fact that I don't have to switch back while here just makes the comfortable suite even nicer!

Although the robot waking me up was annoying.

I glance at the clock near the bed before my eyes widen at finding it already at about noon.

Okay, maybe it was a necessary wakeup call.

After stretching a bit, I get up and move over to the basket, noticing that the robot wasn't very orderly in their transfer of my stuff. They didn't break anything – partially because I don't have much – but all they did was stuff everything into the basket. Both clothes and non-clothes.

This'll take a while to sort out.

**"Why is your entire wardrobe so dark?"** Tar suddenly asks, making me jump in fright, having briefly forgotten about him in my sleep addled mind. **"Oh, well good morning to you too."** He huffs.

"Sorry," I apologize while rubbing the back of my neck, only to frown and add, "Wait, leave my wardrobe alone!"

**"But it's all blacks, whites, and reds! There's nothing else there!"** Tar complains, making me wonder if tanuki's wear clothes in their realm. Wherever that is.

Oh, right. He only has this form here.

Wait a second, I wonder if his form is anything remotely human?

**"No, we fae do not look like humans in the slightest,"** he says, reading my thoughts. **"Although we are humanoid in form. And we do wear clothes thank you very much."**

Interesting.

Anyways, I kneel down next to the basket before beginning the long and arduous process of sorting things out. Following shortly after by putting everything around the new suite. Most of which is only the clothes, daily necessities, and other stuff like that. Very little actual personal items or decorations.

Much to Belle's chagrin.

After putting everything away and changing shirts and pants but leaving on my jacket, I stretch once more before glancing at the clock and finding it to be about 2PM. Which is further announced by my growling stomach.

"Let's go get something to eat," I tell the tanuki that's been following me around my room for some reason. Only to pause after just a single step where I turn to ask, "You do eat, right?"

Surprisingly, the tanuki shakes his head and says, "Fae are not mortals and therefore do not require the same sustenance that mortals do. Instead we require the lifeforce of other living beings."

My mouth forms an O in understanding.

So that's why part of the terms of their contracts is to extract a small portion of the life force we drain when killing something.

Wait, doesn't that make them like vampires? Life force vampires or something?

If the twitching of his ear as he floats past me is anything to judge by, the tanuki pretends he didn't hear me.

Yep. Definitely life force vampires.

His ear twitches again.

I smirk.

Guess I'm going to be eating by myself then.

I head towards the door to my suite before opening it with my handprint. Only to find three people standing on the other side having a conversation in a hallway that looks very different from what it looked like when I first arrived. One that stops the moment they hear the door opening.

One of them – a woman with golden hair wearing a Lion's Heart Guardians University uniform with some jacket in her right hand – immediately smiles at me the moment she sees me.



Then she rushes at me while shouting, "You poor girl!" her form turning into a bit of a blur before she glomps me with so much force that I forcefully let out all of the air I had in me while backing up a couple of steps until she stops us. After that, my air is cut off as she holds me so tightly that it becomes difficult to breath, completely distracting me from the physical contact itself. I pat her arm multiple times as a sign to let me go, only to end up pushing her instead after that doesn't work. "No one should have to fight a knight in their first Fracture! No one!!!"

Am I really going to die by suffocation through a hug?!



“Denise, you’re crushing her,” one of the others says – this one a man with short black hair with vibrant green highlights who looks to be about a decade older than me. And only a second after he says that, the lady legs go of me, letting me gasp, finally breathing in air again. “This is what you get for unbalancing your stats. You need to fix that as soon as you can.”



The woman, who I now realize is wearing what looks like a school outfit, the same as the other two but with a skirt instead of pants, looks ashamed for a second before glancing back at me and saying, “I’m sorry. I got a little carried away...”

I look between the three while backing up so that there’s a whole meter between me and the lady before I finally manage to catch my breath and answer, “It’s... it’s okay. Just please don’t touch me. I don’t like physical contact.”

For some reason me saying that seems to make her sad, but it doesn’t really matter.

That aside, their uniforms are clearly for Lion’s Heart Guardians University. Which likely means they’re my fellow students there who also happen to be in the Silver Association.

I glance at the third of the little trio to find them standing about a meter behind the guy.



But the moment our eyes meet, she immediately rushes to the guy and hides behind him.

Guess she's shy?

The girl is wearing the same uniform, but she has her hair – which is mostly black with much more vicious green highlights than the boy – done in a single ponytail, and unlike Denise, whose hair is short, this one has long hair reaching all the way past the middle of her back.

Must be a pain to deal with. Assuming she doesn't just use the clean skill, now that I think about it.

Which is a nice realization I made while checking out the bath and shower last night.

What strikes me the most interesting about the girl though, is that her eyes are glowing with a faint green light.

Interesting.

## Chapter 33

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### New Home Part III

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#### Scarlet

“My apologies for our companion,” the man says with a light bow of his head, “she... can be a little too caring for her own good sometimes. And is lacking the filter to stop herself from doing things she shouldn't.”

I make sure to keep my eye on the girl in case she tries something else as I slowly answer, “It's alright. Just, don't do that again.”

A few seconds pass in awkward silence before the guy puts his hand on his neck in what looks to be embarrassment as he says, "Well, we were going to show you around and give you a welcome to the Association, and the university, but things..." he trails off with a glance at the Denise girl, "...didn't pan out as were planned." He turns back to me again and says, "Let's start over. I'm Michael Winters. The one hiding behind me is my sister, Emily, and the idiot is Denise Harley. We're all Guardians who've contracted in the last few weeks and were scouted to join the Silver Association just like you."

I glance at the girl hiding behind him before looking at him again. Then I repeat this a few times.

"You both contracted and still somehow ended up with the same hair color?" I ask with a confused frown.

Unless they both dyed their hair or something. Which is entirely possible.

Emily just hides her face behind her brother's shoulder as he chuckles and says, "Well, that just sort of happened. Both of our magics are kind of green in nature, so our hair mimicked that."

I notice his sister flinching at the word 'magics' but decide to ignore it as I focus solely on Denise, who is literally twiddling her thumbs. In all honesty, I'm a little surprised she didn't say anything to being called an idiot. But at least she looks apologetic.

"My name is Scarlet Asger. It's a pleasure to meet you," I tell them with a nod of my head before glancing at Michael again to find his sister behind him peeking out over his shoulder at my ears. But I ignore that to ask, "You mentioned something about a tour?"

He immediately nods his head, a relieved expression showing on his face as he says, "Yes! This place is rather large, so it's pretty easy to get lost without knowing the place!" Michael then turns around, startling his sister in the process before calling out over his shoulder, "Follow me!"

Some of the awkward atmosphere begins to dissipate as we walk through the building. Although Denise still hasn't said anything since her first outburst. But in all honesty, I don't mind that.

"And this is the cafeteria, where we have quite the number of top class chefs hired to keep all of the Guardians on a healthy and tasty diet," Michael says, almost making me pause as he talks as if he had something to do with that. Which he clearly didn't, considering that he's only been here for a few weeks himself.

Maybe he just has pride in the Association he's a part of now?

Either way, I listen to his spiel – which sounds just like what a real tour guide would give – just taking the important information out of it. Which generally comes down to the locations of the training halls, the cafeteria, meeting hall, the public gym, garage, experimental fields, research sector, the library, the dozens of bathrooms, and, of course, the common area.

Which is a lot to keep track of.

A lot of the other areas he showed me aren't places I'll ever be going. Like the photo gallery, where photo shoots are taken of the Guardians who want a little bit more money and are fine with being turned into public celebrities or models or whatever. Or the control center, which is basically where

Sage lives despite having a suite of her own. It's where the more technical and not directly combat focused Guardians tend to work. Meaning I won't be going there unless I am asked to.

Also, when we went outside to see the experimental fields, I saw that the blood moon was gone and the sun was high in the sky. Meaning that the Demonic Assault had ended at some point while I was asleep.

I am happy that we were able to eat while touring the cafeteria though.

After showing me everything and describing it all like a salesperson, Michael turns around in the common area and asks, "So Scarlet, would you like to join ou-" His words are cut off by the sound of the speakers high in the room clicking on and Sage's voice echoing throughout the entire common area, bringing the attention of a few dozen people up to the ceiling as she says, "Scarlet Asger. Please meet with Cipher in training hall 1 to get yourself evaluated."

Then the speakers click off again, leaving the common area in silence for a few seconds only for quite the number of eyes to turn to me – the new girl. And some of their voices enter my ears, questioning why I'm being evaluated by Cipher himself and not Sage or someone else. Only for them to be answered by people showing them some of the videos of me fighting online.

My eyebrow twitches, but I focus on Michael anyways as I ask, "You were saying something?" breaking him out of his stupor.

"Uh, yeah. But that can wait till after your evaluation," he says, stuttering once before continuing as normal. "Good luck!"

I watch him for a few seconds before nodding my head in appreciation. Then I glance at the other two, who both mutter well wishes as well.

Right as I'm about to head towards the training hall though, I hear Denise speaking up, "I'm sorry for earlier! I hope we can be friends!"

The corner of my lips twitch upwards slightly as I raise my hand without saying anything.

Was wondering when she'd get around to it. It was obviously eating her up, the mistake she made. So I've been wondering how long it would take her to speak up.

Anyways, time to see this evaluation of theirs.

## Chapter 34

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### Evaluation Part I

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Scarlet

It takes me about ten minutes to find my way to the training hall in question to find Allen standing at the very center of it. The hall itself is incredibly large, spanning the size of a football stadium with a ceiling going dozens of meters into the air. It has the same blue lines going across the walls, albeit being bigger to allow for more mana for the shields, and there are several areas to the training hall. One has several targets set up, another a training dummy made out of metal and obviously magi-tech, some seem to have devices in them that I have no idea what to do, and others are just straight up sparring rings.

“You’re here,” Allen says with a serious look on his face, telling me that he’s in his business attitude right now. “We need to evaluate your stats to determine your Tiers.”

I frown at that, but before I can complain, he adds, “And no, I’m not going to be determining or asking for your statistics. This is purely to classify what your strengths and weaknesses are in each stat. Like your strength, agility, mental defenses, mental offenses if you have any mental attacking skills, and so on.”

Oh. Okay.

“What we’re going to be doing is going through a multitude of tests, where the machine will classify your different capabilities into tiers ranging from Tier E through A, with A being the top Tier. This is standard procedure for a new Guardian and is required by the law, not to mention the Guardian Universities,” Allen explains before crossing his arms. “The way it works is that each Guardian has a different makeup for their statistics. In their physical stat, some are stronger than others, some faster, some have better physical reflexes. And it’s the same with the other stats, so a Tier system was created to judge each individual characteristic within the stats and compare it to the norm.”

That makes sense. I did think it was a bit odd that the System never clarified what exactly was changing with each stat point, and whether or not every physical capability was changing at the same rate.

“Someone with a Tier A capability in one area generally has a magic that focuses solely on that capability, whereas Tier B capabilities are only seen when someone has a magic that focuses on two, or rarely three capabilities.” He continues while uncrossing his arms again and walking over to a terminal at the center of the training hall. “Tier D is the average capability classification for the capabilities that aren’t amongst a user’s magic enhanced capabilities, while anything below that is considered below average.”

Allen begins messing with the terminal for a few seconds before stepping back and nodding his head towards it. “Enter in your level. It will be used in the classification process before being immediately deleted after the process is over. Your capabilities will then be determined as if you had all of your statistics at the exact same point using all of your free points.” He pauses for a second as he sees my frown to add, “It’s illegal for anyone to force someone into showing someone their status or telling them their level, and even more illegal to use methods such as stealing their level from a machine like this before it’s finished. So don’t worry if that’s bothering you.”

I still give him a frown, only to eventually sigh and walk up to the machine as he turns around to not look.

It's just my level, so I don't really care too much about it. Not enough to get into trouble just to avoid the miniscule chance someone could hack into this machine and find my level.

So I put in level 15 before tapping submit and saying, "It's done."

He turns around again and immediately says, "Now remember. You need at least two capabilities at Tier B, or one at Tier A to be able to qualify for Lion's Heart. Even if I can get you in with capabilities lower than that, you wouldn't enjoy your time there. Not at all."

I nod my head before looking at the terminal again, which is now showing three stats. Physical, Mental, and Magical.

"Let's start with physical capabilities first," Allen says while reaching out and touching the box labeled Physical, making the screen change to show several more boxes. These include Strength, Agility, Constitution, Endurance, Perception, and Vitality. And underneath each one is a description of what the capability is.

<b>Strength</b>	The measure of how physical strong an individual is.
<b>Agility</b>	The measure of how fast and maneuverable an individual is.
<b>Constitution</b>	The measure of how much damage an individual can take.
<b>Endurance</b>	The measure of how much stamina an individual has.
<b>Perception</b>	The measure of an individual's senses.
<b>Vitality</b>	The measure of the regenerative rate of an individual.

"Beginning with Strength so that I can show you the ropes of how this works," Allen says while tapping on the black box for Strength. "You can go in whatever order you'd like after that."

I nod in understanding, only to quickly spin in a circle to find one of the sections of the training hall seemingly rotating out for a different one. This one being a single magi-tech dummy.

"This one is incredibly simple as all you need to do is punch the thing with all of your strength, not using any of your skills in the process," Allen says before nodding his head towards the dummy.

If that's all it is then why do you want to 'show me the ropes' for the first test?

I narrow my eyes at him only to shake my head and walk towards the dummy.

He probably just wants to see my first result before he goes to do whatever he's planning on doing while I do the rest. Which could very well be sitting around and doing work as he watches from afar or something.

I stop walking once I get in front of the dummy before glancing at my fist.

This'll be interesting.

## Chapter 35

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### Evaluation Part II

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## Scarlet

I pull my fist back before punching directly at the chest of the dummy, making a loud crashing sound echo throughout the training hall. But despite the noise, the dummy doesn't so much as budge. Then I hear a beep from the dummy, followed by Allen's voice, "Do it again and again every time it beeps."

Following his directions – which turn out to be more useful than I thought – I repeatedly punch the dummy about five more times before a loud beep sounds from the terminal at the center of the room.

"That's enough. Now we can see your..." Allen's voice trails off as I turn around to look at him, just to find him standing over the terminal gawking.

