Rebound volume 3

B.I.B.L.E. Comics script

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1.

Balthazar and the police officer that has been assigned to his case are standing on a rocky ledge in a desert landscape on Balthazar’s home world Halashin. From the ledge they have an overview of a run-down looking town.

Balthazar has his enchanted sword and a couple of bags with various necessities with him. The feathers on his colorful wings have already started to fall off and be replaced by black ones after he received his equally black halo. His newly acquired status as a fallen angel is already obvious.

**Police officer:** “Are you certain you want to stay on Halashin?”

**Balthazar:** “No place like home.”

**Police officer:** “There isn’t much to do on a regular mortal world like this.”

**Balthazar:** “No... I think I need to clear my head for a while.”

**Police officer:** “I see.”

Balthazar stays silent for a while and looks down at the town below.

**Balthazar:** “Look at this place. Not a single building has been left standing since I lived here, yet nothing has really changed. We used to fight over resources. Now everything is solar powered and there are means to put food on everyone’s tables. But there’s still soldiers patrolling here.
It doesn’t matter if it’s better interests or politics or ideology. People will always find something to squabble over.”

**Police officer:** “It must be hard to be a military general with such a bleak outlook.”

**Balthazar:** “Did you have children, officer?”

**Police officer:** “I don’t think that’s any of your concern.”

**Balthazar:** “I guess not. I taught mine to believe they could change this world, if only they wanted it enough. I still believe that. What else can you do than believe that.” He looks blankly ahead. “I’m sorry. I’m sure you have places to be.”

**Police officer:** “Don’t worry about it. I’ll meet you here in a week and brief you on your situation. Noon, local time?”

**Balthazar:** “As good a time as any.”
**Police officer:** “Make sure to be here so I have a chance to find you. Lay low and I believe you’ll be fine, General. So long.”

He gives Balthazar a genuine smile and teleports away. Balthazar does a small wave with one hand. His expression turns grim as soon as the police officer is gone.
Balthazar walks along a path that takes him from the ledge and down to the town. It seems to be a normal, uneventful day for the mangi inhabitants. Still, there is a heavy atmosphere and soldiers patrol the streets. None of the mortals can see him, so he passes through the town like a ghost.

While the sun sets, Balthazar sits on a roof, looking down at the street below, deep in thought. A couple of soldiers are dragging a woman out of a house on the other side of the street. A younger woman, maybe her daughter, runs after them screaming and crying.

Balthazar looks at the scene with a distant expression. There is nothing he can do about it anyway.

**Max:** Has landed silently on the roof, just behind Balthazar. “I'm quite offended.”

Startled, Balthazar turns around.

**Balthazar:** “Max?”

**Max:** “Not so much as a goodbye.”

**Balthazar:** Stands up. “I'm sorry... I had a lot of people I needed to talk to in a very short span of time. How did you know where I was?”

**Max:** “I didn't need to snoop in the reports to know that you'd go to Halashin. You're so predictable.”

**Balthazar:** “Heh... If now isn't the time to be a little wistful, I don't know when is.”

**Max:** “It doesn't suit you.”

He looks Balthazar up and down with the same kind of nonchalant condescension that he almost always exudes.

**Max:** “Ah, what a predicament. I told you not to talk to Lana, but here we are.”

**Balthazar:** “I don't think Lana was the one to tip the scale.”

**Max:** “I don't think you realize how much she has been vilified over the years.”

He sighs melodramatically before he continues.
Max: “I'm tired of seeing one friend after another be exiled. Heaven is getting more boring by the minute.” He looks pointedly at Balthazar. “I expect you to do something about this, not just sit around and be wistful.”

Balthazar: “Do what? I'm cut off from everyone I'd usually go to. I don't know where to start.”

Max: “Well. You could take the traditional route and waste your time striking fear into some demons as a beast buster or whatever they call you these days-”

Balthazar: “That's such a terrible nickname.”

Max: “-Yes, but it gets the point across. Or! You could be pro-active and continue what you were already doing. Find out what in all the worlds is going on. I have to say, I'm curious about that myself.”

Balthazar: “You're curious about everything.”

Max: “Is that a crime now? Nonetheless, if I can assist with anything, I'll be happy to do so.”

Balthazar looks out at the town while he thinks.

Balthazar: “Actually. Speaking of exiled friends... I was thinking about Jeremiah.”

Max looks completely confounded for a moment, realizing that Thera probably didn't tell him Jeremiah's whereabouts just to be nice. He casts his eyes down as if to gather his thoughts, then looks up at Balthazar with a more appropriate, skeptical expression.

Max: “He won't be happy to see you.” He speculates for a bit. “The idea is decent, though. With all the years he spent as a spy, he's bound to still have some connections.”

Balthazar: “Exactly. Besides... I'd just like to talk to him.”

Max: “Good luck with that. I'll... have to see what I can dig up from the archives.”

Balthazar: “Thanks, Max. Really.”
2.

Balthazar has left Halashin to travel to a sparsely inhabited open world. He is now standing in a train carriage driving through a barren steppe landscape. The train is mostly loaded with construction materials and other freight, but this particular carriage has been partially reserved for passengers.

Around Balthazar is a small assemblage of demons who all look quite uncomfortable with his presence.

**Demon child:** “Mooom, why's there an angel on the train?” She points at Balthazar.

**Demon mom:** “Shh, don't point. It's okay, sweetie. I'm sure he's a very noble and good angel.”

Balthazar looks at them with a pensive expression. The mother smiles apologetically at him before he turns around when the train comes to a halt.

**Conductor:** “Rover's Crossing, people! Hurry up and get off.” He jumps off the train himself to help unload some of the freight.

Balthazar gets off the train along with several of the other passengers. The town they have arrived at is relatively big, but still has the air of a new settler establishment and is still growing, judging by the unfinished buildings lining its outer edges.

The land around the town is mostly steppe - flat and dead.
On his way towards the center of town, Balthazar looks at the many demon inhabitants with just as much caution as they radiate at him.

He reaches a large building that mostly resembles a warehouse. There is a poorly crafted sign out front saying *Rover's Crossing - Counselling*. A demon stands outside the building and notices Balthazar coming towards him.

**Demon:** Walks inside the building. “Hey, Harvey! Featherbrain alert.” He nods towards the entrance.

A stocky, rugged looking human man reacts. Contrary to most of the people in town, he isn’t a demon, but a devil. It’s evident from his black scleras that he is the kind of devil that started out damned to Hell.1

Harvey is standing next to another demon who is sitting on a table, looking scared and worn out. He is wrapped in a blanket, but is clearly wounded and has lost an arm.

**Harvey:** “What!? I'm kinda busy here! If it ain't a buster, y'can tell 'em to take their pansy, feathery ass back to the pearly gates.”

**Demon:** “Black as Greed’s feathers, man.”

**Harvey:** To the wounded demon: “Well shit, looks like I have to go deal with this.”

**Wounded demon:** “W- Wait, no, Sherba and the others are out there all alone! We- you have to--”

**Harvey:** “C’mon now, take it easy!”

He slaps the poor demon on the wounded arm so he winces badly.

**Harvey:** “We'll find 'em alright.”

Harvey hobbles towards the door. His left leg has been amputated below the knee and is replaced by a somewhat ill-fitting prosthesis, so he isn’t very fast.

**Balthazar:** Has reached the entrance to the building. “Excuse me?”

**Harvey:** “Yes! The hell d'you want?”

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1 Harvey himself
Balthazar: “I'm... Looking for someone. I was told you know most people around here. Harvey, am I right?”

Balthazar extends a hand to Harvey in an attempt to be polite. He glares back at Balthazar with no intention of shaking it.

Harvey: “Y'know, we don't take very kindly to angels here. Never know what your kind’re getting at. Hehh, 'specially someone fresh dumped outta the heavens like yourself.”

Balthazar: “Wh--”

Harvey: “Oh I can tell, Feathers. Th'way you're prancing about like you're better'n everyone.”

He glances at one of Balthazar’s wings that still has a few colorful feathers left.

Harvey: “Haven't even dropped your shiny colors yet, general sir. Plenty of demons to murder 'round here. Why should I think you ain't just out for some cheap points?”

Balthazar: “I have to hear this from a devil? Being damned to Hell doesn't really make you the pinnacle of trustworthiness either.”

Harvey: “Ha ha ha! That's some healthy prejudice there, sonny. But you so happen to be on my land, so I wager I'm the only one in a position to throw around insults.”

He looks at Balthazar with stone cold gravity.

Balthazar: “Fine. Can we get to the part where you're helpful, then?”

It takes a while before Harvey’s unwaveringly stern face clears up a little. He smirks slowly and points a finger at Balthazar.

Harvey: “I like you, you're a snarky one, Feathers. So who's this fella you're looking for?”

Balthazar: “Another angel, actually. Fallen angel. I'm just taking wild shots, but I got a tip he might be around here. His name is Jeremiah.”

Harvey: “Hmm? You sure 'bout that?”

Balthazar: “He's an old... friend of mine, so yes. Human, light skin... That's not much use, is it.” He thinks for a couple of seconds. “Miiight also go by the name, uh, Fluffy?”

Harvey: “Fluffy! Ha ha, shit, who knows what Jerry's real name is anyway.” His expression abruptly turns serious again. “What d'you mean old friend?”

Balthazar: “Just that.” He shrugs, not knowing what Harvey is getting at.
Harvey: “Hm. I'll trust you're alright, but I'm watching you, Feathers. You touch that boy, or anyone else here, I'll make sure your life takes an unfortunate turn.”

He laughs at the ridiculous nickname again.

Harvey: “Fluffy. Long time since I've heard that one.“

Balthazar: “I'm sorry, did you say boy?”

Harvey: “Ah, whatever, figure of speech. I think he’s older’n me to be honest. Does it really matter to old fucks like us? C'mon, get your skinny ass moving before I change my mind.”
It's still early in the day when Harvey and Balthazar walk through Rover's Crossing until they reach a row of two-story buildings that are rented out as apartments.

Harvey stops in front of the entrance to one of the buildings.

**Harvey:** “This is the spot. First floor to the left.”

**Balthazar:** “Thanks.”

Balthazar enters the building and walks up the stairs to find the apartment in question. He knocks on the door. Nobody answers, so he knocks again, harder.

After a little while, a faint grumbling can be heard from inside the apartment.

**Jerry:** “Yes, alright!”

The door opens to reveal a very tired and really quite unremarkable looking human man. He is only wearing a pair of boxers and carries a white rabbit under one arm.²

**Balthazar:** “Jeremiah.”

Jerry looks at Balthazar with an incredulous expression before he promptly slams the door in his face.

**Balthazar:** “Uh…” He stares at the door with clear frustration.

Jerry opens the door again and looks up at Balthazar’s black halo.

**Jerry:** “Whhh... No. NO! Not even going to fucking ask!” He slams the door a second time.

**Balthazar:** Looks even more bewildered and frustrated. “I just want to talk to you, okay?”

He glares at the closed door for some time before he acknowledges that he probably won’t get an answer. He shakes his head and decides to go back outside.

**Balthazar:** “What was I thinking…”

Outside, Harvey has stayed and waited in the building’s shadow.

**Harvey:** “Back already?”

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² Jerry, except dressed
Balthazar: “Why are you still here?”

Harvey: “I told you, I'm keeping an eye on you.”

Balthazar: “Well, it didn't seem like he was in a chatty mood.”

Harvey: “Eh, he'll come around.”

He walks around the building and picks up a rock off the ground, then throws it at one of the windows.

Harvey: Shouts: “Hey! Princess!”

Jerry: Opens the window and looks outright livid. “What?! Harvey, what the fuck?! I'm trying to sleep, quit throwing shit at my window!”

Harvey: “Y’got company!”

Jerry: “I'm not talking to that backstabbing asshole! I told you not to drag people over here, you're gonna get me murdered in my sleep, man!”

Jerry slams the window shut. Balthazar just stands there and looks at the scene.

Harvey: “Bah, just give him a bit of space. He's like a delicate flower, needs time and caring.” He forms a metaphorical flower with his hands and rolls his eyes.

Balthazar: Smiles a little. “Hard to work with?”

Harvey: “Y'don't have the slightest blasted idea, Feathers.”

He lets his arms drop to his sides with an irritated look on his face and staggers away from the building.

Harvey: “I'll be seeing you.” He lifts one hand in a sort of wave.

Balthazar: “Probably…”
3.

In a beautifully decorated hall, a large number of angels have gathered to attend a ceremony for a handful of newly appointed generals. Duncan is one of them.

The new generals, Councillor Xifeng and a few other officials are standing on a stage in one end of the hall. With them is an incarnation of Faith in the shape of a large, bright white wolf. Faith walks to each of the appointed angels, bends down to touch his forehead against theirs and changes their halo to the decorated, red halo of a general. Xifeng follows behind him to congratulate each of the angels.

Opal and Omar are standing among the audience. Opal is glaring at the stage.

Opal: Mutters: “I can’t stand looking at this. He might as well have wrung that halo out of Balthazar’s hands himself.”

Omar: “I know. You said it yourself, we’re just here to keep up appearances. I’ll get you out of here as soon as possible.”

Xifeng gives the new generals a small bow before turning to face the crowd. She stands there with her back straight, looking very composed. She doesn’t need to do anything more to instill silence.

Xifeng: “Congratulations to our new generals. As head of the military, I am expected to say a few words. Allow me to tell a small anecdote from my own time as a general. I was once asked to assist another group of angels who were trying to unravel why several of our soldiers had gone missing in an area of Sloth’s circle. When I and my own soldiers arrived, they were nowhere to be seen. We found them later. Speared on sticks. In pieces. The swamp demons had sold their teeth and feathers as good luck charms and been eating what was left. I had a whole area of Sloth’s land torn to the ground that day. No such vermin should be allowed to exist.”

Xifeng looks out at the crowd. Everyone looks more or less uncomfortable.

Xifeng: “Did you think it would be a funny story? There is nothing amusing about warfare or eradicating demons. That is exactly why I commend the new generals with us today. To devote so much time and energy to a responsibility that will only cause them grief. To do what is necessary to keep their fellow souls safe, and guard our way of life. That is a truly honorable pursuit. Ah, but don’t let an old, battle weary lady treat this as a funeral. It is also a day of celebration, so by all means, enjoy your party.”

Xifeng leaves the stage and, with some hesitation, conversation picks up again.
Omar: “Not exactly a crowd pleaser, is she.”

Opal isn’t listening. Her eyes follow Xifeng as she disappears into the crowd of angels. She reluctantly decides to take the chance to follow her. Omar trudges along behind her.

Opal: “Councillor Xifeng?”

Xifeng turns around and looks down at Opal, seemingly a little amused - It isn’t common for a lieutenant she doesn’t already know to have the nerve to approach her.

Xifeng: “Hello.”

Opal: Looks nervous. “I… I hope I’m not out of line, but I’m a friend of Balthazar who the Council decided to banish not—”

Xifeng: “I am well aware who Balthazar is. What of him?”

Opal: Is a little annoyed by Xifeng’s indifferent tone of voice. “I would like to hear your reasoning. You… Not to disrespect your decision, but you struck down on him very hard with no real proof to justify it.”

Xifeng: “You do not think the circumstances surrounding him are alarming? Too alarming not to act on. I have seen many people like him in my time. They become too single-minded, too angry, and begin making rash decisions because of it.”

Opal: “But he hasn’t done anything! If you wanted to take precautions, you could’ve just arrested him and kept him here!”

Xifeng: “Had we incarcerated him, there would be no further development in the case. Banishing him leaves him fairly useless to any arrangement he might have with Rex. On the other hand, if his loyalty still lies with Heaven, he will be of greater use as a fallen angel than locked up here. I am not so naive as to think he will keep his nose out of this.”

Opal: “So, wait, you’re punishing him for going behind your backs by pushing him to keep doing it? That’s ridiculous!”

Xifeng: “I believe I have done him a great favor by insisting that he should be banished rather than put in a prison cell. What he does with it is for him to decide, but I assure you, this is the best possible arrangement. You’re speaking of a man who has been a soldier for hundreds of years. If he can’t handle this, I will seriously question whether he is fit to lead other people into war. If he is as innocent as you claim, he should have no trouble redeeming himself eventually.”

Opal: “When are you going to give him a chance to do that, then?”
Xifeng: Nearly rolls her eyes. “You asked if you were out of line. You are out of line. What is your name, lieutenant?”

Opal: “O-Opal…”

Xifeng: “Opal, a word of advice. Don’t place your loved ones on pedestals. They might very well disappoint you.”

Xifeng walks away. Dejected, Opal returns to Omar who is standing closeby.

Omar: Slowly shakes his head. “Really not a crowd pleaser.”

Opal: “Balthazar always thought she was about the most admirable person in the world. I wonder if he’s so happy about her now…”

Duncan walks through the crowd. He spots Opal and seems to hesitate for a moment before turning towards her.

Opal: “Oh no…”

Duncan: “Hello Opal. Omar.”

He nods at them. It takes him a little while to figure out what to say.

Duncan: “I realize how this must look, but—”

Opal: “Spare me your explanations, will you?”

Thera has trailed behind Duncan and steps over next to him.

Thera: “It’s a good explanation, though. Duncan was selected to be appointed general quite some time ago. These inaugurations don’t happen all the time, you know.”

Opal looks at Thera’s halo which has also been upgraded to that of a lieutenant.

Opal: “I see it isn’t just Duncan who has conveniently moved up the ranks. Is you being made lieutenant completely unrelated to Balthazar too?”

Thera: “No. It probably isn’t.”

Opal looks a little deflated by Thera’s blunt honesty.

Thera: “I may have lost my temper, and I’m sorry about that, but I think it’s only right to act on well-founded suspicions. The same can be said for Duncan, and eeeh, even yourself?”
**Duncan:** “Opal, it’s very likely that we will be assigned to work together again. I would appreciate if we could at least get along on a professional level.”

**Opal:** “I’d appreciate if we just didn’t work together. But to be professional, as you put it, let’s leave it at that.”

Opal takes Omar’s arm and walks off with him, not sparing Duncan another glance.
4.

The morning after his failed attempt to talk to Jerry, Balthazar has sat down on the doorstep of the apartment building to wait for him.

After some time, Jerry comes down the stairs wearing his typical casual getup of flip-flops, a horrendously colorful t-shirt and a pair of sunglasses. He looks considerably more cheerful than the day before.

**Jerry:** Walks out the door, sees Balthazar and suddenly doesn't look so cheerful anymore. “Ohh... I almost forgot you were here.”

**Balthazar:** Stands up. “I... If you think I'm a backstabbing jerk, that's--”

**Jerry:** Interrupts him. “Dude, don't. If you came here to apologize or some sappy shit, you can save yourself the hassle. I know what this is. Don't know what you did, but you got the boot, didn't know where to go and thought, hey, who else do I know that's an ostracized loser? Oh yeah, good old Jerry.”

**Balthazar:** “Something like that.”

**Jerry:** “That's pathetic.”

**Balthazar:** “I'm inclined to agree.”

**Jerry:** “So?”

**Balthazar:** “To be honest I think I'm going to go insane if I stay put like a ghost for another day. Would it be so horrible to talk to me? You know, for old time's sake or... something?”

**Jerry:** “Eh.” He takes off his sunglasses. “You're just going to sit here like a sad, green puppy if I don't, aren't you?”

After frowning appraisingly at Balthazar for a few seconds, he lights up in a goofy smile.

**Jerry:** “You might be a dumb asshole, but I kinda missed you, blondie.”

**Balthazar:** “Really.”

**Jerry:** “Yeah, whatever. Thirty years is a long time to hold a grudge.”
Jerry opens the door to the apartment he’s staying in and picks up his rabbit when it’s about to escape out into the hallway.

**Jerry:** “Look, I'm actually in a hurry. I have to go grab some stuff, but you can stay here if you want. Watch Fluffy for me.”

He hands Balthazar the rabbit. Balthazar takes it, but looks a bit uncomfortable.

**Balthazar:** “I never understood your affection for these weird, jumpy rodents.”

**Jerry:** Holds up one hand solemnly. “They're my lifework and I've grown very fond of them, okay?”

**Balthazar:** Grins amusingly. “Summoning rabbits is your lifework now?”

**Jerry:** “It's not like anyone else cares to practice the forgotten art of weird human magic. Look at how good I've gotten, though!”

