

Jeremiah woke up to the taste of death, piss and rotting corpses.

He sat up and tried to moisten his mouth to get rid of the taste of death. He looked at the unfinished slab of lamb in the corner that the flies had long since gotten to and cringed.

He wiped at his face, salty sweat layered onto him like a fine sheen.

How long had it been? A week since he left his room? Week and a half? Something along those lines seemed about right.

Jeremiah eyed the door. No paper slid underneath it. Weird. He had been skipping his meetings with U'ala recently, and he had thought she would have gotten pissy about it.

Instead he hadn't heard anything from her. Even when his husks passed her in the hall, she just gave a polite nod.

It was nice because it meant no more paperwork. It was annoying because it just meant she apparently decided she was better than him.

“Personal tutelage” his ass.

Just another person not worth his time. He should probably clean. Last time someone walked in here they filed a complaint. He didn't even know that was possible. Something about a hazardous and wasteful risk.

It didn't help that now mold spirits were casually chilling in his room and kept trying to be his friend. Becoming an Essential had been worth it, but spirits were EVERYWHERE. It was obscene.

He sighed and shuffled over to his draped over husks, stumbling over a couple dozen empty bottles and plates as he did.

Reiner was a well created husk, probably his best so far, made for combat. But he was like a hinblinbear. Not really good for anything precise.

Lar'ian had dexterity in his hands. Able to write for hours on end with precision and handwriting far better than anything Jeremiah could muster. Plus, he didn't blink as much. A nice feature.

But for precision and heavy lifting combined, that job would go to Kayeth. His third husk. Reiner was made to look like an orc, Lar'ian was made to look like an elf, Kayeth was made to look like a dwarf.

Some people probably thought it was weird that he named his husks when he could barely remember anyone else's names, but it was the type of personal touch he was adamant.

*Never forget them.*

He had about two other working husks, but they were more painful to even acknowledge they existed. Well, sort of two. One was missing an arm because he had to replace his own arm in some emergency surgery, and the other was missing anything of a lower body, and he was planning on trashing anyway, since he had only been doing it to see if he could, and was rapidly becoming disillusioned with it.

Well, more of severely creeped out with himself, but that was besides the point.

He went over to Kayeth, put the key in her pocket and made the appropriate hand symbols.

Orders: Put me in the bed, then clean the room, put everything in its proper place.

He woke up ten hours later in a worse state than before.

The room was cleaned, sure, but something was rather off. For one, he had *ten hours* of memories to sort through.

Cleaning a room did not take ten hours!

For another, the room was hardly what he'd call "spotless." The rotting food was removed, the glass bottles were cleared off, but everything was still turned over. It couldn't have take ten hours to do that shitty of a job...?

Jeremiah groaned and rubbed his head and cringed. Oily and gross. This whole "never leave his room ever again" plan was not turning out well.

OK. Memories.

Started tidying up room. Good.

Placed trash by door. By now he was about two hours into the memories, and the room looked more or less like it did now.

Take trash outside, to return plates to messhall, or somewhere not his room. There was a lot of trash and there are multiple trips.

Zander encounter. Jeremiah gritted his teeth. Great just the fucking asshole he never wanted to see again for as long as he lived.

Hah! The brainless idiot gave her a passing flirt. Didn't even realize that she was one of his. Wish he had given orders for her to punch him in the teeth. That would have been nice.

Hah.

Hahahah.

Hah...

*That's not funny.*

Gave a few vacant stares to him, he picked up on it after a while and backed off. All right.

Then the dishes were returned in the messhall. They threw a bitchfit over some of them having mold on it and others being shattered. They could easily get a few thousand plates for free, he really didn't see the issue here.

They made him stay and clean the dishes. Assholes. Got mad when he didn't understand complex instructions. Another three hours there before they were satisfied. Assholes.

Barely took two steps out of there when some blasted Giver carted him off, claiming that it was imperative he saw an appointment with healer pomaday since "she was clearly new."

Fucking dammit this is what he got for giving a too simplistic order.

Protest. Guards called. Subdued. Taken to Healer Psdfgh by force. Confirmed that it was indeed a husk. Questioned who belonged to (because no one thought to do that before) and said Jeremiah.

Collective groans throughout the entire wing. He hated that stupid Giver. Always so antsy around him, no matter what body he was in. Or at least he assumed it was the same Giver, who he had angrily dubbed “4 arms.” Because there could be like five givers and he’d have no way of knowing.

That took up a decent chunk of time as well. Poor Kayeth. All he told her to do was to clean. Never meant to do anything else. It hadn’t even occurred to him she would have to leave the room to clean fully, otherwise he would have put more effort into the order.

He would have to stop being so damn lazy with his orders. He had a notepad that had a list of well working orders that would allow for some degree of versatility.

The last updated order for Reiner was:

“Participate in combat as a member of the Crusader A Team, where you will make sure they do not get hurt, cursed, or otherwise killed, whilst also only picking fights with hostile creatures that are attacking you or other crusaders, with the exemption being crusaders who are fighting each other unless everyone is running away for some reason, during this time you will loot anything of interest that you find and keep it with you to later give me, as well as anything that there is one of a kind of, objectively valuable, or powerful, with the exception being if someone in power orders you to give it back or if it was merely a lent object or if it can be used to get you something else desirable and important, and finally to be malleable and understanding of orders from other crusaders, always make sure leadership is aware of when someone is doing something illegal, but to always preserve your “primary” life first and everyone’s secondary, but put your “secondary” life before others, unless that life involves someone on my shit list, who you are to not trust or like, but be polite to, and to observe all crusaders but especially them extensively in order to record information that your primary may use later.”

It was an utter fucking mouthful and annoying to shit but it got the job done. It used to also include “acquire health potions whenever possible, and take opportunities that would allow you to get more,” but he dropped that a while ago.

Instead he just made a deal with an Esdgh to make it go away! Easy solutions to problems he never wanted to solve in the first place. Apparently being in the Crusaders was the best way to just make everything go away and to become supremely powerful.

And so far that seemed pretty accurate. Jeremiah was quite the fan. Picking up an unheard of alchemy, having access to *thousands* of minor alchemy he never even knew existed, becoming an essential, occasionally getting a night’s rest, access to one of the best libraries he ever

encountered and a consistent payment of three whole fuckin' gold arviris a week, and he was well on his way to becoming WHATEVER he wanted.

He just wished he could figure out what "whatever" was. A god? A spirit? Immortal? an Elder? A Dragon? Some weird chain smoking mouth embodiment? An Emissary? Head Alchemist of some organization? He was a druid, but that was more of a means to an end, not what he wanted to do with his life. "High Druidic Alchemist" had a pretty nice ring to it though...

Too many choices. It would be awe-inspiring if it wasn't so fucking annoying.

Anyway, back to memories. From there, Kayeth went to return, but got interrupted by a gaggle of kids. By now it was mid-morning and apparently there was some sort of... event... going on. He couldn't really deduce what it was, but tiny multi-racial children were in a huge crowd, making a mess of everything. The event looked like it was going to last a while, too.

Several people tried to stop him, asking if he wanted free food or something and of course that took forever because "I must go and clean now" is an odd response to give in hindsight to every single question in eternity.

Then Kayeth finally made it back, and after several minutes of fiddling with the key (to be expected with husks), she made it back in and promptly woke Jeremiah up.

Husks tended to always do that if time went on too long. It was like the longer they were around, the more uncomfortable they got. When Reiner had to be gone for days it was always so stressful.

Jeremiah sighed. Well at least his room was mostly clean. He could always send Kayeth or another out to get him some food, and then return to the entirety of cleaning.

He went to put Kayeth back, propping her against the wall and draping the sheet over her. He went to return to his bed when he paused.

The sheets were dark. For a second he panicked until he realized exactly what it was -- a really huge sweatstain.

God damn he was filthy. And slightly hungry.

He rubbed his hair, only for it to tug on his piercings. Jeremiah angrily swore at the sudden, unexpected spike in pain.

He momentarily lost focus and his spirit senses turned on.

The sweat spirits cheered in unison.

**WE ARE SWEAT AND WE ARE LEGION WE WILL TAKE OVER THIS ENTIRE ROOM THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF US OUR SUPERIORITY IS UNMATCHED WE ARE--**

And off it went!

Spirits were fucking weird. But if there was any hint that he should *probably* take a shower, that was it. Shower. Then maybe send a husk to get food. Or grow his own. He could try that. It was so annoying though. And honestly an uncooked yam wasn't his idea of a meal either.

Eh, whatever, he'd deal with it later. He could also get that meal first, and then shower. The sun was kind of high out in the sky, which meant he might have to deal with people.

*Ugh please no.*

People were annoying, whiny and complicated. He'd just wait until it was night.

But then... no that wasn't an option.

He took his damp headband off, and his sticky hair clung to his face.

*Disgusting.*

Yeah. Shower now.

He grabbed a few things from his room, grabbed the key from Kayeth's pocket, and hesitantly inched the door open a crack.

A few guards were talking. Something about one of their own being injured and now one of them needed to take the night shift. Lots of exasperated noises or something whiny like that. They weren't leaving either. Ughhhhhhh.

Leave dammit. Leave so they didn't have to see him as the utter mess of a dwome being that he was.

They weren't leaving. Fuuuuuck. Fucking guards and their "assigned" positions. Fuck em fuck em fuck em.

What if he got Reiner to carry him? Yeah. Ok. He draped a blanket over him, Reiner carried him to the shower, and then...

no fuck what would he do with the body someone would see it and panic FUCK.

Rationalize dammit. He didn't even know these guards. Guards were just random peons in the giant council cog (heh) machine.

He draped the towel over his head and tucked his beard into his shirt. It clung uncomfortably to his chest and back. Quietly closing the door, he shuffled off to the showers. As he did, he idly sniffed the towel. He couldn't tell if it also smelled or not. Wellp it didn't matter to anyone but himself, so who cared?

*Besides there was nothing wrong with him, where the fuck did they get off judging him?*

The showers were a damp wooden room always with some degree of fog in it. There were easily at least twenty stalls, each one wide enough to probably fit their own mini-orgy. Which was good for him. Plenty of room to not get noticed and do his own thing.

The moist air was somewhat pleasant on him. He felt cleaner already. He took a few breaths to make sure he was DEFINITELY repressing the spirits voices. Nothing more awkward than hearing spirits in places like these.