**"I should warn you, you're not a human. Not fully at least. So your capabilities will probably be a little higher on average compared to a regular human Guardian,"** Tar suddenly says, making me want to slap him for the late information.

You couldn't have told me that sooner?!

Tar somehow sends the mental equivalent of a shrug before explaining himself, **"It wouldn't have mattered. You would've just tried holding back or something, which the machine would've been able to detect unless you were a master at your own body. And then it would've required you to redo the test. Not to mention that having higher capabilities is what gets you a better place in the universities of this world."**

I... can't help but agree with that assessment.

Allen stays silent as I walk over to the terminal, only to turn to me with a frightened look on his face as he puts his hands on my shoulders and practically shouts, "You didn't unbalance your stats, did you?!"

I shake my head, "No, they're balanced."

And my answer only serves to make his fear shift to confusion. So I turn to look at the terminal to find that my stats are at about Tier B for Strength.

Oh. Yeah, guess that makes sense why he'd be afraid of that possibility.

After all, he knows my magic is blood magic, and knows some of the skills it gives me, making it obvious that it's not a strength focused stat.

"Maybe you're just really strong because of some skill you got from killing the demon knight? Or maybe blood magic has a secondary bonus to strength?" Allen begins muttering to himself. But because I know it's not gonna get him anyways, I simply select the next test, which is agility, before going back to the machine after it flips to the next one.

This test has a treadmill-like device going through most of the floor.

After I stand next to the treadmill for a few seconds, a screen lowers itself down above the platform, but far enough above that it won't mess with the test. Then the words, 'Run on the treadmill' appears on the screen.

Simple enough.

I step onto the device, and it immediately starts moving at a much faster speed than the treadmill I usually use at the gym. But at the same time, it feels too slow for me thanks to my status as a Guardian.

A few seconds pass and the treadmill starts to speed up, slowly at first, then faster and faster until it reaches my own pace where it stops speeding up. And when I'm beginning to think the test is too... straightforward, hurdles and other sorts of obstacles begin to appear on the treadmill, making my eyes widen with a mixture of surprise and fear.

That looks like it'll hurt if I mess up.

I continue running through the treadmill, avoiding most of the obstacles, but still hitting around six of them before the treadmill slows to a stop again and a loud beep sounds from the terminal.

Then the sound of someone slamming something enters my ears, directing my focus towards Allen who is staring at the terminal with his fist on the counter beneath it, sending cracks through the poor counter.

Yeah, I get the feeling he's going to be doing that a lot today.

When I walk over to the terminal, I find this one also at Tier B for agility. Which is quite nice. But it seems to be giving Allen an aneurism or something as he can't take his eyes off of the screen.

Maybe if would be better if I just went through all of the tests back to back?

Yeah, that would be better. Like tearing off a band aid right away instead of slowly peeling it. If he gets all of the surprises out of the way now, maybe the counter might just survive the day?

And with that thought in mind, I press the next capability on the screen. Constitution.

When I turn around to look at the platform, it has something that kind of sends shivers down my spine. But I still walk towards the platform either way.

Once stop right in front of the large golem – one armed with weapons to the tee – I feel a refreshing feeling very much like when Allen healed me before sweep through my body. And looking down, I find a green glow to be the cause of it. One coming from the floor of the platform.

Good. So the tests do heal you in between.

I'm guessing it's every two tests or something?

Either way, I stare down the golem before finding a screen coming down again.

'Fight the golem.'

This test doesn't bode well. Not when it's one to see how much damage I can take. And especially not when this golem has blades all over its body, hammers in the place of hands, glowing eyes, even



more weapons stored on its body that aren't attached, and who knows how many hidden weapons it must have as well.

I don't think I'm going to like this test.

And that thought is confirmed the moment the golem bursts into movement, with all of its weapons going into action, slicing straight through my clothes and skin.

## Chapter 36

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### Evaluation Part III

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#### At the Terminal while Scarlet is doing her Evaluation

Cipher continues staring blankly at the terminal for who knows how long, wondering just what the heck is going on. Never once has there been a blood magic user whose physical capabilities were so high. Not once.

Blood magic is supposed to be a magic focused, well, magic. It is not supposed to be a physical focused capability.

*But if that's the case, then what are these results?!*

After a few seconds, Cipher finally begins to remember that he isn't alone. So he looks up just to find that Scarlet had already begun the Constitution test, making him immediately grimace before turning around at the sight of her clothes ripped up. Even if she continuously repairs them to keep them from getting too badly damaged to repair again.

*Everyone hates that test.*

Nearly three minutes pass before the test ends at the sound of the tone from the terminal. And the moment Cipher sees the results, he can't help but shout, "What the fuck is going on here?!"

*Tier B Constitution. Three Tier Bs in a row. In Physical capabilities. For a Blood Magic user.*

Cipher raises his head to gawk at Scarlet, who is already walking back to the terminal with the platform having healed her of all of the wounds and even cleaned her and repaired her clothes for her after the test finished. But that doesn't do anything for the scowl that's on her face, showing exactly how she felt about that test.

After she reaches the terminal, she doesn't even bother looking at Cipher, simply pressing the next test button and going back to the platform.

*Is this why she wanted me to raise her? Because she knew just how powerful she would be if she became a Guardian? Or is it something else?*

Cipher can't help but think back to the day when *she* arrived carrying Scarlet as a baby nineteen years ago. The first thing he thought when he saw her was that there was something strange about her. About the way she looked at him. Not as a baby would look at an adult, but with silence. With calm eyes and not making a single sound in the process.

Some things never change. And that was one of them.

Cipher looks down and rubs the lower half of his face as he ignores the test going on right now.

*But just what is Scarlet's connection to her? At this point I wouldn't be too surprised if she were her mother. They do look a little bit similar, in a way. But then why would she give her daughter to someone else to raise? It doesn't make any sense.*

He thinks about the questions for who several minutes before looking up again to find Scarlet struggling to keep going in the endurance test after having run on the treadmill for who knows how long. The test also occasionally stops the treadmill and has her fighting with a golem that is instructed not to actually harm her but to just tire her out before switching back to the treadmill again.

*Another unpleasant test. But there's no way she can get a fourth Tier B capability. Right?*

Time flies by as the test continues until it finally ends with another tone, following which he lets out a sigh at seeing the capability at Tier C this time.

*Right. No more Tier Bs. She can't be that much of a demon.*

If her capabilities were too high then people would flood her with requests to join their Association, or to enter their university. She wouldn't have a moment of peace, and he knows exactly how that would turn out.

With her probably running and blowing everyone off, not bothering with it after only the fifth request. Which would in turn look bad for Cipher.

*She's already passed the criteria and more for Lion's Heart, so it's fine even if she gets a Tier D beyond this point.*

Cipher nods to himself as Scarlet passes by, sending him a strange glance at his actions before pressing the next button on the screen.

Perception.

*Wait. Doesn't she... shit.*

Cipher stares as she walks into the perception test, only to walk out of it again a few minutes later with the terminal beeping once more, showing her perception as Tier A.

*Well, shit.*

Scarlet's eyes widen before she smirks and then presses the next button as if getting three capabilities in Tier B and one in Tier A wasn't earthshattering already.

At this point, Cipher just stares at her, not letting anything faze him anymore. Not the nonchalance she's carrying herself with, nor the theoretically impossible Tier set she has listed next to her physical capabilities.

"Scarlet..." he says, calling out to her right before she steps onto the platform of the vitality platform. But when she turns around to look at him with her head tilted slightly and her ears somehow tilting with them, he just says, "Nevermind. Just... just continue."

Scarlet frowns at him, her head straightening, only to shrug and continue onto the platform.

After her test starts, he finds himself putting his face in his hands and leaning them on the cracked counter with a groan.

*And to think I was originally thinking that I'd enjoy seeing her capabilities. That maybe her competitive streak would be sparked by seeing some low capabilities or something and she would work hard in training to make up for the lacking capabilities instead of just trying to level up. Or that he'd just be proud of her for doing quite well.*

The tone sounds again a few minutes later, making him lift his head to see a B for Vitality as well.

*At this rate, I'm pretty sure the others are going to be going after me to take her in.*

Cipher turns to look at Scarlet, his frown growing deeper as he stares at the source of his current troubles. Only for her to frown and tilt her head ever so slightly in confusion again.

## Chapter 37

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### Evaluation Part IV

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#### Scarlet

I swear, some of these tests are just trying to torture us. And why does Allen keep staring at me like I'm doing him some great disservice or something? It's getting annoying and awkward.

Allen takes in a deep breath before letting it out again. Then he repeats that process once more and says, "While your capabilities may be theoretically impossible, don't let that get to your head. It doesn't mean your immediately the strongest person even close to your level or anything like that. All it means is that your physical capabilities will rise at a slightly faster pace than everyone else on average. But there will still be people who – even at the same level or below you – can challenge you with ease as long as they focus on one stat or just happen to counter you."

I nod my head, taking his advice to heart.

He nods back before pressing the okay button on the screen that appeared after I finished the last physical test, making the screen go back to the three main stats, but with Physical crossed out this time.

Then he waves for me to do the rest myself as he goes to the edge of the room and sits in a chair while rubbing his temples.

Does he have a headache or something? I know my capabilities are quite good, but is it that big of a deal?

**“Probably,”** Tar says, his amusement clear in his voice. **“Noble demons are known quite well for having a stronger talent in both magic and physical prowess over humans after all. So it makes sense that a half blood lycan would be stronger than most humans at the same level. But as he said, don’t let this get to your head. Humans are crafty, and magic is – as some would say – without bounds.”**

I nod my head again as I reach out and touch the button for Mental stat capabilities.

<b>Processing</b>	The measure of the processing power of an individual.
<b>Intuition</b>	The measure of how fast and efficiently an individual can understand new things.
<b>Resistance</b>	The measure of how strong an individual’s mental resistance is towards mental attacks.
<b>Offense</b>	The measure of how powerful an individual’s mental offense is.
<b>Reaction</b>	The measure of an individual’s ability to react to stimuli.
<b>Willpower</b>	The measure of an individual’s willpower.

Huh. Not what I expected.

Video games make it sound like things like wisdom or intelligence should always be mental stats or something. But on second thought, it makes sense that they’re not.

By the way, Tar?

**“Hmm?”** his voice echoes in my head as I reach out and touch the processing box.

I would’ve thought there would be a reflex capability or something in the physical stat. Why isn’t there?

**“Oh, that. Yeah, reflexes aren’t really something that improve in your body,”** he says, confusing me in the process. **“I guess the Reaction capability would be the closest thing to reflexes, even if it’s still different. Because that’s your ability to react to something, not your instinctive reaction to something.”**

Huh. Okay. I’m just going to pretend I understood that and move on.

**“Yeah, let’s just say that your reflexes don’t change as you grow stronger and leave it at that,”** he says, clearing it up in a better way.

Hmm.

Anyways, I walk over to the processing test to find that the test is basically just overloading me with mental stress in the form of random useless information and seeing how I cope with it, and how much I can actually process via answering questions about the information it’s slamming into my head.

By the time I get out of the test, I have a rather strange urge to go punch whoever made these tests in the face. But I doubt that would work out well for my career, assuming they’re even still alive.

Before I even see my result, I surprisingly find Allen letting out a sigh of relief. Which probably means it's not as 'theory breaking' as my other capabilities.

I walk up to the terminal before looking at the results.

Yep. Tier C.

**"Yeah, most of your mental capabilities won't be as good as your magical or physical, and you should know why by now,"** Tar says with what sounds like a yawn.

Wait, is he just watching me get tortured while almost falling sleep?!

The tanuki doesn't say anything in response, making me narrow my eyes in suspicion. But after a few seconds, I just press the next button and head back to the platform.

Why do I feel like this next one will be a quiz of some sort?

---

The rest of the mental tests fly by rather quickly, albeit painfully in some of their cases. Such as the resistance capability test. And by the end of it, I'm looking at a row of almost straight Tier Cs, with the exception of Reaction and Willpower, which are both Bs.

I glare at Allen who seems to be jumping for joy for some odd reason.

Why is he happy at my bad results?

**"Um, those aren't actually bad by human standards. They're pretty go-"** Tar begins but I mentally respond with a big, 'Don't care' before he can finish as I continue glaring.

The culprit in question seems to notice my look and coughs lightly once before pressing the okay button and then the Magical button, showing the next capabilities for the last stat. But I continue glaring at him for a few more seconds anyways, just to drive the point home. Then I turn to the screen.

<b>Capacity</b>	The measure of the amount of mana an individual has.
<b>Power</b>	The measure of the purity of an individual's mana.
<b>Control</b>	The measure of how much control an individual has over their mana.

I blink in surprise.

There are only three capabilities for the Magical stat?

That's... surprising.

**"Well, the only magic you can use are the skills you have. And you don't get much control over those until Class IV or even V, which only a couple of humans have ever reached,"** Tar explains in response to my surprise.

Oh. Okay.

I select Capacity first before turning around and finding the platform to now have a single orb on it.

## Chapter 38

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### Evaluation Finale

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#### Scarlet

The test turns out to simply be pouring half of my mana into the orb, so it isn't painful, stressful, or anything like that. It doesn't even take longer than a couple of minutes before I hear the tone from the terminal stating that the test is over.

And once I get back to the terminal, I find that I have Tier B Capacity as well. Which is nice.

The two tests following that aren't very hard to do either, and I end up with Tiers A and B for the next two in order.

In the end, Allen and I are left looking at a final list showing all of my capabilities in each stat, along with a little loading symbol on the bottom of the screen and the words 'Sending results to officials' above the loading symbol. But Allen doesn't say a word until it's finished. And the moment it is? He just sighs. Then a loud ringing sound echoes through the room followed by a large screen floating down in front of us.

Before I can ask what's going on, the black screen changes to show Belle who is sitting down on a desk in what I'm guessing is a classroom. And she doesn't look very happy either.



However, that changes after she sees me, making a smile spread across her face again as she says, "Scarlet! You're awake!"

I raise an eyebrow before chuckling.

“Good morning,” I tell her, only to frown for a second then correct myself, “Good afternoon.”

She laughs for a few seconds. But then she turns a scowl on her father, who is still staring at my results. “Dad, we need to talk.”

His head shoots up and a complicated expression replaces the dumbfounded stare he had. One that looks both confused and guilty at the same time. As if he felt guilty but didn’t know what he was guilty about.

