

The journey through the Endless Desert was quite a taxing, torturous experience. The perpetual dark of the sunless sky made the tracking of time all but impossible. The alien, green stars faintly shining above offered no comfort, their strange constellations only fill men with unease when looked upon, as if the soul knows it ought not look at them. The endless, featureless silver sands deprive the mind of context, scale and stimulation, making one feel as if he was stuck in an endless, desolate ocean with no land in sight. And the arid air saps the moisture from one's very being, so that after the first step on his journey a man feels his throat dry out and makes him crave water. Even packed food, no matter how well insulated or protected, becomes desiccated, losing its flavor and texture until it feels like treated leather.

"How long have I been going?"

Jet asked, his sense of time and direction utterly shattered a long time ago.

"Three days. We're more than halfway there. Just a little more Jet."

"So tired..."

"Then rest. I think you earned yourself a little sleep. Don't worry. Even a stop contributes to the five day journey."

"Then why have I been walking for three days non-stop?"

"Prostration. It may take five days, regardless of how fast one goes. But should one disrespect Lady Cecelyne by not taking her desert seriously, She will punish them for it gravely."

Not having the strength or will to argue Jet collapsed on the spot, feeling glad that he can finally take a break.

"Take a knife and cut open your palm. Make an offering of blood and pray to Cecelyne. Just to be safe. It should placate her."

The Infernal took the knife out of his pack and cut open his palm. Even his mercurial blood felt thicker than usual with all the water gone from his body. The ichor dripped from his palm onto the sand. It wasn't merely soaked up by the sands, it was gone as soon as it touched the sand the same way a drop of water gets lost in an ocean. As Jet's palm closed up he offered a silent prayer, in accordance with Markolabs instructions. It was vital he did not ask for anything and simply offered his worship as a sign of respect. In Hell one does not pray for benediction, but typically for the Yozi to ignore them.

Once his hollow prayer was over he fell backwards onto his rear and started panting.

"Is crossing over always this bad?"

"Bad? This was easily one of my best journeys so far. It's not usually this uneventful.

Sandstorms and the occasional desert critter Cecelyne throws your way to spice things up can be deadly. Be grateful this is all we have to put up with. But don't worry. Once we're in Malfeas you'll be compensated for the troubles, I guarantee that!"

Jet sat there, motionless, thoughtless. Despite his exhaustion he did not have it in him to lay down and sleep. He feared what nightmares the sands might conjure in his mind. But he did not know what else he could do. The stars above only unnerved him, and the empty dunes were driving him insane. He looked around for something, anything to capture his attention, no matter how fruitless it might be. He almost did not believe it when he spotted something over the horizon, beyond a spot he had already checked before. As his eyes narrowed to focus he started making out the distinct shapes of... trees. Palm trees. Their green contrasted so much against the endless silver it was almost blinding. An oasis.

In his mind echoed the words of his coadjutor. He was warned at the start of his journey that Cecelyne sometimes offers relief for those crossing her wastes. But it always carries a hefty price. The water and food she offers either turn to sand in the stomach, leaving one more famished than before. Or she demands a terrible price to be paid for her kindness. But despite being fully aware of this he did not care. He had never felt such thirst in his life before. He was desperate for refreshment, for nourishment. He got back up on his legs and shambled towards the oasis, hoping, praying that he may have some relief. To his mild surprise the life-giving waters and the vegetation he saw were not a mirage, a cruel joke played on him by the Yozi, but a very real thing. What shocked him more was that he got something he did not expect to receive. Company.

Jet thought he saw movement in the oasis well before he got there. But he thought it was just a trick of his own mind. It wouldn't have been the first time. It was still possible these figures were the result of sand-madness but if they were then they were quite elaborate hallucinations. Children were moving about, harvesting what they could from the plants and drawing precious liquids from the watering hole. At first they did not notice the approaching Infernal, but it's hard to blend into an environment of pure silver. When the kids notice his approach they hurry into a tent made of various rugs and come back out with a grown woman, presumably their mother, who stared at Jet intently.

She casually approached him and offered greetings.