It was quiet. He looked at the bottoms of the stalls. One was in use, but far down the line, it seemed. It was doable.

He stood up and nearly yelped, but quieted himself. A string of basins all in front of a large mirror. He had forgotten that was there.

Looking at himself was... not a pleasant experience. It never was, but now it REALLY wasn't.

*Not even a ring of attraction could stop YOU from being ugly.*

He walked up to the basin and wet his hands. He idly brushed over his scarred forehead, now exposed due to the disposed of headband. His glass eye rested idly in his socket, while his good eye bulged out of him like he was some sort of abominable insect.

He needed to cut his hair. He hated the feeling of it clinging to him like that. It was gross. Even when he wasn't a sweat ball it was just fucking gross.

But if he cut his hair, more skin would be exposed. More of his disgusting rubbery skin.

He could always cut all his skin off.

*Cleanest Shave you'll ever have.*

He idly bent down and took a switchblade strapped to his boot. If he was going to be staying in his room, then no one was going to see him, so he might as well get himself comfortable.

He gripped his hair.

*Disgusting.*

And started to whittle away at it. It could remain neck length. Nothing past that. Just so he couldn't FEEL it anymore. Necks were usually less sensitive. He could have it on his neck. It would be fine there.

It was taking longer than he anticipated. His hair was so damn long and thick. It had the combined powers of a gnome's hair to defy logic and a dwarf's hair to dominate all in its path. It was unstoppable and obnoxious.

He used to like his hair. It used to be a sea blue, but then he shaved and it came back... this display. He had tried to shave it a few more times, but he didn't like shaving completely. It meant time he had to look at his face, and that was not something he wanted to commit to in the long term.

He tried to untangle the hair from his piercings, but it was too much of a mess. He put down the blade, and methodically began removing the rings and studs from his ears and eyebrows, placing them on his towel, which was currently on the wooden table holding the basins.

"Mother fucking..." Jeremiah quietly swore as his hair frayed and tugged as he tried to take the piercings off. Hair was so damn *complicated*.

It was sticking out with knots in every which way and his eyes were sunken in and everything was such a damn MESS.

Finally the last piece of metal was placed on the towel. He looked like a blobby potato with two blue rocks stuck in it.

He cut the rest of his hair with only some muffled cursing interspersed throughout.

“Oh, hello, Jeremiah, wasn’t it?”

SHIT MOTHERFUCKING COCK SUCKING FUCKING BULLSHIT FUCK

He turned around to see an unfamiliar face. Which meant it could be literally anyone he met in the past few months.

Taller than him. Dark grey skin. Completely naked except a towel, as you do when you’re not an oversensitive fuck like himself.

Glowing skin.

What a freak.

And utterly nowhere in his pitiful memory databanks.

But more importantly. And WAY more importantly, was that this weirdo was staring at his disgusting smelly self while he had a mishaven head and a weapon out.

*Kill him and hide his body and no one will know.*

No. You can’t just KILL people to solve all your problems, dammit!

“Dafuck are you?” He spat, trying to ignore how much he wanted to run.

“You don’t... remember me?” The person asked, sounding like it was a personal insult.

“I don’t remember my own father’s name, and I certainly don’t remember random faces. Who are you?” Jeremiah repeated.

“I am Lsdfgh. I work at the Font. We discussed tattoos before?” His voice seemed sort of guyish. But in that really elfy way.

One of those new elves? Mauve Elves or something? Wasn't there one in the Crusaders? Didn't seem to act the same, and he said he worked at the Font so. Not a Crusader. That was a relief, it meant he didn't have to depend on being nice to this guy.

He had no memory of discussing tattoos with anyone. Not saying it didn't happen, just that he had no memories of it.

"Hi...uh..." Crap he already forgot Glowie's name. Like a chump.

"Sorry I'm a bit busy right now. Can you...maybe fucking talk to me when we're not in the fucking showers?" Jeremiah politely asked.

"Oh, sorry. I was just wondering how you liked the book you took out? *Alchemyckal Resonance*?" Glowie took another step forward, smiling weirdly.

"Fucking. Showers!" Jeremiah practically shouted. "And I never took a fucking book out called that! So fuck off, ya skinny, glowing freak!"

"Mother Above!" Glowie sputtered, backing out of the showers with quite speed. "Sorry! Sorry! So Sorry!"

Wellp if he had talked to that guy, he probably never was going to now. Ugh, that guy was probably going to start spreading rumors about him now, even though all he'd done was ask him to leave him alone.

He hadn't done anything wrong.

He cut some of his beard, but the moment had passed. He settled for a nice trim instead of a full on shortening. Well, by "nice" it was more of a "only slightly passable in any remotely respectable fashion" but whatever.

Then he went into one of the showers, got undressed, placed the clothing in the furthest corner so they stayed dry in the stall and wouldn't get stolen.

He fumbled with the controls. There was some weird sort of heating system they had with the furnaces below, but whatever it was, he never could get it right. He always ended up getting doused in scalding hot water despite only wanting cold water.

Sounds from the outside. People walking into the showers. FUCK. Why couldn't he just catch a single solitary fucking break?

Whatever focus on the water and--

YEP HOT SCALDING WATER RIGHT HERE RIGHTEO.

His concentration broke.

**OHMANDIDYOUHEARTHATELIZADELEGANOHADTOBEDEMOTEDFROMTHEDRUIDSTHATISSOOOWEIRDWHATHAPPENEDOHIHEARDSHEWASAIDINGHEAR  
TLESSDEMONSTHATHAVEBEENATTACKINGTHECOUNCILANDSHE'SACTUALLY  
ADEMONARIWHOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHTHATISSOWEIRDALSOWA  
TERSPIRITFIFTYSEVENHASBEENPERMANENTLYTRANSMUTEDINTOENCHAN  
GMENTEDICEWOWOALSOLEADERCUPBOARDHASAGIRLFRIENDHEKEEPSMEETIN  
GUPWITHSOMEGIRLWITHREDHAIRCUUUUUUTE.**

Why.

Why?

**HEYHECANHEARUSHE'SADRUIDTOOHELLOWHAT'SYOURNAMEWHYISYOUR  
BEARDSOBRI--**

And off it went again!

In distress, he silently fiddled with the controls some more until ice cold water came out. Finally.

He closed his eyes and let the water wash over him. He would stay in here as long as he needed.

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Two hours later, utterly soaking wet, Jeremiah walked out of the shower. The first group hadn't stayed long, they just wanted to wash up, but then someone else came in and took a shower and then a third group of people...

He was out now, and that was what mattered. People didn't scare him per se. He just didn't want to risk having to deal with them.

He dried up, got dressed, grabbed his piercings, draped the towel over his head, and snuck back to his room. There he put his headband back on. Putting the dirty clothes on kind of ruined the point of a shower, but he felt cleaner.

Feeling better, he sent Kayeth to go get him a meal.

He woke up with no food.

Memories told him that when Kayeth went to get food, the aids had gotten angry at “her” for the moldy dishes. Refused to serve her.

Dammit.

Ok fine he would just send Lar’ian.

He woke up with no food.

Mother fucker!

Memories told him that they were no longer allowing takeout since SOMEONE had apparently been hoarding all the plates and returned them molded and broken.

Ah fucking come on! That wasn’t his fault! He was a god damn crusader...

Fucking shit piss fuck.

What was he supposed to do now?

Go to the mess hall and eat food like some fucking pleb?

Fine. He was gonna go to the mess hall and eat food like a fucking pleb he hoped the world was FUCKING happy.

He put the piercings back in first. He felt more naked without them on, and they were one of the few things he liked about himself. The part that wasn’t himself.

Now he would definitely have to interact with crusaders. Wonderful. Ssdfgh and Csd fgh were gone, so that made his life easier there, turning into a mouth and a dragon respectively.

He walked to the mess hall, which was luckily in the same building, so no annoying walking outside nonsense.

Asdfgh and Rsdfrh would be a problem if he ran into them though. Well, no, he was trying to be nicer to Asdfgh-- *Astral*, since there was that time he helped him depose the entire leadership (still can't believe he got that to happen...)

Fsdfrh and Hsdfrh were gone too. Married or something weird like that.

Was there anyone else he had to worry about? Oh yeah. Fsdfrh, Gsdfrh and Zander. Fuck those three. If he saw them he'd just get mad and angry.

As opposed to now where he was calm and happy.

*Yeah right.*

Some guards and assorted people of varying jobs walked past him, but no one did that "look" to him. The look of "I recognize this person!"

Then there were the gaggle of kids from before, with some of them retreating inside, to spread their annoyingness as far as possible.

Then the mess hall. Crowded, but no one looked at him like he was a friend. Just like he was some sort of freak.

His stomach grumbled vaguely, and Jeremiah realized he was a tad woozy. When was the last time he had eaten? Three days ago, maybe? It sounded like a lot but it really wasn't. He was burning energy at a far slower rate than the average person, considering how rarely he got out of bed.

He spent most of his time in a coma, of course his schedule was a tad off.

The food looked gross, as it always did, but now it was freshly gross, as opposed to cooling on his desk for an hour before he woke up gross.

He stared at the cooks in annoyance. They stared blankly at him because they had no idea who the fuck he was.

They gave him his food, brisket and mashed potatoes. Yum. He sat down in a table with a wide enough girth from everyone else.

Now just to eat and relax and let everything fade away...

“WHAT DO YOU MEAN VSFDGH IS NOT ALLOWED TO BRING HIS OWN CHICKEN?”

Oh great.

Some large demon guy was yelling at the cooks. Probably a Fsdfgh since otherwise it would have been mass attacked by now.

“Sir, we do not cook to order, that meat could be tainted, please just take the brisket, it is very good today,” The cook pleaded in a voice that implied they had a knife ready in the hidden hand.

“VSFDGH DEMANDS CHICKEN FOR HIS HARD DAY SAVING KITTENS FROM TREES.”

His voice sounded familiar. In that grating sinking terror way.

“We have some left over chicken in the back, please take your ring off, sir.”

The demon shimmered and turned into something way less terrifying, but still demonly shaped.

“VSDGH WILL BEGRUDGINGLY ACCEPT THE POOR SUBSTITUTION TO VSDGH’S SUPERIOR SLAIN BEAST.”