I almost laugh at the look on his face, only to hold myself back as I hear Belle saying, “I want to go to Lion’s Heart.”

Uh, this conversation doesn’t sound like it’s gonna go in a direction I’d like to be here during.

Fortunately, Allen turns to me and says, “Your results should have been sent to the authorities, so go explore the base a bit for the rest of the day. We can deal with your application to the university after the results are processed.”

I nod my head in appreciation, glance at Belle to find her glaring at her father, then quickly make my exit as fast as my legs will carry me. But despite that, I still hear Allen stating, “No. Non-Guardians are not allowed on a Guardian University campus without a good reason, and you know this.”

Then the door shuts and I can’t hear anything else.

I let out a sigh of relief.

Now then. To the gym.

**“Didn’t you say yesterday that you were going to skip your workout today?”** Tar comments with confusion evident in his voice.

That was before I got so much pent up stress I needed to work off.

Then I can take a shower after that. And I don’t care if you’re human or not, you’re either gonna disappear at that time or you’re staying in my room.

Tar just chuckles at that.

I let out a huff of air as I begin my walk towards the public gym.

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### A few hours later

I let out a sigh as I get out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around my neck, over my shirt before my phone buzzes from my pants pocket, my jacket having been left on my bed during my shower. So I take the phone out before unlocking it and raising an eyebrow at the text I find there. One with a simple thumbs-up emoji at the end of it.

**[I managed to get a tentative maybe on that ‘going to Lion’s Heart’ thing!]**

She actually managed to convince him? Or... no, she said a tentative maybe.

**[What did you do?]**

After sending my response, I lie back on my bed and raise my phone in front of my face, just searching through the videos online about me. And it only takes me a few minutes to find a full blown news article as well, instead of just the simple videos posted on streaming services.

There isn't much different about it from the videos I've already seen though, just that the articles are written by people who are actually with the news and not just some video streamer. Makes it look more official.

I flop my hand against the bed with a sigh before muttering, "This is going to be a pain."

Tar appears in the air above me, only to float down to land on my chest. I almost unconsciously drop my phone and reach out to start petting him as I close my eyes.

If I remember correctly, the capital has the most Demonic Assaults out of all of the cities in the world. Generally about one every three or four days. But since the city is so massive, the various Fractures are spread out, and rarely ever strike the same building more than once in two months' time.

I can't remember how big the city is though. Not exactly at least. Just that it's multiple times larger than any Tier 2 city, and at least a dozen times larger than Rothwell City was.

And Rothwell City was still about a few hundred square kilometers in area.

So the city is massive. And every Demonic Assault has at least a couple dozen Fractures spread across the city, focusing in areas with a lot of people – hence why it often happens in buildings. They also can't appear where there is no flat ground, so the airways of the city are safe as well despite how many people are always flying through it on their air cars.

Which is still a strange sight to see.

My thoughts are interrupted by my phone once again buzzing. So I remove my hand from the unbelievably soft tanuki to grab the phone, only to gawk at it after seeing her reply.

**[Dad agreed to take me to a Fracture during the next Assault as long as I stay safely at the entrance. And if I do get offered a contract, then he will allow me to apply for Lion's Heart.]**

## Chapter 39

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### Call For Help and a Talk

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Scarlet



**[Are you kidding me?! Don't do something so stupidly dangerous! I'm the reckless one, remember?!]**

I glare at my phone, having a hard time believing someone like Belle would actually do something like this. And for what? Just to go to Lion's Heart Guardians university? Why does she want to go this badly anyways?

I've heard that there are some Guardians who take their children to Fractures in case a 'spirit' decides they want to contract with them, but generally that's looked down upon. Many believing that surviving your first Fracture unaided until reinforcements arrive being the best way to prove yourself or something. Not to mention that apparently people who do that aren't as likely to be contracted.

**"Of course, they aren't,"** Tar suddenly says, reminding me of the weight on my chest that I had forgotten thanks to her message. **"When you're looking for a champion to represent you, would you pick someone who is basically being walked through their first Fracture, taking the easy way through life? No. You wouldn't."**

Then the tanuki goes quiet again.

He makes a good point though.

Belle responds to my text a minute later, making me grimace.

**[Then take this as me learning your tricks. You always pull through after all, so why can't I?]**

She has a point. I don't think I have the right to get mad at her over this.

But...

I quickly copy her original text saying her plan before sending it to Arthur.

He can.

And with my tattle tailing done-

My thoughts pause as the phone buzzes again before I can even put it down.

**[I see. Thank you for telling me, I'll be sure to have a nice little chat with her.]**

I grin at that as I put my phone away and get up, startling the tanuki into flying into the air. But after a few seconds, he just floats over to my head and lies down there instead, making me flinch as he touches my ears, which are still way too sensitive for their own good.

Better not let others touch them, else they might see how sensitive they are. Specifically Belle.

She'd have a field day trying to tickle me through my ears.

I grimace at the thought as I reach over to grab my jacket and pull it on while walking over to the door.

Time to get some fresh air.

---

Tar appears next to me – having vanished the moment we left my suite – as I lie down on my back on the roof of the base. Which took me a while to find.

High in the sky are the beautiful stars that you don't get to see from the city proper thanks to the lights, along with the full moon glowing a bright yellow. I can't help the smile that stretches across my face as I just stare up at the sky, looking at the moon.

At least I now have a logical reason for why I love the moon so much. It's probably because I'm half blood lycan.

The peace of the night calms my nerves after spending most of the day doing tests that were more akin to torture than evaluations, followed by my workout which fortunately was a lot less eventful. Even if there were still some people watching me, what with me being a newbie here and all.

Actually, come to think of it, do Guardians really need to continue working out?

Tar's ear twitches as he answers, **"Yeah. It's a little complicated, but your draining of life force basically makes your presence in reality stronger, increasing the current prowess of your body. And if you don't keep in shape, it will show in a pretty decent decrease in your physical capabilities. Of course, you'd still be far stronger than a regular human being. But not as strong as you could be, and you wouldn't look as well fit either."**

Oh. That's honestly rather interesting.

There's still one thing bothering me though.

**"What's that?"** Tar asks, lying down on the ground next to me, surprisingly not lying on top of me this time.

Well, I noticed that my life drain skill mentions that it mentions me draining the life energy from other beings to heal myself. What's the difference between life energy and life force?

Tar glances at me before staring up at the sky again with his little legs sprayed out on each side in an adorable manner, **"Life force is what grounds you to reality and what reality uses to ground itself to you. It establishes your presence, and your power. But life energy is basically just what keeps your body alive. Kind of like the HP or hit points you often see in a video game."**

Wait, you know about video games?

The tanuki rolls over as he says, **"Yeah, my last contracted partner was really big on them. To the point it was nearly an obsession, and he was even starting to think of the world as a game as well. What with the similarities between the System and games. Which wasn't a good thing for a Guardian."**

I wince.

Yeah, I can see that being bad.

Sorry I asked.

Tar floats up into the air and onto my stomach as he says, **"It's fine."**

We both stay silent for several minutes, just enjoying the peace on the roof that is only occasionally broken slightly by the sound of an explosion occasionally happening from the experimental fields. Explosions that make me even more happy that the building is soundproof. They also makes me switch to my human ears, because ouch.

“Tar,” I ask, my relaxed face turning sad for a moment.

How do you think the others would react to knowing that I’m a half demon?

The tanuki doesn’t say anything for nearly an entire minute.

**“Probably not well,”** he eventually responds. **“But I can see your friend Belle looking past it, from what I’ve seen of her so far that is. And maybe that Cipher guy as well. Maybe.”**

Hmm.

Thank you.

He nods his head before closing his eyes and resting his head on my stomach as if he were going to sleep.

If I’m being honest, I don’t really care much about not being fully human anymore. But I do care about what they’d think.

Tar doesn’t say anything to that, his breathing hinting towards him having fallen asleep.

I let out a sigh.

Why couldn’t life be more like a video game than it already is? Games aren’t often complicated. Not some of them at least. Move your chess piece one space to the right and look at the board to figure out your next move. Not guessing beyond the limited scope of moves the other player has. No way they could break the known rules and go off the board. No other players there to interfere with the game.

No emotions going into play in the game, complicating everything.

I let out another sigh before following the tanuki’s example and closing my eyes.

A short nap will be nice. Then I can go back to my room.

## Intermission

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### **Within the Government Hall at the heart of the Capital City of the Terran Republic, Terra**

“Can you verify these results? Are they real?” Jacob R. Ashton asks his assistant as he stares at the paper in front of him. One with the results of the new wolf girl Guardian’s evaluation.

The assistant nervously nods her head before answering, “I’ve had several people going over both the documents, the terminal on our end, and the terminal on their end, and nothing looked wrong.

Everything was working. We even have recordings of her evaluations with the initial inputting of level taken out.”

The official in charge of registering new Guardians sighs as he slumps into his chair. The man is wearing a black business suit with a dark blue crystal amulet hanging around his neck over the suit. One that will transform into his armor at a moment’s notice. He has short brown hair that matches his chair as he stares at the paper in front of him.

*This... this shouldn't even be possible. So what am I looking at?*

Name: Scarlet Asger		Magic: Blood		Age: 19	
Physical Capabilities:		Mental Capabilities:		Magical Capabilities:	
Strength:	Tier B	Processing:	Tier C	Capacity:	Tier B
Agility:	Tier B	Intuition:	Tier C	Power:	Tier A
Constitution:	Tier B	Resistance:	Tier C	Control:	Tier B
Endurance:	Tier C	Power:	Tier C		
Perception:	Tier A	Reaction:	Tier B		
Vitality:	Tier B	Willpower:	Tier B		

“And we’re... sure she didn’t lie about her level?” Jacob mutters, not taking his eyes off of the results.

His assistant answers with more confidence this time, “Yes sir. You know as well as I do that the Capacity test also judges the level of the user it is testing to make sure they didn’t lie at the beginning of the test. Furthermore, even if she did somehow manage to lie, do you think a regular person would be able to reach a high enough level to get *these* results from a faked test?”

Jacob just sighs again.

*I know a Guardian’s capabilities aren’t everything, and are only really important for people within around a dozen or so levels around your own, but still... the Guardian Research Team is going to have a field day with this... real proof that a Guardian can reach past the theoretical ceiling that was decided upon.*

After gathering his thoughts together, the official finally sits up again and truly looks over the girl’s paper in front of him.

*She seems like she’d make a good scout with her perception, but that’d also waste her offensive capabilities that she has with those other physical capabilities and her magical ones. But one thing’s for sure. We should avoid having her go to any Class III Fractures until she gets a skill to defend her mind, which seems to be lacking behind the others. Even if what’s lacking for her is average, or even considered good for others...*

The man continues planning on how she’d best be taught, only to eventually realize that he isn’t the one who will be teaching her.

*Right. I left that position when I handed down the university...*

A few seconds pass in silence with the assistant nervously gripping her clipboard to her chest until out of nowhere, the man grins and says, "On the other hand, it might not be a bad thing that I stepped down from the headmaster seat."

His assistant tilts her head in confusion.

"Oh, right," he says, clearing his throat. "Well, the various universities are going to have a field day with her, fighting over who has the right to enroll her. But in the end, she'll likely end up going to Lion's Heart, as do almost all of the exceptional talents."

*But I'm not the one fighting over the talents anymore. That's her job now.*

Jacob can't help but chuckle at that thought. Then he stops a few seconds later and says, "Get me Cipher on the phone. I would like to talk with him. And if possible, with the girl."

His assistant – Marie Jones – hurriedly nods her head and rushes away, out of his office.

Jacob tilts his head as he watches her for a second.

*Despite how nervous she is, she does do a good job. Looks like hiring her to pay her back hasn't been a total wash at least.*

He then shakes his head and looks down once more at the document in front of him.

After only a few minutes, Jacob's phone rings and he immediately picks it up right when his assistant forwards the call she had made to him. Then, another ten or so seconds later, Cipher picks up the phone on his side and says, "Cipher here."

"Hello, Cipher. Imagine how surprised I was to find the new Guardian's capabilities appearing on my desk today," he immediately gets to the point of the call.

Cipher doesn't say anything for a few seconds before saying in a slightly strained voice, "You're not the only one who was surprised."

Jacob scoffs at that as he leans back in his chair. "Don't give me that. I bet you're jumping for joy at having such a talent in your Association. You've been needing more combative Guardians recently, am I right? Well now you've got one."

"Yes," Cipher says immediately in a tense voice. "But this will also cause problems with the other Associations, not to mention the other universities who want her."

The official just laughs without saying a word.

"Seriously?" Cipher mutters. "You do know that this is *her*, right?"

Jacob shuts up immediately while practically shooting to his feet and shouting, "*What?!*"

This time Cipher laughs before hanging up the call, leaving Jacob to stew over the revelation.

*If she's really the one who White had him raise, then maybe those capabilities might begin to make some sense... maybe.*

The man continues pondering over the subject for several minutes, only to realize that he didn't get to the point of the reason he called Cipher in the first place. To ask what university she was going to go to, and to attempt to ring her into the government after her higher education is over.

"That bastard just played me..." he mutters with a frown, only to shake his head and shout, "Jones! Bring me some coffee!"

*Today is turning into a long day...*

## Chapter 40

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### Registration Part I

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#### Scarlet

I yawn as I enter what is apparently Allen's office after being called over – and woken up – by Sage using the intercom again. This time about my application to Lion's Heart. And the first thing I see in his office is the sight of him sitting down on a comfortable looking sofa holding his head with his elbows resting on his knees.

"So is this because of Belle? Or something else?" I ask with a raised eyebrow, making him look up with a scowl. "Your moping I mean."

His eyebrow twitches.

"Maybe a little of both?" I ask while putting my hands comfortably in my jacket pockets and walking over to the sofa across the table from him to sit down.

He just stares at me, scowling all the while.

Probably a little of Belle and a little of my capabilities.

Eventually, the man lets out a sigh and reaches over to grab a document from his desk that he then puts onto the table in between us as he says, "This is the application for Lion's Heart Guardians University. Fill it out."

Oh, he's really in a bad mood. But also, it feels a little bit different from his normal bad mood. Since he's normally fine with yelling at me then.

Meaning he must also be happy about something I did? Or something involving me right now?

Either way, I reach forward to grab the paper, only to find that I don't have a pen. But before I can ask, he grabs a pen and puts it on the table as well.