"Praise be! Welcome stranger. It's so good to finally see a friendly face, you wouldn't believe."

"I-Is this real?"

"You poor thing... I know how you feel. Please, come with me. Come and allow me to offer you relief from the desert's hardships."

The woman was an older one, probably around forty, fifty years of age. Her complexion was ashen, suggesting a Southern descent. She wore loose robes of dull, washed out colors, similarly faded like her skin. In fact, even the tent and all their possessions looked weathered. Her children were numerous and of various ages but the youngest ones looked like teenagers in their late years. They had similar skin to their mother, but even paler. Instead of robes like their mother they wore whatever scraps of fabric they could scavenge, and they only cover their

genitals, but in contrast to that virtually all of them wear a golden bangle, rings with precious gems, ear piercings, nose rings or other forms of jewelry. All in all the group looked like they've been stuck here for a very, very long time and the blowing sands coupled with the lack of sunlight mostly drained their dark skins of color. The interiors of the tent, though still dull, were still very vibrant compared to the outside desert.

Jet was sat down on a large pile of pillows with the woman sitting down on her knees in front of him. Her two dozen children all sat around him and were actively leaning in to take a close look at him. It was only at their mothers reprimand that they did not start poking him out of curiosity. Jet was immensely confused.

"Pardon my rudeness but who are you?"

"Who... am I?"

The woman touched her own cheek, her amber colored eyes looked worried and weary.

"It's been so long I'm... afraid I've forgotten."

She gently pats the head of one of her children.

"I've only been called "mother" for a long time now. I apologize for not being courteous, or a proper host."

She gave the man a pained, tired smile.

"I'm afraid I have not been able to practice my etiquette for many years. We don't often get the chance to entertain guests you see."

"How long have you been stuck here? Do you even know where we are?"

She nods.

"We're in Cecelyne. And erm..."

She places a hand on the daughter that looks like the eldest of the bunch.

"I've already been here for a few years before I had my first child."

Jet could not believe it. In fact, he found this so improbably he tensed up as his survival instincts started alarming him.

"I was... a queen once upon a time. My husband, the king, had grander ambitions than a man ought. He begged Lady Cecelyne for more power. I was the price she named. I've been stuck here since. She will not let me leave, you see."

Jet shuddered, then relaxed. He feels like he's going insane just after a few days. He can't imagine what it'd be like to be stuck here for years. And at least now her story checks out. If the Yozi want to prolong her torture then she would be kept alive, barely. Her state and that of her children reflects that.

"I'm... terribly sorry."

"Thank you. But don't be. I have my precious with me. And we've learned how to subsist off of what little we can scavenge from the desert. Oh, but I'm so rude. I have not offered you any refreshments yet! Children! Please make our guest feel welcome! It may not be much but please, do accept our hospitality!"

The children scramble and they bring forth jars of various food-stuffs and water from the spring. Things ranging from candied scorpion, dried jerky of unknown origin, cactus fruit, pickled roots, desiccated herbs and other preserved foods lay before him. Despite her modesty it does not look like they are lacking in quantity or variety. He cautiously tried a few of them at first as he thought they might taste terrible and he did not want to rudely spit them out. But his fears were unwarranted. The candied insect was sweet and crunchy, the cactus fruit juicy, the dried meat was spicy and well seasoned. Hot, sweet, savory, salty and sour flavors danced harmoniously on his tongue and promoted his thirst, which was quenched fast by the cool and refreshing spring water. He felt not only rejuvenated but dumbfounded as to how a random woman in a demonic desert could offer him a feast that casually makes a mockery of the lavish banquettes he experienced on the Blessed Isle.

He wanted more, he wanted to devour everything presented to him, for he did not know if he'd get another chance to eat in here and he simply wanted to taste more of the wonderful aromas on display. But Jet reined himself in and stopped once he ate enough to quell his growling stomach.

"Thank you for the meal. You are much too kind my lady. The years of imprisonment have not tarnished your nobility one bit. Please, if there is any way I can repay your kindness then name it. I will help if it is in my power."