What a schmuck. Jeremiah returned to his meal, and did his best to ignore him. Just eat his food and get out. They were serving hot chocolate because of the cold. Maybe he could get some of that. Yeah. That sounded good.

He got up and got some hot chocolate. Maybe he should practice some alchemy after this. Shadow Alchemy had been absorbing all his time recently. That and the secret essential learning sessions with Hsdfgh. Qsdfgh had taught him the basics of Shadow Alchemy, but he was kind of a crummy teacher. Luckily he had been able to deduce and extrapolate most of what was to be learned from his vague and jerkish explanations.

There had been an annoying issue of Qsdfgh withholding information too. Like it was too good for him. Pissed Jeremiah right off. He tried to figure it out himself, but couldn't. Luckily for him, the apple of knowledge took care of that.

Jeremiah smiled to himself. Sometimes he did enjoy his own ability to solve problems.

He took his fork and idly traced a foreign alchemy symbol in it. He had trouble drawing it out of his subconscious but it seemed to be getting more accurate now. From what he could tell it was some sort of health related alchemical symbol. Meant to stimulate the nervous center, increase alertness. Could be interesting to test out and apply.

“HELLO THERE, FRIEND OF THE MAJESTIC BEARD!”

Jeremiah nearly jumped out of his skin when the tall and boisterous Fsdgh (Forgotten?) sat in front of him.

“We're not friends,” Jeremiah snapped.

“We went on that adventure with the insane fire women and got friendship bracelets! Of course we are friends!” Vsd fgh responded with much gusto.

Jeremiah shuddered. Oh right. THAT. The thing some Esdfgh named Sdfghj had given them. It was still in his drawers. He was not fucking touching that because no way was he pretending to be friends with Zander, who had also gotten one.

“Fine. Fucking whatever. Let me eat,” Jeremiah muttered. He wasn't as tense as the showers, since he wasn't in the middle of metaphorically stripping, but he still wanted him gone.

“I HAVE DONE NOTHING TO STOP YOU FROM EATING!” Vsd fgh responded, and took a swig of his own hot chocolate, before spitting it out.

“THIS IS HOTTER THAN WHAT WAS PROMISED VSDFGH!”

“SON OF A--” Jeremiah swore as hot liquid sprayed on him. “What the fuck is your problem?!!”

“THIS MELTED CHOCOLATE IS VSDFGH'S PROBLEM!”

“Fucking-- here, give me,” Jeremiah snarled.

“IT IS VSDFGH’S MELTED CHOCOLATE.”

“I’m not stealing it from you, I can fucking make it better!” Jeremiah snapped. Pointy headed freak.

Pointy Head reluctantly passed his hot chocolate to Jeremiah. He took his hand and made a quick hand symbol around it. The steam lessened. He pushed it back.

“Try now, big guy,” He said.

Pointy Head took a sip and smiled with elation. “YOU ARE SKILLED WITH PITIFUL MAGIC TO DO THIS!”

“It’s not magic. It’s alchemy. Fucking completely different,” Jeremiah muttered.

“Vsdgh sees no difference. It is not giant sword you use to destroy your enemies so what is the point?”

“The point is to not burn your damn tongue off,” Jeremiah responded, gritting his teeth.

Pointy Head shrugged and drank the rest of the hot chocolate, immediately got up, came back with two more cups, and pushed it in Jeremiah’s direction expectantly.

*Mother fucker.*

He took them and made the same hand symbols to cool them down.

Pointy Head eagerly tore his chicken apart while he waited.

“So, while Vsdgh does not understand difference as both are nothing compared to sword, Vsdgh is curious as to what this difference is of which you speak.”

“You’re asking me to explain the theoretical differences between Alchemy and Magic?” Jeremiah nearly spat in surprise.

“This is the correct conclusion to reach,” Pointy Head replied.

Jeremiah was about to scoff and say he wouldn't understand it, but paused. This was a chance to talk about Alchemy, and it had been a loong time since anyone gave a damn about that. All right.

“You know the applicative theory? “If you can move a rock, you can eventually move the world,” as the saying goes. Say you can generate a ball of water via your standard “Aquatora” spell. It stands to reason that with practice you can generate a bigger one, a better one, one that can even turn corners if you practice right.

“Alchemy does not have that. Even the more potent brands are extremely limited. Hang on— see this brand here? This is what lets me cool down liquids. If it was purely magical it means that I could be hypothetically freezing anything that comes my way but it doesn't. It can cool an amount of liquid about yay big about yay amount of degrees and that is it. And if the cup is thick enough or made of the wrong metal it just flat out won't work at all.

“It's not really what I'd call glorious. I used to have over a hundred of these babies to accommodate for the amount of skills I wanted to have, but most of them got distorted after the breach and I broke all the bones in my body. Never got around to reapplying them all, it's a right fuckin' pain.”

Pointy Head nodded and began idly taking chicken bones out of his throat.

“Anyway so magic comes from taking the thaum and altering to your whim. There are dozens of thaums with all sorts of streams. Some run counter to others, like Apotropaic. Most non-magic users don't notice it, but some train to channel it through items. Those are thaum benders and thaum warriors. It's limited, but you can do some really impressive stuff with it.

“Alchemy takes advantage of the thaum, in a way, but doesn't actually interact with it until the final product is done. This is why even the most anti-magical people can use it. It's more of a... poison, actually. You cause the reaction within your body, through the use of the tattoo and the hand symbols. Once it exits your body, it ignites the thaum around it and BAM spell. But it means it takes on very different forms, as I said before. It can't be extrapolated like magic can. And it doesn't intersect well. Very few alchemies play nice with each other, unlike magic which is basically a giant friendly orgy.

“Like sure, I could carry a few dozen on me, and even that is uncomfortable. Just on the theory alone. Accidentally make two hand motions of two separate alchemies, and suddenly your gallbladder is exploding and gushing out of your mouth at about three feet a second.”

Pointy Headed nodded some more. “Vsdgh has learned many things today. Vsdgh will remember this if ever have to murder Alchemist.”

Jeremiah softened ever so slightly. “Yeah that’s one way to use it. Although I’ve barely scratched the surface, it gets so much more indepth than that, you probably wouldn’t understand it.”

“Vsdgh accepts this challenge! Tell Vsdgh more about the exploding gall bladders!”

Jeremiah took a few bites of his food and immediately began to launch into a comprehensive history of the ethics of alchemy. He had plans to also include the results of failed alchemy, since that would no doubt impress this easily incited Fsdgh.

He had just started on the historical discovery of Elemental Alchemy (which involved people turning into statues, albeit temporarily) when a loud noise started coming his way. Someone had that “I recognize you” face on. Only it was more of a “Son you’re gonna fucking die” face.

“Jeremiah,” The voice said.

It was one of those dog people. And the voice implied one person. Asdfgh. No. Astral. His name was Astral. He was putting in an effort to remember his name, remember?

He looked...unhappy. Like someone had just walked all over him again. So you know, what he always looked like.

“Astral,” Jeremiah repeated back, matching the dog’s annoyed tone. You know what was hard? Reading people’s expression when they had a damn snout. He should be getting half credit for his ability to tell them apart, not to mention being able to tell when he was frowning or grinning.

It was really hard and everyone just fucking acted like it was a natural inborn trait that they’d all just learned immediately after meeting the Federational Races. It was fucking bullshit.

“What do you have to say for yourself?” Astral said in a voice that implied Jeremiah had something to say for himself.

“The hot chocolate kinda tastes like they didn’t add enough milk,” Jeremiah replied still unsure as to where this was going.

“That is not what I meant, and you know it!” Astral barked.

Jeremiah paused mid bite of his mashed potatoes. OK so they were doing this.

He stood up. "Excuse me?"

"Vsfgh suspects there is a part he is unaware of." Pointy Head said.

"The KIDS, Jeremiah!" Astral cried out.

Was he shaking?

"Yeah, they're fucking annoying, got anything else you wanna spit in my face about?" Jeremiah said, idly licking his teeth with his tongue. He didn't know what Astral was accusing him of, but he didn't like it.

His right hand curled into a fist. It weighed uncomfortably on his shoulder, but that was to be expected, it was a new arm after all.

"Don't play dumb with me, I saw you. I saw you screaming at that crying child for accidentally bumping into you. What is WRONG with you?" Astral cried out.

"Whaaaat?" Jeremiah nearly choked out. "You have the wrong person, mate."

"WHAT OTHER PERSON HAS DAMN A RAINBOW BEARD, JEREMIAH?" Astral screamed, slamming his fists on the table.

There was a silence in the mess hall.

Jeremiah took a deep breath, and grinned, showcasing far too many teeth for any one mouth.

"Well it wasn't fucking me. I didn't yell at some fucking kid. And if I did, so what? It's a bratty kid. Probably deserved it." Jeremiah said.

Vsdfgh stood up. "If my new friend says he did not do it, Vsdfgh will stand with him!"

"I SAW YOU! I HAVE EYE WITNESSES, JEREMIAH!" Astral continued to yell.

"What no you do--" Jeremiah cut himself off. In the background a few Crusaders from assorted teams were watching. They had nodded when Astral talked.

...What the *fuck*?

They were agreeing with him? Had to be. He had Pointy Head but...

He didn't do it. He never yelled at some fucking kid.

*Had he? No.*

And now he was being cornered over something that was COMPLETELY not his fault!

"Well your eye witnesses are fucking wrong! I haven't left my room in a week!" Jeremiah shouted back.

How dare this furry faced wuss accuse him! After he went to an effort to remember him and not be outwardly mean! He wanted to punch him in the fucking face for making a spectacle like this. He was perfectly fine just talking about Alchemy with Pointy Head, but no, Astral here had to ruin it.

"Stop lying to my face, Jeremiah!" Astral spat, leaning in closely.

Jeremiah returned the favor, leaning back in turn, while Pointy Head stood menacingly.

"I don't fucking lie, you're just an idiot! And you're the murderers of the group, but you get strung up because you think I yelled at a kid, which I didn't? Fucking get real!"

"You don't hurt kids! What messed up world do you come from?"

"They're living breathing incubation sacks. They are NOTHING special, wolf boy."

Astral stared at Jeremiah. If he ever had murderous intent towards someone who wasn't some faceless stranger, it was probably now.

"You're REALLY pissing me off, Jeremiah." Astral said carefully. He was straightening himself up.

"Ooh, that makes two of us, then!" Jeremiah said happily.