"Thank you," I mutter before beginning to read over the application. Which isn't really that much. Just basic information, who my sponsor is, answering a few personal questions about humans, demons,

and Guardians, along with some of the laws that are in place that are different between humans and Guardians.

After I finish filling it out, I place it back on the table again and say, "Done. Anything else?"

He lets out a sigh and gets up from the sofa while saying, "Yes. You will also have to take an exam, but that is given out in person. I also doubt it'll really have an impact on whether you're let in or not, just purely because of your capabilities."

There's the exam. Knew there would be one of those.

"You know when we'll be doing that?" I ask, only to be surprised as he meets my eyes and says, "Now."

My mouth parts open for a second, only to close as he adds, "Or rather, a couple of hours from now. On the university campus."

Oh.

---

Two hours later I find myself standing in the office of the registrar for Lion's Heart, who of which does not look to be very happy.

"So why did you bring this orphan girl here?" the woman asks with a scowl on her face and a slight look of disgust directed towards me. "If it's to register her, then you can take her away no-" She cuts off when Allen tosses my file on her desk in front of her, the woman's eyes latching onto it in the process.

Silence follows for several seconds. Then she immediately reaches to grab it as if her life were on the line, reading every last capability I have and occasionally glancing between me and the paper.

Wow. Guess my capabilities really did matter that much.

After what feels like five whole minutes but is probably just half a minute or so, the woman finally asks, "And this has been verified and confirmed by the Governmental Office already?"

Her eyes widen even further after seeing Allen nod her head. Then she turns to me with a brilliant smile and says, "Welcome to Lion's Heart Guardians university, sweetheart! I hope you have the best stay possible!"

My mouth drops open in shock at the complete one eighty her personality just did.

She ignores my very obvious shock to gather the paper along with my application as she says, "Now, of course we still have to deal with your examination, but I'm sure that won't be a problem. But I think I should also get the vice-headmaster in on this, since I'm pretty sure they'd want to be notified about such a shining star of a new student, don't you think?" she says the last part while glancing up at Allen with a pretty smile on her face, showing off her perfectly white teeth.

The Registrar lady then takes me and Allen to a very comfortable looking lounge where she leaves us, saying that she will be right back with the vice-headmaster.

I stand in silence, not even bothering to sit down as I stare at the door she had just left through.

“What... what just happened?” I mutter, dumbfounded by the events that just took place.

Allen just bursts out laughing. And laughing. And laughing some more.

Eventually I get sick of it, so I threaten, “You keep that up and I’ll tell Belle about your little stash of-”

He stops before I can even finish, immediately saying, “No! There’s no need for that!” Then, after seeing me sit down, he sits down as well and says, “A lot of the faculty, and especially the higher ups and professors at this university are incredibly old school in how they do things. They like ‘well bred stock’ as a matter of terms. People who are raised in the best of families, with the best educations possible.”

And certainly not orphans, much less ones from a Tier 3 city.

“But at the same time, they value capability and magic over basically anything. And you have both of those in spades. An incredibly useful magic. One that is versatile and can be used in many different ways in combat. And the capabilities of a lifetime. Practically a dream come true for any Guardian University,” he explains, making me understand just why he was moping so much recently but also silently happy with me. “In fact, you’re so important that even if you completely failed every last part of the exam far below a passing score, they’d probably just fake the test results entirely.”

“Wait, so my results on the examination literally don’t matter?” I ask him, feeling that that’s more than a little unfair.

He nods his head with a shrug and says, “Yeah, but that’s just how high society is with Guardians. Power makes right. And talent makes power.”

Our conversation is interrupted as the door opens again, this time with an old man walking through it. Which is surprising, considering that Guardians don’t tend to age that much. Mostly depending on how much they actually fight and level up, since leveling up tends to stall your aging process.

And the moment he sees me, his eyes widen with what looks like recognition.

Huh? What’s up with that?

## Chapter 41

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### Registration Part II

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#### Scarlet

The recognition in the old man’s eyes goes away just as quickly as it had appeared, making me briefly wonder if I was just seeing things.

If I had to guess, then I’d say this is the vice-headmaster that the registrar was going to get. But surprisingly, that lady isn’t here anymore. Even after he walks in.



“Good morning Cipher, and a wonderful morning to you as well, Scarlet Wolf,” the old man says, making me frown at his term of address towards me. And I can’t help but hear Cipher laugh at it.

Seriously? Even other Guardians are starting to use the title the internet came up with for me?

Where is the originality in that title? It’s literally just tacking on Wolf to my name!

Although, from what I’ve been able to gather, someone’s been hiding my name from the public. Or at least censoring it wherever it appears, so most people don’t know my actual name.

Which probably makes it worse since they don’t know how ridiculous the title is without knowing my first name.

My title aside, the old man is wearing some sort of magi-tech infused business suit. One that looks kind of like regular formal wear but with lines of glowing blue running throughout it, along with two tails sticking out of his backside, and glowing blue eyes.

I can’t help but glance at the tails as they slowly sway behind the man before I focus on him to find him simply staring at me without any real expression on his face. Then we simply stare at each other for who knows how long.

This is awkward.

Eventually, an elderly smile stretches across his face, and he says, “I think she’ll do nicely.” Then he turns around and adds, “Follow me to the examination room, young miss Asger.”

I glance at Allen, only to find him mouthing, ‘Only you.’

Guess Allen’s not coming then.

I turn around and begin following after the old man. And as we walk through the fancy halls of the university, I notice that not a single student is actually wearing their uniforms. Which is odd.

We continue walking for several minutes until we end up in a large room that I can only assume is meant for examinations testing a large number of people. Right now, though, there’s only a single desk despite the size of the room, with several papers on the desk and some writing utensils.

The man walks up to the front of the room next to a whiteboard and turns around while finally introducing himself, “My name is Alfred Raynsford, and I am the vice-headmaster currently overseeing the university in the headmaster’s absence.” He then pauses to indicate the desk. “You will now take your entrance exam into Lion’s Heart Guardians University. But don’t worry as regardless of what your result is, I’m sure we can manage something.”

He says that last part with a smirk.

Guess Allen was right about that.

I sit down to take the exam, which ends up taking nearly an hour. Throughout it are various questions over different subjects, such as mathematics, history, a little bit of science, and a lot of combat knowledge and Guardian Laws. And while I feel incredibly good about the mathematics, history,

and science portions, I'm quite lacking in the combat knowledge, and a little lacking in the Guardian Laws.

All of which is confirmed when the old man looks over my exam right after I finish it and basically says the same thing. But he does look a little surprised as he's talking about my mathematics, history, and science portions of the exam. And in the end, he raises his head and says, "You did a lot better than I was expecting. In fact, your scores in mathematics, history, and science were top notch, brought down only a little by your lack of combat training or teachings in Guardian Laws."

I can't help the proud smile that stretches across my face.

Looks like I passed even without the cheating they had planned.

And I can't help but feel like my value in the old man's eyes just rose thanks to that. Maybe he was mentally preparing to have a country bum educated properly or something and didn't expect me to actually be smart?

Either way, he gathers up the papers and puts them into a vanilla envelope before smiling at me and saying, "Welcome to Lion's Heart Guardians University, young miss Asger! May you enjoy your stay here and make pleasant memories along your path to power!"

"Thank you, sir," I answer, feeling like the words are necessary right now.

Alfred nods his head in approval before motioning me with his finger to follow him again. We then move through the halls some more before ending up back at the room where we find Allen lounging on the sofa.

He immediately sits up at our unexpected entrance and asks, "So how did it go?"

I give him a smile, making him relax ever so slightly.

Guess he was worried about how I'd do even knowing that they'd cheat my score. Which makes sense, as it'll likely affect how I'm treated. In fact, I think it already has since the old man started talking a little bit while we walked unlike when we were going to that examination room in the first place.

"She did extraordinarily well for someone raised in a Tier 3 city," the old man immediately begins before asking, "Could that be because of your influence?"

Allen just shakes his head and answers, "Unfortunately not. She was influenced mostly by the people around her who would always treat her rather poorly for being an orphan. It seems to have developed a bit of a complex towards overworking herself to prove those sorts of people wrong."

I glare at him for trying to psychologically analyze me.

The man just ignores my glare as he continues, "She did ask for a lot of research and study material from my daughter though."

"Oh really?" Alfred mutters while turning a curious glance towards me. "Very interesting."

## Chapter 42

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## Registration Part III

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### Scarlet

“Let’s get down to it then,” the old man says, glancing between me and Allen in the process. “The Fall semester begins in a week, on next Monday. You are expected to attend the Semester Opening Ceremony the day before the first day, on Sunday, where the speeches will be held by the faculty and the student council president, following which a tournament will be set up. During this, the Guardians may challenge other Guardians within their same Class and year. This is to set up the rankings for that year.”

My mouth parts open at the mention of rankings.

I knew the Guardian Universities were competitive, but damn... isn’t that a bit much?

“Many new Guardians tend to wonder why we do things with a ranking system, so I’ll just tell you this now. It’s there to inspire Guardians to go out and fight in the Fractures. Otherwise, many of our more spoiled students wouldn’t bother as they’re already given most of what they want in life without having to risk their own lives to get it,” the old man says, answering my unasked question as if it were normal. “You will be sent two uniforms soon, one of which has pants and the other a skirt. Which one you wear will be up to you, but you are only required to wear the uniform during social gatherings such as the Semester Opening Ceremony. And you do not have to wear it when in combat, such as the tournament that follows the Ceremony.”

I let out a breath of relief at hearing that.

Because I’m really not a fan of uniforms.

It’s also quite nice that the skirts aren’t required, because the one that Denise girl was wearing looked too short in my opinion. Not even something I would be caught dead wearing.

The corner of the old man’s mouth twitches slightly most likely in amusement at seeing my visible relief before he continues, “The ranking you get in the tournament will decide what group you’re put into. The Regular one, the Advanced one, and the Top Class one. Each of these groups have different permissions across campus and are given different levels of assistance by the faculty. And the higher your rank is, the more priority you’ll get for the Fractures in the city.” He pauses here to glance at Allen as he asks, “I’m assuming she will be getting combat training during this next week?”

Allen nods his head, prompting Alfred to turn back to me as he says, “Then I would also suggest you fight in one of the Fractures of the next Demonic Assault to get some more levels before fighting in the tournament.”

I nod my head, “Of course.”

His lips twitch again before he says, "The exact rules of the tournament will be announced at the beginning of it. So prepare for it." The man then nods his head towards me, then towards Allen as he says, "Scarlet Wolf, Cipher. It was a pleasure."

We both respond in kind, following which the man leaves us be with one final statement saying that anything else I may need will be sent to me via email.

After his departure, I turn to Allen and ask, "So what now?"

"Now we head back to the base," he answers while walking over to the door.

---

It doesn't take long before we're back in Allen's office with him sipping coffee and me having a soda.

"I still don't know what you have against coffee," Allen mutters as he stares at the soda in my hands.

I just shrug and retort, "Well I don't know why you like that disgusting stuff. And I've never had trouble staying awake, so there's really no point in having coffee."

He scoffs and goes silent, understanding that the argument won't go anywhere. Not if the past who knows how many times we've had it are anything to judge by.

We sit in silence for several minutes before he eventually says, "That went a lot better than I was expecting. But we'll still be receiving the complaints of the other Associations, even if we got the other universities to shift their target from us to Lion's Heart before they even learned of your existence."

I nod my head, not really understanding some of it since he hasn't exactly told me of all of his problems. Just that the other Associations and universities probably want me and don't like how quickly I was 'snatched up' by someone else.

"You'll probably end up being harassed a little bit by the other Associations as they try to 'convince' you to join them and leave the Silver Association. So tell me if they try anything you can't handle," Allen says, a serious look on his face. "And I mean it. Don't just deal with everything yourself like you always tend to do."

I purse my lips for a second before reluctantly nodding my head.

"Good. There's nothing else for the rest of the day, so do whatever," he says while getting up from the sofa and walking over to his desk. "I have a bunch of paperwork to get through thanks to you."

I can't help but raise an eyebrow at that, only to shrug a second later as I begin to walk out of the room. But right before I close the door, I tell Allen, "Thank you for all your help."

He pauses and literally drops a piece of paper he had been holding before I shut the door, not giving him the chance to respond.

Allen's helped me a lot in these past few days, even if I sometimes get annoyed at his assistance. And especially in the forceful manner he sometimes approaches it.

Guess he really does think of me as a daughter of sorts, just like Sage and Sylver keep implying.

A tiny smile creeps onto my face at the warm thought before going away again as I begin walking down the hall.

Time to get breakfast, since I was never able to eat that. Although by now it'd be lunch.

Because I'm starving.

## Chapter 43

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### Recruitment Part I

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#### Scarlet

I sit in the corner of the cafeteria with quite the number of people staring at me as I wolf down the large volumes of food in front of me. And despite their attempts to stay quiet, I hear plenty of the conversations around me.

*"How does she stay so thin despite eating that much?!" "Is she a bottomless pit or something?" "Was she starving for days?"*

I ignore the comments at first, but then some more join in, answering the question for the others.

*"I heard she uses blood magic." "Oh, if that's the case then it makes sense." "Yeah."*

That's all the convincing it took? Is that really why I've been so hungry since becoming a Guardian?

**"Part of it at least. It's also because you're half blood lycan,"** Tar answers my question. **"Some blood magic spells use the users blood in the process, so the users end up needing to eat a lot. And lycans in general have a fast metabolism."**

Oh. Okay.

Kind of annoying though, since I'm not much of a fan of eating in general.

**"Oh really? Why is that?"** Tar asks as I continue eating, thankful that the people around me aren't talking about me much anymore. Except the new arrivals that is.

It's because it's a waste of time. Instead of eating, I could be working on something. But nope. I have to spend time from my days eating.

**"But you wasted time showering and even going outside to stare at the moo-"** Tar begins, only to be cut off by my thoughts.

No. That's not wasting time. That's what I want to do. So it's not a waste. But eating isn't something I want to do, so it's a waste.

Tar goes quiet as I feel waves of confusion running through whatever strange bond we have going on.

Don't try too hard to think about it. Belle, Allen, and Arthur all gave up long ago on trying to figure me out.