Jerry conjures up another white rabbit. The process is fast, but looks strange, like the animal’s mass is pulled out of the air around them.

**Jerry:** “Perfect!” He hands Balthazar this rabbit too.

**Balthazar:** “Yeah, last time I saw you do this they usually didn't come with a head.”

**Jerry:** “You have no idea how hard it is to create an actual living creature out of thin air. I'll be back in a minute.”

Jerry teleports away.

Balthazar walks around the somewhat messy apartment. He notices an open cage and puts the rabbits in it. In lack of anything better to do, he ends up wandering into the kitchen and studies a couple of pipes that lead up to a sink.

He experimentally turns on the faucet.

**Balthazar:** “Huh. They even managed running water.” He looks a little impressed.

He finds some tea leaves in one of the kitchen cupboards and a kettle standing on a small gas stove. He pours some water in the kettle and lights the stove to boil it.
When Balthazar walks back into the living room, he can faintly hear someone moving around in the next room. A four armed demon with big, bright red hair walks in, only dressed in her underwear and an open dress shirt.\(^3\)

**Elle:** Rubs her eyes tiredly. “Jerry, I don't think we…”

She opens her eyes, sees Balthazar, and screams.

**Elle:** “AAIIEEEEEE!!”

**Balthazar:** Holds his hands out in front of himself. “No wait, I don't--”

Balthazar doesn’t have a chance to say anything more before Elle sends a surge of fire magic at his head. He practically has to throw himself under the table he’s standing next to to dodge it.

He quickly gets back on his feet and grabs a chair to hold in front of himself like a shield.

**Balthazar:** “Would you listen to me for two seconds?!”

**Elle:** “GET OUT GET OUT GET OUT!!”

She sends another couple of fireballs at Balthazar who blocks them with the chair.

Jerry appears in a flash of light in front of the front door, carrying a box full of folders and papers. One wall and multiple pieces of furniture are on fire.

**Jerry:** “Okay, I'm back!”

**Elle:** “Jerry, wHY IS THERE AN ANGEL IN THE LIVING ROOM?!”

Frantically, Jerry puts the box down. Balthazar is staring at him from the wall he’s currently pressed up against, still holding the chair up in front of himself.

**Jerry:** “Nonono, Elle, it's okay, it's okay. This is the guy from yesterday, see?”

He takes one pair of Elle’s hands and holds them to his chest.

**Elle:** “You let him stay here while I was sleeping, are you INSANE?! It’s an angel, an angel right here in my living room! That is so NOT OKAY!!”

**Balthazar:** Slowly puts the chair down. “Uh, if I could just--”

**Elle:** “EEEE, GET HIM OUT!!!”

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\(^3\) Elle, except not freaking out
Jerry: “Okay, okay!”

He pushes Balthazar out the front door and slams it shut after him.

Balthazar stares confusedly at the closed door. He can still hear Elle yelling. It takes a little while before Jerry joins him in the hallway.

Jerry: “Out.” He gestures at the stairwell and starts walking, looking quite irritable.

Balthazar: Stares at Jerry indignantly. “Are you— She’s a demon!”

Jerry: “Yeah?”

He walks down the stairs with Balthazar trailing behind him.

Balthazar: “That’s just wrong!”

Jerry: “Watch what you say about my girlfriend or it’s gonna be me kicking you out.”

Balthazar: “Your girlfriend?”

He looks like that’s the funniest, most grotesque thing he has ever heard.

Balthazar: “Are you serious? Not that it’s any of my concern what you choose to stick your dick in, so to speak, but--”

Jerry snaps around to face Balthazar.


Balthazar: Shakes his head. “Okay. I’m not going to say anything.”

Jerry: Continues to stare Balthazar down. “I’m really trying to be hospitable here.”

Balthazar: “I know. I’m sorry.”

Jerry walks outside, still angry and irritable. It takes a while before he says anything again.

Jerry: “Angels don’t exactly come here every day, and when they do it’s bad news. Usually it’s just me. People get scared.”

Balthazar: “You actually live here? As in permanently?”

Jerry: Shrugs. “Only place I’ve been able to stay for more than a year.”
Balthazar: “That devil, Harvey, he seemed very suspicious when I said I was a friend of yours.”

Jerry: “Yeaahh, I kinda messed up with some other angels.”

Balthazar: “What’s that supposed to mean?”

Jerry: “Eugh, you’re gonna meet douchebags like this. If you’re a fallen angel, Heaven says go kill demons, right? So they kill demons. Don’t even care to find proof they did something wrong in the first place. Anything to get back in. It’s disgusting. So uhh, we didn’t get along and I kinda got one of them killed. Not a very smooth move, heh.”

Balthazar: “And you thought this was a good place to hide because..?”

He looks around, still with an expression that clearly communicates that he is anything but happy to find himself in this demon ridden place.

Jerry: “I know Harvey from way back. I uh... I watched him for a while. He used to be a slaver, somewhere out in Greed’s circle. Well that was until he bought a bunch of slaves himself and put them to work on this place. He said he was doing them a favor, but it was really shady, you know? Didn't work out at first either. You don't keep a bunch of demons against their will and get away with it scot-free. But that's Harvey for you, always about the end justifying the means. I can't say I like it, to be honest I fucking hate the guy, but look at this place now. It actually worked.”

Balthazar: “What are they trying to build?”

Jerry: “Just somewhere to live. Hell isn’t exactly a safe place unless you’re in one of the clans. There aren’t many places to go if you don’t want to deal with those guys. I help getting people here sometimes and try to keep everyone from getting at each other’s throats.”

He shrugs and smiles.

Jerry: “Guess I like staying with this bunch of misfits.”

Balthazar: Skeptically raises an eyebrow. “That sounds awfully responsible of you.”

Jerry: “Yeah, I bet you’re so happy for me.” He glares at Balthazar. “Maybe I just got tired of running for my life.”

Balthazar: “Oh wow, I thought you were over your ridiculous grudges.”

Jerry: Points at Balthazar accusingly. “I have saved your stupid, reckless ass so many times, but I make one mistake and you turn on me and leave me to rot out here!”
**Balthazar:** Looks very angry. “You saved me? I did nothing but hold my hand over you, because I trusted you knew what you were doing. And you did! You didn't make a mistake, you were insubordinate as ever and you lied to me and you got people killed. My people. I don't know why I was surprised to find you here. You always put your filthy demons first.”

**Jerry:** “I was just trying to help! I-- Now we’re talking about this anyway…”

**Balthazar:** “Well you started it!”

**Jerry:** “Let’s just… not. It doesn’t matter anymore.”

Any sign that he was just yelling at Balthazar vanishes from his face.

**Jerry:** “Heh… Now that karma finally caught up to you, I guess you got what you deserve anyway.”

**Balthazar:** “Funny how that works.”

**Jerry:** “Eh… What do you even want? A place to stay?”

Balthazar sighs and looks at the ground.

**Balthazar:** “I didn’t want anything specific. I can’t really settle with this... soul-searching thing the Council expects me to resign to. I need something productive to do, and apparently the most productive thing I could think of was searching you out. I don’t know what that says about me. But with you up to your neck in demons, I don’t think this is an improvement of the situation.”

**Jerry:** “Dude, look where you are. You met my screaming girlfriend. These people are more afraid of you than you’d ever be of them, even if they all decided to bring out the torches and pitchforks and chase you out of town. As they probably should, because you’re being a complete xenophobic dick.”

**Balthazar:** “Aha. And what do you suggest I do here?”

**Jerry:** “Dunno. Broaden your extremely narrow horizon for once. How about I show you around?”

**Balthazar:** “Oh yes, then I can truly see the magic of your little settler society. Seriously, where do you hide the rainbows and magical animals?”

**Jerry:** “Man, people are just waiting to do their song and dance routine over the rooftops to welcome you, you have no idea.”

**Balthazar:** Laughs. “Okay, I get the picture.”
5.

Lance is sitting on a sofa in a small office, looking uncomfortable. Across from him sits a psychologist in a nice, green and brown armchair with a notepad in his lap.

**Psychologist:** “So when these anger outbursts happen, are you thinking about anything? Is there something you’ve noticed can set them off?”

**Lance:** “No, I just feel really angry.” He thinks for a bit and adds: “And confused…”

**Psychologist:** “Why confused?”

**Lance:** “Because I don't know what's going on, and don't know why I'm getting so angry.” He shrugs.

**Psychologist:** “Mhm…” He writes something on the notepad, then looks back up at Lance. “How often do you feel this anger?”

**Lance:** “Emh, a few times a day I think?”

**Psychologist:** “That's more than last time I spoke to you, isn't it?”

**Lance:** Nods weakly with a distant expression. “Yeah…”

**Psychologist:** Leans forward with folded hands. “Why do you think these fits are becoming more regular? Have you been feeling stressed? Worried?”

**Lance:** “No. Or, well, maybe. I don't know. It's just… there. It doesn't feel like me in a way… Does that make any sense?”

**Psychologist:** “Mh.” He nods and waits for Lance to continue.

**Lance:** “It's scary, it's like I don't have any control over it at all. That thing that happened with my paradise, I didn't even know I was doing anything.”

**Psychologist:** “I don’t think we should focus so much on your paradise. I talk to a lot of people who have experienced trauma of some kind, and it isn’t the first time I’ve heard of someone’s paradise changing, seemingly on its own. Even if your case is rather extreme, you have to remember, your paradise is simply an extension of your own soul. It makes sense that if you’re struggling, it'd reflect on your paradise, right?”

**Lance:** “Okay. I guess.”
**Psychologist:** “It worries me a lot more that you feel so disconnected from the anger you’re experiencing.”

He looks down at his notes and stays silent for a little while, thinking.

**Psychologist:** I don’t like that you’re alone so much. When these fits happen, ideally you should have someone to reach out to, to help you through it. It's difficult when you can’t teleport on your own." He gestures at Lance’s grey newcomer's halo.

“If it keeps getting worse, I would like to request to have you committed to a hospital, for observation. You’d be around other people and maybe it’d be easier to find a pattern in what triggers these outbursts if we can see you all the time. What do you think about that?”

**Lance:** “I don’t know… Is it really.. that bad?”

**Psychologist:** “If it severely hinders you from living your life, then I’d say it’s bad enough.”

He looks up at a clock on the wall.

**Psychologist:** “I’m sorry, Lance, but it looks like our time is up. I have other patients today.”

They both stand up. The psychologist walks Lance to the door and pats him on the shoulder.

**Psychologist:** “Think about it, then we can talk about it next time.”

He gives Lance a friendly smile and lets him out.

Nicole is sitting outside the room, waiting for Lance. She turns her head towards him when he comes out the door.

**Nicole:** “Ready to go?”

Lance nods and Nicole teleports them to his paradise. It looks more or less identical to how it was before it “melted”.

**Lance:** Fidgets awkwardly before looking up at Nicole. “Um. About last time you visited me... I'm sorry.”

**Nicole:** “Yeah it’s... Don’t worry about it.”

Nicole seems to debate with herself whether she should bring up what’s on her mind.

**Nicole:** “I’ve been thinking... What kind of stuff is that guy asking you?”

**Lance:** Shrugs uncertainly. “All sorts of things. Mainly about my anger issues.”

**Nicole:** “Why do you think he’s so interested in that?”

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Lance: “I-I don’t know. To help me get over it?”

Nicole: “Are you sure about that? Because the way I’ve heard people talk about you, they’re not watching you for your sake.” She pokes Lance in the chest.

Lance: Holds a hand to his chest like it hurt him. “What do you mean..?”

Nicole: “Don’t you think it’s weird they only started to care about how you’re doing after that stuff happened to your paradise? They’re even asking me questions, you know.”

Lance: “Maybe they thought I was feeling fine.”

Nicole: “Seriously? Why would anyone assume you’d be fine? It’s just that, up until now, I’ve been the only one who cared! You know what I think? I think they’re just waiting for some reason to label you as dangerous.”

Lance: “Mh…” He thinks that over. “And then what, if they find me dangerous?”

He pauses and looks increasingly distressed.

Lance: “What if I Am dangerous..? Th-they’ll think I’m just like one of the sin eaters and banish me to Hell!”

Nicole: Bends down a little and grabs Lance's arms. “Lance, you’re just a kid! It’s fucked up you even have to think about that. No matter what’s up with you, what could you possibly do that’s so dangerous?”

Lance: “I don’t want to leave! They can't make me leave!”

He shouts the last sentence with sudden anger and shoves Nicole away. Immediately afterwards he raises a hand to cover his mouth, startled by himself.

Lance: “... S-sorry…” He looks at the ground. “It's just getting worse and worse…”

Nicole: Looks at Lance with concern. “Even if you don’t feel like it, maybe we should leave for a while. You know, just... you and me. I think you need some space, because... I’m really worried. What if it’s your therapist or somebody else you throw a fit at someday?”


Nicole: “Not everywhere. I'm sure we could find someplace nice.”

She smiles, but the smile quickly turns into an unsure expression.
Nicole: “I'll have to think about it.”

Lance: Glances at Nicole questioningly. “I don't think I'm even allowed to leave.”

Nicole: “No. I know.”
After dragging Balthazar all across Rover’s Crossing, Jerry stands on a pile of wooden planks outside a construction site, looking out over the town as if he’s trying to spot if there’s something he’s missed.

Jerry: “It’s not saying much, but I think this is the biggest town this side of the planet. Well, I don’t know, there might be cities further off, but everything here’s just damn endless plains. There’s so much endless plain it continues into another world we’re connected to.”

Balthazar: “What about materials, then?” He gestures at the planks Jerry is standing on. “Wood. Metal?”

Jerry: “Oh there’s some trade routes cutting through. It’s kind of a pain to manage importing everything, but what can you do. Harvey’s more concerned with having as few open routes through Hell as possible, than to make things easy. I guess it’s the smart choice.”

Balthazar: “And what, he just makes the decisions around here?”

Jerry jumps down from the stack of planks, flapping his wings once for a softer landing.

Jerry: “Him and a few other people. Harvey’s like the self pronounced mayor slash sheriff. Whatever. No one’s dared complain about it and he’s pretty good at this stuff.”

He suddenly looks at Balthazar suspiciously.

Jerry: “… How did you find me?”

Balthazar: “Heh.” He grins. “Max says hi.”

Jerry: “Are you serious? That little shit.”

Despite his words, Jerry seems elated to hear that. Still, it only takes a second before his expression turns serious again.

Jerry: “Heaven has records of me being here?”

Balthazar: “I'm not sure. At least you've been seen in the area. I had to ask around a bit.”

Jerry: “Oh for fuck's sake, I thought I had shaken them off!”

Balthazar: “Maybe some stray angel came by and recognized you.” He shrugs, unsure what the problem is. “Why are you hiding in the first place? Of course, Heaven wouldn’t like what you’re doing here, but avoiding them is even worse.”
Jerry: “I don't care about Heaven! I don't want anything to do with Heaven! It's just causing trouble for everyone if there’s angels running after me.”

Balthazar: “Oh. I... I guess, with all the time you spent away while you were still a spy... being a fallen angel isn't much different.”

Jerry: “No, honestly? Apart from everyone wanting to kill you, it's better. I don't have to report back to some green jerk.” He gestures in Balthazar’s general direction. “I don't have to worry whether Heaven agrees I'm making the right calls.”

Balthazar: “But you have a halo again.”

Jerry: “Yeah...”

Jerry starts walking back towards Elle’s apartment and Balthazar follows after him.

Jerry: “I had a looot of contacts who thought I was a devil. That went up in smoke real fast. But if there was one thing I missed about being a proper halo wearing angel, it's being able to teleport. I'm not giving that up again. Heaven can get this halo back when they pry it out of my cold, dead hands.”

Balthazar: “You always were disturbingly good at that.”

Jerry: “Teleporting? I’m the best there is, man. I mean, even you need like fifty square meters of free space and three minutes transit time to feel confident you're not gonna land on top of somebody’s expensive furniture.”

Balthazar: Smiles good naturedly. “I suppose.”

Jerry: “I don’t know how I lived without it for so long. But of course, I was in Hell most of the time. The whole angel magic thing doesn’t do you any good there.”

He can’t help but look up at Balthazar’s halo, just as black as his own.

Jerry: “So anyway, what did you do to get booted out of Heaven?”

Balthazar: “I thought you didn't want to know.”

Jerry: “I'm kinda curious how you pissed people off that bad. Degrading you or something is one thing, but kicking you out?”

Balthazar: “I take it you haven't forgotten Rex?”

Jerry: “'Course not.”
Balthazar: “It appears he hasn't been lying dormant while he's been underground. He's plotting something, and by some bizarre turn of events I've been wrapped up in it. At least that's what the Council thinks, but to be honest I have no clue what he's up to. Trying to take Heaven down all over again, I suppose.”

Jerry: “I think so.”

Balthazar: “What?”

Jerry: Looks at Balthazar with an uncertain expression. “You don't know about that?”

Balthazar: “Know about what?”

Jerry: “Huh…”

He hesitates like he isn’t sure if he should continue the conversation.

Jerry: “It's not just him. I know he's been involved with this big group of people for years. Devils, demons, other fallen angels. All kinds of people who don’t really belong anywhere else. Well, they like to call themselves revolutionaries. They're trying to even out the odds for everyone, it's not just about Heaven.”

Balthazar: “An entire organization, planning to attack Heaven.”

Jerry: “I don't know. Word goes around, but--”

Balthazar: “This is even worse than I thought! Why haven't you passed this on to someone?”

Jerry: “Dude, to me it's common knowledge! So maybe Heaven doesn't know them as a group, or maybe you didn't get the memo, but these guys are everywhere. Who cares if they got Rex on their team? Besides, maybe I wouldn't want to tell anyone.”

Balthazar: “You wouldn't want to? What's wrong with you?!”

Jerry: “Calm down! What kind of hypocrite would I be if I didn't support that someone has the guts to try and fight all the bullshit we have to put up with? These people might not like Heaven, but they do a lot of your work for you.”

Balthazar: “If they are anything like Rex and they plan to attack Heaven, how will that help anyone?"

Jerry: “Well as long as Heaven’s stuck with the same old council full of elitist assholes and the same hostile, arrogant, bullshit attitude to the rest of the universe, nothing’s gonna get any better, is it?”
Just look at yourself! Stellar fucking example of how little angels know about the real world right there!"

**Balthazar:** “... Do you know where they're hiding out?”

**Jerry:** “Where they're hiding out? You mean in their evil lair?”

He can’t help but laugh scornfully.

**Jerry:** “So what if I did? You gonna swoop in there and take them all out on your own? Man, why do you even care. Your halo was taken because of this, right? So let the Council deal with their mess, since they've made it goddamned clear they don't want your help.”

Balthazar gives Jerry a stern look.

**Jerry:** “Fuck, you've got such a hero complex. Let it go. Maybe you'll figure out they're not as awful as you've been led to believe.”
Opal strides across a largely empty military training grounds. She looks furious as she steers towards Thera who is talking to a couple of her subordinates in one end of the area.

**Opal:** “Where is Duncan?”

**Thera:** “I don’t know, actually. Probably off to a meeting somewhere.” She turns to the soldiers. “You can go, I’ll talk to you later.”

The soldiers nod and walk off, fleetingly glancing at Opal on the way.

**Opal:** “I thought I made it very clear I don’t want to work with him and the first thing he does is agree that I should stay assigned to Tibra, with you and under his watch?!”

**Thera:** “Well, you were the only lieutenant officially appointed to that mission, so it only seems logical for you to stick with it, right?”

**Opal:** “I think you’re perfectly capable of standing watch on the Gluttony side of the rift without my help.”

**Thera:** “I think Duncan thinks this is a good low-risk assignment for us to get to know each other better. Like it or not, you and Duncan are already pretty well acquainted, so this won’t be the last time we end up teamed together.”

**Opal:** Rolls her eyes. “I can’t believe this.”

**Thera:** Looks a little irritated. “Maybe you should make the best of it and look at it as an opportunity. You’ve really been through a rough spot. Losing so many soldiers and then the general you usually work under, who’s also a personal friend of yours, is banished? It doesn’t come off very flattering.”

Thera looks Opal up and down appraisingly.