"I will be taking in the complaints... of the children and report it to the proper authorities," Astral said. He was trying to remain calm.

“Oh good for fucking you!” Jeremiah snapped. This whole thing was stupid anyway. He didn’t do it. Kids were dumb. Who cared? Who honestly fucking cared?

*I do.*

Astral turned to leave.

“Go ahead, tell them what you’re stupid enough to think I did, we’re not all lucky enough to be fucking the commander!” Jeremiah shouted as he walked away.

Wrong move.

Astral halted like he ran into an invisible wall.

He swivelled around, his eyes narrow. In his hand was a swirling cool blue liquid -- Aquatora.

“Say. That. Again.” Astral rasped. Normally he wouldn’t be able to hear it over the din, but the mess hall was continuing its deathly silence.

Jeremiah gave a cold laugh, and started to walk towards him. Fine.

“What, you gonna assault me, now? Just like that elvish bitch? Think you’re that better than us? Fine. I’ll say it again. We can’t. All be. FUCKING. The commander. Face it puppy, that’s the only reason you’re even allowed to TOUCH leadership after the shameless display you put up the past few missions.”

*And with all the gods as my witness I will make you as miserable as me.*

Jeremiah brought up his own right hand. Go ahead. Let him douse him in water. He’ll reflect it right back.

“Sure you don’t want me to wait for you to get your Husk? I’m surprised you can even walk considering how long you stay asleep.” Astral said calmly.

*Eye twitch.*

Jeremiah tightened his right fist. He wasn’t going to start a fight. He was better than that. Unlike Astral his skin was tougher than that.

*It certainly was leathery enough.*

“Oh so you finally learned how to string a few fucking words together. How about, ‘Gee Jerry, sorry for fucking accusing you of something you didn’t do, I’m a giant fucking idiot!’” Jeremiah snapped back. He was staring upwards at Astral, feeling his disgusting dog breath on his head.

*half circle. half circle...*

“Why don’t we both calm down, hm? Take a few health potions to relax. You’re good at that, right?” Astral replied.

*oh FUCK YOU.*

The room exploded, as several things happened simultaneously.

The first was what happened between Astral and Jeremiah. Water splashed against Jeremiah, cutting his face rather deeply.

But more jarringly was his outstretched, broken, right arm.

And the gaping wound across Astral’s bleeding chest.

He had seen it coming, and tried to dodge it, glancing it neatly. Leaving a trail of destroyed ground next to him, but it was still too much.

*Demolior.*

What the fuck? He didn’t even remember...

Jeremiah barely had a few seconds to register what was happening when he got tackled violently to the ground.

He hadn’t meant to. That wasn’t his fault. That wasn’t his fault. It was an accident. He didn’t even have the stamina to CAST that spell and...

How?

“WHAT. DID. YOU. DO?”

Jeremiah's eye slowly came into focus to see who was screaming at him.

Astral was being held by Pointy Head (who looked like he jumped in to participate, only to find that his possible enemy had been nullified seconds into the fight.

In the background was Zander, standing with a few other Crusaders, looking shocked.

Fucking dammit.

On top of him, however, was a vaguely familiar face and a vaguely familiar voice. Rsdfigh. The Commander. Whose name he couldn't be damned to remember.

Oh. Lovely. This was great. This was just fucking great. He just wanted to eat some food. What had he done wrong, honestly?

*DEMOLIORING ASTRAL.*

That was an accident!

"Getthfuckoffme!" Jeremiah wheezed, and Rsdfigh did just that, but gripped his shirt with a good degree of intensity. She turned to Zander.

"Get him to a healer!" She said, pointing to Astral.

Zander opened his mouth as if he was about to protest, pointing to Jeremiah, but stopped. He helped Astral up and began to walk away, with Pointy Head helping.

Astral stirred ever so slightly as they walked. He was going to be just fine...

Hahah. Hah...

Shit he messed up badly here. Now everyone was going to think he was some trigger happy murderer. He never killed anyone! Ever! And he was being treated like the bad guy!

*Fucking liar.*

Rsdfigh pointed outside of the messhall. "Outside. Now." She hissed.

Just fucking great.

Jeremiah yanked his shirt away from her, but didn't protest. His arm was broken. Absolutely flippin' broken. How did that happen? Maybe a bad reaction? It was a new arm he had been using for one of his husks, maybe he had messed up the tattoos...?

Impossible, he hadn't messed up ANYTHING. Maybe someone tampered with it.

But he kept all of his shit locked up...

unless...

hm.

“WHAT. WAS. THAT?” She yelled, but in a way of her trying to have authority and strength. Jeremiah didn't buy it for a second.

He really didn't buy anyone here. Always so weird and acting like everyone revolved around them. At least Zander had the decency to admit he had an ego the size of Kasinthia.

...

“He accused me of something I didn't do and then threatened me in front of everyone!” Jeremiah said, breathing a bit less easily than he would like.

*Ignore everything else and you almost sound innocent there...*

He could see the cogs turning in her head. Acting like he was somehow twisting the words to suit his own agenda. He wasn't. That was what actually fucking happened. It wasn't his fault that someone in leadership got twitchy the moment he let a minor insult fly.

“And that was an excuse to try and *murder* him?” Rsdgh asked, gripping her axe by her side.

Why did people fight with axes. They weren't very good. Then again blades in a general were just kind of a pain. Why hit people with metal when you could do so many other things? Creativity, people...

A few crusaders from assorted teams hurried up behind Rsdgh.

“Rsdgh!” one called out.

She turned. "I'm busy, here!"

"I saw the whole thing!" Said the one. Short, kinda ugly looking. The thief from the previous mission. Wsd fgh or something.

"So I was outside, and it was nice out, and I saw a festival going on and it was great! And Astral was there so were Crusaders from B Team and that new gnome was playing tricks on people! I was so excited, and then he showed up, and made a buncha kids cry. Astral tried to confront him, but he told him to effe right off! Then he walked away and then Astral followed him after he made sure the kid was ok!" Wsd fgh immediately began to ramble.

No. Oh no. Oh fuck no. No no no NO!

"That is not what--" Jeremiah began.

"Quiet," Rsd fgh interrupted.

"And so then he got mad and we decided we should confront him because making kids cry is NOT OK so we went to the mess hall and I stayed behind because I did not want to get into a fight but Astral did and then Jeremiah said a bunch of curses and things I'm not really too sure on because I wasn't ENTIRELY paying attention to, and then they punched each other with magic!"

This was revenge. It had to be. He was being set up here, right? Insult a few crusaders and now they concoct some sort of elaborate scene to get him in trouble.

He felt the blood drain out of his face. Screwed. He was fucking screwed.

"It's true, he's telling the truth," A small elf said behind Wsd fgh.

He didn't even recognize this one. Did that many people have it out for him?

A rumbling of agreement came from the group that was huddling around this "private" talk.

"I... I didn't fucking do it!" Jeremiah said somewhat pathetically. Cornered again like a fucking rat. He'd just have to do what he always did. Take the punishment and seek some sort of higher power. He doubt he could start another petition, unfortunately.

“You know what, I don’t care. I don’t care! You cleaned a chunk of chest out of my general. I hope you like toilet duties, because you are going to be scrubbing them in the night shift for a long time!” Rsd fgh said, her tone as exasperated as her words. “And it better be you, and not one of your husks!”

This made Jeremiah’s blood turn to ice. Rsd fgh turned to leave and the others gawked at him.

*Anything but that.*

“No. You can’t do that to me. You can’t--” Jeremiah started.

“I just fucking did!” Rsd fgh snapped back, turning to stare him down. “If you don’t like it, why don’t you start a fucking petition, huh?”

Some mumbles and laughs spread throughout the crowd. Jeremiah felt his face turn hot. Blood dripped idly down into his eyebrows and beard. It was going to be a bitch to clean later.

*Make only enemies, don’t be surprised when no one is on your side.*

*Swallow your pride. Plan revenge later.*

Face burning, he turned around and walked away.

He was humiliated.

The walk back to his room was slow and agonizing. His arm hurt. His head hurt. His ego hurt.

Everything hurt. How dare they! How dare they abandon him and not even listen to his side of the story! It wasn’t fair.

He fumbled for his key for a bit, and entered his room utterly disgusted with everyone.

*Easier that way.*

He took a few deep breaths.

He could calm down.

He calmed down by punching the wall and saying rude words about how Astral barely got injured anyway and Rsdgh was being irrational, and other related musings.

Calm and rational yessirree.

He paused mid-punchings to think about something.

He was punching with his right hand.

His broken right hand.

He looked down at his hand. It was still broken, that was for sure. The elbow was nearly inverted and everything hung limply.

*Make a fist.*

A fist formed.

Shit ok, that was...worrisome.

He wasn't a husk was he? He sometimes had nightmares about that concept. If husks had consciousness or not. That'd be a terrifying reversal.

No! That was stupid! Don't even entertain that notion.

Some nerves didn't connect right so he wasn't feeling enough pain to stop him from having it act like a normal broken arm.

He could fix it himself, he just needed some of his other limbs, a health potion and his blade.

He began to search his recently tidied room and quickly discovered it was a lot harder to find anything in this room now that he could actually see the floor.

Where were his extra limbs? Those didn't exactly get up and walk away, did they?

Underneath his desk he found some dusty books, including a few library books (oh hey, *Alchemykal Resonance*, fucker wasn't lying after all... whoops), a slew of notes that were too illegible to read, and a bunch of dust that Jeremiah deduced to be burnt scrolls.

When the fuck did he buy scrolls? Had he been drunk at the ti-- hey a flask! Yep probably drunk.

He sniffed the flask and nearly gagged. That seemed less like drinking alcohol and more like disinfectant, but whatever. It probably tasted better when he wasn't sober.

Man ever since he had cancelled Drinking Night with Zander he just hadn't been drinking anything recently. It wasn't really pleasant, he needed to pick that up again. Drinking. Yeah.

He distracted himself as he searched through his stuff, finding joy in the solidarity. His day had been utterly shitty. And hopefully that was the last of it and he could never leave for a long time. He showered. He had one meal. He dealt with people's bullshit. He deserved a fucking medal.

Oh. Wait. Night Shift with the toilets.

Fucking hell he forgot about that.

Just great. Just fucking...

He would get out of it. He didn't know how but he would get out of it.