My internal conversation with the tanuki is interrupted when I hear someone approaching me through my wolf ears, making me turn to find Michael, Denise, and Emily approaching me with trays of food. And they each look surprised when they find me turning towards them, likely not having expected me to know of their approach or something.

"Would it be alright if we sat with you?" Michael asks politely while indicating the other seats on this circular table.

I just shrug with a "Sure," and return to eating my food with gusto.

They each sit down, with the two siblings sitting next to each other and Denise sitting on my left with Michael on my right. And I quickly spot them sending a strange glance towards my food only to ignore it as they begin eating their own much smaller assortments of food.

None of us talk for several minutes, but after I finally move on to my last dish, Michael speaks up.

"I heard you were accepted into Lion's Heart?"

I glance at him before looking at my food again as I answer, "Yes."

More like they were rushing to get me in though.

The guy watches me eat for several seconds – which is just weird – before I eventually ask, "Why?"

I noticed that they're all still wearing their uniforms despite not needing to according to the vice-headmaster. Which is quite odd, but to each their own.

And Denise is still strangely quiet, which I also find very strange considering her first reaction towards me. To the point that it feels a little creepy somehow.

"And why are you so quiet? I originally pegged you as a talkative and energetic person," I ask rather bluntly towards Denise, startling her in the process.

She hurriedly looks between me and the others before eventually focusing on the food in front of her with a vaguely sad look on her face as she says, "Well, I thought you didn't like me and would prefer for me to be quiet. It's what I deserve after what I did to you when we first met..."

I blink in surprise.

She felt guilty? Incredibly guilty by the sounds of it... but why would she think I disliked her?

When I ask her that, she just looks confused and says, "You said not to touch you again..."

I stare at her in silence for a few seconds.

“Why would that translate to me disliking you?” I ask, not really understanding that jump in logic. “I don’t even like my own best friend or father figure touching me in any way, much less someone I just met.”

This time she stares at me for several seconds in silence.

Then a blush emerges on her face, and she looks down again while muttering, “I... I thought you were only saying that to get me to stop...”

I raise an eyebrow.

“Why would I do that?” I ask, a frown stretching across my own face.

“Well, some people just make up excuses to politely tell someone not to do something!” she says as if defending herself before gaining a sad frown. “Sorry.”

Yeah, I’m not really the type to do that.

“Don’t apologize. Just stop being so mopey and quiet. It really doesn’t suit you,” I tell her, muttering the last part a little quieter than the rest.

Her head shoots up with a surprised expression on it, but I return to eating my food before she can say anything. I do glance up while eating to look at the siblings though, just to find them both with expressions showing a mixture of surprise and amusement on their faces. Then I focus on my food again until I finish the very last dish.

Right when I stand up from my seat, about to excuse myself to head to a training hall, I hear Michael ask, “Hey, Scarlet, can I ask you something?”

I glance at him before simply saying, “You just did.”

He grimaces at that for a second, only to then grin as he repeats himself, “Can I ask you two more somethings?”

I stare at him for a second before grinning myself and crossing my arms. “Go ahead.”

Without any hesitation, he immediately gets to the point, “I would like to ask if you’d join our team for the interschool tournaments.”

## Chapter 44

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### Recruitment Part II and a Surprise

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#### Scarlet

“Your team?” I repeat, a frown developing on my face.

If I remember correctly, the Guardian Universities Interschool Tournaments are always broadcast live to every city regardless of Tier. They are basically the replacement of the old world's Olympics, making the most important sporting event of the year to a lot of people.

The tournaments themselves are located in things called 'Magical Realities' which are created through specific types of magic put into magi-tech that allow a sort of virtual world where everyone who dies in the world is simply just kicked out of it with a massive headache. With no actual damage done to them. So killing is perfectly legal in these tournaments as it prepares the Guardians for real combat in Fractures. Which makes sense.

It's honestly a little sickening how a lot of the powers Guardians gained were basically turned into ways to make them celebrities soon after the Demonic Fronts became less of a pressing issue and more something that many Guardians treat as ways to grow stronger and get more wealth and popularity. But I guess that's human nature at its finest.

"You should know that I don't tend to work well with groups," I tell them, not breaking eye contact with Michael, who is obviously the leader of their little group.

He just shakes his head at that and retorts, "That's not true. I saw you working perfectly well with those researchers and security guards in the video of your fight against the demon knight. You just prefer not to work with groups, or plain dislike it."

I barely manage to hide my wince.

"In fact, I'd say you're even pretty good at leading a team, or at the very least co-leading one," he presses on, standing up from his chair to reach his full height, which is a few inches taller than me, making me look up to maintain eye contact. Which is rather annoying. "And you having blood magic makes you the perfect member of nearly any team. So what say you? Will you join?"

We continue our staring contest for who knows how long before I eventually turn around, breaking the stare lock as I bring my large number of trays over to the counter while calling back, "I'll think on it."

Whether or not I need a team will determine my choice. If I have to compete in the team branches of the tournament, then I will work with them. If not? Then I won't.

I don't look back to see what their reaction is, but I can still hear Michael's previously racing slow down a little as he lets out a sigh and sits down.

Which wasn't really something I noticed until I actually focused on it. The fact that I can literally hear a person's heartbeat.

Maybe I can use that to my advantage? I feel like I remember hearing about Guardians with incredible hearing being able to detect lies or something.

I'll have to look into that.

But first, it's time to go visit the training hall. Because I really need to learn how to better use my skills in combat.

---



I frown as I reach training hall D and realize that the dummies don't exactly have blood for me to experiment with. Nor do they have life energy, according to Tar.

Well, this makes things difficult.

Am I always going to have to test my skills blindly in combat? Because that doesn't sound especially safe.

I stare at the terminal for several seconds, just frowning as I try to think of a solution until the sound of the door opening brings my attention back to the door, where I find Sylver standing there. And he doesn't look surprised to see me in the least. In fact, he nods his head at me as the door shuts behind him and he begins walking over here.

The man is wearing much more casual clothes than the last time I saw him, with a simple hoodie and shorts on, each black and silver in color. Which is a good set of colors.

"Scarlet Wolf," he says, a hint of amusement in his eyes as he no doubt links my name to my title, making my eyebrow twitch with irritation. But other than that, his face is still mostly without any real display of emotion. "I thought I'd come to assist you."

I narrow my eyes.

"Why?"

He frowns before shrugging and saying, "Because you're too reckless. And without proper training, or the knowledge of using your skills, you will end up dead."

I stare at him for a few seconds before sighing.

He's right. Putting how he came to know that I was in here aside for the moment, he is right.

"Alright," I tell him while crossing my arms. "Train me then."

He's a Class II Guardian, so he has to be strong. And to have survived long enough, there's no way he doesn't at least know the basics. So even if he doesn't end up being the greatest of teachers, he'll at least be able to get me started while I wait for Allen.

He nods his head, "Good attitude. First, use whatever skills you need to test on me." I frown at that, but he just adds, "Unless you've gotten new skills since, I can already pretty much guess what your skills do from the recordings. It's one to manipulate the blood of your enemies in some way, one to somehow boil the blood of your enemies, and one to create claws of blood on your hands, right?"

I reluctantly nod my head, only to secretly hide a grin.

He doesn't know about life drain.

From my understanding, most of a Guardian's skills aren't really possible to keep private. After all, we're always using them in public to fight the demons, and a lot of people tend to get camera happy around Guardians. So most of the skills are leaked out rather quickly.

Not much use in hiding it, especially from a fellow Guardian in the same Association as me.

I won't explain them though.

"Come at me whenever you feel ready," Sylver says while stepping up a few steps before stopping in place and casually putting his hands in his hoodie.

Seriously? Am I that little a threat to you?

## Chapter 45

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### Training

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#### Scarlet

The first thing I do is take off my jacket, which garners a raised brow from Sylver. Then I activate Blood Claws, watching the mana drip down slightly on my status by about a point or so every five or so seconds. I keep my eye on my status as I draw my claw down my arm, cutting it open a little and seeing my mana decrease at a faster pace of about one point every second instead.

Okay, so using my claws increased the mana cost of the skill.

I keep my eye on my status as I drain some of my own blood, and find the mana decrease slowing down again. So I pull the claws out of my forearm, leaving it a little bit soaked in blood.

After a second though, I use clean to remove the blood before turning to Sylver, who's just staring at me like I'd gone insane.

"What's wrong?" I ask, slightly confused as to why he's looking at me like that.

He just shakes his head and mutters, "The way you can just cut open your arm like that is honestly a little disturbing."

"Oh," I mutter before shrugging and adding, "well, it won't be hurt for long. You're gonna help with that."

This time he looks genuinely confused. But I don't give him the chance to say anything as I use life drain while keeping an eye on both my wound and my status.

I also make sure to glance at him from time to time as his expression twists into discomfort, and he raises his hand to his chest. And it's because of that that I notice a tiny little stream of red energy, almost like a fog leaving his chest and going into mine. But he doesn't seem to notice it.

At the same time, my mana begins to drop rather quickly. About ten or so mana a second. And the wound on my arm closes up in just about three or so seconds as well.

"Interesting," I mutter, only for my eyes to widen as I realize that I never asked about-

**“Don’t worry. Just like hp in a video game, life energy regenerates with time as well,”** Tar says, predicting my bout of worry somehow.

I let out a sigh of relief before looking at Sylver, who is giving me and my arm a strange glance.

“Don’t mind me. Just testing out my skills,” I tell him, hiding a smirk.

Now then. Let’s see what blood boil does on a Class II Guardian!

---

I continue experimenting with my skills for nearly an hour before he seems to get sick of having his blood played with and starts the combat lessons. And he actually turns out to be a good teacher, against my expectations.

Or at least I think he’s good. I’m learning at least.

Not like I’ve ever had a combat instructor before, so...

He starts off with teaching me various stances, followed by correcting my manner of punching and kicking, and showing me more ways to attack with parts of me other than just my hands and feet. Such as using my forearms or calves for example.

Then after finishing showing me everything and having me repeat it once or twice each, he goes through and has me redo everything from the start. Over and over again. For three hours.

And the first time I ask to call it a day, he just says, ‘You’re quite a bit stronger than a normal new Guardian for more reasons than one, your Predator Skill likely having something to do with that at the very least. So I think you can continue on for another hour.’

Then two more hours pass and I collapse onto the ground with a groan, thanking the stars that I had the clean skill. Otherwise, my clothes would’ve been soaked with sweat.

Despite that, every last muscle in my body aches, feeling almost as if my muscles would all just split apart at the seams. Assuming muscles had those. Which I doubt is true unless you consider tendons seams?

Whatever. I’m not a biology major.

**“Are you talking to me or yourself?”** Tar asks, hearing my brief insanity caused by mental exhaustion.

Either way.

“That was because I used blood boil on you too much, wasn’t it?” I manage to groan out to the Sylver who is currently popping his neck and grabbing his coat, ready to leave.

He glances at me, mirth clear in his eyes this time as he says, “No. It was that other skill you used to heal yourself. It really was quite uncomfortable. Like having pins and needles piercing through my heart.” Then he turns around again and leaves the training hall with me still a mess on the ground.

“Ya know, Tar,” I pause to spit up a tiny bit of blood, “I think I’m growing on him.”

Tar just snorts.

Hey, it's probably true. He would barely even look at me when we first met!

**"And do you care if he likes you or not?"** Tar asks, the sarcasm clear in his voice.

Well, no. Not really.

**"Exactly."**

Huh. Good point.

Out of nowhere, I feel a wave of relief flowing through my body that almost has me groaning just from the relief of it. But I don't. Barely. Instead, I roll over onto my back to look up at Michael, whose hand is glowing green.

"Hello there," I hear him say with a smirk of amusement as the green light begins to fade.

"Hi," I respond back before trying to get up and stretching my arms, feeling all of the kinks and pain having vanished. "Huh."

"Another perk of joining my team," he says while flashing me a grin showing all of his teeth, "I have nature magic, which pretty much specializes in healing and summoning."

Oh. A healer.

Interesting.

"Don't you remember that blood magic can heal too?" I ask while walking over to my jacket and reaching down to grab it off the floor.

"Yes, but I'm pretty sure most blood magic users need other creatures nearby to heal themselves or others," he says from behind me, making me wince. But since he's behind me, he can't see it as I put my jacket on.

After that I turn around and put my hands in my pockets while saying, "True. I'm still thinking about it, so be more patient."

I wonder why he's in such a hurry? Guess I can ask if I ever do decide to join his team.

## Intermission

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### Cipher's Office within the Silver Association Base

Cipher has almost never before wanted to slam the phone down and destroy the device in the process than right now.

"I'm sorry, but since you were the orphanage director that raised her all the way till her becoming an adult, you are legally considered her guardian, and therefore you are responsible for filling out the

portions of the paperwork meant for each student's legal guardians," Alfred says with his mirth clear in his voice.

*He's enjoying this! He's seriously enjoying making me suffer through mounds of paperwork?!!*

"What self-respecting *university* requires a parent to sign and read through fifty-six documents!!!!" Cipher shouts, his voice echoing down the hall out of his office despite the door being shut, startling anyone who happened to be walking by. "It's ridiculous!"

"Why, I'm sure your parents had to sign those too," Alfred says, skillfully hiding his amusement this time behind a wall of sternness. "In fact, I can go ahead and call them right now if you want me to."

Cipher immediately backtracks, saying, "Nonono, that's fine. There's no need for that! But are you sure that all of these documents are-"

"My apologies, Cipher, but my assistant is calling me. If you have any other questions, then you may forward them to the registrar," Alfred cuts him off with a smile on the other side of the video before bowing his head and saying, "Good day to you." Then the call drops.

Several seconds pass silently in the office before a loud shout can be heard once again by anyone wandering by his office door.

*I understand that he might be mad at me for organizing that little party back when I was a student at Lion's Heart, but does that really deserve sending me extra documentation that wouldn't have been necessary? And he can't convince me that signing a document about Scarlet's 'permission to go to the swimming pool' is something that a guardian should be fucking signing!!!*

A knock sounds from his door, making Cipher raise his head and look through his nanomachines at whoever is on the other side of the door. And when he sees Sylver there, he says, "Come in."

Sylver quickly makes his way into the office, only briefly glancing at the stack of documents before sending a look of pity towards the leader of his Association.

"Don't give me that look," Cipher mutters. "What did you need?"

