

Chapter 1 - Rude Awakening.

POV: Vincent

Vincent Murdock was a happy man. Or woman, or whatever-the-fuck. He was too old to be questioning so he left it at "man". Vincent Murdock was a happy man.

He and his wife had just paid off their home loan on the condo by the beachside. And they'd had a lovely dinner night in, just the two of them.

If you had asked Vincent what he was going to be doing at age 35 back in highschool, the blonde haired cunt would have laughed and said fucking his way up the coast, smoking weed all day and living the high life.

So what, he was a loser, dropout playboy back then, but he'd shaped up!

He'd had to.

One of his many flings had come to him, crying and sobbing, begging him to raise their child with her when he was 19. In a moment of weakness (which, all things considered, was when he finally started doing the right thing.) he'd told her the truth. He had the ability to make people fall in love with him, an influence he'd been using on all the people around him to make them stay in his life. She'd challenged him to stop using it on her, and ask her then if she loved him. She still did, but she also had been deeply heartbroken by the betrayal. When she proved him wrong a second time by still choosing to stick by his side and foster real love between them, he stopped using that ability for good.

It had cost him everything. Without it, his friends, blinded by the influence- realised he was a tool, so they cut ties and stopped talking to him. His flings stopped being so deeply interested in hanging off his every word and eventually stopped hitting him up.

But he had Adalle, and little baby Dusk. They became his whole world and he couldn't be happier.

The spirit, the one who had given him these powers- Kyu, had *not* been happy about this outcome. The arrangement was for her to feed passively on his bonds of love- romantic, platonic, sexual and even familial to sustain her power. So when she suddenly had next to nothing to feed on because her favourite fuckboy had turned a new leaf, she'd screamed and cussed at him to break their pact.

He'd made the decision to let her actively feed on his love for his wife, but drew the line with his familial love for his daughter. That had been good enough for Kyu. Adalle had questioned the decision, hell, Vincent had too initially, but Kyu had become his best friend outside of his wife and daughter. She kept him sane amongst all the voices he had to tune out as a mindreader, so, parasitic as the fucker was, Kyu was here to stay.

He and his wife had an open relationship, it was for both of them, but Vincent was more interested in utilising it. Addie was content with having the option to indulge if she so chose, on a few conditions for the both of them: "Flings only, don't bring anyone home, don't stay over, don't talk about it." Sometimes it happened, sometimes it didn't. Kyu preened every time she got the chance to feed on a new bond and Adalle had assured him she was legitimately okay with it all. It was awkward explaining it to Dusk when she was old enough to notice her dad kept

leaving the house at night without explanation, but she took it surprisingly well. Speaking of his daughter, he had to get up and collect her from the sleepover she'd been at last night. He couldn't wait until she got her license.

Adalle wasn't a morning person, neither was he, but it was clear he was far more cognizant in the mornings out of the two of them. Kyu would shake him awake anyway if he was in any real danger on the road.

"Goodmorning baby" He rolled over with his eyes closed to bury his face in Addie's long, ink black hair. Hmm, did she cut her hair? He reached over to wrap his arm around her. The lump beside him stiffened, then bolted upright and leapt out of the bed with a strangled scream.

His eyes snapped open, and standing in his bedroom, in place of his wife was a blue haired girl he'd never clapped eyes on in his life. Yeah, he was fucking wide awake now.

"Who the *fuck* are you?" He yelled at the girl. "How'd you get in my house?"

Blue hair looked close to hyperventilating "Where am I-" She glanced at the window with open curtains fluttering in the wind and whatever she saw made her pale. "Did you fucking *kidnap* me?"

"What are you talking about? Answer the question, who the hell are you and what are you doing in my house?"

She ignored him again. "Vincent what happened, where am I? Did you *slip me* something?" Her rage is palpable even in the barely lit room. She steps closer with her fists clenched. "Choose your next words carefully" She spits.

He'd had enough of this, something was clearly up. She knew his name, said he'd slipped her something which heavily implied they'd fucked. *That* was starting to scare him because he *remembers* slowdancing with Adalle last night, they'd had no alcohol, no drugs, no nothing. Yet this mystery girl suggests otherwise.