"It is only natural to offer hospitality to our guests. You needn't thank us. But... if I may be so bold... could you tell us of how things are in Creation? It's been so long since I heard from my home. And I'm sure the little ones would love to hear your tales as well!"

Smiling, the infernal acquiesced. Though his studies at the Spiral were more for giving speeches at the Deliberative, his eloquence still came in handy when spinning tales. The kids though did not speak, and communicated in a form of sign language mostly, still understood him and stared wide-eyed as he described the looks of things in Creation. Most things were beyond their comprehension but their imagination ran wild when he mentioned things like how lush everything is, and how bountiful nature was outside of the desert. It felt like he could talk for hours about the plants and animals of the Isle or the Threshold and it still wouldn't be enough to satisfy the kids, thankfully their mother took mercy on him and his sore throat after an hour or so.

The kids scattered afterwards and feverishly gestured their unspoken language at each other, as Mother sat down next to Jet.

"Thank you. It's rare to see them in such high spirits."

Her expression then gets more worried.

"If I may ask sir, what is one such as you doing here in Hell?"

Jet could only let out a snarky chuckle.

"I really wish I knew that myself."

"Are you perhaps a hero? A champion of sorts?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Most wouldn't dare to make the journey to Hell alone. And few of them would ever make it. Thus I think you must be special."

"Maybe I am. Maybe I'm not. Why?"

"If you were... I'd ask a favor of thee. I'm in need of a champion. But alas there's little I can offer as payment."

"Then name it. If it's within my power I'll help however I can. It's the least I can do to repay your kindness."

"Thank you!"

Her chest falls as she lets out a sigh of pure relief.

"You see... I am looking for something. One of my children. They are lost. But try as I might, I simply can not find them on my own. So I beseech thee, brave champion. Will you help this poor mother out?"

Jet looked at the mother who looked at him with bated breath. Even her other children have stopped what they were doing and now stared at him with their big, amber eyes.

"Sigh. I can not make any promises. But I'll try. Did you lose your child in the desert or-"

The woman clapped her hands loudly, cutting him off mid-sentence, and the tent erupted with the cheer of her and her children. This was the first time they made any sort of noise.

"Hear that, children? The champion is going to help us!"

She parted her hands and slid one across the rug that made up the floor until she was touching the man's hand.

"Thank you! You have no idea how much that means to me, to us."

"I-It's really nothing."

He replied, unnerved by the sudden touch of the woman.

"But please don't get your hopes up. I said I'd try. I can't promise I'll succeed."

"Please, my prince, have more faith in yourself. Like I do."

Without warning the woman removed her hand from his, slowly crawled forward and clasped her hands around Jet's face before throwing herself onto him. Her mouth entwined with his, and though her lips were dry and cracked the inside of her mouth was wet and sweet. And as her tongue invaded his mouth and explored all of its folds Jet felt at the same time cold from the shock and warm from her heat.

The woman briefly pulled back and pushed Jet onto his back and crawled on top of him as her children restrained each of his limbs. He was about to throw them off when he realized just how strong the bastards were. The woman let out a soft chuckle as two more of her kids came and gently pulled her robes aside to reveal her mature figure.

"Do not worry my prince. Just relax."

She undid his pants, revealing his manhood while the girls holding his hands gently but firmly guided them to explore their bodies. He tried harder and harder to break free, going as far as to open his caste mark at its full luminescence, but the strength vanished from his limbs as the old woman's tongue slid across the skin of his shaft. He felt a jolt rushing through his entire body, sapping his strength as he had a tit in one hand, a sapping womanhood in the other, one girl's tongue invading his mouth and their mother gently ministering his penis whilst two more were tongue bathing his testicles.

He tried making sense of the situation but everywhere he looked he saw the siblings undressing each other and engaging in all manners of sexual activity, all waiting for their turn on him. Brother laid with brother, sister with sister, and boys coupled with girls risking conception that was assuredly a tad bit too pure. There wasn't an orifice, appendage or body part left unused, many of which Jet had no idea could be erogenous zones but the moanings they produced proved him otherwise.