"It's about Scarlet," Sylver says, making Cipher groan and put his face in his hands as he mutters, "Just what did she do now...?"

Sylver blinks in surprise before saying, "I was training her for a while and noticed that she was quite a bit stronger than she should've been when fighting against me. Stronger against me than the dummies. So after some sparring with her, I realized that she has to have her Predator Skill at either Predator III or Predator IV."

Cipher's head shoots up from the desk as he shouts, "She *what?!?*"

His shout doesn't faze Sylver, and he continues, "Furthermore, after more sparring, along with making some questions towards the researchers who were with her, I've come to the conclusion that she likely has Predator IV."

"But that would mean that she's fought and killed something at least fifty levels above her," Cipher mutters, anger beginning to blaze in his eyes as he realizes what Scarlet had said when he was talking

about her fighting the demon knight. And as he thinks about it, he vaguely remembers seeing her face twitch when he said it was probably around level thirty. "That little sneak..."

"If there's nothing you need me for, then I'll take my leave," Sylver says before turning around. But before he can reach the door, Cipher says, "Wait, you said you were training her? What did you teach her? I need to know for when I start her combat lessons tomorrow."

Sylver turns around and begins explaining each of the moves he taught her, along with the basics of sparring while using her skills.

After listening for a few minutes, Cipher narrows his eyes on Sylver.

*Why do I feel like they did something else as well, but he won't say?*

Sylver doesn't let any signs slip, so Cipher lets it go. But he does ask one more question.

"Why did you teach her, anyways?"

This time Sylver opens his mouth to speak, only to pause, not getting anything out for a few seconds. Then he eventually says, "I don't know."

Cipher frowns, but still says, "Alright. You're dismissed."

Sylver nods and leaves the office, shutting the door behind him with a click that resonates throughout the room as Cipher continues staring at the door.

*Suspicious. Very suspicious.*

He continues staring at the door for a few seconds before shrugging.

*Then again, he's never really been the type. So I doubt it's that.*

Cipher looks up at the ceiling before closing his eyes with a grimace.

*She killed a demon over fifty levels above her in her first Fracture, has the highest recorded capabilities in the world, and uses blood magic.*

Several seconds pass in silence.

Cipher suddenly opens his eyes and turns on his office computer. He then navigates to a folder that he has yet to show Scarlet and clicks on it, opening the folder. One that is labeled 'White'.

Inside of the folder is the image of a baby Scarlet with raven black hair and small little specks of red in her otherwise grey eyes. The baby is being held by a woman with stark white hair and grey eyes. Eyes incredibly similar to the ones Scarlet used to have before becoming a Guardian.

But what strikes Cipher more is the similar appearances between Scarlet's current appearance as an adult and 'White's', despite the drastically different colored hair and eyes.

*Is she really your daughter? Because if so, then everything would finally make sense... sort of.*

"It would also make things even more complicated," Cipher mutters after a few seconds.

## Chapter 46

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### A Terrible Decision and Payback

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#### Scarlet

After the sparring, I take a quick shower before calling it a night. But the next morning, I'm woken up by the sound of loud footsteps entering my suite.

I rub my eyes as I sit up in my bed, more than a little annoyed at being woken up. Again. For the third time since coming here. Out of three nights.

It's not a robot this time, as robots don't have footsteps. They simply roll in or hover over the ground.

Which means it's someone with the clearance to enter my room. And I can only think of a few people who would have that clearance...

Soon enough, I hear Allen shouting while banging on my door, not daring to open it when I could be undressed or something.

"Scarlet! Wake up right now and explain to me why the *fucking* hell you thought it would be a good idea to fight a demon knight over *fifty* levels above you!!!!"

Oh.

I scowl at the door.

He's just mad about that.

I glance down at myself to find that I'm wearing a tank top and shorts before muttering, "It's too early to deal with this." Then I glance at the clock to find that it's six AM, only to look up at the door through sleep-filled eyes and call back, "Come back in a few hours!"

"Come back in... *what?! You can't just ignore this, young lady!*" he shouts, but I'm already going back under the sheets and using my pillow to cover my ears.

Then I fall back into the comfortable confines of sleep.

---

#### *Several hours later*

I groan as I climb back to my feet from the mat, only to spit out a mouthful of blood.

Maybe going back to sleep was a bad idea.

My gaze goes towards the still-irate man who's been beating me up since I woke up in something that he calls 'sparring.' Which in reality, is nothing like the sparring I did with Sylver. This is more just him teaching me while using the chance to take his anger out on me.

Or is it the other way around?

Well either way, he's certainly enjoying our combat lessons with way too much vigor.

"You too weak to move on? Or was that level fifty-three demon knight just sitting there for you to kill?" Allen taunts me, making a vein throb in my forehead as I rush at him again. "Wrong." Only to be knocked flat on my ass again by Allen. "You leave too many openings, not to mention that you forgot to use your skills entirely in that attack. Try again."

I want. To punch. Him. Soooo badly!!

After a second of life draining him, which he learned about through Sylver and decided to use to lengthen our lessons, I climb back to my feet again and enter a ready stance, just like he and Sylver taught me.

"Good. Now again!" he shouts, and I burst forward to attack.

---

A good five hours straight of pain later, I find myself barely dragging myself into the cafeteria where I order two of everything on the menu. Because using so much blood magic was quite possibly the most hunger inducing thing I've ever done.

It doesn't help that he didn't let me have much time for lunch earlier either.

Also, is it just me, or is everyone sending me looks of pity?

I look around for a second to find everyone hurriedly turning away and focusing on their food.

My eyes narrow.

Definitely something going on here, but I'm too tired to figure out what.

I sit at what's become my regular table in the corner before lying my head on the table as I wait for my food to arrive. And only a few seconds later, I hear footsteps approaching. But at the same time, I don't smell any food. So I raise my head to see who it is, just to find Michael approaching me without any food or anything, really. And he's still in his uniform.

"Why do you always wear your uniform?" I mutter while resting my head on my arms on top of the table.

Michael looks down for a second before looking at me and answering, "Well, the status it grants me when I'm out of the Association and the university campus. That and the magi-tech in it."

I blink in surprise, raising my head slightly.

"It has magi-tech?" I mutter, a little bit more curious about the uniform.



The nature magic Guardian looks at me surprised for a second before answering, “Yeah. You didn’t know? Silver Works makes the uniforms.”

My mouth parts open slightly for a second before closing again.

“Oh.” I mutter, only for the sound of food, err, the waiter approaching to grab my attention away from the man.

Somewhere in the corner of my mind I hear him chuckling as I quickly begin digging into my food the moment it’s placed in front of me.

I can ask Allen later what the magi-tech in the uniforms do. For now, filling my empty stomach is more important.

Time seems to freeze as I practically devour all of the food in front of me before I make my way through towards my suite. And after sluggishly closing and locking the entrance, I walk over to my room, then flop on my bed, not bothering with a shower this time. Because that would be more effort, and we can’t have that.

I let out a sigh of relief the moment my face hits the pillow, and I don’t even bother taking my jacket off to sleep, just like the first day I got here.

Out of the corner of my eye, I notice Tar appearing and tugging the blanket over me.

“Thank you...” I mutter, my eyes drooping before fully closing.

The number of times he told me not to push myself, and now he’s doing this to me?

Must be karma.

It’s got to be.

“**Just go to sleep,**” Tar says as I feel him lying next to me. So I hug him while going to sleep.

## Chapter 47

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### The Library

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#### Scarlet

I can’t help but groan and curse at the same time as I am woken up by my door opening to a robot entering. But by the time I bring my head out from under the sheets to look, the robot is already gone, with two bagged uniforms lying on the floor of my room.

Oh. Right. The uniforms for Lion’s Heart.

Why can’t these people find a better time to barge in anyways?

I glance at the clock to find that it's 7:30AM. Which isn't as bad as the jerk from yesterday.

Turning my attention back to the uniforms, I get up from my bed with a grunt before grabbing them both and putting them on my bed, where I leave them to get ready for the day. Then, after doing that, I come back to them again.

I stare at them for several seconds, only to shrug and leave my suite, locking the door behind me.

Time to check out the library.

As I walk across the base – only getting myself lost once in the process – I notice that everyone is acting rather tense. Which in hindsight makes sense, considering that it's been a few days since a Demonic Assault. So another one is bound to happen either today or tomorrow.

That thought shakes out any of the sleepiness that was lingering in my head as I come upon the library, which is rather large. Practically the size of one of the biggest libraries in a Tier 3 city, or a public library in a Tier 2 city.

I walk inside, briefly taking a moment to take in the massive size of the place before focusing on the lady standing behind the counter, who is also looking at me now.

"Welcome, Scarlet Wolf! How may I help you today?" she asks, sounding incredibly polite. Which just makes her use of my title feel even worse.

But I guess I better get used to it as it sounds like it's gonna stick.

The woman looks to be in her early to mid-forties, with brown hair and a warm, motherly face. She's wearing a red blouse and a black pair of pants, with a watch on one arm and several books stacked up next to her on the counter.

"I was wondering if you had any books on Guardian Laws?" I ask while glancing around the library, only to turn my head back to her again when she answers, "Of course! Only the best for the Silver Association Guardians after all!"

That statement makes me cringe a little inside.

"Joey! Go get the Basics of Guardian Law, by Jonathan Legrange, the Introduction to Guardians, by Rachel Whiteford, and The Differences Between Human Law and Guardian Law, by Andrew Smith!" the lady shouts at some young kid who immediately scurries off to the left side of the library. "They're in the Guardian-Government section!"

When the boy doesn't stop running, she shouts, "It's in the other end you dolt!"

That gets the boy to turn around rather quickly.

I can't help but wonder if the boy is this lady's son or something, but before I can so much as ponder over that, she turns back to me and asks, "By any chance, do you like reading?"

"Uh," I stutter for a second before answering, "Yes. Why do you ask?"

She leans against the counter while tilting her head ever so slightly as she says, "Oh, just wondering if I'd be seeing you again on a regular basis or not. It's always nice to find new readers here! Especially amongst the Guardians!"

Actually, that reminds me.

"I know that there are a lot of non-Guardians on the base as well as the Guardians, but why is that?" I ask the question that's been burning in my mind since I arrived. Just that I never had the time to ask.

She doesn't actually look surprised as she answers, "Everyone who works here is from Silver Works, and we have all been vetted by either Sage or Cipher himself, proving that we're trustworthy enough to work here."

My eyebrows rise at that quick answer.

"Guess other new Guardians have asked the same question?" I ask, genuinely curious.

"Hit it right on the nose," she says, a grin breaking out on her face. Only for the grin to drop as she turns to look at the kid and shouts, "What's takin ya?!"

As if summoned by her shout, the boy comes running with three books in his hand of varying sizes. He then tries to hand him to the lady, only for her to point him at me. But he seems to grow shy once he gets near me, even blushing just from looking at my face.

I reach out and take the book before thanking him and the lady and walking over to find a nice spot to read. Which I soon find to be a comfortable reclining chair next to a window on the second floor of the library.

Very nice place to read indeed.

I spread the three books out on my lap as I recline the chair back and stretch the legs of it outwards. The thickest of the three books is titled Basics of Guardian Law, whereas the other two are both about the same size. But I decide to go ahead and start out with Introduction to Guardians, because a refresher never hurts. Especially when this probably has more information about being a Guardian than the school taught us.

The moment I turn the cover though, I find the words 'The Saviors of Humanity' written in large print on the first page.

Guess I know where the author of this book stands on the Guardians.

There are multiple standpoints, with some researchers and critics believing them to be the saviors of humanity, and others believing us to be rather sinful, and not much better than the demons. A sort of necessary evil, since we have power, and there are more than a few Guardians who tend to lord that power over the non-Guardians. In fact, some even over other Guardians who happen to be weaker.

It's rather sad to be honest.

I flip to the next page and begin reading the book.

## Chapter 48

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### Guardian Law

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#### Scarlet

As it turns out, there really is some stuff I hadn't read about before in the book. Or learned in general.

Such as the origin of why Guardians started becoming celebrities in the first place. Which in hindsight should've been rather obvious.

After all, people needed hope when they were faced with what they saw as the end of times, and making Guardians – people with supernatural abilities that fight off their worst nightmares – into public figures for everyone to look up to makes perfect sense. It brings that spark of hope needed by the people.

And the Guardians get fame, fortune, and opportunity in return for being put on a pedestal. So it's a win-win situation.

It was never really specified in class. Just the fact that it happened and some of the important developments in Guardian Society throughout the last two centuries.

Nothing else in the book is new to me though. Just stuff about the Guardian's competitive nature towards each other, the bare bones about what the public understands about spirits, the specifics behind out status and the stuff that was already explained to me by Tar.

In the end I close the book and move onto the next one. Basics of Guardian Law.

The very first page specifies the exact laws that are the most important and that every Guardian should know.

1. **The Assault Obstruction Act** – *Obstruction of a Guardian from entering a Fracture of any Class by anyone except another Guardian is prohibited by the law and is grounds for a year's sentence in prison.*
2. **The Guardian Assault Obstruction Act** – *Obstruction of a Guardian from entering a Fracture of the same Class as themselves by another Guardian is prohibited by the law and is grounds for a severe fine defined by the government unless said entering Guardian does not own a certification granted by attending a Guardian University.*
3. **The Rightful Earnings Act** – *All Guardians are to be paid fairly by the government office for each Fracture they clear out or assist in clearing out based on an amount determined by a randomly selected jury of citizens and past payments to other Guardians as a whole made for that each Class of Fracture.*

4. **The Association Act** – *Guardians may create an Association of their own with the permission of one of the Heroic Guardian's or every member of the Council of Governor's. These Associations may take in other Guardians, train them, acquire and distribute their Fracture payments, and act as partially responsible for the Guardians during their stay in the Association.*
5. **The Lawful Associations Act** – *Associations must pay their Guardians at least 90% of their earnings from the Fractures they specifically help clear out, in addition to whatever their pay would be for working under the Association's employ.*
6. **The Guardian's Law Act** – *Any criminal charge applied to a Guardian is to be taken under consideration in a court of law and decided upon whether it should be redacted or reduced based on that Guardian's circumstances.*

Huh. I actually didn't know about the last three laws at all. They of course taught us about the first three acts, but I guess it makes sense that they wouldn't just go around telling people that a Guardian could get off Scott-free for breaking a law that a regular person would be sentenced to years in jail for. Or even just fined for breaking one that would lead to a life sentence for a regular person if the Guardian is important enough to society.