He was using his genesis, he was clearing this all up and this girl was marching right out of his house.

He delved into her mind with practiced grace, snaking around all the obscenities she was throwing to find any hints at all about what had happened. He fished around, and found a few things.

Her name was Lillith, apparently they had met at some bar he'd never heard of and left together to fuck in his car, at which point he had dropped her home and they'd exchanged numbers before they parted ways. Her mind screamed something about arriving home at 12:02, which didn't make any sense because he'd been winding down with Adalle on the couch drinking hot chocolate and watching trashy TV she liked last night around that time, they'd gone to bed roughly an hour later, one-to-two-pm range.

The time discrepancy meant it wasn't possible he'd snuck out in the middle of the night, gotten trashed and couldn't remember what actually happened. Something was seriously *wrong*. Either this girl was literally insane and her brain conjured this whole elaborate story in her head and convinced itself it was real or-

"Hold on, Vincent, you look different." She squints "Didn't you say you were like, 19 or something?"

Vincent's heart drops to his stomach. Oh god, what did *that* mean?

"Lillith." He says desperately, grabbing the girls shoulders. He licks his lips nervously. "How old are you?"

She looks at him strangely. "I told you last night, I'm 20."

Vincent Murdock was a man horrified beyond belief. He closed his eyes, his wife was going to fucking kill him.

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Chapter 2 - Visitors.

POV: Lillith

Lillith really really really wanted to go home. She was tired, hungover and confused as all fuck. Vincent, who really did look a lot different now that they were in his living room, was pacing around while she sat like a wet sack at the boy's- sorry, *man's* table. He was taller, broader, looked a lot kinder and far less cocky than the guy she'd met last night at the bar. He had a *16 year old daughter* for fucks sake, yeah. The Vincent from last night was decidedly *not* the Vincent currently pacing. Which made things even more horribly confusing. So she focused on what *did* make some sense. That was, getting a ride home from this kind-of-not-really stranger and moving on with her life. No offence to Vincent, 19-year-old him was an *incredible* lay and 35-year-old him (she tried really hard not to balk at that) seemed like a genuinely nice guy. But she was definitely blocking his number after this. And maybe easing up on the booze for awhile... okay maybe she can hold off for two nights, max. Ava would be happy at leas-

Holy fuck, Ava. She was probably all alone in Lillith's apartment wondering where the fuck her maybe-hopefully girlfriend had gone. Fuck. She checked her phone, but weirdly there were no texts. She flicked her an 'are you awake? Call me'

"Hey man, can you take me home? I'll pay for gas." She was tired of racking her brains over how she ended up two cities away without her recollection so she was just rolling with it.

Vincent seemed to have decided otherwise.

He paused his pacing. "I have to pick up my daughter." He sighs and sits down. "I was hoping my wife had gone to do that, but our car's still in the driveway and she's not returning my calls." He chews his lip. "Do you think you'll be okay taking the train? I'm sorry Lillith, I am. I would like to drive you myself as an apology for this morning, but you live miles away. I *need* to pick up my daughter first and to say it would be awkward to show up with a girl 15 years younger than me in the car would be an understatement. And if you stay here and wait for me, you run into the possibility of running into both my daughter *and* my wife. Which as you can imagine, will *not* go down well"

He sighs. "Look, we can both agree something is seriously wrong here, neither of us know what happened and neither of us have any answers for each other. I'm not *okay* not knowing what happened, but we have lives to get back to and my family takes priority."

Lillith nods vigorously "Yeah no, chill, the trains chill. I don't mind taking the train."

He pulls a hand through his blonde hair, the fringe flops back like nothing happened. "I'm seriously considering telling Adalle, my wife, what happened this morning, because it feels wrong to lie to her about something like this." He sits down at the table "Would you be open to the idea of maybe exchanging numbers so you can talk to her?" He grabs a napkin and pen left haphazardly on the table and scribbles down his number. "It'd mean a lot to me, but I also understand if you'd like to be done with this." He gave her a reassuring smile.