The old queen finally felt like she had enough foreplay and moved her snatch, wet from the ministrations of her own children, over Jet so she could finally have her fill. She slammed down on him with great force and the heat emanating from her walls was almost burning. She savored the moment with a vicious grin as her children gave her a tongue bath. This is when the Infernal realized that not one drop of moisture left the woman's body until now. All the "sweat" on her was just the saliva of the siblings. Finally she started to move her hips up and down, twisting it all around. First it was slow to ease things into motion but her gentle lovemaking turned quickly into savage, feral fucking. Her needy and jealous children kept fighting over who gets to join their mother and her new lover whenever they felt like one of them was taking their sweet time sandwiched between the embrace of their "parents" '.

With the slightly wrinkly and saggy woman on top of him, his balls slathered, his hands engaged in all manners of petting and his hand kissing some type of lips at all times Jet felt overstimulated and he simply could not last long in this fierce pincer attack. Involuntarily he released his seed into the woman riding him, and she let out a long, drawn-out moan of great satisfaction while rubbing her belly.

"Finally... I was in need for so long... There. Was it so bad, my prince?"

"Please... no... more..."

"No? More?"

She chuckled.

"Well, I was about to let one of the girls take over, I pamper them too much you see? But I just can't refuse a request from such a handsome young man!"

Jet tried to do something, anything, but his mind was so clouded from the storm of pleasure that he couldn't get a grip of his own essence to manifest any magic. Again and again the woman drained him, whilst her children performed more and more obscene things in the background too unwholesome for him to even understand how their bodies are conjoined half the time. After each round the elderly woman's womb distended a bit more, and the edges of reality started to fray in Jet's vision. Perhaps it was the sheer amount of exhaustion and the terror of what was happening causing it, or perhaps something more sinister was afoot. Things got blurry until the features of the woman and the kids were gone, leaving only their silhouettes. Then even the color faded from his sight, leaving only pale, vaguely human, silvery shapes in front of him.

He lost himself afterwards. Even lost count of the times he was drained. But he knew it still kept going. The last thing he remembers is the gravid form of the old woman standing next to him, as she rubbed her belly which looked heavily pregnant.

"Thank you for helping me find my child, champion."

Just as he felt like he was about to fade into nothingness his eyes snapped open, like from the most vivid of nightmares and Jet felt his heart pounding in his chest. He was hyperventilating while looking at his environs. Around him was only the endless, silver desert and the black void of the sky speckled with green stars. Even Markolab was surprised by this.

"Whoah buddy. Calm down. Must've been one heck of a nightmare. Are you okay?"

Jet kept panting for three entire minutes without a single thought crossing his mind, only the fear of seeing one of those monsters from his dream mattered. He finally calmed down as he slowly came to the realization that it was all a dream. His clothes were not torn to scraps and drenched with all manner of bodily fluids, his skin bore none of the claw marks the woman and the girls left, and he chafed nowhere. He sighed with relief as he finally responded to Markolab.

"No. This desolate place is driving me insane."

"Yeah. Crossing Cecelyne will do that. Better get moving. You know, walk it off. I guarantee once we get to the Brass City you'll start missing the emptiness and the silence. Well, maybe not the silence."

"Yeah."

Jet stood up and dusted himself off before starting his march again. But as he got started something struck fear in his heart again. He no longer felt deathly thirsty or hungry. Nervously he pocketed his hands and found a blue ribbon in there, one he remembers yanking out of the hair of one of the girls whilst savagely fucking her.

"Markolab... Do you... remember anything about the Oasis?"

"Jet, you're delirious. There has been nothing but sand since we got here. And if you ever spot an oasis in Cecelyne? Word of advice: Don't. She likes to play pranks with travelers she thinks are disrespecting her."

Jet looked at the ribbon again, shook his head and once he opened his eyes all he saw was a handful of sand, the grains of which were trickling out of his palm.

He started his trek in earnest now, and he never spoke of the incident again, not to Markolab and not to himself. Choosing to believe it was a particularly vivid nightmare the infernal desert conjured in his mind. And some time later he did not remember it at all.

After one more day of walking the duo finally spotted the brass towers of the Demon City on the horizon.