**Thera:** “Look at you. It must’ve been difficult for you for you to make a good impression in the first place. Just a small woman from a stubbornly pacifistic species. And a former nurse even. The exact opposite of what it requires to be a soldier.
I can relate, somewhat. I used to be a detective for the police. Not exactly the most aggressive of positions either.”

Opal scowls at Thera.

**Thera:** “Duncan really is a good man, and I promise you, neither of us think less of you for any of this. Duncan is well respected, he’s accommodating. The only thing that makes the situation a problem is your own attitude.”
Thera shrugs in a slightly confrontational way. Opal looks down, still disgruntled.

**Thera:** “Sorry, am I being too direct? I do that sometimes.”

**Opal:** “No, it’s… fine.”

**Thera:** “This is just guard duty anyway, you don’t need a general around for that. You probably won’t even have to look at him. Eeeh, but then, I guess you’re angry with me too.”

**Opal:** “Not really. I mean, you barely even know Balthazar and at least you can admit that turning him in was a benefit to you.” She looks at Thera, a bit stiffly. “I actually appreciate that.”

Thera smiles crookedly, a hint of surprise on her face.

**Thera:** “Oh. I’m glad to hear that.”
Harvey is standing in the doorway to his office, talking to Balthazar who is standing on the porch outside the house.

Harvey: “C’mon, Feathers, y’can’t expect me to let you slag around here for free.”

Balthazar: “I never said I did. It's just not an option. I would trap myself in a corner helping you keep those trade routes open. It's risky enough that I stay here. Someone’s bound to spot me out there.”

Harvey: “And people tell me I'm paranoid.” He scoffs. “Where else can I put you to use?”

Balthazar: “I don't know. I used to have a carpenter business long ago. You have a lot of construction projects, right?”

Harvey: “Hm. I'd rather you didn't waste them military skills away.”

Jerry and Elle walk over to them.

Harvey: To Jerry: “Your pal here’s being difficult.”

Jerry: “Myep.” He seems pretty indifferent about this fact. “You wanted to talk to me?”

Harvey: “Yeah, c’mon.”

Jerry follows Harvey into his office. Balthazar moves off the porch, but can faintly overhear their conversation.

Harvey: “What’d I tell you about bringing ’em here? I already got a system in place, beyond that I want nothing t’do with that lot!”

Jerry: “What do you want me to do? We can’t handle this ourselves. Right now we have seven people missing, are you just gonna let them die?!”

Elle leans forward a little to get Balthazar’s attention.

Elle: “Hi. I'm Elle. We never really got to say hello?”

Balthazar: Turns towards her with a vaguely disapproving look on his face. “Balthazar.”

Elle: “Sorry about the whole shooting fire at you thing. You kind of startled me.”

Balthazar: “Right. That’s understandable.”
Neither of them say anything for a while.

**Elle:** “Sooo. Beast buster, how's that working out for you?” She tries for a joking smile, but it just comes off a little awkward.

**Balthazar:** “Are you seriously asking me that?”

**Elle:** “No? I was just... Um, I mean, I guess what I was trying to say was you were talking to Harvey, so I was wondering if you had figured out what you wanted to do? Is that... a better question?”

**Balthazar:** “Harvey is trying to get me to join his little escort missions. I liked him better when he was being paranoid. I'm not particularly happy about staying on a world full of demons.”

**Elle:** “Okay then...” She looks somewhat offended.

**Balthazar:** “No offense, but I have a position to retain and if anyone caught word of me helping demons, it would not improve my situation. I'm going to stick around, though. I have to admit, Harvey seems to have a lot of contacts, and I might need the information.”

**Elle:** “Well, why would he do you any favors if you're not going to give anything in return?”

**Balthazar:** “Exactly.” He frowns.

Jerry comes back out from the house.

**Jerry:** “Hey, did you wanna go pick up your stuff?”

**Balthazar:** “You don't have to assist me, but yeah, sure.”

**Jerry:** “No, it's cool.”

**Elle:** “Um, can I come with you?”

**Balthazar:** Raises his eyebrows in slight, disdainful exasperation. “Sure, let's make an expedition of picking up a couple of bags.”

**Jerry:** “She’s trying to get to know you, give her a break.”

**Elle:** “Sorry, I'm just curious. It's on your home world, right?”

**Balthazar:** Tiredly shakes his head. “Fine.”
He places a hand on a shoulder on each of them and the next moment they’re standing on Halashin, close to where Balthazar has put his belongings.

**Elle:** “Urgh, I don't get how you ever get used to jumping around like that, it's so weird. Wow, this is even drier than our place.” She looks around at the desert landscape.

They walk over to the rock cave where Balthazar has left his things. He picks up his bags and the fire enchanted sword.

**Jerry:** “Dude. Isn't that Roan's sword?”

**Balthazar:** “It was. He passed it on to me after he died.”

**Jerry:** “Roan died? Man... I'm strangely sorry to hear that. But why give you his sword? I always had the impression he hated your guts just as much as he hated mine.”

**Balthazar:** “Heh. You don't know people 'till they're gone I suppose. Although I have a suspicion he only wanted me to have it so it could burn my hands and break my skinny arms. This thing is ridiculously heavy.”

**Jerry:** “Pfff, yeah. More plausible than the thought he'd hold the tiniest shimmer of compassion in his hardass, veteran heart for his best disobedient recruit.”

Elle is standing on the ledge overlooking the town below. She glances at Jerry and Balthazar with a hint of sadness in her eyes. They join her after a little while.

**Elle:** “Um, did you grow up here?” She points down at the town.

**Balthazar:** “I grew up in a mansion in a big city. I lived here for a long time, though. I died here.”

**Elle:** “Like, with a family? I mean, from what I know you didn't fail at life and die in your twenties like Jerry.”

**Jerry:** “Nothing wrong with dying in your twenties, Elle.”

**Balthazar:** Glowers at Jerry reproachfully. “Excuse me, did you tell this girl my entire life story?”

**Jerry:** “Nah, only selected parts.”

**Balthazar:** Looks back at Elle. “I was married when I was sixteen because my fiancée's family were massacred and she had nowhere to go. After that we had to flee here and manage on our own while my father was out defending our country.”

**Elle:** “Oh...”
**Balthazar:** “What, did you think demons were the only ones to grow up with murder and warfare? Are we done snooping in my past life now?”

**Elle:** “Sorry, I... I’m just a little surprised you’re not more understanding about us then.. maybe...”

Balthazar scowls at Elle for some time, but doesn’t say anything more before he turns around to leave.

**Jerry:** Whispers to Elle: “He gets kinda touchy when you start talking about his mortal life.”

**Elle:** Whispers back: “Oops.”
9.

Paolo and a hashmal angel with a glowing, blue halo are standing in the doorway to a small bedroom. Inside the room, a closet standing against the wall, as well as part of the wall and floor, has turned black and strangely contorted. The distortion of the floor stretches out into the hallway outside and continues for a few meters.

**Paolo:** “His behaviour has just gotten more and more erratic, and he doesn’t even seem to remember it later on. Earlier today, he attacked another patient here. And this strange magic…” He glances into the room and shakes his head weakly.

**Hashmal:** “We have discussed the possibility of taking him back to Kimera.”

**Paolo:** “But… That’s completely against protocol. He just died, we can’t just put him back.”

He looks at the hashmal, a little perplexed.

**Hasmal:** “Not back to his home, of course.”

**Paolo:** “It would still be cruel.”

The hashmal turns away from the doorway and inspects the black track in the hallway instead.

**Hashmal:** “This isn’t fire magic. It isn’t like any harul magic I have ever seen or heard of.”

He follows the track to a glass door. On the other side, Lance sits on a bench in another, largely empty hallway. Lance has pulled his legs up under him and looks anxious and tired. The skin on the knuckles of one of his hands looks raw and bruised like he punched someone with it.

**Hashmal:** “You know what it reminds me of? Bad magical corruption. Like this perfectly ordinary looking child is just radiating nether energy.”

The hashmal regards Lance coldly. Lance briefly meets his eyes, then looks away nervously and hunches in on himself.

**Hashmal:** “It’s very disconcerting.”
10.

On Netoka, commercials are running on a big screen on the side of a building. A commercial from Skull Inc. comes on.

A voiceover talks over the images: “Are you tired of the everyday routine? Do you dream of getting away, or are you looking for new business opportunities? Are you on the hunt for adventures and hidden treasures? Then our newly discovered world, Shangri-la, is just the place for you! Skull Inc. are proud to present this new, luxuriant world filled with never before seen animal life.”

Messa and Lana are standing in front of the building, looking up at the screen.

**Messa:** “What a load of bullshit. They tell you all about what a wonderful a place it is, and absolutely NOTHING about the people who already lived there, forced into giving their land away! It should be illegal in every way possible!”

**Lana:** “It is illegal, by the law of God. I do not believe you will find a higher authority in this or the next life.”

**Messa:** Looks askance at Lana. “You know, sometimes I get reeeally tired of your never ending talk about God and Heaven and angels. Next thing you know, you'll be standing next to the blind dude over there. Raving mad, poor and unwashed!”

Messa points at a homeless man standing with a sign that reads *“Repent now, for paradise is real!”*

**Lana:** Smiles fondly. “I will never end up like that. I have you to look out for me.”

She reaches out to pat Messa on the head. Messa dodges Lana’s hand and shakes her head in exasperation.

**Messa:** “Yeah. I honestly have no idea what you’d do without me.”

She is holding Kaël’s wallet in her hands and looks into it to find nothing but a couple of money bills.

**Messa:** “This sucks... It works a hell of a lot better to storm furiously out of the house to spend all the jerk’s money on new accessories, when you remember to steal his credit card.”

**Lana:** “Looks like the joke is on you. Again.”

Messa gives Lana a furious glare.
**Lana:** “You really shouldn't steal Kaél's money when he is already giving you so much out of good will.”

**Messa:** “Maybe if he wasn’t such an ass all the time, I wouldn’t have to take his stuff to get back at him!”

Messa grunts angrily and stomps off with long, rigid steps, her back hunched and her hands balled into fists.

**Lana:** Thoughtfully continues: “You should not steal at all, Messa. It is a direct way into the hands of Greed.”

**Messa:** Rolls her eyes and mutters spitefully: “It is a direct way into the hands of Greed.” She yells over her shoulder: “Will you stop preaching already?!”

**Lana:** Follows Messa at a safe distance. “How about I stop preaching when you start behaving?”

**Messa:** “Yeah, whatever. We both know that'll never happen!”
Messa and Lana leave the central part of the city and walk to a slum like neighbourhood where the rent is cheaper, but the environment makes the disregard Skull Inc. has for the places they occupy a lot more obvious.

They arrive at a three story apartment complex where they and Kaël live. A spotless, blue sportscar is parked outside, looking completely out of place next to the drab appearance of everything else in the area.

**Messa:** “Stupid douche with his stupid car!”

She kicks one of the wheels on the car when she walks past it. She continues up the three steps to the entrance to the apartment building and flings the door open.

**Lana:** “I will stay out a while longer, if you don’t mind.”

**Messa:** “Whatever!”

She waves a hand dismissively and doesn’t even look back at Lana before letting the door slam shut behind her.

Lana stands next to the door and looks at it expressionlessly for some time before she turns around and tilts her head up.

**Lana:** “Are you coming down?”

Balthazar flies down from the roof and lands at the foot of the stairs in front of Lana.

**Balthazar:** “Uh, hi. Looks like I've been spotted.”

She sees Balthazar’s now black wings and for a moment she looks completely thrown off. She then manages to contort her face into a strained smile.

**Lana:** “How can I help you this fine day?”

**Balthazar:** Looks at the ground thoughtfully and shrugs. “Remember when you said you wished people would come see you just to see you? Well. I thought I owed you as much. Now that we’re in the same boat and all.”

He makes a gesture at his black halo with one hand. Lana tilts her head a little bit and her smile turns more genuine and kind.

**Lana:** “That is really considerate of you.”
She doesn't quite know how to continue and ends up looking troubled.

**Lana:** “Especially when life seems to have been so hard on you… Unless, of course, you have finally been fed up with Heaven's ways and have chosen this fate yourself.”

**Balthazar:** Laughs. “Lana, come on, you can just be straight forward. I was kicked out, what's up with that. It's not like the neon sign above my head is keeping it a secret. But no, I certainly didn't do this to myself. Why would I do that?”

Lana looks embarrassed as she smiles and absentmindedly touches the halo-made-ring on her finger.

**Lana:** “I thought you might have chosen to do this to get a break of sorts.”

She shrugs uncertainly.

**Lana:** “Yet, you are not the type who ever takes a break. Willingly at least. So I suppose it was quite obvious from the start that the Council finally got their way with you. However, it baffles me how someone with your mindset could possibly do something so wrong that they were literally able to throw you out.”

**Balthazar:** “Consider me baffled as well. Ever since Rex showed up they've had a thorn in my side thinking I was somehow involved with him. Completely preposterous rumors, but it's not as if I had a say in the matter.”

**Lana:** Looks completely blank and does a slight bow. “I'm sorry.”

**Balthazar:** Looks confused. “Sorry for what?”

**Lana:** “I…” She peers down at the sidewalk. “I suppose it's about time I stop apologizing for his doings.”

Lana raises a hand to her face and laughs softly, flustered.

**Lana:** “Forgive me, I'm rambling. This is stupid.”

**Balthazar:** “It's fine…”

He seems to think for a few seconds, then decides to just get to the point.

**Balthazar:** “Did you know Rex is not alone in these attacks?”

**Lana:** Stops smiling, still with her hand held to her face. “What do you mean?”
**Balthazar:** “Apparently it’s old news that he’s just one in a whole organisation. Revolutionaries they call them. I’d rather call them terrorists.”

**Lana:** “Terrorists. What… What are you talking about?”

**Balthazar:** “Like you told me, Rex wants to tear down Heaven and Hell and rebuild the entire system. Turns out he’s not alone.”

**Lana:** Gapes at Balthazar, puzzled. “And releasing one of the great sins is going to help him with this, how?”

**Balthazar:** “I still don't know. I hardly even have any means of finding out. If I don't want this fallen angel thing to be permanent, I have to watch where I set my feet.”

Lana subtly shakes her head. She walks down the couple of steps from her place at the door, then decides to move to a backyard behind the apartment complex where they won’t stand so blatantly out in the open.

**Lana:** “With no insight into the greater scheme of things it might seem like pure idiocy. However, if my husband’s mind hasn’t been deteriorating during the last century, I'm sure it's a well thought out plan. He was bright enough to be a seraph once, after all. This should not be taken lightly.”

Balthazar’s face has taken on an empty expression.

**Balthazar:** “And less and less I find myself able to care." He mutters to himself: “Jeremiah must be rubbing off on me…”

**Lana:** “Jeremiah.”

She looks at Balthazar with disgust written all over her face.

**Lana:** “That's like admitting to rolling around in the droppings of a goo demon.”

**Balthazar:** “Excuse me?”

**Lana:** “Look... All I'm saying is that it probably isn’t wise to let someone like Jeremiah rub off on you too much.” She says the name Jeremiah like it leaves a bad taste in her mouth. “Sympathising with demons will not get you back into Heaven.”

**Balthazar:** Lets out a soft laugh. “No... No, you're probably right. I never knew you felt so strongly about him. You might be happy to know he has also joined this band of dropout angels. Free to wallow in his demons as he pleases. He certainly isn't complaining either… The stupid weirdo.”

**Lana:** “See, that I do believe.”
Lana: “I see you've picked up a sidekick of your own.” He nods at the building they're standing behind. “Who's the girl?”

Balthazar: “How so?”

Lana: “After a century spent in almost absolute solitude, hunting down one rogue demon after another, existence started to seem pointless. I started to look for something that would give life, if not a meaning, then at least some diversity. It was not easy to find. Not before I met her at least. She reminded me that only with other people in our life, can we truly live. It's something so simple and basic, yet I had lost it.”

Balthazar: “I suppose sometimes it just takes a long time to figure out what you need to do.”

Lana: Smiles a bit more openly. “I suppose it does.”

She briefly hesitates before continuing.

Lana: “So, have you figured out what you need to do?”

Balthazar: “The Council wants me to wait and hope for the best. I tried to stay put on Halashin for a while, but I realized I just can't do that. Being a ghost in the place that used to be my life once, dwelling on the past, it's just sad... I'm staying with Jeremiah now, actually... In this bizarre demon town. They know more about what's going on than I do, if nothing else.”

Lana gives him a long, hard and very sceptical stare.

Balthazar: “What?”

Lana: “You are staying in a demon town. With him.” She continues to stare. “Have you listened to yourself? That is so unbecoming of you, I don't even know how to respond.”

Balthazar: “Yeah, you know. We were close... once. It was the best I could come up with. Listen, I'm not happy about it either. What is your problem with Jeremiah anyway?”

Lana: “I am just concerned on your behalf.” She sighs and composes herself. “The first thing you tell me is that you don't want to be an outcast forever. And then you proceed to inform me of how you hang around in a demon town of all places.”

Balthazar: “Where else is there to go? Where were you before you wined up here? I mean, Skull Inc., you're not doing much better yourself.”

Lana: “I am hardly able to see what harm it can do me now. I...”
She looks genuinely sad.

Lana: “I am not pointing fingers, Balthazar. I am honestly concerned. Unlike me, there might just be hope for you yet, if you want back into Heaven.”

Balthazar: “Well, thank you, but I'm not putting myself out of the game because of this.”

Lana: “If Heaven finds you there, what do you think will happen?”

Balthazar: “If I don’t at least attempt to make sense of this mess, then what got me here in the first place will have been for nothing!” He frowns bitterly. “And in case Heaven finds out and takes offense to that, I guess I just have to take the consequences. It might work for you, but I can't just sit around with my hands in my lap and give up.”

Lana: “Well, what would you have me do instead?” She throws out her hands angrily.

Balthazar: “I'm sorry. I don't know.”

Lana: “Even the archangels personally made it really clear to me, that it would be better if I just lay down and died.”

Balthazar: “I just don't understand why you still have your halo, then.”

Lana: “I--” She touches her halo-ring.

Balthazar: “Hidden, even.” He gestures at the halo. “By whatever obscene sort of magic you used to do that. What's the point?”

Lana: “I don't know, okay?”

She takes a deep breath and tries to compose herself.

Lana: “Maybe I didn't want to be the one to burn the last bridge. Or maybe I felt that I would lose whatever part I had left of myself if I became a devil. Maybe... Maybe it's simply to avoid giving any angel a chance to hunt me down and put an end to me.”

Balthazar: “No one could put you down easily.”

Lana: Smiles modestly. “I suppose you're right about that, but what if the poor pursuer gave me no choice but to harm them when they tried?”

Balthazar: “Then that would be their own problem.” He shakes his head resignedly. “Whatever Lana, you can do what you want. It's none of my business.”
Lana: “I know I shouldn’t put my nose in your business either. Just… Be careful where you step.”
Nicole walks inside a large hall that is used as a training facility by the military. Nicholas is on the floor, fencing against another angel. Nicole leans on the wall nearby, waiting for them to finish.

Nicholas fumbles, loses his balance and ends up falling on his butt with the other angel’s wooden practise sword pointed at his throat.

**Nicholas:** “Aww man! That's like the hundredth time today.”

**Fencing angel:** “Actually, it's only the twenty-seventh time... But you're getting better.”

He looks away from Nicholas when he adds the last bit, as if it isn't quite true. He notices Nicole and waves at her.

**Nicholas:** Turns his head to see who the other angel is waving to. “Hey sis!” He stands up.

**Nicole:** “Hi. Are you guys done?

**Fencing angel:** “Sure, you can have him.”

**Nicholas:** “Oh, but I wanted to practice more...” He frowns, a little disappointed.

**Nicole:** Smiles, but mostly looks nervous. “Thanks. I just have to ask you something.”

She gestures for Nicholas to follow her. Nicholas walks over to her, dragging his sword behind him. Nicole grabs his wrist and drags him away from the main hall.

**Nicholas:** “Hey, where are we going?”

**Nicole:** “Anywhere here that's not full of people.”

**Nicholas:** “O-Okay...”

Nicole stalks down the hallway they’ve walked into until she spots an empty, unused locker room and pulls Nicholas with her in there.