"I uh, already have that number." Lillith gulped. "That's the number you gave me last night."

Vincent looked distraught

"Okay" He says slowly "I definitely didn't give you that, but *okay*." He studies her for a second and is seemingly unsatisfied with what he found. He fishes out his wallet and pulls out a couple 50's. "Look, I'll just wait for you to give me a call, if you've lost my number and never do? I understand." He gets up. "I'm just going to call Addie again and hopefully figure out where she is, then we can part ways." He gives her an approximation of a smile and ducks into the next room.

Lillith stares at the ceiling, largely ignoring her coffee that Vincent had been kind enough to make for her. She'd tried drinking it, but her stomach was temperamental on a good day and today was *not* a good day. She tries calling Ava, but it goes to voicemail. So she texts the groupchat with her girls "Witch Orgy?": 'hey any1 able to call Ava?' and is reading through the backlog she missed yesterday evening. The 'goodnight from me and Ava' she remembers texting in the group chat sears her eyes. That's right, Vincent *couldn't* have kidnapped her (weird age discrepancy aside) because she'd gone right to bed with Ava. God, why the fuck was this happening-

Lillith feels like she's been struck by lightning, her eyes roll back and she falls out of her chair, but she's *awake*. Distantly she hears something crash in the other room.

Booming and clear in her mind now, devoid of all thought, she feels in her bones: "Champion of another world, heed thy call, I grant thee audience of divine intervention, slay all other champions, stand victorious alone and be granted a wish of thy choosing. The power to change time, space and reality at thy fingertips, to ripple across the multiverse as a furious, cosmic god. seek the other champions, Do not fall, claim your prize."

And with that Lillith gasps, sucking in big gulps of air because she'd been holding her breath the whole time and her vision swims. She picks herself up off the floor, ignoring the chair behind her.

"You alright Lillith?" Rasps Vincent from the other room. He steps in before she can call out. His eyes bug out of his head. "You... You heard that too?" He runs his hand through his hair again. "That- the message?"

Lillith nods warily "Champions and power?"

"Oh my god, what the fuck is happening. First you appear in my house, now im getting voicemails from *gods*-"

The doorbell rings out. They both turn at the sound, just staring as it fades to nothing.

Vincent swears under his breath, motioning at Lillith to stand by the door, out of sight. "Who is it?"

"It's me V. We need to pick up Dusk" A woman's voice calls out. Adalle.

Lilliths heart sinks, oh god they were so fucked.

Vincent seems to agree, as he closes his eyes for a beat before opening them back up and whispering "The back door, go" to Lillith like she was some side bitch scampering after a night of fun. But she *was* that bitch in this situation. She hesitated. There would be no other way to explain to Vincent's wife what she was doing here. Hiding honestly felt worse, so she should probably jet right fucking now-

Drip, drip, drip

Right above his blonde hair, Vincent's death clock ticked ominously.

"00:00:10", "00:00:09", "00:00:08"-

Lillith felt like she'd sucked something *sour*. Her tongue died in her mouth, she had to say *something*.

"Coming Addie!" Vincent called out, hand reaching for the doorknob, before he stopped, looked confused for a second, looked back at Lillith who- wow, was she having an honest to goodness *stroke* right now? Why couldn't she *speak*? She opened her mouth like she'd never used the muscles before in her life, mouthed the syllables, the constants, the whole lot. Pushed a bunch of air like she was trying to whistle, but even *that* didn't make any noise. It's like someone had put her in a headlock and asked her to sing the alphabet of a language that didn't exist. She just *couldn't*. Lillith's eyes locked on her phone, still on the table, which buzzed with notifications, one after the other after the other after the-

"00:00:07", "00:00:06", "00:00:05"-

Vincent was staring at her curiously, like he and he alone was privy to her struggle. A flash of pink glazed over his eyes and he frowned, eyed the door and took a step back. "I'm just going to get my keys" He calls out. Adalle doesn't respond. He strides over to the dining table and picks up his keys. He looks back at her "*Are you okay? Why aren't you going?*" His eyes seem to read. He licks his lips. He's nervous. *She's fucking terrified right now.*