All right, limbs. No limbs. Fine he would take one from his husks. He had an unfinished one that he wasn't gonna finish any time soon, anyway.

He took off the sheet.

A Glassy Eyed Zander stared back at him.

Well, a really bad interpretation of him. Eyes were the wrong color, the hair had barely been threaded through yet, and the cheek bones just couldn't get that proper angle.

A sense of sickness churned in him.

*Creep.*

It had just been a project. To see if he could do it. All of his other husks had been based on memory alone and he had just wanted to know if...

Whatever. WHATEVER. No one could see him. No one could judge him. No one ever had to know ANYTHING about him. EVER. Because it was HIS life and no one elses.

So long as everyone just stayed far away and didn't piss him off.

He took his switch blade out and struggled to rip open the shoulder blade, but he really couldn't do it with one arm. Reluctantly he had his right hand try and hold the body steady, but it just kept flopping once any amount of pressure was applied.

This wasn't working.

He could just go to Healer Psdfgh and get help there. It was mid afternoon it would be fine. Besides, he wasn't a carcass. Performing surgery on himself was PAINFUL and involved complicated husk back-and-forth interactions. And he had no idea how Healear Psdfgh had put this spare husk arm on him.

It would be easier.

*Would have been easier if your arm hadn't been torn off in the first place. Zander and U'ala's fault.*

He sighed and walked out of the room after covering the husk back up. Great now he had to walk outside.

The weird festival was still going on, judging by the kids. A few adults saw him and gave him the stink eye.

Why? Was there a fucking gnome going around making illusions of him? He was gonna be so fucking pissed if Zsdfgh or Bsdfgh or Ssdfgh were doing that. So fucking pissed.

He decided to take a long loop around then, around the gardens, hit the healer's hut on the curve. He didn't need to have anyone else piss him off.

For the second time today (technically), he entered the Healer's Hut. They knew his husks semi well here, since in the past he had been slinking around to get health potions.

It was weird how that part of him just evaporated. It was like having an entire pillar of his life just disappear without a context. He wasn't complaining, he really didn't like that part of him. Made him too desperate, too reliant, and he was far more unpleasant than, then he was now.

As he stepped through the doors, Astral and Rsdfgh stepped out.

The two stared at him.

“Jeremiah,” Astral said politely. His chest looked perfectly fine. But of course he’d still get toilet duty.

“Asshole,” Jeremiah shot back, and shoved past him.

Liars and conspirators weren’t getting his damn attention.

The place was oddly busy considering how they hadn’t suffered any mass invasions. Or... whatever drama the Crusaders were able to muck up at any given time.

“Hey. I need to talk to Healer...Pom...,” Come on subconscious retrieval don’t fail him now “ador.”

“Healer Pom-a-day?” The Healer asked, head tilting.

Healer Psdfgh. Of course. He totally remembered and internalized that name, and would now never make that mistake again.

“Yes. That woman. Where is she? She did a crap job on my arm,” Jeremiah said.

“Busy. We had a slew of injured druids and guards from the recent heartless invasion. She’s busy at the moment,” The Healer said breathlessly before dashing off in a random direction.

Fucking--

“MY ARM IS BROKEN!” Jeremiah yelled. “COULD SOMEONE PLEASE HELP ME?”

“I will,” A voice from behind him. Taller than him. Mask. Four arms.

Great. A giver. Was it Four Arms or a different giver? The world would never know. Either way his anger was already in the middle of being processed.

“Thank you,” Jeremiah said between his teeth.

The Giver gestured to a free bed and Jeremiah followed suit.

“Now, let me just heal it--”

“Stop. Stop. Stop. If I wanted to do that I’d have just grabbed a health potion. I need you to cut it open and make sure all the nerves are connected properly,” Jeremiah snapped. The Giver was beginning to touch him and he REALLY hated when people touched him.

“Sir I understand that you are worried but we are doctors here an--”

“And I think I know my own fucking body!” Jeremiah yelled back, swiping his arm away from The Giver.

He waved his right arm around in ways that really shouldn’t happen when it was broken. Pain vaguely registered in his brain. He wiggled his fingers back and forth, before pulling his hand back so it reached his shoulder, backwards.

There was a slight crunching noise. He crudely wiggled his fingers again.

“Capische? I need...The Head Healer. Woman. That Woman,” Jeremiah said, taking some joy in the Giver’s mildly worried face.

“Please tell me how this happened, and I will be more than capable of helping you,” The Giver replied.

Jeremiah rolled his eyes. “Buddy it’s a long story. She already knows the story, so get her.”

“I cannot.”

Jeremiah sighed.

“OK so it started when I was at this bar, right?”

*Jeremiah, Zander and U’ala sat at the bar. There was arguing, banter, and the occasional flirt. Jeremiah had always flirted with Zander more when he was drunk, but it wasn’t really a thing he only reserved for such things.*

*It was harmless, Zander seemed to take pride in it, and he never realized it was anything but Jeremiah being insulting, so what was the harm?*

*“You know, Zander, Jeremiah insults you way more than anyone else. Do you ever think why that is?” U’ala asked.*

*“I’ll fucking insult you too if you want!” Jeremiah snapped back. “Your scales look like pebbles. Your hair is so frizzy it gets stuck in doors. I am pretty sure you could use your nose to cut bread. Every time someone brings up sex you get all crosseyed!”*

*U’ala just smiled, not even fazed by Jeremiah’s words. “See, diverting the problem and trying to distract you.”*

*“That... makes no sense,” Zander slurred.*

*“He likes you, Zander!” U’ala said.*

*“I don’t think he does...” Zander replied, looking at him in confusion.*

*Jeremiah pretended to ignore them. Shut up, U’ala. Don’t do this. Don’t ruin this.*

*“And I was in a really pissy mood because I was drunk and was having a bad time. So I did something fucking stupid.”*

*Zander tried to grab Jeremiah’s hand. Jeremiah tore it away and hissed at him. U’ala’s attempts to get them to talk about such nonsense had been going on for several minutes and Jeremiah was having none of it.*

*Then Zander paused, frowned, leaned over, and kissed Jeremiah lightly on the mouth.*

*Jeremiah stared at him and stuttered. Crap. Craaaap. He had swore he wouldn’t get involved with this man but... but...*

*Crushes sucked. Especially crushes on guys who could never return your feelings. This would make him Crusader #3, more if you counted Siz...*

*“All right,” Jeremiah said, against all reason screaming at him not to.*

*“Which is, when I noticed that the bartender wasn’t at the bar, I tried to talk to the guy next to me, this big beefy guy with a rat of a dog.”*

*Got you back. God of Humiliation, remember?*

*PS. Get your clothes.*

*ZANDER*

*Jeremiah clenched the letter angrily, and shortly later stormed out of the room, fuming. It had all been a fucking joke. He had been such an IDIOT to think anything like that would have EVER worked out.*

*He needed alcohol. Lots of it.*

*But no bartender. Fuuuuck.*

*“Hey, Cueball, do you know where the bartender went?” He asked the beefy bald guy with spikes all over his jacket.*

*“No. Nice to meet you.” He extended his hand.*

*“Jeremiah DON’T--!” Zander protested in the distance.*

*Maybe just to spite him, Jeremiah took his hand and shook it.*

*“Ba’loch. Et Ada of Slavery. Nice to meet you. I own you now,” The big man said, gripping his chain and ever so slightly strangling the barking rat dog.*

*“Turns out it was some... demon god thing. I don’t fucking know. Put some sort of ghost chain around my hand.”*

*“Just there, at the bar?”*

*“Buddy I don’t know fucking why bad things follow me, but they do. If you meet a guy named Zander, you can blame him for it. He worships one of them called Nisis. Pretty sure it attracted the others. Point is, not my fault.”*

*Jeremiah looked down at his hand. He didn’t FEEL any differently.*

***WALK.***

*The order hit him like a ton of bricks. He was painfully aware of every second, but was suddenly unable to not listen.*

*He started walking. U'ala tried to stop him. She grabbed him, far stronger than him. Sparrow was there for some reason. When did he get there? Zander was there too. The bastard. He tried to break free anyway. Had to because of this POUNDING in his head that didn't let him decide otherwise.*

*His arm dislocated and he tried to break free, but it didn't work. U'ala held fast with the help of the other two, and his arm was quickly healed.*

**WALK.**

*He didn't want to do it this was HIS body. No one got to control his body but HIMSELF dammit. DAMMIT.*

**WALK.**

*Jeremiah went ethereal. Stepped out of their grasps. Started walking. Had to.*

*Then she attacked him. He dodged and deflected and disengaged. He had to. He wanted to scream but he couldn't.*

*Then she finally got him down, with all the power of the merverse.*

*He REALLY needed get back to putting his mind under lock and key.*

*Jeremiah slumped over, and U'ala picked him up like a rag doll. But he was still aware, somehow. Blood coursing through him, telling him terrible disgusting things, urging him to **WAKE UP and WALK TO THE DAEVA SHRINE.***

*“So we get back to council and this chain rips my entire fucking arm off.”*

*They carried him through a cullis gate to the council. Then the chain jerked. His body started being dragged across the ground, skidding his back up.*

*They grabbed him and stopped his unconscious body.*

*The chain pulled.*

*They pulled back.*

*Jeremiah woke to the sight of his own right arm being torn off. He didn't even have the time to bring up enough energy to scream, but he screamed all the same.*

*He blacked out after that, woke up in a hospital, a new arm attached to his side.*

“The... Healer took one of the arms from my husks and attached it to me. But I don't think it's working right. And THAT is why I'd really like to get her to help me out.”

“That wasn't a long story at all.”

*A knock on Jeremiah's door. Lar'ian answered.*

*“Hello, this is Lar'ian. Jeremiah will not be going outside ever again, as he does not like it very much.” The husk said to a crestfallen Zander and a disappointed U'ala.*

“Well it felt long to me,” Jeremiah snapped back.

“Regardless, I've healed your arm back. Your nerves are fine,” The Giver said with a shrug.

Jeremiah rolled his eyes and snatched his far more functional arm away from Four Arms. “Did you not just listen to me?”

He probably should have pointed out this hand was subconsciously casting demoliors that he had no stamina to cast.

...actually no do not give them the admission that you attacked a crusader.

Do not do that.

That would be bad and open up all sorts of cans of worms.

“I listened to you. Your nerves were fine. Maybe the problem is where the arm came from?” The Giver asked, not really pausing to say these words, instead hurrying off into the crowded ward.