**Nicholas:** “What's with all this sneaking around?”

Nicole shuts the door behind her and looks at Nicholas with a very grave face.

**Nicole:** “Okay Nic, I'm dead serious here. It's okay if you don't want any part in this, I don't expect you to, but I trust you'll at least not tell on me.”
**Nicolas:** Stands there with his mouth open and looks deeply confused. “Ehhh, what?”

**Nicole:** “I'm going to take Lance and I'm going to leave.” She looks like it has only just now dawned on her what she's about to do. “Yup, I'm doing this. I'm running off.”

**Nicolas:** Shrugs. “Well, then I'm coming along.”

This throws Nicole off whatever she was going to say next.

**Nicole:** “Just like that?”

**Nicolas:** “Yeah! I'll follow you to Hell and back if I have to. You're my only sister after all.” He smiles like it'd be silly to question that.

Nicole spontaneously starts crying.

**Nicole:** “I just don't know what else to do! I'm sure they're going to put him down like some kind of rabid dog! They're just waiting for him to have another melt down, I know! And I can't-- I have to do this, Nicholas.”

She sniffs and tries to wipe her tears away with one hand.

**Nicole:** “I'm sorry, I'm so scared.”

Nicolas walks over to give Nicole a hug and pats her hair.

**Nicolas:** “Who are we talking about again?”

**Nicole:** “Lance, you numb nut!”

**Nicolas:** “Ahh, him again.”

He rolls his eyes, then holds Nicole out in front of him so he can look at her questioningly.

**Nicole:** “Can't you just leave that kid well alone? He's a baaad omen.”

**Nicole:** Slaps Nicholas' hands away. “No I can't! It's not like he has anyone else to help him!”

**Nicolas:** “But why does it have to be you? You can't save the world all alone, you know.”

**Nicole:** “I'm not trying to save the world! He's a good kid, but now all these caseworkers got their hands on him they're treating him like he's a ticking bomb or something!”
**Nicole:** “Ehh.” He scratches the back of his neck and looks a bit apologetic. “He might just be that.”

**Nicole:** “But-- So maybe that ritual messed with his head, but what could he do? What if they're going to kill him? Or, or just banish him! They could do that.”

**Nicholas:** “No way they would destroy a soul like that, sis.” He ponders this for a moment. “I think…”

**Nicole:** “You don't think they banish people? Ohoho, think again! Like… Like you know Balthazar? I mean, what did he even do? They didn't think twice about banishing him! What do you think they'll do to a mentally unstable half demon, huh? And even if they didn't kill him, sending him out of Heaven he'd be as good as dead!”

**Nicholas:** “Yeah, yeah, I get it... It's obviously very important to you to save him. So, you're gonna need a strong, handsome knight to protect you both, right?” He stands up straight and runs a hand through his hair. “I'll take the job!”

**Nicole:** “You don't have to... What was I even thinking asking you this... What am I thinking? It's not like I can just take him out of here with no consequences. Just... Stupid.” She covers her face with her hands and sobs.

Nicholas carefully removes Nicole's hands from her face so he can looks her in the eyes.

**Nicholas:** “Hey, shush. Wherever you go, I'll follow and watch your back. That's what we've always done, right?.”

**Nicole:** “But what about your friends and the platoon and everything here?”

**Nicholas:** Smiles brightly. “You don't get it. I became a warrior to protect you, and that's all it means to me.”

**Nicole:** “That's dumb, Nic.”

Nicholas just looks at her with big puppy dog eyes.

**Nicole:** Wipes her tears away again. “Okay, but if you start whining about how you've got no one but me and the psycho vampire to bother, it's not my fault you agreed to this.”

**Nicholas:** “Deal.” He grins.

Nicole looks down at the floor, then puts her arms around Nicholas in a hug.

**Nicole:** “You're the best, do you know that?”

**Nicholas:** “Yeah, I know.”
Jerry and Elle are sitting on the couch in the living room in Elle’s apartment, while Balthazar sits at a table in the other end of the room.

Elle: “No no no, focus! You have to focus right on your fingertips, like you're trying to gather all your body heat there.”

Jerry: “I am doing that!”

Elle: “Maybe it'd be better to try with something flammable.”

Jerry: “No, I can do this. I already did it once.”

Elle: “That was such a lousy excuse for a flame, I'm not even sure I saw it.”

Balthazar is studying a bunch of maps illustrating how the area around Rover’s Crossing is connected to other worlds. He looks reproachfully at Jerry with his head propped up on one hand.

Balthazar: “You shouldn't be playing with magic in the first place.”

Jerry: “Why the hell not? I have a top grade fire mage to teach me right here.”

Balthazar: “It's magic. It'll hurt you.”

Jerry: “I don't know if you noticed, but I'm a human. I was made to do magic, it can't hurt me.”

Elle: “Why is that anyway? I mean, why you and not all the other souls?”

Jerry: “I don't really know. The story goes we were supposed to be some kind of creators way back in the beginning. Kinda like the archangels? But apparently we sucked at it, because most of those powers were taken back. Anyway, it's why I can do the rabbit thing. In theory I guess I could make all kinds of things, it's just really difficult to learn. I'm not gonna go batshit crazy from making a rabbit a day for the last eighty years either, so that's nice.”

Elle: “Yeah, my mom's really insistent I should be super proud of all the human blood in our family.”

Jerry: “She's borderline creepy about it.”
Elle: “Hahaha. She's not gonna leave you alone until you give her a million pure blooded grandchildren.”

Jerry laughs and holds up a hand dismissively when Balthazar glowers at them with a poorly concealed look of disgust on his face.

Jerry: “For the record, Elle's mom is alright. She can't help that she's a creepy succubus.”

Elle: “Okay shush, try the fire thing again.”

Jerry: “Right.”

He immediately, spontaneously manages to form a small flame with his hands.

Jerry: “Shit, look, I'm doing it! It's working!”

Out of sheer excitement that it finally worked, he loses control of the flame and sets one of his hands on fire instead.

Jerry: “Fuck!” He frantically waves his hand in an attempt to put the fire out, but it doesn’t really work.

Elle: “Hahaha! Oh no, you're simply... You're just... You're the worst at this.”

She has tears in her eyes from laughing so hard when she leans over, grabs Jerry’s hand and makes the fire disappear.

Elle: “Please.. Please stop before you set the rest of yourself on fire.”

Jerry: “We can't all grow up natural pyros!”

Elle notices that Balthazar is still looking at them with a very cross expression before he stands up and walks into their kitchen.

Jerry: Holds his slightly burnt hand. “Man, I'd better get some water on this.”

He gets up to walk to their bathroom.

Elle: “Yeah…”

She looks towards the kitchen and doesn't really appear to be listening. She sits there for a while before she gets up with a determined look on her face and walks into there herself.

Elle: “Do you have a problem with me?”

Balthazar: “I don't know what you mean.”
Elle: “You keep looking at me like I’m some kind of disgusting animal!”

Balthazar: “Well it’s not my intention to do so.”

Elle: “What’s this even about? That I’m teaching him magic? So what?! You don’t get to come here and look at me like that! You just can’t accept that we’re no less than you. What do you-- What does Jerry have that I don’t? A soul? What’s that even worth?! Does it magically make you a better person?”

She holds one set of her hands to her face in frustration.

Elle: “Why are you doing this to me?! Now I’m freaking out and I’m just proving all your points on how we are uncivilized, violent, rampant beasts and I--”

Balthazar: “Calm down.” He cautiously pats Elle on the shoulder.

Elle rips his hand away with surprising force.

Elle: “Don’t! Don’t touch me.”

Balthazar: “You’re not exactly without prejudice yourself.”

Elle: “No, don’t pull that on me! I’m not the one who’s been murdering demons for centuries without ever once stopping to think that they might be people too! People with lives and families and feelings!”

Balthazar: “Oh, no prejudice at all, I see.” He throws out his arms.

Elle: “You don’t understand what it’s like! There is no place for us. Heaven doesn’t want us, Hell doesn’t want us. We have to prove our worth and scrape and bow to everyone just to be left alone in this dump of a world!”

For a second, Balthazar actually looks like he feels a bit stung by that. He takes his eyes off Elle and smiles faintly.

Balthazar: “You seem like a smart girl, Elle, I have to admit. But please understand that I have met few other demons like that.”

Elle: “How many demons have you met that you didn’t immediately cut down anyway? If we’re so awful, why are you still here?”

Balthazar: “Because this world is the only link I have to know what’s going on right now.”

Elle: “Or maybe you just won’t admit that we’re the only hospitable people you can turn to! You want to be different from those councillors, right? The archangels? The typical military
guys that come here and walk all over us when we can't do anything about it? Then stop acting like one of them!”

She suddenly realizes that she has been yelling at the angel in front of her. Her eyes flicker to the floor and she holds all of her four hands protectively out in front of her while she backs away from Balthazar, worried that he might hurt her.

Elle: “I... I'm sorry…”

She bumps into Jerry who has appeared in the doorway to the kitchen, then turns around and quietly leaves the apartment.

Jerry's face is unreadable as he looks at Balthazar for a long time.

Jerry: “I think you should leave. This isn't working out.”
Nicholas is waiting near a big, clear lake on an open, deserted world. On the ground next to him lies three big camping bags. Nicholas has his arms crossed and taps one foot impatiently.

Nicholas: "Wait for me here she says... I'll be right back she says... I've been waiting here for like-" He holds out his left arm so he can look at the watch strapped to his wrist. "-thirty seven minutes!"

Nicole pops up a short distance away, holding Lance by the hand.

Nicole: "I got him! Just, God... I had to get rid of one of those caseworker people, he wouldn't stop talking."

Nicholas' cross expression softens up and turns into a smile.

Nicholas: "It's okay, I'll live."

Lance looks uneasy. With some apprehension, he gives Nicholas a weak wave. Nicholas ignores him.

Nicole: Starts rummaging through one of the bags on the ground. "You remembered everything, right? That... Gas burner? Oh, and my shoes!"

Nicholas: "Everything you wrote on the list is in there, I promise."

Nicole finds a pair of hiking boots in the bag and relaxes a little. She takes off the pumps she was already wearing and pulls the boots on instead.

Lance: Mutters quietly: "I really don't think I'm supposed to leave..."

Nicole looks at him for a long moment.

Nicole: "Do you want to go back?"

Lance: Quickly shakes his head. "No."

Nicole: "Okay..." She turns towards Nicholas. "Okay, are we just staying here?"

Nicholas: "No, I think we should try and find a less obvious spot to camp out. I was thinking we could try and look for a place up there." He points at a hill that leads into the forest surrounding them.
Nicole: “Yeah, let's do that.”

She struggles a bit to get one of the camping bags on her back. The straps clasp shut in the front so she can get them over her wings.

Nicole: “Maybe we shouldn't go too far away from the lake, you know?”

Nicholas: Picks up the biggest bag. “Sounds like a plan.”

He looks back at Lance with an indifferent expression.

Nicholas: “You coming, Lance?”

Lance: “Umh, yeah.” He attempts a smile while he picks up the last bag. “This is for me, right?”

Nicholas: Throws out his arms. “I don't see anyone else here, do you?”

Lance: Flinches faintly. “I'll just take that as a yes, then…”

Nicole: “Wow, mr. grumpy, don't worry about being nice or anything.”

She stops and turns to Lance.

Nicole: “Don't worry, we won't walk that far.”

They wander through the forest. Nicholas gladly helps his sister up a small cliff, but looks like he's going to throw a fit when she does the same for Lance. Nicole doesn't seem to notice.

Nicole: “Well guys, I guess we have officially run off from Heaven.”

Nicholas: “I guess?”

Nicole: “Just leaving like that… They're probably not gonna be happy about it.”

Nicholas: “Are they ever happy about anything? They're just a bunch of dusty old people with no sense of adventure.”

Nicole: Smiles uncertainly. “Heh.”

Nicholas: Smiles back at Nicole. “It's not like we're that important anyway. I don't think anyone's gonna care much.”

Nicole: “I was just thinking about Lance…” She lowers her voice and discretely glances at the boy behind them. “I mean, all those officials are going to flip their shit now they can't psychoanalyze him anymore.”
Lance huddles after them with his eyes on the ground, apparently very focused on not tripping over any rocks or tree roots.

**Nicholas:** Rolls his eyes. “They’re probably just happy to be rid of him, really.”

Nicoile punches him hard in the arm.

**Nicholas:** “Ow! What was that for?” He gives Nicole his best sad puppy eyes.

**Nicole:** “Why did you even go with us if you’re going to be like that?!”

**Nicholas:** Turns around and points both his arms at Lance while he whispers quite loudly: “Just look at him! He’s almost falling over his own feet walking on flat ground!”

With the concentration of someone in the middle of performing brain surgery, Lance steps over a big root that sticks out of the forest floor.

**Nicholas:** “Just look! How am I supposed to let you go ANYWHERE outside Heaven with only him to protect you?!” He stares at Nicole very intensely with his arms still pointed at Lance.

Nicole slaps Nicholas’ arms down and looks at him angrily.

**Nicole:** “Please stop with this whole protective thing. This is a nice, peaceful forest on an empty planet in the middle of nowhere. What exactly are you’re going to protect me from? These terrible, dangerous trees that are probably gonna fall on me any minute? The vicious forest animals?”

Nicholas continues to stare at her. Eventually he gets a sad look in his eyes and walks away with a dismissive wave of his hand.

**Nicholas:** “Whatever…”

**Nicole:** “Oh!” She raises her pointer finger. “And how about you don’t forget how it’s always been me who’s taken care of you!”

While Nicholas and Nicole have been arguing, they have reached a small clearing that overlooks the lake where they came from. Nicole annoyedly takes off her backpack and throws it on the ground.

**Nicole:** “Urgh… How about we stop here? As good a place as any.”

**Nicholas:** “Yeah. Sure.” He drops his bag as well.

Nicole sits down on her bag and looks at Lance who’s trotting towards her.
Nicole: “You okay, Lance?”

Lance: Reaches Nicole huffing and puffing. “Yeah... I-I'm fine.”

Nicole fishes a bottle of water out of her bag and throws it to Lance. He almost catches it, but ends up smacking it away with his hand so it lands on the ground a couple of meters away.

Lance: “FOR FUCK’S SAKE!”

He stomps over and kicks the bottle away.

Nicholas: Glowers at Lance and mumbles to himself: “The most vicious forest animal here is the one she decided to keep as a pet...”
Opal and Thera have been stationed in Gluttony’s circle of Hell with a good portion of their soldiers. Since the rift between Gluttony and the port town on Tibra wasn’t completely sealed during the last mission there, the two lieutenants have been tasked with keeping the area around the rift safe on the Hell side.

A few of their soldiers are standing guard by the rift itself where Opal and Thera have stayed as well. The rest of the squad is spread out across the surrounding jungle, on the lookout for any hostile demons.

Hannu, the seraph who was with Opal and the others on Tibra, is still assigned to properly closing the rift. He has just left through a temporary interdimensional gate he made between here and Faith’s circle. When he comes back, Paolo, Lance’s guardian angel, is with him.

Hannu: “Here he is, Opal.”

Opal: “You could have just asked for me to come to you. You shouldn’t have to travel all the way to Hell.”

Paolo: “No no, it’s perfectly fine. And it’s only one, quick question. Nicole, Lance’s friend, I know you have been in contact with her too?”

Opal: “Yeah. Actually, I’ve been a bit worried. Her brother is one of my subordinates and he should’ve come with us here to Gluttony, but I haven’t been able to get a hold of neither him nor Nicole.”

Paolo: “Oh.” He furrows his eyebrows. “Well, the thing is, Lance is missing too. All three of them must have left together… But, what I wanted to ask was, do you recall Nicole mentioning anything about where they might have gone?”

Opal: “No…” She thinks for a bit. “Sorry, nothing comes to mind.”

Paolo casts his eyes down and raises one of his four hands to his mouth thoughtfully. Opal looks at him with concern and a little confusion.

Opal: “Is he… alright? Lance, I mean.”

Paolo: “Not exactly. He was supposed to be hospitalized for a while. I’m honestly very disappointed in Nicole if it really is her who has taken him away without so much as mentioning it to me.”

Thera has been lingering closeby, carefully listening in on the conversation.
Thera: “Why would she take the boy anywhere?”

Paolo looks a bit surprised by the new person joining the conversation, like he had momentarily forgotten that he’s standing in the middle of a military camp.

**Paolo:** Even though he’s answering Thera’s question, he still addresses Opal: “She has been very skeptical of how Lance has been treated since he came to Heaven. I admit, I might have been too slow to realize that the poor boy is in a really bad way, but at this point she should leave him to the professionals who are trying their best to help.”
15.

Since Dexter came to teleport him away from Tibra, Rex has been staked out in an old, abandoned Skull Inc. camp.

The camp is placed near the edge of a cliff that rises out of the ocean. It appears to have been a permanent establishment with its brick buildings and housing accommodations, but clearly hasn’t been used by the rightful owners in a long time. Moss and algae cover the masonry in splotches, and some of the roofs and other outlying parts of the buildings have been eroded or broken down by the insistent ocean wind that sweeps across the area most of the time.

Rex is leaning on the outer wall of one of the houses with his arms crossed. He seems a bit irritated with the two demons and one devil who are talking next to him.4

Demon1: “Really, how long are we going to stay here?”

The devil glances at Rex with a bleak expression. She is a rather big creature with dark fur and strong arms and upper body. She is more quadrupedal than bipedal and sits on the ground with the posture of a dog.

Jamila: “As long as it takes. It’s been too long since we’ve heard any news.”

As if on cue, Thera appears next to the group in a flash of light. She looks agitated like she has been in a hurry to get there.

Thera: “The boy is gone.”

The others just stare at her for a few seconds.

Demon2: “What do you mean gone?”

Thera: “Remember the nurse I was worried about? Everything points to the fact that she’s run off with him somewhere.”

Demon1: Drags a hand down his face. “I knew we should’ve done something about her.”

Thera: Turns towards Rex. “Why is this taking so long? You said it’d be a matter of a week before the kid’d blow up like he’s supposed to!”

Rex: “Blow up, what a crude way to put it.”

4 Jamila and the two demons
Thera glares at him warningly, so he steps away from the wall and continues talking.

**Rex:** “I said I *assumed* it would be a matter of a week. I’ve also told all of you multiple times that there was no guarantee it would even work.”

**Thera:** “I didn’t spend the last six years of my life getting this position just to throw it all away over your useless scheming!” She gestures angrily at her halo.

**Rex:** “I didn’t spend the last *sixty* years of *my* life researching something that would actually make an impact to be disrespected like that!”

**Thera:** “Well congratulations! This was your one chance of pulling this off, right? And you just blew it.”

A tense silence stretches on for a while. Jamila looks furious and starts pacing back and forth.

**Jamila:** “So what are we supposed to do now?”

**Demon2:** “Why’re you so sure it won’t work all of a sudden? Didn’t you say he was acting weird?”

Thera takes a deep breath to calm herself down.

**Thera:** “Yes. Weird. Weird, but not remarkable. A little aggressive, some evidence that he can use magic, but so can every other harul and their mother.” She rolls her eyes. “It’s nothing that seems like it’s going to escalate.”

Rex looks deep in thought. The others are all staring at him with varying degrees of impatience, but it takes some time before he says anything.

**Rex:** “I have an idea of what might be the problem. But if I’m right, it’s very important that we find the boy.”

**Thera:** “Eehh, can you elaborate?” Her tone holds quite a bit of hostility.

Rex looks annoyed that he has to explain himself.

**Rex:** “To put it simply, maybe the energy Heaven is composed of is so self-contained that a fragment of one of the sins would never be able to return to Hell. Heaven doesn’t mix with the rest of the universe like Hell does… A seraph might be able to make a gateway between Heaven and Hell, but that’s not a transfer of energy, it’s only a window from one place to another. I didn’t expect it to work so differently, but I’m afraid… If the boy has left, wherever he is, the same thing we were waiting to happen to Heaven will happen there instead.”
**Jamila:** “That’s… not really simple, but okay, I follow you.”

**Demon1:** “But we’re not interested in that, right? That’s awful, I mean, he’s probably on some ordinary world!”

**Thera:** Looks even angrier than before. “Yes! How is this going to make us look? It’s the exact opposite of what we were trying to do!”