"00:00:04", "00:00:03", "00:00:02"-

Vincent somehow approaches the door even more apprehensive than he was before. Lillith watches his adams apple bob. "I'm opening the door now" he says slowly. Silence. Lillith's heart leaps into her throat, she opens her mouth again to scream but nothing comes out, she channels her dread into her limbs and sprints at Vincent as he swings open the door

"00:00:01"-

The shotgun barks out and the pallets bite into the wall behind them. Vincent lands with a crash, the air kicked out of his lungs and he groans, Lillith collapses on top of him without so much as an "oof". Vincent's counter has some time left to spare on it again, she doesn't bother calculating how much- she just cares that he's still alive and breathing.

She tears her eyes off him towards the door. Standing in the doorway is a woman and a man(?) in matching crisp, black suits with gold trim running up and down the sleeves in depiction of japanese style dragons. They look a couple years older than Lillith. The woman had blonde hair like Vincent, except it seemed natural, instead of obviously dyed like his was. Meanwhile the guy(?), who was giving mad androgynous vibes- she'd be insanely jealous over this fact if they weren't levelling the shotgun they'd let loose the second the door opened- has bright white hair and baby blue eyes. They smile at the two of them in shock on the floor and hands the shotgun over to their partner. "A pity" They say and shake their head "-was really betting on taking out the competition early before Delta gets his hands on them". The woman tilts their head to meet her gaze and gives white hair a quick kiss on the lips. So, *partner* was right. "There will be

plenty of time for that later.” She looks down at the two of them and laughs “Oh right- *Talk*” She says with a strange reverence.

Lilliths tongue stops tying itself up in knots and her face muscles cooperate with her. “Who-”

Vincent groans beneath her. Moving her gently off him. Lillith doesn't protest.

“Ira” blondie supplies. Then points to white-hair “that's Leon.”

“Sorry about the wait, we got here as fast as we could from a couple cities over” Leon chuckles. “Busy day, we're sure you'd understand.”

Ira talks next “We think you should come with us, we have some people we think you'd like to meet” Ira grins, and she might as well have been looking at a particularly juicy steak.

“Where's Addie?” Vincent demands as he gets to his feet. “Why are you here?” He hisses out.

He freezes when he looks past the two suits.

Lillith follows his gaze and her eyes widen. Standing outside are two women held by more suits.

She immediately recognises Ava, who has a gun pressed to her head, her fiery hair parting around the barrel, tears streaming down her cheeks. She hardly moves, doesn't make a sound and Lillith dully wonders if that's what she looked like when she couldn't speak, before Ira had said she could talk, and magically she could again. Ava mouths “*help me*” to her and Lillith feels clammy. The tall black woman with dark hair in a super long ponytail towers over her, looking bored out of her mind as she holds her gun.

The other woman with a gun to her head is older and has long ink-black hair. She's clutching a girl that looks a good few years younger than her. *Probably Adalle and Dusk.*

Adalle, unlike Ava, seems to have the blessed ability of speaking, and is openly sobbing and begging to the woman(?) who has her in a vice grip to let her daughter go. She looks over at Vincent and sobs even harder. The woman(?) holding Adalle is short and asian, they whisper something into Adalle's ears that makes her go stiff with fear.

Vincent's eyes go hard, and he takes a step forward, getting right into Leon's face. “What do you want from us” he spits. It occurs to Lillith now that Vincent is a pretty tall and relatively built guy who looms over this twink-person who threatens both his family and Lilliths girlfriend. Yeah, she's super on board with Vincent snapping Leon's neck the first chance he gets. And by the look in his eyes, he might be convinced to do just that.

Ira makes to say *something* and Lillith feels vaguely nauseous, like something heavy sits in her stomach at the thought of more words in that *tone* she used.

Leon holds their hand up without facing Ira, and she closes her mouth and cocks a hip instead.