Jeremiah grimaced. Had to do EVERYTHING himself.

Next stop was simple, the graves. The Body Depository. Limbs R Us, if you will. The Council, unlike shitty ol' Aranarth, kept a decent stockpile of executed individuals and other assorted dead folk on the premises for the purposes of scientists and alchemists everywhere.

It was... actually a really good idea, Jeremiah had to admit. It was a bit barbaric, but it wasn't anything he was going to complain about. His curiosity mostly went as far as the fact that the amount of bodies in the mausoleum did not match the amount of executions there were.

Not by much, but the discrepancy was there.

Which meant there was also a secondary source of murders going on.

Who knew where that was going on? Perhaps the realm of fantastical happenstances? Maybe their newly found alliance with the demons had some perks? Or maybe Elder Csdfigh was a mass murderer in league with the Assassin's Guild. The possibilities were endless.

He briefly considered getting one of his husks to do this for him, but he decided against it. He needed some time in the dark, and no one ever was stupid enough to disturb someone else in the crypts, assuming there even was anyone else.

He gave a forced smile to the guard as he walked by. This time the kids were more dispersed and the festival was dying down, so he didn't have to avoid them so obviously.

The guard stopped him. She frowned at him, deeply.

"No."

"What?" Jeremiah asked.

"Are you going in because you forgot something down there?" The guard asked.

"No?" Jeremiah said.

The guard took out her pen and paper.

"I had you down there for nearly twice the allotted time we give people in there. Don't think we don't keep track of your husks." She said, frowning at him.

“Hey, I go the normal time, even with my husks! I don’t cheat the system! Now let me in,” Jeremiah snapped.

The guard went over the paper. “Not unless you’re willing to sign yourself up for mandatory mental evaluation and come back with the slip.”

“Ah s’fucking... seriously?” Jeremiah spat.

“Yes,” The guard stated.

“Does anyone else even go down there?” Jeremiah asked.

“Classified and none of your business. You know how this works,” The guard stated dully.

“Yes, yes, everyone is awarded some amount of privacy unless they’re using the crypts as a murder keeping place in which case they will be shamed exposed and made part of the scenery,” Jeremiah recited, having it drilled in his head when he first applied for allowance into the crypts.

Apparently some asshole just before he left was using the crypts to dump his own dead bodies and hide them amongst the rest. He hadn’t been found although apparently there were attempts to capture their echoes through the Angler Fish. Results were inconclusive though.

Not his problem. What was his problem was that they were trying to cheat him out of his hours. Fuckers.

He argued back and forth with her for a while, but it wasn’t worth it. It was getting darker too. In a few hours he’d probably have to go and start scrubbing toilets.

Unless Rsd fgh forgot and turned in the paperwork a few days later.

His stomach rumbled vaguely. He was hungry again. He didn’t even get to finish his original meal. Vsd fgh was probably not around to listen to his talking either. That had been nice. He needed to find the other alchemists in this group. They were so rare. He knew the elvish bitch had used some elemental alchemical skills, but he didn’t talk to people who physically assaulted him. And so far that list consisted of her and Zander. Zander for using stasises and her for using stasises and fear.

Honestly it was so fucking disturbing. How people just cast spells on him like he was some prop for their amusement.

The chemical reaction of fear LITERALLY made a person more afraid than they'd ever been in their god damn life. People had been arrested over using a spell like that on him in the past. And now? Oh tra la la, it's no big deal. Your dragon popsicle mommy still loves you, so long as you suck her proverbial dick every time you see her. Here's a reward, become a fucking dragon!

He wondered if the same was going to happen to Zander. What would Nisis turn him into? A giant butt plug, because of how much of an asshole he was.

Yes.

*If they had cast those spells on anyone else you know they would feel sorry for you. Instead they probably feel bad that they had to sprain a hand while attacking you.*

Probably shouldn't have stolen her shit.

*Probably shouldn't have immediately accused you of being an evil prick the second you decided to defend yourself from crusaders attacking you.*

Probably should have given up that fight.

*You won.*

She became a fucking dragon and could smite him at any second.

*All the reason to get as much power as possible. This is exactly why you should have kept those artifacts. To protect yourself from people like her.*

Jeremiah grimaced and left the crypts. Not worth it. He'd just wait until the new week and get as many bodies he could, even if they didn't work right, or they didn't look good. He could just treat them. Get some dye out, it would be fine.

It would be just... fine.

He walked back to his room in silence.

He didn't want to go back to the mess hall.

Unless...

An idea struck him. Remove the throat. Replace the stomach with a bin. It'd be a bit odd, but he could transport the food that way.

Yes! No interaction required!

Reiner? ehrrrrr he needed him for combat. La'rian? Maybe. Kayeth? Nah she had that warrant out for Do Not Allow Near Kitchen.

He did have one last usable husk though.

It'd be a bit annoying to gut it for this, but so long as he kept everything nice and neat... yeah. That would work.

Whistling to himself, he took the switchblade out, and unveiled the last husk in his room. It was only slightly taller than him, with a much larger stomach area. Good. Plenty of area to store food.

He bent down, idly clicking against his tongue, lifted the husk's shirt up, and made a small nick for where the main incision would be.

Wait, crap, did he actually have a basin, box, or bucket? He got so excited he skipped a few steps.

He'd just have to look for a--

*thwack.*

*Thwack.*

*THWACK.*

*KNOCK.*

*Knock.*

*knock.*

“JEREMIAH, ARE YOU IN THERE?”

A bleeding and bruised Jeremiah woke up with a start.

Wha?

He sat up.

What the *fuck*?

“Yyeah,” He croaked.

“You are to report to toilet duty, please come out,” The unfamiliar voice said.

Fuck. How late was it? It was probably midnight by now...

Why did his head hurt?

It took a few seconds for him to process what he saw.

He wiped away the dried blood, and then he realized.

Across the room, white sheets lay on the ground, with nothing to hold them up.

His husks.

Someone *had stolen his husks*.

What else had they stolen?! Just the husks. He opened his drawers. A few dozen glass eyes stared back at him. The only valuable one was stuck in his face, the rest were decoys, but none of them had been taken. Ok, good.

THE ROOM WAS TOO CLEAN FOR HIM TO TELL WHAT WAS MISSING DAMMIT.

“Jeremiah Eudicot. Please exit the room. If you are late you’ll be written up,” The guards from the outside said.

“I’ve been fucking robbed!” Jeremiah cried out.

“ ... ”

There was a pause, and then the guard spoke.

“Impossible. These rooms can’t be robbed. Do you have your key?”

“Yes I fu--” Jeremiah cut himself off.

He reached into his pockets. A metal key was in his pockets. Yes. OK.

“YES I FUCKING HAVE MY KEY I STILL GOT ROBBED!” Jeremiah screeched. His heart was pounding. He had been robbed he had been robbed he had been FUCKING robbed like some FUCKING chump could this day GET any worse?

“Just open the door, sir.”

Grumbling, he opened the door.

The two guards looked at him. One was a dwarf, and thus able to stare at him eye to eye. It was kind of worse that way, because he could see that split second reaction of “holy shit dude what the fuck did you do to your everything.”

They looked in the room and saw the extremely cluttered, if somewhat organized room, with books and potions strewn liberally about, with arvirns on the floor rather casually as well.

“Right, well, sir, you can report a possible break in after you’ve finished your four hour shift with the toilets.” The dwarf guard said, handing him a map, a mop and a bucket.

“Also next time please report into the station on time. It’s in room 27B.” The taller guard said.

“And uh, might wanna wash up. You have... some stuff on your face.” The dwarf guard said.

“I WAS ATTACKED, YOU IDIOT!” Jeremiah roared.

“Then go get a healing potion!” The tall guard snapped.

The two guards walked away. In the distance, Jeremiah could faintly hear

“Acting like we have to serve him hand and foot... after the way he treated us...,”

He'd never treated a guard that badly! He barely knew who they were! AAARGH!

He looked down at the map. The entire Crusader floor was circled. Yay. Just... yay.

How humiliating. He had to clean and serve those that made his life miserable. This was the ultimate of ironies.

His initial plan was to go track down Dsdafh, U'ala's husband, but the urge died in his legs before it even started. He wasn't going to listen to him. U'ala had probably been badmouthing him the entire weeks he'd been skipping the druid meetings.

He clutched the mop. The sooner he put this off, the later he'd be up. And he could not be up past three am. It would be... probably bad. There was a reason he stayed in the council. No need to make himself an open target for whatever being wanted to take an easy shot on him. Did the assassin's guild have a hit out on him? He bet.

*Amongst others.*

It would be easy. He could clean some fucking toilets. He was Jeremiah effin' Eudicot. He had won awards! He was smarter than half the crusaders combined, objectively! He could fucking clean some toilets.

He took his mop and bucket and map and started walking down the hall. His stomach vaguely growled in protest. Back in the day he'd just guzzle a health potion and be fine, but he didn't really want to find out if the "signing away your addiction" thing was a "sign away THIS addiction" or a "sign away your ABILITY to be addicted" so he wasn't gonna try and get him rehooked on it.

He'd just starve then. Whatever.

Fucking stealing his husks. He was LIVID. Those were his most prized possession as a Biologics Alchemist. He barely had enough stamina to cast any of the old skills anymore, since the accident with the Breach. But that one had always been reliable, and it had put him miles ahead half the crusaders easily.

He NEEDED those husks. Otherwise he would be worthless in the eyes of his terrible companions.

*Worthless Disgusting Miserable Man.*

He went into the first bathroom, which was a small solitary, for people who felt anxious over sharing the larger bathrooms. Someone had dumped five tons of coffee beans into the sink, and it looked like no one had cleaned it for several months. Wow.

Wowwww.

He got to heaving the coffee beans to outside. A nearby window was open, so he just flung it out there. Fertilizer! Clever him.

He started walking back, when he stopped. He heard noise. Oh shit. Crusaders. They could not see this. Nope nope nope.

He gave a yelp and hid in the showers, the one he was in previously. His rainbow hair was still on the basin.

Oh yeah. He never cleaned that up.

...

Oh god dammit.

Now he was the one who had to clean it up!

That was unfair! Why did he have to clean it up? Why...

Fucking shit no. This time it was honestly his fault. He had been a lazy ass and now this was karmic retribution. He had no fucking comeback for this in his head. No mental loophole or short cut.