Jamila is the only one who acts oddly calm now that there is an actual, concrete problem at hand instead of more waiting.

**Jamila:** “Thera, go back, stay alert. Do everything you can to find out where he is. I’m sorry if this is going to blow your cover, but…”

Thera nods grimly.

**Thera:** “Yeah…”

**Jamila:** “We’ll stay here and figure out a backup plan.”
16.

Balthazar is back on Halashin, getting an update on his case from his assigned police officer.

**Police officer:** “You might be happy to hear that the Council has issued a search for Rex by now.”

**Balthazar:** “Why have they suddenly changed their minds?”

**Police officer:** “Multiple circumstances, really. That vampire boy who died on Kimera has displayed some rather strange behaviour. They’re worried it might be caused by the ritual he was involved in. As you know, the investigation on Kimera has been ongoing since you left, but nothing much has come of it.”

**Balthazar:** “So the only things left to do is ask the instigator himself?”

**Police officer:** “I think that’s the idea, yes. As for you personally? Your case has pretty much been boxed while there is still no evidence for or against you. This isn’t a cue for you to put up a search of your own, though. It’s in your own best interest if you stay put.”

**Balthazar:** “Yes, I know.”

**Police officer:** Gives Balthazar a slightly doubtful look. “Very well. I’m afraid I don’t have much else to tell you. If that was all..?”

**Balthazar:** “It’s fine. Thank you.”

**Police officer:** “I’ll meet you here in another week, then.”

He teleports away.

Balthazar is about to leave when he hears the sound of claws against rock coming from the cave behind him. He turns towards the sound.

**Balthazar:** “Thera?”

Thera has been standing unnoticed right inside the cave, waiting for the police officer to leave. She smiles and gives Balthazar a friendly wave as she ambles over to him.

**Balthazar:** Scowls at her. “What, did you come all the way here to gloat?”
Thera: “Now, now, don't be angry. I came to see how our favorite general is doing in this big, free world outside Heaven’s iron fist. My bad - that should be ex-general, shouldn't it?” Her smile turns condescending.

Balthazar: “Thank you for reminding me, I almost forgot. I see that as usual it pays off to be a snitch, lieutenant.”

Thera’s eyes briefly flicker to her own halo.

Thera: “How nice of you to notice. I honestly couldn't have done it without you, so I should be the one to do the thanking.”

Balthazar: “Okay, I'm really not in the mood for this. What do you want?”

Thera: “Right to the point, eh? I like that.”

She puts on a more serious face and glances to the side where the police officer stood a little earlier.

Thera: “You wouldn’t happen to know anything about that boy, would you?

Balthazar: “No. I think you'd have more luck asking Opal about him.”

Thera: “I thought as much. Anyway, that isn't why I'm here. I come with a message for you, from some of my associates who are wondering if you'd like to fight for a good cause. We have had an eye on you ever since you were booted out. To our surprise, you ended up walking around demons all so friendly rather fast.”

Balthazar: Stares at Thera warily. “How do you know that?”

Thera: Smiles again. “When you walk on open worlds amongst demons, you're on our territory. That's all I can say about that.”

Balthazar: “What are you talking about? Your territory?”

Thera: “We have no name, that would just give people something to tattle about. We fight to put an end to the ridiculous war between the archangels and the Fallen One. Their silly disagreement has been tormenting us,” she holds a hand to her chest, “the mortals they do not understand, for all too long.”

Balthazar just looks at her in silence for a long moment.

Balthazar: “Don't tell me you're one of these so called revolutionaries. Please…”

Thera: “Eeh." She cocks her head with a mocking expression. “Thought you would have said terrorists. How awfully polite of you."
Balthazar: “You singled me out - you got me thrown out, for what? To recruit me?! Why would you do that?” He repeats himself, but louder this time: “Why would you do that?!”

Thera: Points at her lieutenant halo. “You were an easy target. You had already stepped on the Council’s self inflated ego one time too many. And then you started digging around in our business? Please, you were almost screaming to be singled out. You handed this to me, and I simply accepted your pleas to be used as a stepping stone. As I said, I couldn’t have gotten this halo without you.”

Balthazar: “Are you stupid? Do you think I won’t tell anyone I can get to about this the first chance I get?”

Thera: “Honestly that is the least of my worries right now.” She looks at Balthazar, unperturbed. “Who would believe you anyway? The loudmouth fallen angel’s word against the trustworthy new lieutenant who always acts accordingly. Eeewh, really? You’d only make yourself look bad, trying to get back at the one who pointed out your treason to the Council.”

Balthazar: “So you got me good.”

Thera: “I did. Now, I’m honestly not a big fan of you myself – You’re too loud. However, several other people in our group think differently. Your little adventure into demon friendly land has made good impressions. They think that walking among the poor things has opened your eyes to the cruel treatment they get from Heaven. They believe that maybe, just maybe, it, together with your hatred for the ancients, can be enough for you to be willing to stand up to the oppression and do what’s right.”

Balthazar: “Haha, oh you are just priceless. What is this, some kind of test? Didn't you hear me before?”

Thera: “Oh, I did. Don't think we’re inviting you into the inner sanctum just yet. We are... merely pointing out the option.”

Balthazar: “Aha. And then what is it you want from me?”

Thera raises a hand to her beak in a thoughtful gesture.

Thera: “I think the higher-ups would like you to show them that you’re willing to do what it takes. Not necessarily now of course. The door is open at any time you should decide to join our ranks.”

Balthazar: “I take it you will continue spying on me then.” He shakes his head, slowly and warningly. “I will find a way to get back at you, Thera. Don't think you'll get rid of me that easily.”

Thera gives him an arrogant smirk.
Thera: “I'll look forward to that. It'll be fun to see you dig yourself even further into the mud. If you change your mind you can always talk to your benevolent host Harvey. Don’t be a stranger, Balthazar.”

She tips her halo as if it was a hat and disappears.
17.

Shortly after his encounter with Thera, Balthazar travels back to Rover’s Crossing and barges into Harvey’s office. He closes the door behind him with a very severe expression on his face.

Harvey looks up at him from his desk, unimpressed.

**Harvey:** “Why, you look like someone who means business.”

**Balthazar:** “What do you know about these people running around calling themselves revolutionaries?”

**Harvey:** “Not much more than the average slob, I’m afraid.” He leans back in his chair and crosses his arms.

**Balthazar:** “Then how do you explain that one of them just told me to contact you about them? Are you working for them?”

**Harvey:** “Ha ha ha, oh they’d loooove to have me on the member’s list, but I don’t sell so easy.”

Balthazar continues to glare at him, so Harvey scoffs and goes on to elaborate.

**Harvey:** “I humor ‘em on occasion. When it’s convenient. For me. I allow ‘em to pass through ‘n do their thing, and in return they offer… shall we say, protection. We’ve common interests anyway – They wanna gather up demons, and oftentimes, so do I.”

He raises his eyebrows and looks at Balthazar pointedly.

**Harvey:** “The real question is, what do they want with your sorry ass?”

**Balthazar:** “To recruit me apparently! They had me banished just to give me an agenda to join them!” He runs a hand through his hair and looks utterly frustrated. “I don’t even know what’s happening anymore.”

**Harvey:** Waves one hand at him dismissively. “Now, not so narcissistic, Feathers. That part was likely just a bonus.”

He thinks it over for a couple of seconds.

**Harvey:** “Hm... You’d make one hell of an asset, though. Intelligence wise.”

**Balthazar:** “Can you get me into contact with them?”
Harvey: “What, you wanna join their ranks now?”

Balthazar: “For God’s sake, no! I want to make a point, that if they’re gonna stab me in the back, I’ll make damn well sure it’ll come back to hurt them!”

Harvey: “Heh. I probably shouldn’t encourage this, but now there’s something I’d like to see.”

Balthazar: “So do you know anything about what they’re planning?”

Harvey tilts his head a little and studies Balthazar with scrutiny.

Harvey: “Your good buddy Jerry helps ’em out once in awhile. I think you’d best talk to him. I figure you have to speak with this demon named Dexter... I’m warning you, though - He’s a rotten pest, but you don’t wanna get on his bad side. Really, the same could be said for all of ’em. Y’think this place has some oddballs? They’re a right freakshow in comparison.”

He pauses before adding: “Don’t worry about me, I’m not gonna get involved. It’s not good for business.”

Balthazar nods and leaves the office without another word.
Balthazar finds Jerry in a small tavern where Elle works as a waitress. Elle is leaning on the bar counter, talking to Jerry. The owner of the place, a very large, lizard like demon with many legs, comes out from a backroom.

**Tavern owner:** “Elle, you have tables to clean!”

**Elle:** Gestures at the empty room with a hint of annoyance. “There's no one here! It's the middle of the day anyway. I'll get to it.”

**Tavern owner:** “I don't pay you to mack on your boyfriend, missy.”

Elle sees Balthazar when he comes in the door, radiating anger.

**Elle:** Whispers to Jerry: “Ooo noo, he's back.”

With his brow furrowed, Jerry turns around to look at Balthazar.

**Jerry:** “What's wrong..?”

**Balthazar:** “I need to talk to you. Preferably somewhere else.”

**Jerry:** “Okaay... Am I in trouble or something?”

Balthazar doesn’t answer, but simply turns around on his heel and walks back outside.

**Balthazar:** “I've decided to help out with your whole freedom fighter business.” He says it bluntly without any further ado.

**Jerry:** “Uhh, what the fuck is that supposed to mean? Is this you lame plan to infiltrate them or something?”

**Balthazar:** Stares at Jerry. “Does it matter? I hear you need all the help you can get, right?”

**Jerry:** “Well, yeah... We're kind of having trouble at the moment. You know, the town.”

Balthazar appears confused by that.

**Balthazar:** “It seems pretty peaceful to me?”

**Jerry:** “Just a lucky streak while you've been here, I guess. There's a bunch of Skull Inc. people running around, killing and kidnapping demons right and left.”

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**Balthazar:** “Why kidnapping..?”

**Jerry:** “Apparently they experiment on them. I don't know, it's some pretty sick shit. We think they're planning on setting up a portal here, and you know what happens to places with one of those.”

**Balthazar:** “They are torn to the ground, yes...”

**Jerry:** Looks up at Balthazar cautiously. “I don't know what happened, but you shouldn't make decisions while you're pissed off like this.”

**Balthazar:** “Can't we just say I genuinely want to help.” He manages a forced smile.

**Jerry:** “Well... It's not really up to me.”

**Balthazar:** “Harvey said I have to speak to someone named Dexter?”

**Jerry:** “Oh, this is his idea? Harvey just loves his drama...” He suddenly seems very exasperated with the entire situation. “But yeah, Dexter... He'll be here tomorrow.”
On Netoka in Kaël’s apartment, Lana sits on the couch and stares blankly into space while Messa is in the middle of rummaging through some dresses lying on a dining table.

**Messa:** “Lana, I’m talking to you!”

**Lana:** Snaps out of her stupor. “Oh. Sorry.”

**Messa:** “Pink or blue?”

She holds one pink and one blue dress up in front of her.

**Kaël:** Walks into the room. “They’re both fine, Messa. Stop being so nervous.”

**Messa:** “I’m not nervous, I just want to look my best! Not that you would know, your excuse for a wardrobe is made up of fifty black t-shirts!”

Messa notices that Lana has gone right back to spacing out.

**Messa:** “Lana what’s wrong? You’ve been super down for days.”

**Lana:** “I think I have to leave.” She says it as much to herself as the two others.

**Messa:** “Why?”

**Lana:** “I mean, I think I have to leave.. for a while…”

**Messa:** “... Why..?”

Lana looks immensely uncomfortable with the idea of having to explain herself.

**Lana:** “How should I explain this…” She takes a deep breath. “I was married once. Before we were separated, my husband did some terrible things and hurt a lot of people. I haven’t known of his whereabouts for years, but I recently found that he might come to harm people again.”

**Kaël:** Looks a bit worried. “Sounds like a real asshole.”

Messa throws herself on the couch, still holding the two dresses, and leans forward confidentially.

**Messa:** “Is he like a mob boss or something? Is that why you never want to talk about it?”
Lana: “Not... quite. It doesn't matter what he is. I know his actions aren't my responsibility, but I feel that I won't be able to live with myself if I do not at least attempt to talk to him.”

Messa: “So you're gonna go kick his ass?” She looks excited by the prospect.

Lana: Smiles weakly for a second. “If necessary. Either way, I must be going.”

She stands up and walks into a small bedroom that her and Messa share.

Messa: “Like... You're leaving right now?”

Lana doesn’t answer immediately, just keeps her focus on the task of gathering her few belongings. She comes back out a few minutes later with a bag over her shoulder.

She glances at Kaél and falters for a moment like she’s not sure what to say.

Lana: “I'm sorry to leave you so abruptly. I hope you will manage.”

Kaél: Still looks worried. “Can you at least tell us where you're going?”

Lana: “No.”

She bends down to give Messa a tight hug. Messa looks a little astounded.

Lana: “Thank you, Messa. For being my friend.”

She walks over to Kaél and bows slightly.

Lana: “Thank you, Kaél, for your hospitality and kindness. I had been without a home for a long time, but I found one here.”

Kaél: “Uh...” He kind of awkwardly gives Lana a hug. “Not that I don't think you know what you're doing, but if you need help you can always call us, you know?”

Lana: Smiles sadly. “Thank you.”

Messa: Looks just as worried as Kaél now. “Lana you're acting like we're never gonna see you again.”

Lana: “I trust that we will, but I still wanted you to know that you are very dear to me.” She walks towards the front door. “Fare well. Don't argue too much while I am away.”

She gives them another sad smile before opening the door and leaving.
The day after Balthazar’s run-in with Thera, he and Jerry are waiting for Dexter on the steppe a short distance away from Rover’s Crossing. Jerry is wearing his usual clothes, but has put on an actual pair of boots for the occasion. Balthazar look a bit more prepared to go fight things and has brought his sword.

Jerry sits on the ground, cross legged with his head in his hands, and looks bored. In front of him, Balthazar is pacing back and forth uneasily.

Jerry: “I don’t know what’s up either. It isn’t like Dexter to be late at all.”

Balthazar: “Yes, this is getting plain rude, isn’t it. What has it been, two hours? But I suppose if he has to walk all the way here something got in the way.” He shrugs annoyedly.

Jerry: Snorts. “Yeah, good one.”

Balthazar: “What?”

Jerry: “Just... You’ll see.”

He stares at Balthazar with exasperation.

Jerry: “Will you please stop pacing? I don’t know what your deal is here, it’s weirding me out. You better not fuck this up, by the way. Some of us have people to rescue.”

There’s a flash of light followed by a strong flurry of wind when Dexter pops up out of nowhere, right next to Balthazar. Startled, Balthazar takes a couple of steps back.

Dexter: “Yes indeed, people to rescue and portals to destroy!” He holds his hands together in front of his chest and grins excitedly. “Such a busy day you’ll have!”

Balthazar obviously recognizes the fox that has appeared in front of him - The very same strange demon who came to Tibra to teleport Rex away.

Balthazar: “You--”

Dexter: Is practically beaming up at Balthazar. “You recognize me?? I’m so flattered!”

Jerry: Stands up. “Wait, what..?”

Dexter: Cuts himself and Jerry off with a clap of his hands. “SO ANYWAY! We fiinally get to play with the lizard man, heheeh!” He leers at Jerry. “And of course, the human as well. Good, good.”
Jerry: “Dude, I have a name.”

Dexter: “Yeah, Pablo or something, right?”

Dexter has moved closer to Balthazar without really thinking about it and lifts a hand like he has an irresistible urge to stroke his hair.

Dexter: “Unusual. Up close you look more like a green cow than a lizard.”

Balthazar: Leans away. “I get that a lot.”

He looks down at Dexter skeptically.

Balthazar: “Judging by your reaction, it doesn’t seem like you have a problem with me being here. I want to offer my help, so is there any chance you can tell me about your plans?”

Dexter smirks and gives him an outright dirty look. He is about to say something when he is interrupted by an extremely tall demon who has somehow managed to approach the other three without anyone but Jerry noticing him.

James: “Dexter, contain yourself. We’re not here to harass these people.”

Jerry: “S’up James.”

James: “Good day, Jeremiah.” He politely tips his hat.

James has rabbit like features and an oddly unbalanced body build with big, heavy arms. He moves quite gracefully despite this. Balthazar looks vaguely uncomfortable standing next to someone who for once is considerably taller than he is.⁵

Dexter: “How the hell, James? HOW do you always sneak up on me like that?”

James: Stares at Dexter, unimpressed. “… Why did you even bother teleporting from the other side of the houses to here? Your laziness will never cease to amaze me.”

Dexter: “I just wanted to pop up here all cool and like, you know…”

James couldn’t possibly look any less impressed.

Dexter: “… Man, you know, whatever.”

Jerry: Laughs. “No one knows how to appreciate all this talent, you know?”

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⁵ There’s James
Dexter: Perks up a little and smirks at Jerry. “Yeah, you're totally jealous.”

Jerry: “Maybe a little jealous.”

James: Clears his throat. “So.” He addresses Balthazar: “You must be Balthazar, if I’m not mistaken?”

Balthazar: “Yes. I am.”

James: “It's a pleasure to meet you. My name is James and I will oversee this mission.”

Balthazar: “Aha. No one told me about… you.”

James: “I have been told plenty about you. We expected you might join us. I generally accept the help I am offered, so I am honestly delighted to see you here. Besides, if Jeremiah approves of you coming with us, I trust his judgement.”

Jerry looks a bit self-conscious. James straightens his back and towers over Balthazar with his full height. He looks down at him with his cold, unblinking eyes.

James: “But just so we are clear, Mr. ser-Imad. If you in any way try to hinder or endanger my mission, I will rip off both your arms and possibly choke you with your own hands.”

Balthazar: Looks a little affronted. “Fair enough. But may I add, that it so far isn't me delaying your mission.”

James: “The delay is not the fault of anyone. The targets have been moved to a more secure location. In response we had to gather equipment to better match the new conditions. Such things take time.”

Dexter: “Ah yes, new location. I hope you fellas don't mind a little snow.”

Jerry: “Wait, they moved everyone? So we don't even have a gate to this place.”

Dexter: “Hahahahaha, oh Jerry. What d'you need a gate for when you have me?!"

A whirlwind of magic surrounds Dexter and the others.

James: Reaches for the fox as if to stop him. “Dexter, do--”

With a loud poof they are all transported to a mostly flat landscape with snow as far as the eye can see. An old, ramshackle warehouse serves as a waypoint in the middle of all the white, but otherwise the area seems empty and abandoned.

James: “-n't teleport…” His outstretched arm drops to his side and he slumps tiredly. “…people around without warning.”
To be moved from one dimension to another by Dexter’s wind magic feels a little like being punched in the gut by a tornado and then having all the air sucked out from your lungs. Balthazar looks disoriented while Jerry sweeps his very windblown hair away from his face.

Dexter’s ecstatic smile fades a little when he looks over at James.

**Dexter:** “Oh, sorry James... Sometimes I forget I literally take your breath away.” He shrugs teasingly.

Balthazar looks out at the snow covered landscape. The snow is light and constantly blown into the air by the wind, so he can’t see very far.

**Balthazar:** “Skull Inc. has a station here..?”

James removes his dead stare from Dexter and looks a fraction more energetic.

**James:** “Yes, a smaller station that functions as a gateway between a few different worlds. They take demons here to be sorted and tagged, before shipping them elsewhere... Or worse.”

**Dexter:** “They got quite a few of these places that we know of. All in hostile environments.”

**Balthazar:** “Yeah... With all the land they're taking over, they're hard to keep track of. Even for Heaven.”

**James:** “Dexter, where are the others?”

**Dexter:** “Oh, yes, the cave entrance is right...” He looks a little confused.

Another demon has shown up behind them. Actually, he doesn’t look like a demon at all. There is nothing fearsome about his round, plushy face and friendly smile.

**Morton:** “Over here, you airhead! By the seven, as soon as you actually have to walk, you have the worst sense of direction ever.”