I do feel as if I remember hearing rumors about a couple of Guardians breaking the law and then having it covered up for them or something.

As for the fourth act? The Associations? I knew about them but not what exactly they entail. Just that most Guardians join an Association because it benefits them to work together in a lot of Fractures rather than working alone. And Associations come with a stable pay and other benefits.

Like this base for example.

I continue reading, but the first several chapters are literally just going over the laws I just read. Pointing out every detail about them, going over their origins, and even covering some court cases that they were used in.

All rather boring stuff, but I make sure to read through it once at least before moving on.

I can study that later for university.

After those chapters, there are a few dozen other laws specified towards Guardians. But none of them are really that relevant. So it makes sense that they'd ignore them.

I also notice that there are very few laws protecting a Guardian's privacy. Which is rather stupid, but I do at least understand that they're trying to make Guardians into public celebrities. And having extra laws to protect their privacy might hinder that, especially considering that Guardians are generally far strong enough to protect themselves.

After all, humans will never be anywhere near as strong as a Guardian. Nor as wealthy.

Also, from my understanding, the majority of Associations tend to do some less than legal cleaning of the internet, if what Allen told me is true.

He also mentioned that the government overlooks it since it's part of their powers, and they don't want to piss off the Guardians.

**“You humans sure love making such complicated laws,”** Tar suddenly says, having apparently been paying attention as I read.

Well, how do you fae organize your society if you don’t have them?

I feel a vague sense of confusion from Tar before he simply states, **“The King makes all of the important decisions. And if he doesn’t care about it, then it’s left to the council to do what they believe he would do if he did care.”**

Wait. So the fae have a tyrant as a ruler?

Wow.

Did not expect that.

**“And now you see why it’s so important to select the right heir to the throne,”** Tar says while appearing in the air in front of me despite us being in the public before he floats down and lands on my lap. **“If the wrong heir is chosen, things could go horribly wrong in our realm. Although it shouldn’t affect you, since the fae still need humans and demons to contract in order to nourish themselves.”**

Huh. That’s rather sad.

**“Yes, that it is,”** Tar replies in his usual robotic tone of voice. But somehow I think I sense a hint of sadness inside of it despite that.

Anyways, time to move onto the next book.

## Chapter 49

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### The Hotel Fracture Part I

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#### Scarlet

The third book really isn’t much use in the end. All it does is go over the specific differences in how the laws apply to a human compared to a Guardian. But I do feel like it could be something that might be tested over in a class, so I make sure to read it all anyways.

By the time I finish reading it and look out the window, I realize that it’s already the afternoon, and my stomach is growling rather loudly. So I grab the three books and head off to turn them back in before going to the cafeteria and grabbing some food.

Several minutes into my meal though, I hear someone approaching my table. And when I look up, I find it to be Sylver who doesn’t seem to be all that happy.

“I’ve been looking for you for hours now,” he states, irritation clear in his tone. “Where have you been?”

I stare at him for a few seconds before answering, "I was reading up on Guardian Law in the library."

That seems to surprise him for a second, following which he lets out a sigh. "The library. Of course."

"So, why did you need me?" I ask before digging into my food again, occasionally glancing at him in the process.

He watches me eat with an incredulous look on his face as he says, "Your father told me to train you today since he couldn't make the time to do it."

I finish chewing the food I'm eating right now and mutter, "Oh."

Sylver watches me eat for a few more seconds then sighs and sits down at the table. "I'll just wait for you to finish eating then."

Cool.

In hindsight I should've expected Allen to be too busy to train me and teach me on a daily basis. He is after all the CEO of one of the most successful companies in the world, and the leader of a powerful Association. Which comes with a lot of responsibilities.

**"You're not even going to comment on his calling Allen your father this time?"** Tar asks out of curiosity.

No point. Everyone just keeps doing it anyways since it's clear that Allen thinks of me that way. So why bother correcting it every time?

It'd just get old fast.

Time passes and soon enough, Sylver looks incredibly bored. That is until right before I finish eating, when a shattering sound resonates throughout the city and the air itself becomes tainted red.

Practically everyone shoots to their feet as a siren then begins echoing across the city, marking the beginning of another Demonic Assault.

"Everyone, begin preparations for the Assault as you wait for your assigned Fractures," Sage's voice echoes from the intercom, just as emotionless as always. "They will be sent to you through your terminals shortly."

The intercom beeps as it's shut off, leaving me frowning at the mention of a terminal.

"You haven't gotten yours yet," Sylver says as he taps the thing on over the forearm of his clothes. Then he reaches up and taps on the amulet he's wearing, making it transform into a full body magi-tech suit. "Your orders should be going through my terminal as well."

As if summoned by his words, his terminal flashes and Sage's voice echoes out of it, "Sylver and Scarlet, you are both to head to The Ancient Dragon 5 Star Hotel to deal with the Class I Fracture there."

Sylver immediately begins grimacing again, likely at being stuck 'babysitting' again. But this time it goes away as he turns to me with a blank expression and says, "Well, let's go."

I make a sour face at the thought of riding on a hover cycle with him again.

---

I'm left gawking for a second in front of the massive building that is apparently a five star hotel by the time we make it to the Fracture. The thing stands at what must be a hundred floors with a giant dragon snaking up the building in what I believe is the pre-world Eastern style of dragon? The one that looks more like a snake with wings than a dragon. A big snake with wings.

"Snap out of it," Sylver says, breaking me from my stupor to find him dismissing the hover cycle and walking over to the building's grand looking entrance. "Sage says that the core we've detected in the building is on the rooftop penthouse, where the building was apparently hosting a massive party. Meanwhile the building itself is giving off Class I signals."

I quickly follow after him to the entrance as he continues talking, "This time I'll be leaving you to clear your way past each floor upwards as I skip through the stairs to the higher levels. Unlike the last Fracture, the majority of the people are in the top floors of the building, making the rest of the floors have much lower chances at casualties."

Without hesitating, we both pass straight through the active shield into the hotel, following which he makes a break past the demons in the entry hall to head towards the stairs. Meanwhile I take a second to focus on the demons themselves.

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Panther – Level 2 |**

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Panther – Level 3 |**

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Panther – Level 2 |**

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Panther – Level 4 |**

**| Demon Spawn – Subspecies: Panther – Level 4 |**

There aren't any hounds on the floor, with the only type of demon here being panthers. And they're all quite weak in terms of level compared to the last demons I faced.

The panther spawn themselves are honestly a little similar looking to the hounds. But as panthers instead of hounds. They have black fur with streaks of some red going through the black, along with glowing red eyes that honestly remind me a little of my own eyes.

Without wasting any time, I immediately use blood boil on half of them, drawing their attention to me as that half begins whimpering and falling to the ground with small bubbles of crimson blood popping on their skin, soaking their fur in the process and painting the black parts crimson. After that, I activate my claws on both hands and rush in, focusing hard in order to use the new combat moves Sylver and Allen taught me on the creatures before I eventually move on to demons that can actually prove more of a challenge.

## Chapter 50



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## The Hotel Fracture Part II

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Sylver continues rushing through the building stairs, taking them two at a time and only occasionally stopping to slaughter the demons along the way. But as he makes his way further up the building, he eventually realizes just how powerful the demons are getting and slows down a little bit.

*It's only the fortieth floor, and there are already level sixties? Shouldn't they be higher up if this is a Class I...*

His eyes widen in shock as he mutters, "Oh shit."

In a rush to confirm his theory, Silver speeds up his stair climbing to leaping from the bottom of each staircase to the top without wasting any time until he eventually runs into a Class II, level 102 Demon Fomorian. The creature has a humanoid form with grayish green scales coating its entire body, a set of worn out looking leather armor, and the head of a crocodile with a sword as equally worn out looking as its armor.

"Fuck!" he shouts before jumping around the creature's sword to throw a bolt of silver lightning at its back, which he follows up shortly by extending a blade from the armor at his wrist and stabbing it into the creature's neck. Sylver then reaches out and taps a few times on the terminal on his arm, sending a call out that is quickly accepted by Sage. "This is not a Class I Fracture! I repeat! This is *not* a Class I Fracture!"

Sage's face changes from her usually indifferent one to show surprise before her eyes narrow and she asks, "A Hidden Core?"

Sylver nods his head as he starts running up the stairs again.

A couple seconds pass with the only noise being that of the demons in the building and his feet touching the stairs until it's broken by Sage eventually saying, "Confirmed. On second diagnosis of the building, Class II signatures can be read from floor seventy and up. And on further analysis and inquiries to the floors surrounding the suspected location of the Class I core, we have confirmed that a bunker was indeed sealed by a panicked individual after they saw demons attempting to leave the bunker. However, the individual felt too guilty to come forward about it until asked, and it was therefore left unreported until now."

The man nods his head, "Thanks," before ending the call, slaughtering another fomorian, and then pausing.

*Scarlet is left down there unknowing of the other core...*

He frowns as he looks back down the stairs, only to shake his head and continue climbing upwards anyways.

*She can handle herself if it's just the first half of a Class I Fracture.*

Despite that thought, he does send a drone back down the stairs without stopping, with the drone having the orders to relay a message to her.

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### **Scarlet**

The first four floors don't take long to clear of demons as all there are on them are the level ones through level fives, and I can hear every last one thanks to my ears.

I don't stop moving until I reach the fifth floor, where I pause at the stairs to ask, "Show me my System messages please." And the System immediately does as asked, showing a pretty impressive list of messages, most of which are from me killing lower leveled demons.

**{Level 3 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x14**

**{Level 1 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x20**

**{Level 2 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x21**

**{Level 4 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x10**

**{Level 5 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x7**

**{One Skill Point is awarded for killing a demon.} x39**

**{Ten Skill Points are awarded for killing over one hundred demons total. Skill Points will no longer be earned through killing demons ten or more levels beneath your own.}**

**{Ten Skill Points are awarded for killing ten each of three or more different types of Demon Spawn.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 16. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 17. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**[Skill 'Blood Siphon' has leveled up to level 3.]**

**[Skill 'Life Drain' has leveled up to level 2.]**

I can't help but grin at the pleasant feeling of raising my stats after using the free points before opening my status to check out my stats and total skill points.

**NAME:**

**SPECIES:**

**AGE:**

**MAGIC:**

**LEVEL:**

**SP:**

Scarlet Asger	Human/Blood Lycan Hybrid	19	Blood	17	103
<b>STATS:</b>					
Physical:	49	Mental:	45	Magical:	47
Physical/Level:	2	Mental/Level:	1	Magical/Level:	2
Free Points:	0	Mana:	501/1,057.5	Free Points/Level:	2
<b>ACTIVE SKILLS:</b>					
Blood Claws	Allows the user to coat their hands with claws of blood. The blood used in the skill is either created through the user's mana, drained from the body of whatever the user has their claws in, or drawn from the user's body.	Skill Level:		3	
Blood Siphon	Allows the user to drain the blood of nearby creatures and use it for various purposes, including transfusing the user's or others blood or infusing the blood into the blood claws skill and other possible skills.	Skill Level:		3	
Life Drain	Allows the user to drain the life energy of nearby creatures into themselves, healing them in the process. Costs mana to use.	Skill Level:		2	
...					
<b>PASSIVE SKILLS</b>					
Predator IV	It grants the user a 20% boost in stats when fighting a creature at a higher level than themselves.	Skill Level:		Static	

Yes! I broke one hundred skill points!!!

I quickly rush to open my Skill Store, only for Tar's voice to resound in my head before I can do so.

**"Didn't you decide to wait before using your skill points to see if you'd get anything at a higher rarity?"**

A frown appears on my face at that, but when I open my mouth to respond, I end up closing it again at the sight of a drone flying through the staircase before stopping right in front of me.

"Message for Scarlet Asger, the Scarlet Wolf. Message for Scarlet Asger, the Scarlet Wolf. Message for--"

"Okay, I got it already! Just tell me the message!" I tell the thing while slamming my fist on top of the circular drone, making it shut up for a second before beginning to replay whatever message it has.

“Sage has confirmed that this is not a Class I Fracture as we were led to believe. I repeat. This is not a Class I Fracture.” Sylver’s voice echoes out of the drone, making my eyes widen at the gravity of the situation. “Sage has informed me that reinforcements won’t be arriving for another two hours, as many of them were sent to deal with a nearby Class III Fracture. Hold out until the reinforcements, and do not push too far towards the Class I core on the fiftieth floor of the building.”

After saying its peace, the drone suddenly starts flying back up the stairs again, leaving me on the fifth floor staring after it.

“Well, shit,” I mutter.

## Chapter 51

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### The Hotel Fracture Part III

#### Scarlet

“I think you need new skills. Now,” Tar says, appearing in front of me with his tanuki arms crossed.

I nod my head and open up the skill store, only to find my eyes widening at the sight of a couple of new and very nice looking skills.

<b>SKILL NAME:</b>	<b>ACHIEVEMENT REQUIREMENTS:</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION:</b>	<b>TYPES:</b>	<b>RARITY:</b>	<b>SP PRICE:</b>
<u>Blood Thirst</u>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a higher level than you by at least fifty levels, by killing at least one hundred demons, by entering a Class II Fracture before level twenty, by killing over one hundred demons within your first week of contracting, and having achieved all of these requirements while at Class I.	On account of the user’s absolute blood thirst and utter lack of a self-preservation instinct, you have learned to grow stronger through each kill.  This skill passively increases all of the user’s statistics by a flat 0.5% bonus for each enemy slain for a period of one minute after their death. This effect is stackable.	Passive	Legendary	60
<u>Life Energy Transfer</u>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a higher level than you by at least ten levels, by	A healing skill that allows the user to transfer life energy to	Active	Rare	20

	being level fifteen or higher, by draining the life energy of at least ten different creatures, and by having blood magic.	another being in order to heal them.			
<u>Blood Bank</u>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a higher level than you by at least ten levels, by being level fifteen or higher, by having siphoned off or manipulated the blood of over ten creatures including your own, and by having blood magic.	A storage skill that allows the user to store the blood of either themselves or other creatures in the void for use at a later time.	Active	Rare	20
<u>Blood Sacrifice</u>	Unlocked through killing a demon at a higher level than you by at least ten levels, by being level ten or above, by almost dying once, by hurting yourself to enhance a blood skill, and by having blood magic.	A sacrificial skill that allows the user to burn their own blood in order to get a temporary boost in their physical capabilities.	Active	Rare	20
...					