His fault.

The noise died down.

He opened the door.

Someone was out in the hallway.

For a moment they stared at him.

The Crusader in the hallway stared at Jeremiah's garish rainbow hair, his assortment of piercings and jewelry, his dark blue eyes that took up about a third of his face, the headband that strategically covered his forehead, and the dark purple tunic that covered the rest of his torso.

Jeremiah stared at the Crusader's garish rainbow hair, his assortment of piercings and jewelry, his dark blue eyes that took up about a third of his face, the headband that strategically covered his forehead, and the dark purple tunic that covered the rest of his torso.

No one from the outside had stolen his husks.

His husk had stolen his other husks. The husk he had made to look exactly like him. The husk he had been planning on turning into a food transporter. The husk he had turned away from for five seconds to look for a basket. The husk that had taken that moment to beat him to unconsciousness.

The other Jeremiah Eudicot grimaced and cursed quietly.

"Fucking dammit," The Other Jeremiah said. "And I was doing so well too."

*Tick tick tick tick tick*

*Ding!*

*Conclusion reached.*

There had been a double he was the one who took the book out the one who hurt the children he went to the crypts to get a new arm when someone salvaged him for the arm he currently had HE WAS THE ONE WHO WAS RUINING HIS LIFE.

They reacted simultaneously. After the moment of mutual reading each other, he lunged, demolior in hand.

Die. Die. Diediediediediediedie!

---

The council was peaceful at this time of night. Only a few crusaders were awake. Prophet was in the library, pouring over a text with a Giver aide. Milui was meditating serenely in her quarters. U'ala was finally asleep after a long day of work and meetings, Denethor happily joining her.

Sparrow had abandoned the premises to go on his bone boat across the world, and there were no emissaries. Even Bastargre had taken to rest, despite his desire to derive as much amusement from life as possible. Obsie was awake, silently pouring over the text of Cog in her room. Lily was happily walking in the garden, idly stringing her bow as she went. Minus the snafu of the last Heartless attack, all was well.

This was not to last.

A loud crashing noise in the Crusader hallway jolted them awake or aware, weapons ready.

The gaggle of Crusaders entered the hall, looking every which way.

“Everyone stay calm,” Rosalie said. “We’ll get this sorted out. Astral! Where are you?”

“Here ma’am!” Astral called from his own room, fighting back a yawn.

“It’s coming from over there!” Milui said, wide awake, pointing in the direction of the garden.

They hurried outside, ready to fight whatever strange matter of creature had decided to be stupid enough to cause them strife at such a later hour in the night.

They reached the garden, and stopped.

Much to their surprise, the fight was not between anything large or destructive. But Jeremiah Eudicot. Fighting Jeremiah Eudicot.

Two of them. Both bruised, bleeding, and practically indistinguishable.

“Whaaaaaaaaaat.” Wynnin said in surprise.

“Oh for the sake of the gods, WHY!” Astral complained.

“You know maybe I’ll just go back to bed for this one,” Garalick chimed in, but made no actual effort to leave, instead focusing intently on the battle at hand.

“Vikalpa is conflicted about this!” The Forsaken disguised as a High Demon said in the back.

Bastargre looked up at him, raising an eyebrow. “Do you... sleep with that enchantment on?”

“Vikalpa does not see the problem with this!”

“Which one do we fight?” Astral whispered to Rosalie.

“I do not fucking know,” Rosalie said, her eyes narrow.

From behind them, a Mershriek rang out.

Standing powerful and annoyed, U’ala and Denethor had their eyes directly on the squabbling dwomes.

The mershriek passed over them both as if it were nothing.

“Darn it, that worked last time!” U’ala sighed.

One Jeremiah grabbed the other Jeremiah, tackling him to the ground. The other, in response, bit him in the neck. Angrily cursing, the first Jeremiah punched the second Jeremiah in the face.

They both pushed off each other, and aimed a skin-tearing spell at each other, that some recognized to be Demolior. They both went flying.

“Now!” Rosalie cried. “Pin them down!”

The crusaders charged and tackled the two separate Jeremiahs.

“What? Get off me! Get the fuck off me!”

“Fucking get off me! Go fucking kill that one!”

Well, they certainly both *sounded* like Jeremiah Eudicot.

Milui went over and grabbed one, forcing him to sit down, much to his displeasure. U’ala and Denethor held down the other one.

“TAKE MY FUCKING SKIN OFF!”

“YOU RUINED MY LIFE!”

“I RUINED JACK SHIT YOU FUCKING DEMON!”

“FUCK YOU!”

“FUCK YOU!”

“Will everyone BE QUIET?” U’ala cried out, silencing all with her leadership presence.

Silence rang, and the Crusaders looked at the two subdued Jeremiahs.

“We’re gonna need names for them. That can be Jeremiah 1. And that can be Jeremiah 2.” Bastargre said, pointing to the one Milui was holding, then the one U’ala was holding.

“FUCK YOU I AM NOT NUMBER TWO!”

“FUCK YOU DON’T PUT ME IN THE SAME CATEGORY AS HIM!”

In unison they turned to each other, and yelled bloodily “STOP FUCKING COPYING ME!”

“How about Jeremiah 1 and Jeremiah A?” The other gnome, Sunny suggested.

Lily giggled in response. “I think that works best.”

“Fine. That doesn’t solve which one is real,” Rosalie cut in.

“I AM.” Both Jeremiah’s called out in unison.

“Maybe... they’re BOTH the real ones,” Bastargre helpfully supplied.

“NO!” The Jeremiahs responded, viscerally disgusted at such a suggestion.

In the distance, individuals from other buildings watch. A shiny metallic construct on a wheel was vaguely visible. Prophet quietly watched.

“Ok this will be fine, guys.” Rosalie said. “We just... have to ask questions only the real Jeremiah would know. That’s how this works.”

“OOH!” Wynnin cried out, skidding to the front of the crowd. “Me first! Me first!”

The two Jeremiahs stared at him with the look of murder.

“So why are you fighting instead of partying? There’s two of you! That’s like a clone brother you never had!” Wynninn exclaimed questioningly.

A small riot broke out as the other Crusaders groaned at the question, and the Jeremiahs spat terrible words at him.

“Strange that that one complains of being called second,” Obsie muttered. “Jeremiah A is probably the false.”

“Fuck you mummy-head!” Jeremiah A spat.

“Calm down, Jeremiah, I know you’re stressed.” U’ala said. Jeremiah A flailed and hissed at her. She paused, and walked over to Jeremiah 1, and touched him briefly.

“Well, Seed of cleansing doesn’t work,” She stated in annoyance.

“No shit!” Jeremiah A said.

“Does anyone have ACTUAL questions?” Rosalie shouted.

“I do!” Astral said brightly. “It’s--”

“VIKALPA WILL GO FIRST AS VIKALPA IS LITTLE BEARDED MAN’S FRIEND!” The High Demon strode past him, standing in the middle.

"Vikalpa demands only the TRUE Alchemist of Many Hued Locks answer this question. Should it be discovered that the impostor dare try, Vikalpa will enact TERRIBLE VENGEANCE!

Describe the order of Realms our Quest of Friendship took us through, in which we slowly drove mad the one with the flaming hair. Then explain in detail the Theory of Applicability and how it does NOT apply to Alchemy.

INCLUDE EXAMPLES!

OR FACE MY WRATH!"

He stood proudly, chest puffed out. Astral groaned and rolled his eyes in annoyance at being upstaged. Every time.

“The Theory of Applicability is--”

“The Theory of Applicability is--”

“I’M ANSWERING FIRST”

“SHUT UP AND LET ME TALK!”

The Jeremiahs roared at each other in anger, as they both tried to spit out the theory of applicability faster than the other. Regardless, what they were saying, while different in semantics, was accurate and the same.

Bastargre stepped up and poked Jeremiah A.

“Ow-- what?” Jeremiah spat.

“Nnope. No friendship from that one,” He said nodding.

Vikalpa slammed his hand down onto Jeremiah 1, as if to pat him on the back. “There is no friendship from this one either!”

“Whaaaaaaat.” Wynnin whispered.

“WHERE WAS THE INJURY FROM TODAY?” Astral yelled over the perceived nonsense.

“Your chest!” The two said in unison.

“Dammit,” Astral muttered.

Vikalpa brandished his weapon threateningly, but was interrupted by Lily asking a question.

“Is there a... downside to if we don’t figure this out in time? Like what will happen here? Can’t we just wait until the morning, or when we get an expert?”

“Downside is that THING is going to murder me!” Jeremiah A said.

“Murder you? Oh that is rich. IT’s the one that tried to rip the key out of my pocket and stab me with it!” Jeremiah 1 spat.

“Fucking bullshit. This guy is speaking second every time and you think he’s me?” Jeremiah A said.

“Yeah because unlike you, I’m actually surprised by the turn of events whereas you’re just fucking ready for every question. LIKE YOU PLANNED FOR THIS!” Jeremiah 1 shot back. “The longer this goes on, whatever fucked up plan you have concocted is getting better and fucking better!”

“You’re full of shit!” Jeremiah A yelled at him. “That is not true and--”

The arguing continued.

Obsie was next to step up and ask an audible question. “So first of all I want to say that I’m a big fan of your work here, good job. Now my real question I’d like to ask is: what the fuck is going on? Is that a demon? Or some sort of weird divine mumbo jumbo?. Either way, my recommendation is dissection.”

“DON’TFUCKINGTOUCHME!” Jeremiah A said.

“I WAS GOING TO SAY THAT FIRST!” Jeremiah 1 yelled back.

“If one of them is a demon,” Denethor postulated. “A sliver of ether might be a feasible test. Demons will often forgo what they are doing to eat ether, as it will grant them way more power than whatever con they’re currently running.”

“Wait, I have a question!” The Postman stepped forward. “WHAT-- is my name.”

“Fucking Asshole.” Jeremiah 1 spat without hesitation.

“Lord Balazar?” Jeremiah A guessed. “I’m fucking terrible with names, why would you ask me that?!”

“Well this is impossible,” Garalick the Postman concluded.

“Jeremiah,” U’ala started. “What are the three books I first assigned you?”

“The history of the Varda--” Jeremiah A immediately began.

“The memories of the eldar--” Jeremiah 1 said at the same time.

A slew of other words expelled from their mouth.