**Dexter:** “Baarh, details. Besides, James told me not to teleport right in there with the angels.”

**James:** “Thank you, Morton.” He takes a few, long steps to reach the new demon and looks over his shoulder at Balthazar and Jerry. “Let's get you some warmer clothing, you two.”

When he steps into the cave where his small team has set up camp for the time being, James tips his hat in greeting before taking it off. Two more demons are already sitting inside - Sal, a green skinned grindylow with a vigilant air about her, and Dorian, a big, heavy,
manticore with thick, white fur, and big paws for hands that makes him look like he isn’t entirely meant to be bipedal.6

**James:** Points his gaze at Sal. “We picked up the angels. Did you get the last of the equipment?”

Sal gives James a firm nod in confirmation and jerks her head in the direction of a few stacks of clothes, weapons and other equipment lying on the ground.

**Sal:** “Sure thing, boss. Even sorted it neatly for ya.”

**Dorian:** “What do you mean angels? There’s more than one now?”

**James:** “Yes, we have a new volunteer, for which we should be grateful.”

The atmosphere in the cave is quite tense as Balthazar and the others have walked in as well. Warily, Balthazar looks around at each member of the group. Dorian doesn’t take his eyes off Balthazar.

**Jerry:** Elbows Balthazar in the side. “Say hello.”

**Balthazar:** Gives Jerry an annoyed glance, then looks out at the others again. “I’m here to help, so I hope we can find common ground over getting this thing done.”

Dorian snorts disapprovingly and continues to glare at Balthazar.

**Jerry:** “What he meant to say was hi, I’m Balthazar. I guess you don’t know me either? I’m from the same town as the demons we’re looking for. Just call me Jerry.”

**Sal:** Gives Jerry a curt nod. “I heard of ya alright. You know how the fox never shuts his pie hole.”

James has taken off his coat and Morton is helping him into a bulletproof vest since his enormous hands makes it difficult for him to do such things himself.

**Dexter:** “YES, Sal, I want you to take good care of this featherboy for me.” He puts an arm around Jerry. “He still owes me a drink or ten!”

Dexter puts his other arm around a clearly uncomfortable Balthazar and squeezes both of the angels.

**Dexter:** “And I want you to keep a sharp eye on our new friend... Not quite as sharp as Dorian's, but you know what I mean.” He winks at Dorian with a mocking grin.

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6 [James’ small team](#)
Dorian lets out a disgruntled huff, but finally looks away from them.

Jerry: “I don't owe you shit, don't come here with your lies.” He laughs.

Dexter: “Oh yeah? What about that bet you lost to me, eyh? Bet you can't teleport that herd of beasts you said! Ain't possible you said!”

Jerry: “You missed three beasts, it doesn't count!”

James: Puts his coat back on. “Dexter, stop the folly, would you?”

Dexter immediately lets go of the angels.

James: Looks at Balthazar and Jerry. “If you would equip yourselves, it would be most appreciated. We made sure to find gear that can go with wings, but it will by no means be a perfect fit. I hope you can work with that.”

Jerry: “Yeah, thanks, I'm kind of freezing my ass off.” He’s standing in his plain t-shirt with his arms wrapped around himself.

Balthazar: “I'm sure it'll do.”

Each of them find a vest similar to the one James is wearing and pick out some warm outerwear as well. Jerry doesn't find it necessary to add anything to the handgun and dagger he already brought himself.

The collected firearms are all equipped with silencers, meant for stealthy infiltration more than blatant shootouts. Balthazar takes a handgun and some matching ammunition.

Dexter: “Oh gosh, look at the time!” He looks down at his watch-less wrist. “I have to move on to my next appointment.”

James: “Of course. Just be sure to meet back up with us here in four hours.” He pulls a pocket watch from his coat and resets it with some difficulty.

Dexter searches through the ridiculous number of stop watches he apparently always carries on his person until he finds one that isn't already counting down.

Dexter: “And you be sure to be here.” He looks up at James with an affectionate, but faintly concerned smile and adds: “…You big loaf.”

Jerry: “Aw, we'll look after him.” He smiles at them.

Dexter grins and disappears in a whirl of wind, not even bothering to go outside first. It sends a good deal of the equipment lying on the ground flying. James doesn't even look fazed by this as he addresses the room.
James: “Before we leave, it would appear my crew has horrid manners. This sharp lady here is Sal.” He gestures at Sal with one hand. “This… man… is Dorian.” Then gestures at Dorian with the other. Finally, he turns towards Morton. “And lastly, this good man is Morton.”

Sal and Dorian both look a little self-conscious. Morton grabs the brim of his white cadet cap and bows his head a little with an ever friendly face.
James and his odd assembly of demons and angels trudge through the snow covered plains on the way to the Skull Inc. camp. The snow is still blowing heavily and the surroundings are nothing but white on more white.

**Jerry**: “Is it really necessary to walk all the way there?” He wraps his arms around himself, clearly freezing. “I mean, wouldn't it've made more sense for Dexter to take us there? Hell, I could take us there!”

**Sal**: “Sure would be convenient, but the glow could be convenient for any guards too.”

**Jerry**: Throws out an arm to bring attention to the weather. “You can't even see two feet in front of you!”

**Dorian**: “What's the matter, featherboy? Getting cold feet?”

**Jerry**: “Yes! Pretty literally!”

**James**: “We haven’t actually been close to this camp before, nor do we know how many people are stationed there.”

**Balthazar**: “You don't know the area either, Jeremiah. You might as well land us right in the middle of their camp.”

**James**: “Mr. ser-Imad is right. It would be quite the tragedy to teleport in, only to get butchered on the spot.”

**Jerry**: “I know! I'm just saying, this is awful.”

Dorian is so amused by Jerry’s suffering that he lets out a low, rumbling laughter. He takes a few more steps, then abruptly stops.

**Dorian**: “Something else is out here.”

Dorian stands completely still, trying to sense any sound or smell that might alert him to what exactly is out there. After a few seconds he gets down on all fours and stalks away, out into the snow, with steps too uncannily silent for such a big creature.

Sal has drawn the rifle she has been carrying on her back. She looks up at James, worried. Morton is just standing around, seemingly unaffected by everyone else’s uneasiness.

**Sal**: To James: “Ya think they've seen us?”
James: “Relax now, it's most likely some local creature running about.” Despite his words he stays very still and listens for any sound other than the howling wind.

They stand there waiting for Dorian to come back when they can suddenly make out a humanoid silhouette through the snow, only a few meters away. The figure freezes for a moment, just as cautious as they are, but then notices Jerry.

Sherba: “Jerry!”

A strongly built, blue skinned woman with coarse, black hair comes towards them. She wades through the snow with long, brisk steps until she reaches Jerry and picks him up in a bear hug.?

Sherba: “Ha ha ha!” She puts Jerry back on the ground, but keeps her hands on his shoulders, looking relieved. “Never have I been so happy to see your ugly mug!”

Jerry: “Sherba! Wow, you got away?” He seems a little flustered from just being picked up like that.

James’ posture eases up. Sal lowers her rifle, but keeps her finger on the trigger, still cautious. Morton continues to look completely unaffected by it all while Dorian appears as a faint shadow through the snow, standing up in the spot where Sherba came from.

Jerry: “Where's everyone else? Are they okay?”

Sherba: “No they're not okay.” Her otherwise kind face twists into a hateful snarl. “They have them locked up, those animals! They have my boy, I couldn't get to him.”

Her features soften again and settle on a hopeless expression.

Sherba: “They took me away for some kind of test, but the idiots left me alone with this pathetic researcher.”

Jerry: “Okay, so you ran off?”

Sherba: “I smashed that disgusting lizard's skull into the wall and took his gun!” She pulls up a futuristic looking taser gun from the waistband of her pants to show it to Jerry. “Then I tried to get the others, but there's guards everywhere! Started shooting at me too. I had to climb the fence and run…”

She raises a hand to her forehead as if to conceal how lost and distressed she feels. After a few seconds, her eyes snap up to the rest of the group.

Sherba: “Who are your friends..?”

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7 Here's Sherba
James: “Sherba, was it? My name is James and our little party here is on--"

Dorian: Walks a half circle around Sherba to stand in front of her and interrupts James in a loud voice: “ON our way to DESTROY those lizard FILTH!”

If James' dead-eyed face was capable of expressing emotion, he would probably look appalled, but instead he just stiffens a little with his shoulders tense.

James: “How rude, Dorian. That is no way to present us. Just, rude.”

Sal: “Ey.” She shrugs and puts her rifle away. “Gonna crack some skulls and take some names.”

Morton: “And potentially feast on their corpses.”

James: “…..”

James: “…”

James: “I assure you, our main priority is to save as many or our fellow demons as possible, and shut down the camp portals.”

Sherba: “Oh I'd love to help out with that.”

Her attention shifts to Balthazar. She looks at him suspiciously.

Sherba: “And this one. Who're you?”

Balthazar holds his hands up in front of himself protectively.

Balthazar: “Not an exodon.”

Sherba: “I know you're not one of them, angel. You have hair.”

Balthazar: “Sorry, I'm just so used to people calling me a lizard. I'm with him.” He points a thumb at Jerry.

Jerry: “Yep.”

Jerry is in the middle of taking his jacket off.

Jerry: To Sherba: “Seriously though, take this.”

Sherba really doesn’t look appropriately dressed for the harsh weather. She is only wearing a tank top and a pair of pants.
**Sherba:** “Ha ha ha!” She puts a hand on Jerry’s shoulder to stop him. “I've spent half my life in weather like this. Don't worry about it, sweetheart.”

**Dorian:** Snorts and laughs. “Nay, perhaps she ought to give you some of *her* clothes. You're turning about as blue as she is!”

**Sherba:** Huffs, a little amused. “Honestly, you do look like you're about to get frostbite.”

Jerry irritately zips his jacket back up.

**Jerry:** “What's with you people? Am I the only one here who’s fucking cold?!" He looks to Balthazar.

**Balthazar:** Shrugs. “It's not that bad.”

**James:** Fumbles with his pocket watch. “I'm sorry to interrupt, but we are on the clock here. Sherba, you're more than welcome to tag along. Strength in numbers, yes?”

He starts moving towards the camp again and the others follow.
James and the others have gotten so close to the Skull Inc. camp that they can make out the buildings through the snow. One of the area’s long sides is in front of them, furthest away from the portals they are supposed to shut down.

Dorian has left the group to scout while the others discuss how to proceed.

**Sal:** “How’re we gonna do this, boss?” She glances towards the faint lights illuminating the camp.

**James:** “With stealth, if possible. If we can keep them from alarming one another, we stand a much better chance. Luckily this terrible weather will help us tremendously with that.”

**Sherba:** “No matter where you come in there's guards. That or their pet monsters.”

**James:** Nods to Sherba in acknowledgement. “You should all be careful with those floppy beasts. They look slow, but they move at great speed across the snow.”

He turns his attention to Jerry.

**James:** “And as a precaution, I have a special mission for you, Jeremiah.”

**Jerry:** “Well, obviously.”

**James:** “I want you to sneak up to the gate control house and shut all the gates down. Should they notice us and sound the alarms, they won't be able to call in reinforcements.”

**Jerry:** “That's probably a good first priority.”

**James:** Looks to Morton. “Go with him, but stay out of sight ‘till he gives the all clear, or calls for aid.”

Morton gives James a "Come ON" kind of look.

**Dorian:** “Yeeah.” He idly scratches his neck. “You're 'bout as stealthy as a marching band. Better stay out of the way ‘till needed.”

The perfectly friendly smile that is usually plastered on Morton’s face turns a little strained and dead.

**Jerry:** “I'm sure there'll be some guards running in to help anyway.”

Morton’s smile returns with unsettling intensity.
James: To Sherba: “Do you know which of the buildings they keep your friends in?”

Sherba: “That big one to the right.” She points at a big, barrack like building that can faintly be seen behind the fence that surrounds the camp. “But they’re not exactly keeping the doors unlocked.”

Sal: “Fiends might still be working in there. Let's see if we got any luck. If not, we'll just have to make some.”

James: “Tearing down the doors will cause too much noise. We will have to go looking for a key, or clean the site of all vermin.”

Dorian has returned to the others and walks up behind James, silently.

Dorian: “I vote for the last part.” He smiles wide, showing off his overabundance of teeth.

Sherba: Glares angrily at Dorian. “I'm not here to kill people and cause a big ruckus. You know what kinda weapons they have. It's risky going in there at all.”

James: “Yes, let's avoid any all out battles. First we need to get in there.”

He turns his attention to Jerry and Morton again.

James: “Go shut down those portals now. Meanwhile, we will introduce ourselves to the guardsmen.”

James’ face does something that might resemble a smile, but not really.

Jerry seems to be sizing Morton up, not completely sure what to make of him.

Jerry: “You think you can climb the fence without tearing the whole thing down, mr. marching band?”

Morton: Slowly turns his head towards Jerry, smiles and answers in a peppy voice: “Shouldn't be a problem, mate!”

Jerry looks a little weirded out.

Jerry: “Okay then. You first.” He points one arm at the fence in front of them.

Morton climbs the fence and Jerry flies over it. They disappear into the camp while the rest of the group moves towards the guardhouse at the camp’s entrance.

Balthazar: “I don't really see how taking the main entrances corresponds with the fact that we're trying to avoid confrontation.”
Sal: “Why not just start at the entrance? Taking ’em out one at a time beats ’em grouping up and coming at us all at once.”

Balthazar: “You don't think they have a bunch of people at the gate?”

Dorian: “There’s two. One of the shits wasn't even paying attention to anything but some dumb game machine while I was scouting... They got one mean ass looking guard pet, though.”

They walk along the fence until they reach a control booth that sticks out from the camp grounds next to the entrance.

One of the guards Dorian mentioned is standing in the doorway to the booth and laughs dumbly at a big animal that looks like a cross between a penguin and a crocodile. Despite the demons all calling the exodons lizards, he looks more like a dinosaur.

The pengudile is flopping around in the snow, gobbling up the little pieces of meat the guard throws at it.

Balthazar: “Okay, I guess their pet is the real problem here.”

Sherba: Takes out her stolen taser gun. “If you can get rid of the guards, it's not a problem.”

James: “Give me half a minute, will you? I will remove the guardhouse.”

He bends down and digs his enormous hands into the snow so he can touch the ground below.

Sherba’s arm sinks, lowering her gun.

Sherba: “You will what?”

James: “I'll remove the ground under the guardhouse, creating a sinkhole for--”

Dorian: “He'll suck the junk heap with guards and all into the ground. Then you can take the beast out, if the fucker doesn’t drop in the hole with the rest of them. Easy, simple, deadly.”

James glowers at Dorian who has now interrupted him for the second time.

Sherba: Just blinks, not entirely sure she’s following. “Fine.”

The guard who was playing with the pengudile looks down, confused by the fact that the ground has started shaking under him. He is about to shout something to the other guard

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8 The majestic pengudile
9 Some random exodon designs
inside the booth, but in the same moment the ground crumbles under his feet and both the guards and the whole house sinks into the earth.

The pengudile is standing right by the edge of the sinkhole. Its hind body slides down, but it manages to pull itself up with its front legs and clambers back onto safe ground. Behind it, the hole collapses in on itself, burying the house underneath. The thick layer of soil is flattened neatly as if there had never been a building there in the first place.

The pengudile spots the intruders and runs towards them. Sherba points her taser gun at it and shoots. The small projectile releases a strong electrical shock that makes the animal jolt and fall over. Despite its muscles convulsing badly, it tries to get up again. Sherba walks closer to it and shoots once more. This time the pengudile stays on the ground.

With the measured ease of someone who is used to hunting, Sherba snaps the pengudile’s neck with a quick twist of its head. She nods her head in acknowledgement of the bare patch of ground where the control booth just stood and turns her head towards James.

**Sherba:** “That's practical.”

**James:** “Yes, so far so good. Let's proceed.”

In the background, Balthazar looks slightly frightened. Dorian slaps him on the back with enough force to nearly knock him over.

**Dorian:** “Now comes the fun part!”

**Balthazar:** “You mean we murder the other guards?”

**Dorian:** “It's war, man. Get with the program.”

**Sal:** “These Skull Inc. fiends deserve no better.” She spits on the ground. “Kidnapping peaceful civilians to use as lab rats, or just straight up butcher.”

**Sherba:** “They don't matter, we need to find a key.” She seems increasingly irritated that the others act like they have only come here to kill things. “Maybe we should split up and speed this up some.”

**James:** “Indeed. Dorian, take Balthazar and Sherba with you into the building ahead. Sal and I will go to the left. And remember, we are here to save the prisoners first and foremost. Don't go looking for unnecessary trouble.” He looks pointedly at Dorian.

**Sherba:** Glances at James. “Thank you…”

Sherba proceeds to trudge through the snow in the direction of a short building close by. Balthazar trails after her.
James: “Should you find the key for the prison building, come get us.”

Dorian grunts and nods in confirmation before he follows after Sherba and Balthazar. When they reach the building, Dorian tries the back door and finds that it has been left unlocked. He holds the door open with one hand and cautiously peers inside. It seems empty of any of the staff.

Dorian: “I'll go ahead and look for trouble.”

He glances at Sherba who still looks angry.

Dorian: “Eh, I mean guards. You two try and find what we need.”

He switches to walking on all fours and quietly disappears down the hallway inside.
Jerry and Morton walk along the path between the barrack building and the camp’s outer fence.

**Jerry:** Looks at Morton. “I don't suppose you're the tech expert of the group?”

**Morton:** “No, clearly the tech savvy one is Dorian. Can't you tell from his big, meaty hands?” His permanent smile doesn't waver in the slightest. “I know how to shut those terminals down. Done it twenty seven times by now.”

**Jerry:** “Huh, cool. I used to do this sometimes, but that's thirty years ago. I strongly assume they've made some upgrades since then. You can read the language?”

**Morton:** “I know a little.”

**Jerry:** “Yeah, same for me. Well. This'll be easy then.”

They make it to the far end of the barrack where they can look out at an open area of the camp. Up ahead, three portals, large enough to drive a truck through, become visible through the blowing snow. A technician is in the middle of inspecting some wiring inside a panel on the closest portal. A mid-sized pengudile is laying by his side, looking around the area attentively.

Jerry steps back as soon as he sees the technician and holds out an arm in front of Morton to stop him.

**Jerry:** “There's some mechanic guy over there, but I'm not going out in the middle of the square. There's cameras all over the place.”

Jerry is quiet while he speculates on how to proceed.

**Jerry:** “You know what, fuck it, we're just going in the control house.”

**Morton:** “Whatever you say, boss.”

Jerry draws his pistol, puts a hand on Morton’s shoulder and teleports them right to the other side of the control house’s front door. In front of them is a hallway that leads to a few side rooms and ends in a small, open sitting room.

**Morton:** Whispers: “Such a gentle touch you got there. Nothing like the fox taxi.”

**Jerry:** Whispers back: “You're welcome.”
Jerry carefully takes a few steps down the hallway. The first door on the left leads to the portal control room. Two technicians are sitting with their backs turned, focused on a lot of monitors displaying various graphs and text logs. Jerry sneaks past the open door towards the sitting room to check if it’s empty.

When Jerry turns around, about to check the remaining three doors in the hallway, Morton has drawn his pistol. Calmly and with one hand in his pocket, he walks into the control room with a casualness like he belongs there.

Jerry: Whisper-shouts: “Morton what the fuck?!”

One of the technicians swivels a little in his chair to address the new person in the room, but doesn’t look away from the screen he’s surveying.

Tech1: “Do bist a lanika Jona?” He speaks like he’s expecting Morton to be somebody else.

Morton lifts his gun and pulls the trigger to hit Tech1 in the back of the head. In the same motion, he shifts his aim to the other technician who janks off the headset he was wearing and turns towards Morton, looking shocked. Morton fires again and leaves Tech2 dead in his chair.

Still wearing his ever-present smile, he sweeps Tech1 out of his chair and sits down in it instead.

Morton: “Now then.”

Jerry barges into the room, stops, and looks at the dead technicians with tired resignation.

Jerry: “I really hope you meant it when you said you know how to shut down the portals.”

Morton: Turns his head halfway towards Jerry. “I ain't no liar.”

Morton opens a console window on the monitor in front of him and carefully types in a few characters.

Morton: “You could try and see how the others are doing while I work.”