Both Tar and I stare at the legendary skill for several seconds. Then Tar just bursts out into laughter.

When faced with my scowl, he just explains mid laughs, **“Even the System’s making fun of your recklessness!!”**

I continue scowling at him for a few seconds before letting out a huff and turning back to the store box again.

Should I buy it or-

**“Yes.”** He answers right away without a hint of hesitation, ending his laughter at the same time.

I blink in surprise.

That was fast.

**“You do not waste time when getting Legendary skills,”** he explains as if it were some universal law. **“Also, to explain that note in the skill’s description, the skills begin to have a bit more flavor in their descriptions when you get to the legendary and mythic skills.”**

Oh. So it wasn’t just the System making fun of *me* personally then.

That’s good to know.

I purchase the legendary skill without another thought, leaving me with 43 more SP remaining. Of which I decide to spend on Blood Bank to store the blood of the demons I slay so that I can use it for my claws later on. And the last 23 SP I decide to go ham on leveling up the new legendary skill.

Tar is briefly surprised by that but doesn't seem against it. Probably because it's a legendary skill.

**[Skill 'Blood Thirst' has leveled up to level 2.]**

**[Skill 'Blood Thirst' has leveled up to level 3.]**

**[Skill 'Blood Thirst' has leveled up to level 4.]**

Interesting. It cost only 3 SP to level up Blood Boil once, but it cost 5 SP to level up Blood Thirst once, then 7 to do it again, and 9 to do it again. Taking up an entire 21 SP just for three levels.

**"That's because the higher the rarity of the skill, the more expensive it is to level up,"** Tar explains before adding, **"Check the skill again."**

And so I do, only to find that the amount of time each stack of the skill lasts has been extended to 1 minute and ten seconds.

Nice.

**"If I had to guess, then I'd say it should have an increase in the percentage that each stack increases your stats by in the next level. On every fifth level."**

Now that sounds very nice.

This skill really does sound incredibly useful. At least, when I'm fighting large numbers of enemies that is.

Not all that useful outside of that though.

**"Don't complain about a legendary skill,"** Tar berates me with frustration obvious in his usually robotic voice. **"Other Guardians would kill to get one of those."**

Yeah, yeah.

It will certainly help while I'm clearing these floor of demons at least.

I quickly check my status again to see how much my mana has regenerated before closing it again at the sight of it having gone up by about twenty-one points in the short break we've taken. Which in hindsight isn't very much.

Any chance I can find a skill later on that'll increase my mana regeneration?

**"That's probable, yes. I also wouldn't be surprised if you found a skill to convert life energy into mana or something like that,"** Tar answers while floating into the air.

That could work. Because my mana regeneration isn't fast enough to slaughter my way through all of these monsters.

**“Well look at the bright side,” Tar says. “That legendary skill you were complaining about will also increase your mana by somewhere between thirty to fifty points per stack.”**

My eyes widen in shock at that.

By the stars, are you serious?! If I can keep the bonus going...

**“Right. As long as you keep killing demons back to back, Blood Thirst will keep increasing your mana in a sort of temporary mana storage, making your skills only draw out of that before it vanishes again,” Tar explains, making me finally realize why this skill is so amazing. “With this you could farm weaker demons all night long with very little time spent regenerating your mana.”**

Okay. I love this skill.

I can't help the wide grin that splits across my face as I run into the floor proper, straight at the level three Spawn I find near the entryway. And before it can react to me, my speed from having fourteen levels on it making me too fast for it to notice at first, I activate my blood claws and dig them straight into the creature's neck, draining the blood inside. Then a message appears in my vision.

**[Blood Thirst Effect applied. Stack is now 1]**

My grin grows even wider.

## Chapter 52

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### The Hotel Fracture Part IV

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#### Scarlet

Who knows how much time passes as I slaughter my way through the fifth through tenth floors, not even stopping to talk to the few people I do once in a blue moon find as it would only waste my stacks. But eventually I do have to stop since despite the nice effect on my mana that Blood Thirst has, the drain on my mana from fighting is still greater than the stacks in the end, albeit only by a little bit. So in the end I do run out and have to take a break.

I lean up against the window as I let all of the System messages flow by.

**{Level 3 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x29**

**{Level 1 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x11**

**{Level 2 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x14**

**{Level 4 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x23**

**{Level 5 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x12**

**{Level 6 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x4**

**{Level 7 Demon Spawn defeated. An EXP penalty has been extracted for killing a creature below your level.} x5**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 18. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**{Congrats, you have leveled up to level 19. Two Free Points have been awarded to you and your stats have been updated.}**

**[Skill 'Blood Claws' has leveled up to level 4.]**

**[Skill 'Life Drain' has leveled up to level 3.]**

Well, there goes my Skill Points.

**"I did tell you at one point that Skill Points would become harder to come by at later levels,"** Tar says while simply looking out the window at the moon.

Yeah, that you did. I'm rather surprised we haven't run into any hounds yet though.

**"We will likely start running into them soon,"** Tar says before floating down and sitting on the ground. **"I'm willing to bet we'll be seeing some huntsmen soon as well."**

I groan at the thought as I remember the feeling of being struck by a huntsmen's crossbow bolt.

That was not fun. Not in the slightest.

But on the bright side, it also means I should be getting Skill Points again soon.

Whether I want to spend those points on leveling up my skills or just buy another skill is an important question though.

**"I'd recommend getting your current levelable skills to level five before going to get more again, since if you keep that up you'll never level your purchased skills,"** Tar advises, giving me a flat look from the ground next to me. One that looks rather adorable given his furry nature.

Yeah. Right. Makes sense.

Oh, right. While we're waiting for my mana to regenerate, I was wanting to ask this for a while.

**"What is it?"** Tar asks, tilting his head.



Well, from my understanding, humans drain the life force of the demons they kill. But if that's the case, then why does the System say 'Bonus EXP' or 'EXP Penalty' when we get a message about killing something?

Tar looks surprised for a second before he answers **"I guess you could say it's because the System is processing the life force into you in a way. And it takes some of that life force for itself, giving you only a portion of it, which you give a small portion of to me. But when you do something extraordinary, like fighting something that is a lot stronger than you, the System tends to reward you for it by giving a larger portion. And it's the same with the penalties, with it punishing you for killing something weaker than you."**

I stare at Tar for a few seconds before muttering, "So it's like the System is playing us all like a video game... just pulling our strings?"

Tar nods his head. **"That's a fair assumption. But we fae don't believe the System is actually sentient. From our understanding, it was created to be this way by the original Fae Ruler, who is long since passed by now."**

Oh. Wait, I thought Oberon was the original King of the Fae?

**"Oh, no."** Tar responds, sounding a little bit reverent of his king and father. **"My father has been the king ever since the first Demonic Assault two hundred years ago, but before that, it was Queen Titania who ruled over the fae. And it was Her Majesty that created the System in the first place before passing away."**

Huh. That's interesting.

You also sound like you respect this queen Titania?

Tar immediately nods his head, showing a rare smile on his tanuki face as he gushes, **"Oh, yes! Titania was amazing as a Queen! She was fair to all of her people and let the fae do as they pleased, giving us absolute freedom before father took over!"**

I blink in surprise.

Wait, so your father took away the freedom she gave with his tyranny, yet you still respect him?

**"Of course. He's my father, and he is the most powerful of all the fae by leagues and bounds,"** Tar says, defending his father with a frown. **"What's not to respect?"**

I stare at the tanuki for a few seconds before rubbing my temples.

This is starting to give me a headache.

**"What is?"** Tar asks, making my headache grow worse.

Oh, nothing much.

I think we just have vastly different ideas of what's normal and what's respectable.

**“Oh,”** the tanuki mutters, seemingly growing contemplative as he lies back with his head resting against my thigh. **“Come to think of it, you seem to dislike physical contact with others, but also seem fine with me lying down on you. Why is that?”**

I blink in surprise at the sudden shift in topic.

Well, because you’re a cute tanuki. No other reason.

The tanuki in question sits up and glares at me as he complains, **“But I’m not a tanuki. I’m a fae, and my form in-”**

You’re a tanuki. It doesn’t matter if you look like a blue human in your realm, you’re a tanuki here, and that’s all that matters tanuki.

Tar grumbles about something, but I just chuckle as I lie my head up against the window, simply waiting for my mana to regenerate.

## Intermission

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### **Inside of the Grand Mall located a few blocks down from the Ancient Dragon Five Star Hotel**

Cipher crashes through the fourth floor of the Grand Mall, falling down into the skating rink while wrestling with a level 500 Demon Enforcer, the leader of the Class III Fracture that he’s inside of right now. And the moment they both shatter the skating rink, chains of ice shoot up from the ground to bind the demon in place for Cipher to bring pull his fist back and smash it straight into its draconic, armored face, shattering the armor covering it.

The creature lets out a loud screech of pain, but continues pushing against the ice, occasionally causing a chain to break in the process. Meanwhile Cipher continues sending blow after blow across the demons body, a blue energy beginning to build up around his fist in the process with each new blow until he opens his palm and slaps it straight on the demon’s chest, making a powerful blue blaze shoot out of it to engulf the demon entirely.

After the blaze fades away, so does the demon, leaving the melted ice beneath the two as water as Cipher catches himself on his knees with heavy breaths of exhaustion.

“Ya know, for a Class IV Guardian, you sure are lacking in the brute force strength if you’re struggling to kill a level 500 demon,” a female voice echoes through the skating rink as footsteps sound off of the ice, following which a woman with black hair streaked with a pale blue walks right up to Cipher. The woman is wearing a very similar set of magi-tech armor as Cipher and is looking down at him while taunting.

“Ha ha ha, very funny,” Cipher mutters while rising to his feet. “If you’re done joking around, we still have some unfinished business.”

Frost nods her head and creates a bridge made of ice down the railing at the edge of the viewing portion of the floor all the way to the first floor, where the core was previously covered by a cage of

thick black bars of some sort of metal. But now that the demon enforcer has been vanquished, it is exposed to a simple spear of ice that Frost sends flying through it.

“That makes one core down,” CIPHER says while stretching his arms after walking across her bridge after her. “How about we go out for eat with Belle after this assault?”

Frost glances at her husband with a brow raised, “No Scarlet?”

At the mention of the girl, CIPHER gets a strained look to his face. “I have the distinct feeling that she’s going to be too busy sleeping to want to come along.”

*Not to mention avoiding you.*

“Oh. That’s a pity,” Frost says, making CIPHER flinch, “I wanted to give her a big hug for making it into Lion’s Heart!”

*And that’s why she avoids you.*

“Well, anyways, dinner sounds wonderful!” Frost says, the sad look that had graced her face at the thought of not seeing Scarlet being replaced by a happy one. “Where should we go?”

CIPHER opens his mouth to answer, only to pause as his terminal rings. He closes his mouth again, holding up a single finger before answering the call to find Sage on the screen.

“The Class II Fracture at the Grand Arena has been ended, along with the Class II Fracture at the Central Subway Station. But the Class III Fracture located at City Hall is still going strong and needs backup. Please head there once you are able to.”

The man glances at his wife with a grimace, who raises an eyebrow in amusement at his subordinate seemingly ordering him around.

*She’s gonna give me grief about that later, isn’t she?*

He sighs after a second before responding, “Affirmative. How’s Scarlet doing?”

Sage doesn’t answer right away, making CIPHER narrow his eyes with suspicion since she always answers right away.

After hearing Scarlet’s name, Frost walks up to the two and looks over CIPHER’s shoulder at the screen on his terminal, only to find Sage frowning. A rare expression for the woman to make.

“Sage,” Frost growls with a scowl. “Answer the question.”

The woman looks at Frost with a slightly fearful expression before immediately answering, “The Class I Fracture the young miss and Sylver were sent to turned out to be a Class II Fracture with a hidden Class I core. Meanwhile we have not been able to send any reinforcements over there way, leaving the two to deal with it on their own until reinforcements free up from the other Fractures.”

Before Sage can even finish speaking, icy mist begins leaking from Frost’s pores, freezing the ground and making CIPHER shiver a little in the process as she asks, “And you didn’t report this to your superior because?”

Even the seer shivers at the sight of Frost's rage as she answers, "I received a prophecy. One of which implied that she would have good fortune if she were to be able to hold out on her own. And if I were to report it immediately, not only would you rush your current Fracture to go help her, putting the survivors of the Fracture in harm's way, but I believed it would stunt her growth, therefore leading to a decrease in her value to the Asso-"

A vast wave of ice shoots out from Frost as her rage reaches new heights, making Cipher wince as the cold affects him. But fortunately for him, his wife manages enough control over it to avoid hurting him as despite her lower level, she is very much a combat focused Guardian, unlike him.

*Fucking hell...*

Before she can even say anything, Cipher scolds Sage, "You do not get to make decisions such as these. If you do this again, you will be sentenced to grunt work for a year, with your pay decreased along with it. I will also see that your parents are made aware of this."

Sage grimaces at the list of punishments before declaring, "Very well, sir."

"Make sure you send the first Class II Guardian who becomes available to her location as soon as possible," Cipher orders her, cutting the call immediately after to find Frost glaring at him. "Yes, I know. Dinner is canceled."

## Chapter 53

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### The Hotel's Sponsor Part I

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#### Scarlet

After spending about an hour or so letting my mana regenerate back to halfway full – which was helped by me raising my mental stat again with free points and therefore increasing my mana – I begin to make my way through the eleventh floor. But not even a few minutes in, I start to hear the cries of a child along with panicked screams of a few adults somewhere down the hall. So I begin running in that direction, clearing out the two spawn panthers that try to stop me along the way.

Soon enough, I find a huntsmen aiming his crossbow at three adults and a young girl who looks to be only about six or seven years old.

#### **| Demon Huntsmen – Level 15 |**

My eyes narrow as I find the huntsmen's fingers gravitating over the trigger, about to fire before I use blood boil on it, making the creature's blood begin to boil beneath the surface as it cries out in pain and staggers, making it just barely miss its shot. The bolt going straight into the wall next to one of the adult's – a woman who is currently hugging onto the child – head.