“They’re both right,” U’ala muttered.

This was somehow more frustrating that they weren’t always speaking in unison. They gave similar answers. Acted similar. Talked similar. But everything they did was different.

“Would you go to the baptismal pools to be cleared of this matter?”

The question cut through the air. Prophet was standing there, watching them.

“Fine.” Jeremiah A said. “Fucking fine.”

“Get your gross god away from me!” Jeremiah 1 said.

There was a silence. Prophet went to grab Jeremiah A, but Jeremiah A flinched, and U’ala stopped him.

“Jeremiah wouldn’t normally agree to that...,” U’ala said, trailing off. “He doesn’t want gods to touch him.”

“We could still do it and solve this entire thing,” Prophet said, but U’ala shook her head.

Jeremiah 1 gave a sigh of relief. “Something good, finally, yes!”

“I was fucking lying! I thought if I said yes that would prove that thing was the fake one!” Jeremiah A yelled out.

“Where did that B bastard make his deal?” U’ala asked immediately after.

“Right hand.” They replied in unison.

“That one is pointless, he’s the husk the arm was taken from!” Jeremiah 1 said.

“What the-- mother fucker YOU’RE the fucking husk!” Jeremiah A replied.

“He has the husk symbol on his chest, I branded it there my fucking self!” Jeremiah 1 shot back.

“No, that’s a fucking decoy tattoo I put for this EXACT REASON!” Jeremiah A yelled.

“Take them apart,” Obsie chimed in. “Will literally make all of our lives easier.”

“I have a few questions.”

The crowd parted slightly.

Tired and grumpy, Zander stood in the way. “Considering how I know you the best second only to U’ala.”

“Fuck off, Zander!” Jeremiah A snarled.

“Fuck off, Pretty Boy!” Jeremiah 1 snarled.

“Did we sleep together?” Zander asked.

“No!” Jeremiah A said.

“No!” Jeremiah 1 said.

Zander’s jaw dropped. “Are you fucking serious right now. Are you FUCKING serious right now? You are literally risking your life because you don’t want to admit-- Son of a bitch motherfucker! You are so far up your own ass, you know that?”

“Fine. Yes. We did. Happy?” Jeremiah A spat.

“What? Fuck! Fuck you! I was going to say that first!” Jeremiah 1 snarled.

“Release the both of them, I have two more questions I wanna get through,” Zander muttered. He looked very unhappy from having to put this much brain power into any of this.

Murmurs went through the crowd. Both Jeremiahs looked rather uncomfortable now.

Zander took out a health potion, and threw it up in the air, just as the Jeremiahs were released.

Jeremiah 1 flinched.

Jeremiah A dove head first and grabbed it.

“Don’t fucking waste--” Jeremiah A stopped.

“That settles it!” Astral said. “Jeremiah A is the one addicted to health potions!”

“You’d think that, but he’s not addicted to Health potions anymore. Is he?” Zander asked.

Jeremiah 1 broke out into a big grin despite himself.

Jeremiah A broke out into a panic while he desperately tried to open the health potion. “No. This is not what it looks like I fucking swear. Please... it just... I just... you said you had one more question! One more fucking question! Just give me one last chance!”

“Fine. Last question is, show me your glass eye.” Zander said. “Cause it’s one of a kind and I’m the only one in this field that knows what it looks like.”

Jeremiah 1 gave a near sob of relief.

“Jeremiah has a glass eye?” Wynnin asked in confusion.

1 popped the glass eye out and handed it to Zander. “Suck it, husk!” He shot.

Jeremiah A paled, and clutched his right arm.

In the light of the moonlight, enchanted runes glinted.

“Jeremiah A?” Zander asked, holding his hand out, expectantly.

Jeremiah A swallowed dryly. “You have to believe me. I’m the real--”

“STOP FUCKING LYING AND SHOW HIM THE EYE!” Jeremiah 1 roared. “And give me my fucking husks back!”

It was late now. So incredibly late. Easily past two am onwards. This was taking way longer than anyone had anticipated, but it finally seemed like the end was here.

U’ala stepped towards Jeremiah A. “Show him the glass eye, if you really believe you’re the--”

Jeremiah A whipped around, and breathed unholy fire in her direction. U’ala blinked in surprise. Incinerated, but still standing. And then she slowly teetered over, before fully collapsing.

A hush went over the crowd as the small bearded man took down the High Druidess in one hit.

Jeremiah A cowed. “No... shit... I...”

“You made a very terrible mistake,” Denethor said calmly.

“It was alchemy it was just alchemy, it was an accident I panicked!” Jeremiah sputtered, as he dodged and yelped. Denethor swung his staff at Jeremiah A with all the force an angry husband could muster.

He dodged the hit, but an arrow from an archer narrowly grazed him, causing him to pause in panic. Denethor slammed the steel rod into Jeremiah A’s head, sending him careening.

He bent down and healed U’ala.

“You are not an elemental alchemist. And they contradict. You honestly think I don’t know how my crusaders work?” Denethor roared. “I looked over every single one of them!”

The Crusaders began to swirl. U’ala stood up, shakily, and very angry.

“It’s not elemental alchemy it’s a hidden alchemy! I swear it’s not commonly known but--”

“No it’s not.”

The group whipped towards Obsie who was speaking.

“I ate that apple too, you know. I know all the hidden skills. Maybe not directly, but I know for a fact that nothing you did describes ANY alchemy skill I have EVER heard of,” Obsie stated.

*Son of a fucking bitch.* Jeremiah A cursed in demonic. He took a minor gasp as he realized what fell of his mouth and immediately reverted to common.

“No. Please. Fucking no! I’m the real one! You have to--” He started to stagger backwards, but Prophet stood behind him, all too ready to take down the non-believer.

“YOU. ARE NOT. ME!” Jeremiah 1 roared back. “And you never WILL be me. I don’t know what the FUCK you are, but you will REGRET this!”

Jeremiah A ducked under Prophet, and started to back away at a very fast pace. U’ala took three strides and was already keeping pace. She prepared a forrestal burn in her hand.

“We’ll see how you like fire in your face!” U’ala said, none too happy.

“STAY DOWN FOR THE LOVE OF EVERYTHING!” Jeremiah A spat, and shot a Demolior directly into U’ala.

She crumbled.

“Dammit he has demolior too, essentials can’t break that!” Jeremiah 1 said. “I can’t fight him-- someone fucking get U’ala!”

“Get him,” Rosalie ordered.

Jeremiah 1 ran the other way.

“Where are you going?” Zander called.

“GETTING MY FUCKING HUSKS!” He called.

Jeremiah A kept running. Crusaders were surrounding him. He gritted his teeth, and spat a few times. They would get close and he would shoot a few demoliors and other attacks he had. Every once in awhile he’d disappear into a demonic fog, only to reemerge to stab them, but quickly flee.

“Uh guys???” Milui said, her ears twitching. “We have company.”

Heartless descended upon the group. They fractured off, some still chasing the false Jeremiah, others fighting the random Heartless invasion. Prophet and Vikalpa in particular took great joy in doing combat with the Heartless.

Jeremiah A continued his trek. He ran without clear purpose, but every step he took was calculated.

He paused when he thought he had outrun the Crusaders and others, and took a deep breath.

Then a sword almost hit him at a thousand miles a minute.

Swearing, he jumped out of the way just in time to see what was in store for him. A betrayed selkie. A pretty boy in the distance.

And a half orc half human. In a long coat.

Reiner.

Jeremiah A visibly paled and ran further. Reiner ripped his sword out of the tree and with a primal cry. His red eyes glowed like a demon.

Reiner caught up with longer legs, and tried to stab Jeremiah, but missed, and cut a tree cleanly in two.

For a brief few seconds Jeremiah A sent some magic Reiner's way, and he stumbled over, confused and addled.

He got further, but then was interrupted from someone rising out of the ground.

Denethor stepped out of planeswalking, rather livid.

“So you think you can get away with trying to murder my wife, twice, that easily, huh?”

Jeremiah A gave another strangulated demonic curse, and ran in a completely different direction.

Reiner charged forward, an unstoppable force, trying to hit an oddly nimble target.

They came into a small clearing, the Daeva Shrine. Jeremiah skidded to a halt, and looked up, just in time to see Reiner leap above him, and brutally stab him in the shoulder.

Jeremiah screamed in pain, panting heavily. Reiner lifted up his blades for the final blow--

A portal appeared underneath Jeremiah, and he disappeared. Reiner stabbed the dirt.

“Dammit!” Zander cried as they got close. “Bastard got away!”

“Yes. Very bad. Will have to murder.” Reiner said.

“Reiner,” U’ala said, “I want Jeremiah to meet me early in the morning. We need to talk right away.”

“It can be now. I was instructed to murder without abandon then return,” Reiner replied pleasantly.

The group nodded, and returned back to the chaos of the Heartless to help there.

---

Jeremiah stood in a broom closet next to the showers where the husks had been stashed. He walked out, rubbing his smooth forehead in exhaustion. His headband had become immensely sweaty in this time. The door had been utterly pulverized in their initial fight, which, knowing his luck, he would have to clean up.

“Jeremiah!” He turned and saw U’ala, Zander, Denethor and Vikalpa. Not surprising, as they had been following rather closely behind Reiner.

“Hi,” He muttered in annoyance.

Vikalpa came up, picked him up, and whirled him around in happiness.

“Stop touching me, dammit!” Jeremiah hissed.

“Not Consent! Put him down!” U’ala ordered.

Vikalpa dropped him, but seemed no less happy.

“How are you feeling?” U’ala asked.

“Like shit,” Jeremiah said. “I got replaced by an evil double but... there was NOTHING I could say to convince you guys it was me. I got fucking lucky. There was no small secret. No key to anything. Because no one likes me.”

There was a silence as the four looked at him.

“Nothing. It’s fucking stupid. I just... I gotta go rethink some things,” Jeremiah muttered, pushing past

“Please see Healer Pomaday about your brain and body tomorrow,” Denethor said.

Zander was about to follow, but U’ala stopped him, mouthing ‘give him space.’

Jeremiah walked away from this group.

The current trajectory he was on... it wasn’t sustainable, was it?

No. It wasn’t.

He had to change. He was the one who had to change. Be better. Become better for everyone.

A better person for his friends. A better fighter. A better thinker. A better speaker.

How hard could it be?

--The End--