He points at a grid of surveillance feeds on a large monitor by the other chair. The images flicker a little since the signal to the cameras is disturbed by the weather. One of the feeds seems to have died completely, leaving its place in the grid black.

Jerry: “Urgh…”

Jerry removes the dead exodon from the other chair and sits down. He glances at the foreign language panels in front of them, then over at the camera feeds. In one recording he can see Dorian in the middle of bludgeoning some poor exodon dressed in a chef apron.
Jerry: “They're murdering lizards as expected, captain.”

Morton: “May I guess, Dorian? Ah yes. That guy and I always got along well.”

Jerry: “Was that genuine or ironic? It's hard to tell with you.” He smiles jokingly.

Morton doesn’t take his eyes off his monitor and keyboard. He slowly but steadily plucks away at the keys like he’s typing from memory rather than what is actually written on the screen.

Morton: “Take a wild guess.” His tone is a little menacing, but his smile stays the same as always.

There is suddenly a loud commotion behind them when a third technician who quite literally shat himself when Morton started shooting, barges out of a bathroom on the other side of the hallway and makes a run for it.

Jerry snaps around, sees him running past the door to the control room and quickly teleports right outside the building. When the technician throws open the front door to flee, Jerry shoots him in the head before he can get any further. The technician falls backwards onto the two steps leading down from the door and slides down a bit so his legs end up right in front of Jerry’s feet.

The technician who was repairing one of the portals sees Jerry shoot his colleague and scampers towards the back of the barrack in a panic. His pengudile on the other hand darts through the snow and goes straight for Jerry.

Morton appears in the doorway and looks down at the dead body lying on the stairs.

Morton: “Nice.”

He shuts the door in Jerry’s face.

Jerry barely has time to react before the pengudile is right next to him and he has to half-jump, half-fly over it. As if out of pure reflex, he conjures up one of his white rabbits and throws it right at the pengudile’s head. It grunts confusedly and snaps at the rabbit. The rabbit bolts towards the center of the camp and the pengudile dashes after it.

Jerry doesn't waste any time in teleporting after the remaining technician. The terrified man runs along the backside of the barrack where Jerry and Morton came from earlier. Jerry shoots him down before he can make it to the other end of the building. He stands for a couple of seconds before he decides to leave the technician there, then teleports back to the other one lying dead by the control house door.
Jerry looks around cautiously, but no one else seems to be close by or have noticed the incident. With some difficulty, he hooks his arms under the exodon’s armpits to lift his upper body and kicks some snow over the spots where he has bled onto the ground so it isn’t too obvious from a distance. Jerry teleports into the control room where the dead technician joins his equally dead colleagues.

**Jerry:** Snaps at Morton: “Look at this mess! This is why you don't just barge in and shoot people!”

Morton ignores him. Frustrated, Jerry runs a hand through his hair and looks over at the surveillance feeds. He can see what looks to be three guards walk in the direction of the control house.

**Jerry:** “How far along are you? Because there’s three guards heading straight over here.”

**Morton:** Still doesn’t look away from his work. “That’s fine.”

**Jerry:** “How is it fine?!”

**Morton:** “Maybe you should lock yourself in the bathroom. Or don’t. I'm about to throw down some magic in here, and I can't control who gets hit.”

**Jerry:** “What? What kind of magic?”

**Morton:** “The kind that'll leave you scarred for life.” He smiles.

**Jerry:** “Okay I'm done with your cagey answers. Have fun with the guards, I'm out.”

Jerry teleports himself out behind the control house and looks around the corner to keep an eye on the guards. They look wary like they already have a suspicion something is wrong. When they walk past the front door to the control house, one of them notices the splotches of blood still visible on the stairs. He waves for the other two to follow him.
19.4

In the other end of the camp, Sherba warily looks down the hallway her and Balthazar has just stepped into. It continues into an open dining hall straight ahead. On the left side are a couple of doors leading to the camp’s kitchen facilities. The building appears to be empty of any people.

Sherba decides she might as well start with the first door on her left. She steps into what looks like a combined pantry and butcher’s cutting room. Balthazar follows closely behind her.

The first thing that meets Sherba’s eyes is a steel table with what is clearly part of some unfortunate demon lying on top. Whoever has been in the process of cutting the meat off the dead body appears to have left in the middle of their work.

Balthazar is stopped in his tracks by the sight of the dead demon as well.

**Balthazar: “Oh…”**

Sherba stands as if frozen. With a start, she aggressively tears through the room, slamming open every pantry door and cupboard in her vicinity. Balthazar is still standing in front of the door and looks at her, but doesn’t know what to say.

Sherba kicks the door open to a cold storage room. She can see more pieces of cut meat on the shelves, probably from other demons.

Sherba turns her back on the cold room and leans on the wall outside. She slides down to the floor and sits there staring blankly ahead.

**Sherba: “These barbarians will take and take until none of us are left. It's hopeless…”**

**Balthazar: “We’re here to stop them, aren’t we.”**

**Sherba: “And then what about next time? We kill them, more will come.”** She glances at the open door to the cold room. “My son… What if…”

**Balthazar: “We don't know that.”**

A little hesitantly, Balthazar steps over to Sherba and extends a hand as an offer to help her back up. He looks like he feels deeply sorry for her.

**Balthazar: “Come on. We have to go get him, right?”**

**Sherba: “Yeah…”**
Sherba takes his hand and lets him pull her to her feet. With stiff body language, she leaves the room.

While Sherba walks into the dining hall to look around, Balthazar checks the next door in the hallway to find a kitchen with nothing of particular interest. When he comes back out, Dorian has made it back to the hall.

**Balthazar:** Without really looking at Dorian: “There isn't much here apart from kitchenware.”

**Dorian:** “And chef, but he be no problem no more.”

Dorian’s fur is stained with blood and he's holding the messily decapitated head of one of the camp’s staff, presumably the chef, under his arm.

Dorian fishes a keyring with a whole bunch of keys and an ID card out of his jacket pocket.

**Dorian:** “Also.” He rattles the keys and grins triumphantly. “Think one of these be what we need?”

Balthazar doesn’t take his eye off the head under Dorian’s arm.

**Balthazar:** “Why did you…”

Dorian looks confused for a second before he realizes what Balthazar is staring at. He grabs the head and looks at it like he hasn’t really considered why until now.

**Dorian:** “Ah. Some of the other places we’ve been had eye scanners for locks. Might as well cover all our bases.”

**Sherba:** “Good, then let’s get going.” Her tone is a bit snappy and she is already moving towards the back door.

**Dorian:** “Angel, if you wanna be a lil’ helpful, go find James and tell him we got the keys. We’ll go bust out Sherba’s buddies.”

**Balthazar:** “Fine.” He looks at Sherba who is waiting by the door. “Be careful.”

Dorian slaps a hand down on Balthazar’s shoulder with excessive force that completely negates any friendliness that might be implied with the gesture. He flashes Balthazar a mean grin when he walks past him. Balthazar glares at him disgruntledly.
Jerry stalks over to the portals to try and discern if there is any other way to shut them down, in case Morton’s frankly suicidal decision to stay in the house doesn’t work out.

The portals are supplied with electricity from a massive generator that’s bolted to the ground next to them. It makes a low, whirring sound. While the portals aren’t currently active, it’s indicated by green lights on each of them that they are functional and powered up. Practically everything on the machines is fortified or bolted together in some way, not easy to pick apart.

Jerry stops at the panel that the technician was working on earlier. The heavy casing that used to cover the electronics has been left on the ground next to a toolbox, leaving the panel open to expose a labyrinth of wires and circuitry. Jerry feels lost just looking at it.

**Jerry:** “Yeah, I have no idea how this works anymore…”

He looks down at the toolbox thoughtfully when the generator suddenly stops whirring and all three of the portals shut down. Jerry looks over his shoulder at the control house. Since Morton apparently did his job right, he decides to fly back there.
After confirming that it is indeed blood on the stairs to the control house, the guards storm through the door with their weapons raised. Each of the are equipped with both a regular handgun and a taser.

The first one through the door systematically checks the rooms, but doesn’t see anything unusual. Even the control room just looks abandoned, not like anyone has just been killed in there.

As soon as the last guard steps inside, the door slams shut behind him and makes all three of them jump. The guard closest to the door reaches for the handle, but the door somehow moves away from him.

**Alec (Guard1):** "The fuck..?"

He reaches for the door again, but this time it disappears completely. The entire building changes into a single, pitch black room.

**Fajan (Guard2):** Starts yelling frantically: “aaAAHH!”

**Matti (Guard3):** "Keep it together, Fajan! It must be some demon mumbo jumbo."

Fajan continues to scream as he looks back and forth between his two fellow guards. Where Matti should have been is now the dead Tech2, bleeding from the gunshot wound in his forehead and staggering towards Fajan like a zombie.

**Tech2:** "Help me! FAJAN, HELP ME!" He reaches for Fajan.

In Matti’s reality he is only reaching out to Fajan to calm him down.

**Matti:** "Keep it together, man!" He shakes Fajan’s shoulders and looks at him imploringly.

**Alec:** "AARrrhh!!"

Matti apparently looks like a zombie to Alec too, because Alec panickedly raises his gun and points it at him.

Although Fajan’s still screaming, all Matti’s shaking actually manages to snap him partially back to reality.

**Fajan:** "AAaaarrrhh... Wait, Matti? But you were..? What’s going on?"
To Alec it still looks like it’s Tech2 who clenches Fajan’s shoulders. Black tendrils grow out of his hands and into Fajan’s open, screaming mouth to slowly choke any sound coming out of him.

Alec: Screams in an almost silent, cracked pitch. <"What the FUCK, What the FUCK IS GOING ON?! FAJAN, NO!“>

Matti: Holds a hand up in front of Alec. <"You need to relax. It's just some demon magic, it isn't real.”>

Alec is trembling, but raises his gun a little and points it at Matti with a determined look on his face.

Alec: <"STEP BACK! Step back right now or I will shoot you!“>
Balthazar walks towards an open door into the building next to the dining area, since James and Sal presumably went this way. Halfway across the gap between the two buildings, a white rabbit sprints towards him, closely followed by an angry pengudile. Balthazar has to jump out of the way to avoid colliding with either animal.

Sal comes out of the open door with her rifle raised and a slightly annoyed look on her face. She shoots the pengudile right below the back of its skull and its legs instantly give out from under it. The limb body slides a short distance before it’s stopped by a pile of snow.

**Sal:** Squints suspiciously at Balthazar. “Ey, where’s the other two at?”

**Balthazar:** “We found keys, so they went back to free the captives. You should probably join them, we don’t know if there’s any guards in the building. I’m just looking to inform James.”

**Sal:** “We got keys too.” She pulls a keyring out of her coat pocket to show Balthazar. “James went on ahead. Said he wanted to check out more of the camp, ‘case we have to come back here. This building’s clear, though. Just some sleeping quarters.”

Sal starts walking towards the barrack, but twists around and points at Balthazar.

**Sal:** “Come straight there when you find him. We better get the hell outta here. Been here long enough.”

Sal leaves and Balthazar enters the building, closing the door behind him. He walks down a hallway with several rooms on either side. Everything looks pristine with no sign that Sal has just searched through all the rooms. Balthazar opens one of the doors to confirm that this is all sleeping quarters. A dead exodon lies on the floor inside the room, shot down by Sal.

The building consists of two oblong wings connected at a 90 degree angle. Balthazar is about to turn the corner to the second half when he hears someone come in through a door at the end of the hallway. He peers around the corner to see another exodon walk into one of the side rooms. Deeming it safer to take on this one woman than to walk back outside, Balthazar continues, quietly sneaking down the hallway.

The door is left open to the room the exodon disappeared into. Balthazar carefully glances in there. The interior looks much nicer than the other room he checked, suggesting that this woman probably isn’t just one of the regular staff. She has sat down by her desk and put on a headset. She supports her head with one hand in a tired way.

**Supervisor:** “Seri, ajan da borchka?”
Whoever she’s talking to doesn’t answer. She pulls the headset off to check if it’s even on, but a small light on it indicates that it is. She puts it back in place on her head and is about to try again, but as if she can sense Balthazar looking at her, she glances over her shoulder.

Both Balthazar and the supervisor jumps. The supervisor panics and throws herself across her desk to reach for a taser gun lying at the far end.

**Supervisor:** Yells, hoping that someone on the other end of the line will hear her: “HADRAN, BISTA DAR--”

Balthazar shoots her in the head before she can yell anything more. The supervisor slumps over, halfway lying on the desk. Worried that she might have alerted someone else in the camp, Balthazar takes her headset off and holds it to his ear. There is still no answer.

Balthazar is about to leave when he notices an open booklet lying among some other documents and binders on the desk. Apart from a good amount of text, some of it in big, red letters, the open page has what appears to be a surveillance photo of no other than James.

With a disbelieving expression on his face, Balthazar picks the booklet up and flips through the pages. All of them contain descriptions of various demons and devils, some with pictures included. Balthazar isn’t sufficient enough at the exodon language to make out the details, but he can at least understand the gist of what he’s looking at.

He stands there for a while, weighing the booklet in his hands, unsure of what to do. In the end he closes the booklet and stuffs it under his coat by his chest.

When he turns towards the door to leave, it’s only to find that James has silently made his way into the room and is standing right behind him. Balthazar is so badly startled that he bumps his back into the desk and nearly falls over.
19.8

When Jerry comes back to the control house he can hear all the screaming and yelling from inside.

**Jerry:** Mutters to himself: “What's he even doing in there…”

The front door is still wide open after the guards stormed through it. Jerry holds his gun out in front of him and carefully looks inside the house. Alec stands in the middle of the hallway with his back turned to Jerry and his own weapon raised. The two other guards are standing in the sitting room at the end of the hall. Jerry can’t see them from his vantage point by the door.

Jerry quietly walks inside the house. As soon as he crosses the doorstep, the far end of the building’s interior turns black and void-like to him as well, but in a much more inconsistent way than what the three guards are seeing.

Alec must have heard Jerry’s footsteps because he takes his eyes off Matti to check behind him. Matti doesn’t hesitate to grab Alec’s pistol and force his arm down so the muzzle points at the floor. Startled, Alec fires a single shot.

Behind Matti, Fajan raises his weapon to shoot Jerry - But Jerry is now Fajan, pointing his gun back at himself. Fajan stares at his doppelganger with confused dread before Jerry shoots and kills him.

Alec is briefly returned to reality by the gunshot. Both he and Matti look aghast at Fajan’s lifeless body as it drops to the floor.

Alec tears his gun free of Matti’s grip and shoots at Jerry. Jerry reacts just in time and ducks into the control room. The bullet only nicks his shoulder.

**Matti:** Smacks the gun out of Alec’s hand. <"Stop it, Alec! It could be the real fucking Fajan!“>

While the two guards fight outside in the hallway, Jerry frustrationally looks around the empty control room.

**Jerry:** “Morton, what's the point of this?! Just shoot them like a normal person, you fucking weirdo!”

For a brief moment, Jerry can see Morton glitch into existence in his chair in front of the computer terminals. He sits completely still with his eyes wide open and a psychotic smile on his face that seems way too wide for his plushy head.
Around Jerry, the room is flooding with a syrupy, black goo that drips down from the ceiling and gushes out of the electronics. Some of it drops down on Jerry and when he tries to move out of the way, he nearly trips over the invisible Tech1 on the floor.

Tech1 comes back into view, halfway swallowed by the black mass that is rapidly covering the floor. He raises an arm and grabs on to Jerry’s leg.

**Tech1**: Speaks with Morton’s voice: “Do you think it's easy, featherboy?”

Jerry startles a little before he shakes the technician's hand off.

**Jerry**: “I didn't say it was easy, I said it was pointless.”

**Tech1**: “I ain't no Dorian. I can't just pop three grown and fully trained men. But I can make ‘em pop each other.”

They hear a gunshot and a startled scream coming from the hallway.

**Jerry**: “Look, I get it, you're a real spooky guy, but this is a waste of time. We didn't get fifty guys running in here, we got three. I'm just gonna take care of the two that's left, okay?”

**Tech1**: “You mean one, right? Just walk in there and put a bullet in him alright. I'll let the illusion go.”

Jerry wades through the black goo to get back out into the hallway. It shrinks away and disappears behind him. The dead technicians lie still and lifeless exactly where they were earlier.

In the hallway, Alec is sitting on top of Matti, screaming and in the middle of choking the life out of him. Both Alec and Matti’s pistols are thrown on the floor. They apparently both managed to disarm each other during their struggle.

Jerry shoots Alec in the back of the head so he slumps over on top of his colleague. Jerry walks closer to the two guards to check if Matti is indeed dead, but realizes too late the he indeed isn’t.

Matti quickly shoves Alec away so he can grab the taser gun he’s still carrying. While still lying on the floor he shoots and hits Jerry in the shoulder. The taser that is made for pacifying much sturdier creatures sends a very strong jolt of electricity through him. Jerry’s body convulses violently and he falls over on the floor.

With one hand on his neck where Alec tried to strangle him just a moment ago, Matti gets up. Now that Morton’s illusion magic is gone and he can see Jerry for the demon he supposedly is, Matti appears to put two and two together and realizes why the two intruders were in the control house in the first place.
Matti runs to the control room. Morton is still in there, clutching his head like he’s in pain. He actually looks a little stunned when Matti appears in the doorway and fumbles to get his pistol.

Matti doesn’t point his taser gun at Morton, but rather at the computers behind him. The whole setup of computers and monitors short-circuits and apparently blows the fuse for the rest of the house since the lights and everything else shuts off. Killing all the electronics sets off an alarm that blares loudly throughout the whole camp.

Matti is about to shoot Morton as well, but Morton has found and raised his pistol in the meantime and hits the guard in the head first.

Morton staggers out of the control room. For once he isn’t smiling - Actually he looks like he has the worst hangover in history. He searches for Jerry in the darkness and finds him still lying on the floor in the hallway. For a few seconds, Morton squints down at Jerry and considers whether he is dead and whether he should care.

In the end, Morton crouches down, picks the taser projectile off Jerry’s shoulder and hits him quite hard in the chest with the side of his clenched fist, as if that would restart his heart in case it was no longer beating. Either way, Jerry wakes up with a start and slowly raises a hand to his sternum.

**Jerry:** “Ow…” He coughs weakly and curls in on himself in an attempt to roll over on his side.

Rather than standing back up, Morton plops down on the floor with his hands covering his ears like he can’t stand the sound of the alarm outside.

**Morton:** “I give it to you, it was a waste of magic for three dudes. The more people, the easier it is to make ‘em turn on each other. Three ain’t many.”

Jerry sits up very gingerly and wipes away a bit of blood running out of his nose.

**Jerry:** “You said there was one guy left alive.”

**Morton:** “I thought there was one guy.”

**Jerry:** “So much for being stealthy…”

They sit there with the alarm still blaring in the background and the dead bodies of the guards sprawled out on the floor on either side of them. Jerry tries to gather the resolve to stand up while Morton is still clutching his head in his hands. Jerry can’t really discern if he’s upset or just in pain.

**Jerry:** “Hey, I didn't mean to be rude or anything before. I can see why James keeps you around. Pulling off a big area effect mindfuck like that? Not a lot of people can do that.”
He pauses thoughtfully.

Jerry: “He really has a knack for picking up novelties, huh.”

Morton: “You mean like you?” He forces a smile back on his face, but it comes out dead and a little menacing.

Jerry: “No?” He looks askance at Morton. “I’m not really part of the club.”

Morton: “The way he and Dexter talk about you it sure sounds like you’re getting there.”
Sal makes her way to the barrack building where the captive demons are being held. The door is already open. When she moves into the entrance room with her rifle raised, just in case, she has to step over a decapitated head and two guards lying dead on the floor - One with his left side completely torn up and the other with her neck twisted and broken.

She continues further into the building and finds Dorian and Sherba in a hallway with a row of cells to one side. The cell walls are transparent, made of some kind of safety glass and further reinforced on the outside with a grid of metal bars. Dorian is in the middle of opening the last cell by scanning an ID card. Sherba is sitting on the floor, clutching an 8 year old boy with skin just as blue and hair just as coarse as her own.

Sherba's son: "Mom, I promise I'm fine…"

Apart from Sherba and her son, four other demons have been held in the cells. Now they're all gathered in the hallway, looking as odd and diverse as any group of demons tends to do. They all stare at Sal warily until it occurs to her that she should probably lower her rifle.

Sal: "This all of 'em?"

One of the demons shakes his head sadly.

Demon: "They took Phyllis…"

Sherba: Stands up and takes her son by the hand. "Took her where?"

Demon: "Through one of the portals I'm pretty sure."

Sal: "Too bad, nothing we can do about that."

An alarm hanging on the wall in the entrance room goes off at a deafening volume. Sal looks at Dorian, but he just shrugs confusedly.

Dorian: Pushes the nearest demon forward towards the exit and yells: “Just get outta here! Follow the fence to the right, we already took care of the guards!”

Sal: Yells to Sherba: “We'll come pick you up, just go back the way you found us."

Sherba nods and she and the other captive demons quickly leave the building.
In the camp supervisor’s room, James stares silently down at Balthazar, his face as unreadable as always. He has to hunch his back and duck his head to be able to stand up in the average-height room.

**James:** “I hope you weren’t thinking of taking off with that.”

**Balthazar:** “Uhh…”

Suddenly a siren on the wall right outside the room starts howling. James flattens his ears and turns his head towards the sound. With rigid body language, he looks back at Balthazar and slowly places one of his giant hands on his shoulder. He keeps the palm slightly raised in a way that makes it very clear that he could easily grab Balthazar’s neck and pull his head off if he wanted to.

**James:** “We can discuss this at a later time.”

He shoves Balthazar out the door and towards the exit. James has to crouch down and almost walk on all fours to follow him outside. It’s evident that the alarm has been set off in the whole camp, not just the building they came out of.

**James:** “Where are the others?”

**Balthazar:** “They all went to free the rest of the demons. Well except Jeremiah and--”

**James:** “We will go to the entrance and hope they do the same.”

Before they can go anywhere, two exodons, one of them a guard, run out from a square building close by. The guard runs straight for James, grabs a taser gun hanging from his belt and raises it in front of himself. The other stays behind, shuffling his feet nervously in front of the building they came from.

James pushes Balthazar out of the way, clears the snow from a patch of ground in front of him with a sweep of his hand, and slams both his palms into the dirt below. The ground under the guard is forced up at a steep angle that makes him trip and roll forward into the snow. James is about to raise the slope he has created further up and bring it down on the guard, but the guard frantically gets up on his knees and shoots his taser at James.

The electrified projectile hits James in the shoulder. He curls in on himself and thoughtlessly takes one hand off the ground to rip the little dart off. The slope he just created crumbles and the guard has to jump out of the way to dodge the falling pieces. He raises his weapon again and shoots James twice - once in the arm and once in the neck.
The arm that James uses to support himself collapses under him and he falls to his knees with a strained noise, about to keel over to the side. Balthazar stares at James like he can’t decide if he should help or run. The guard switches his aim to Balthazar now that he’s no longer hidden behind James. He shoots, but Balthazar manages to dodge it and flies to the top of the building he and James just came out of. He flattens himself against the roof so the guard doesn’t have a chance to hit him.

James is doing his best to get back up, so the guard shoots him once more in the thigh, then presses a button above the gun’s grip that makes all the projectiles give off another jolt of electricity. James drops heavily onto his side.

At some point the other exodon has found the courage to help and has picked up a shovel that was leaning on the square building. Now that James is on the ground and rendered mostly harmless, he takes the opportunity to run over and smash the shovel down on James’ head. He hits James a couple of times before the guard can rip the shovel out of his hands.

**Guard with taser:** "Stop it!"

Another guard comes to the others’ aid. She’s holding a regular shotgun and walks towards James at a quick pace while aiming the gun at his head.

**Guard with taser:** Nervously: "You can’t kill this one, the company wants it for research!"

**Guard with shotgun:** "No way we’re keeping it around."

The guard positions the shotgun to shoot, but before she can pull the trigger, Dorian barges out from behind the building James and Balthazar came from. The guard with the shotgun manages to stumble out of his way, but the one with the shovel is knocked over and slammed onto the ground by Dorian’s huge paws. Dorian rips his throat open with his teeth, leaving the man gurgling in his own blood that spreads all over the snow under him. The guard with the shotgun has regained her bearings enough to shoot and hit Dorian in the upper back.

Dorian roars and whips around to face her. He rips the shotgun out of her hands with one paw, nearly taking an arm off with it, then throws her to the ground with the other. Dorian stomps on her head with all his weight a few times and crushes the guard’s skull.

The guard with the stun gun has so far stood at a distance, paralyzed by the horrifying scene. When he moves to flee he is shot down by Sal who expertly hits him clean in the head. She has followed Dorian, killing a few more of the alerted staff on the way.

**Sal:** “James…”

Her usually composed demeanor is dropped as she runs over to James and crouches down next to his head to check if he's still breathing. She relaxes a little when she finds that he is.
Dorian: “What the fuck were you DOING?!”

He looks towards the roof where Balthazar has been hiding. Balthazar hesitantly stands up.

Jerry and Morton appear in a flash of light close to the others. Morton seems to have given up on smiling and looks more like he’s going to throw up.

Jerry: Immediately notices James and lifts his hands to his face. “Shit…”

Morton: “Is he dead?”

Sal: “No…”

Morton: “Okay.” This is apparently all the information Morton needs.

Jerry looks up at Balthazar with an incredulous expression.

Sal: Has taken James' pocket watch, suddenly remembering their time limit. “Dexter is here. He has been for ten minutes…”

Jerry: “Shit. Just... Wait here. I'll go get him.”

Jerry teleports to the cave where they first met up. Dexter is waiting by the entrance looking extremely jittery and nervous. He sees that Jerry is alone and obviously concludes that something terrible must have happened.

Dexter: “Where's the others..?”

Jerry: Holds up his hands in front of him. “Please just listen for a second--”

Dexter conjures up a strong gust of wind, nearly knocking Jerry over, and disappears. A second later he is standing in the middle of the camp. He can make out the others' silhouettes from there and quickly teleports again, now landing directly next to James who is still lying in the snow. Jerry also reappears shortly after.

Sal moves out of the way to give Dexter some space. Dexter drops to the ground and cradles James' head in his arms. He sits like that for a while, quietly whispering "no" over and over.

Dorian: Inspects his gunshot wound. “Urgh, this bloody HURTS. You better be grateful I came 'n rescued your gullible fucking boyfriend, or they would've blown his head off! I demand to be compensated for this!”

Sal: “Dorian, not now.”
Dexter looks up at the others with a vicious expression that seems completely alien on his usually grinning face.

**Dexter:** “What happened?”

**Dorian:** “HA! What happened?! That useless angel James decided to bring tossed him to the lizards first chance he got!”

Dexter turns his head in Balthazar's direction.

**Jerry:** “Uh…”

On the roof, Balthazar is starting to look nervous and backs away from the others.

Dexter quickly gets on his feet and moves a little away from James to avoid accidentally dragging him with him. He teleports to the roof. Jerry reacts very quickly and teleports himself right in front of Balthazar simultaneously with Dexter so he comes to stand between them.

**Jerry:** “Dexter, you seriously need to calm down.”

**Dexter:** “CALM DOWN?!”

Dexter does not look like he is about to calm down at all. Before Jerry or Balthazar can do anything, a powerful tornado forms around them and all three of them disappear along with a good chunk of the roof.
Jerry, Balthazar and the debris from the roof are all dropped unceremoniously on a forest floor. Dexter lands next to them, a bit more gracelessly.

**Dexter:** Snarls at Jerry: “How’re you gonna get away now? Can’t use you shitty angel magic when you’re in Hell!”

**Jerry:** “Dexter, I swear, if you don’t back off I will stab you.” He has drawn the knife he’s been carrying.

**Dexter:** “WHY ARE YOU PROTECTING THIS PIECE OF FILTH?!”

**Jerry:** “How is it his fault someone got hurt? Going up against Skull Inc. is dangerous, you always have that risk!” He looks at Balthazar, obviously waiting for him to back him up.

**Dexter:** “Dorian saw him just stand there and WATCH!” He points an accusing finger at Balthazar.

**Balthazar:** “I’m not a demon. If I hadn’t gotten out of the way, the same thing would have happened to me, and I do not think I would have survived that.”

**Jerry:** “See? He was just looking out for himself first. You can’t blame someone for that.”

**Balthazar:** “What reason would I have to want James dead? I couldn’t even have joined this mission without his approval.”

**Jerry:** “Don’t you think you should talk to James about this? You think he’d approve of you murdering someone who was supposed to be his responsibility? Just... go wait for him to wake up.”

Dexter narrows his eyes at Balthazar.

**Dexter:** “I know you did this on purpose.”

He abruptly teleports away.

The two angels relax a little, but a minute later there is a surge of wind above them and a huge, aquatic creature, somewhat like a whale, pops up among the treetops. Jerry and Balthazar barely manage to avoid getting crushed when it drops to the ground and sends tremors through the whole area.

The poor creature writhes on the ground and wails pathetically. Out of its element and probably badly injured from the fall, it won’t survive for long.
Balthazar looks completely stunned while Jerry seems more angry than shaken, having witnessed the capabilities of Dexter's rather intimidating brand of teleportation magic before.

**Balthazar:** “And I thought James was terrifying…”

**Jerry:** “I know.”

Balthazar looks out at the dense forest surrounding them.

**Balthazar:** “Where are we?”

**Jerry:** “Lust's circle.”

**Balthazar:** “Oh… Great…”

**Jerry:** “It's okay. I know…” He looks around too. The forest stretches on as far as he can see on one side, but is cut off by a steep cliff on the other. “…approximately where we are. We just need to find a portal out of here. Shouldn't take more than a day.”
For the first time in very many years, Lana travels to Kimera. She walks along a dirt path outside of a small town. The path leads to an old, worn down library, overgrown with plants that have crawled up the outer walls and roof.

Lana passes a couple of auódom that look much like herself, tall and slim with natural, feathered wings, except they have far darker hair and skin. They look at her strangely and make sure to stay out of her way.

Lana enters the library and looks around at the stocked rows of bookshelves and the beautiful interior of the ancient building with a sad sort of wistfulness. There are only three other people inside - An old harul woman who appears to be the librarian, and an elven man who is searching through a section of books and handing some of them to an auódom who is following behind him.

The auódom does a double take when he sees Lana. He hastily pokes the elven man and points at her. The elf looks just as unsettled by Lana’s presence as his helper. They both inch towards the entrance, hoping they can move around her without her taking notice.

Lana stops in front of the librarian and bows slightly.

**Lana:** “I know I am not welcome here, but I only ask that you leave me be so I can find an answer to a difficult problem. It’s very important.”

**Librarian:** Huffs. “I’m not so stupid as to try and stop you. The proper angels just left, and now we get a fallen one instead. I’m too old for all this commotion.”

Lana looks at the librarian with her brows furrowed, but doesn’t say anything. She casts her eyes down and wanders into the labyrinth of bookcases.

After searching through the shelves for quite a while, Lana sits down at a table with a stack of old, weathered books. She flips through one of them with a contemplative, but tired look on her face.

The librarian walks past her, on her way to return some other books to their rightful shelves. She can’t help but stop and observe the strange, halo-less angel who has come into her library.

**Librarian:** “Are you the traitor they tell so many stories about?”

Lana briefly looks up, then returns her gaze to the book in front of her.

**Lana:** “Yes…”
**Librarian:** “I always thought the descriptions of you as some luminous, white oddity were a Lucifer allegory, but I can see they told the truth. How unusual.”

**Lana:** “I try to repent for my actions. That’s why I’m here.”

The librarian walks a little closer to make out what Lana is reading.

**Librarian:** “Are you investigating that damned ritual site as well? You’re wasting your time, the others angels demolished the entire thing. I tried to tell them there is nothing unusual about it, but they wouldn’t listen. It’s no way to treat a historic relic... But I suppose the soul eaters had defiled it already.”

**Lana:** “Why do you not think it’s unusual?”

**Librarian:** “There are many enchanted circles in the area, it’s no different from the rest. In the old days, when the Belili breached Kimera, they served as portals back to Hell. It isn’t much different from the gates your seraphim make, just different magic sustaining it.”

**Lana:** “So this particular site led to Wrath’s circle in the past?”

**Librarian:** “I suppose. I’m no expert.”

Lana absentmindedly flips through a few more pages in her book.

**Lana:** “I am more interested in why they would attempt to bring any part of Wrath here. The sins do not simply give away their energy. They take back, they swallow what they can.”

**Librarian:** “Well, I have heard of the soul eaters experimenting with such things before. To my knowledge, it has never ended in anything but painful death and horrible disfigurations. Haven’t you seen the area around the site? Their ritual may have been cut off prematurely when the portal was damaged, but it still did *something*. The place is more unstable than it has ever been.”
On the old librarian's request, Lana travels to the now demolished sacrificial site. The ground where the engraved stone slab and pillars were before has been dug up, but the forest around it looks quite bizarre. The trees that were already naked and dead before have collapsed in on themselves in some places and sprouted new branches at unnatural angles in others. The soil around the hole in the ground has turned black and taken on an odd, lumpy quality.

Lana walks into the clearing and looks down at the upturned ground. The air around her makes everything look warped, and without meaning to cross over, she finds herself standing on a vast, volcanic plain somewhere in Wrath’s circle.

She stays there for some time and stares out at the barren, ash covered landscape, deep in thought.
Balthazar and Jerry trudge through the eerily quiet forest in Lust’s circle, still on their way to a portal leading out of Hell.

At one point they get lost and Jerry has to ask a travelling merchant for directions. She looks too tired of life in general to be frightened by a couple of fallen angels. Jerry gives her two of his self-made rabbits in return for the inconvenience.

They walk in silence for a long time, Jerry with a sullen demeanor and Balthazar looking deep in thought. Eventually it gets dark.

Jerry: “Maybe we should call it a day. I don’t like to walk around this place when it’s dark. Too many nasty things you can stumble into.”

Balthazar is snapped out of his thoughts and looks confused for a moment.

Balthazar: “Oh. Sure. I guess we can make a fire.”

They both go to gather branches for a bonfire. It isn’t difficult with the forest around them dense with pine trees.

Jerry: Looks at the pile of branches they have collected. “You know what this is? This is a perfect opportunity to test out my badass fire magic skills.”

Jerry sits down, cross legged, and holds his hands over the branches. He concentrates very intently, but nothing happens. Balthazar looks unconvinced that they’re going to get anywhere with this.

Balthazar: “You know, I have a sword that’s permanently on fire, if--”

Jerry: “Shhh!”

Jerry turns his head towards Balthazar to say something, but in the same moment a fireball of considerable size is expelled from his hands. The fire flares up when it hits the pile of branches and Jerry has to scramble out of the way to not get burned.

Jerry: Points at the fire, looking outright elated. “Look at that! I did that!”

Balthazar: “You sure did.”

Jerry seems a little offended by Balthazar’s lack of enthusiasm, but doesn’t remark on it. They both sit down next to the fire.
Jerry: “I don’t know why everyone’s so hell bent on learning magic just to kill each other with it. There’s so many ways it can be more useful. Take someone like James who does earth magic. Want to plow a field? Just turn that shit over with a wave of your hand. Want to level the ground so you can build on it? Hey, no problem. And fire magic? Sure it’s probably the most mundane brand of magic you can pick up, but I’ve seen people so good at controlling temperature they could weld metal with their bare hands.”

Balthazar: Listens with genuine interest. “That’s impressive.”

Jerry: “Impressive doesn’t cut it.”

Balthazar: Smiles faintly. “Isn’t this the message you should be spreading instead of helping out a bunch of violent mage demons?”

Jerry: “Heh… Well. I’m as much of a hypocritical piece of shit as everyone else.”

Balthazar doesn’t appear to like the self-deprecating way Jerry talks about himself, but doesn’t really know what to say.

Balthazar: “… For someone who made a career out of lying, you’re one of the most honest people I know. So you have that at least…”

Jerry stares sullenly at the fire for quite some time before he suddenly leans forward and covers his face with his hands with a frustrated groan.

Jerry: “It’s a really weird time to say this, because I hate you right now and I don’t think you understand how much of a shitty situation you’ve put me in, but I really missed talking to you.”

Balthazar: Looks bewildered. “Why..?”

Jerry: “I’ve been asking myself that ever since you showed up. I don’t know… It’s…” He tries to gather his thoughts. “I can name maybe five people in this whole fucking universe that I actually trust anymore, and for some reason you’re one of them.”

Balthazar: “I can’t believe it’s me who has to say this, but why in the world would you trust me?”

Jerry: “Maybe it’s the wrong word… I don’t mean trust like I trust you have my back, because you obviously don’t.”

He sends Balthazar a fleeting, mean-spirited glare.
Jerry: "I mean trust like, I know even though you do stupid shit sometimes, it's not coming from a bad place. Like, you're a decent, okay person. Even though you can be seriously single-minded, if someone has an actual conversation with you, you usually listen."

He shakes his head a little.

Jerry: "That's why I was okay with you going with James and the others in the first place. I was thinking, then you could see for yourself that you were actually helping with something important."

Jerry doesn’t say anything more and Balthazar doesn’t know how to reply, so they sit there in silence for quite some time. Balthazar looks more and more regretful until he eventually reaches into his coat and takes out the booklet he found in the Skull Inc. camp.

Balthazar: Looks down at the booklet in his hand. "I found this at the camp. You can probably read it better than me, but it looks like they've gathered a whole lot of intel on your resistance group. Profiles, meeting places, the whole deal."

He hands the report to Jerry.

Jerry: "I KNEW IT!"

Jerry rips the booklet out of Balthazar’s hand and stands up, livid.

Jerry: "I fucking knew you'd pull some awful stunt, and I let you go with us anyway! You stupid asshole!"

He hurls the booklet at Balthazar’s face and Balthazar has to block with his arms. It drops down in front of him, nearly hitting the fire. Jerry thinks better of it and picks the booklet up again. He angrily flips through it, skimming bits of the text and looking more and more incredulous with each page.

Jerry: Looks over at Balthazar. "You could hand this to Heaven and they’d probably be thrilled to let you back in. Rex is even in there."

He holds up the booklet and points at the open page. There are no pictures of Rex, but the text supposedly describes him.

Jerry: “Why are you giving it to me?”

Balthazar: Looks genuinely sad. "I forgot what it's like-- And I'm so ashamed to admit this, but I forgot what it's like not to have anywhere to feel safe. I can't blame anyone in your town for turning to this group. Those demons, they're not bad people. They're just... people."

He pauses for a few seconds.
**Balthazar:** “James uh... James saw me with that. I went on that mission with every intention to find a way to sabotage the group.”

**Jerry:** “So you would’ve just let him die?”

**Balthazar:** “At the time it seemed really convenient if he went away.” He looks at the ground.

**Jerry:** “I don’t know him that well, but James is a pretty good guy. I hope you know that.”

**Balthazar:** “I'm really sorry about all of this.”

**Jerry:** “You know Dexter’s gonna come and straight up murder you the minute he hears about this, right? I’m not exaggerating. As soon as we find that portal out of here, you gotta leave, man. Don’t come back to the town.”

**Balthazar:** “What about you?”

**Jerry:** “What the fuck do you think? He’s gonna come after me too! I-- Did you even think about that? Everyone’s gonna blame this on me and you wouldn’t even have said anything!”

He puts a hand on the back of his neck and tries to contain his frustration with the whole situation.

**Jerry:** “I guess I’ll leave for a few days and hope he cools off in the meantime.”
21.1

After a long walk, Jerry and Balthazar make it out of Lust's circle through the portal they were looking for. They are now standing at the edge of a field with tall, yellow grass. It's early morning on this world and still dark out.

Jerry: “Well. Have a nice life I guess.”

Balthazar: “I think a thank you is in order, so... Thanks. For everything.”

Jerry: Shakes his head, tired and apathetic. “Okay.”

He points at Balthazar while walking a few steps backwards as if to leave.

Jerry: “Don’t come back to town, don’t get involved in anything. Practically everyone knows Dexter, so good job there.”

Balthazar: “Yes, I get it.”

With no further ado, Jerry teleports away and leaves Balthazar by the field, looking gloomy and a little lost.