"We're sure you two have lots of questions. And you will get your answers." Leon says smoothly "I won't go into much detail here, I'm sure you'd both like your loved ones back in your arms as soon as possible-." They speak like they're just waiting at the fucking airport for them. "-and the big man is waiting, so I'll be brief. You two are 'Visitors', people from another, parallel universe. Who, we know received the same message as some of us have." they tap their head twice. "Of divine intervention, a wish that can change reality as we know it. We do not know how many of these 'champions' there are, so it is possible this conflict could be drawn out quite a bit. But rest assured, you will return safe and sound to your respective family, friends and loved ones by the time this is over one way or another." Lillith eyes the shotgun Ira clutches lazily. *One way or another huh?*

Leon turns away from Vincent's murderous gaze, unbothered, and claps their hands "Now! Seating arrangements. Who will be riding shotgun?"

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Champions Remaining:

Vincent, Lillith, Leon, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???.

Chapter 3 - Low spirited
POV: Vincent

Lillith and Vincent sit together in the back of a sleek black car. He'd wanted to be with his wife and daughter, same as Lillith wanted to be with Ava. But they had deliberately separated them. Vincent had watched the car containing the hostages veer off onto another road than the one they were travelling and felt ill.

Ira and Leon sat as driver and passenger respectively. Vincent was so paranoid that it wrapped back around to not giving a fuck that they could overhear him.

The kid, Lillith, is bouncing her leg like she's possessed and normally that kind of stuff doesn't bother him, but *circumstances have changed*. The silence was really getting to him though.

"Thanks." He manages to push out.

Lillith looks up from her bitten nails. A question in her eyes. *Jesus kid you're ravaging them.*

"For saving my life, I mean." He clasps his hands together "that was really brave of you"

Lillith laughs, it's ugly and hollow and she has tears in her eyes as she wraps her arms around herself.

"Don't mention it man, so long as you got me next time" she jokes. Least he thinks she meant it as a joke. But he lets that sink in. He really does owe her.

He knew something fucked was awaiting him on the other side of the door, he'd heard as much, both from reading the minds outside and Kyu's sudden screeching. He just didn't know what.

He'd heard Adalles fear, her begging, same with Dusk calling out for him in her head. The despair of the other girl, who Lilliths tells him is her girlfriend (kid had blushed as she told him, which was fucked because they were involving *kids*). But the rest of them, these *cunts*? Nothing.

Vincent had made a few observations of his own as a mindreader without anyone to guide him. One such observation was that people like these gangsters? people like Leon, Ira and the lot of them? Killers and Murderers? They barely thought about who they were hurting, who they were butchering. Vincent can prove as much. Leon was thinking of a pop song while they waited by the door. Ira was wondering what fucking colour she should paint her nails next. How these soulless, vile monsters could live with themselves was beyond him.

He's had run-ins before with gangsters like these. First time when they fucked up his arms so bad that even surgery couldn't get them working right. Goodbye, Olympic Kendo team spot. Second, when he and former best friend 'Loser' used to peddle weed and party favours to kids their age in highschool. Saw these kinds around from time to time and there was only really one rule when it came to them: *don't fuck up*.

Vincent was convinced he'd never have to see these kinds of people again. But *god* quite literally had different plans for Vincent Murdock it seemed. Maybe it'd make for a fun Christmas party story to tell when they made it out of this. Vincent cringed, he had a spectacular feeling that they were *not* going to live to see the end of this fucked up contest. He wasn't very smart, but he knew when things looked bleak, and *man* were they bleak.

Kyu was oddly quiet in his skull, usually she was all up on him with raunchy commentary, busying herself with laughing at his expense. He'd ignored her mostly in favour of figuring out who Lillith was, and then making sure Addie and Dusk were safe. He wasn't exactly keen on the innuendos or loud sexual moans she'd been filling his brain with. Nor the "jail-bait" jokes she'd been making once she realised Lillith was quite a bit younger than him. Insanely uncomfortable. Tact usually wasn't a spirit's specialty.

He tells her as much with a grin, which slips at the uncomfortable silence. He'd think she'd up and disappeared if it wasn't possible without the two of them consenting to break the pact.

"Kyu? What's wrong, you're scaring me here babe."

"Ruvia..." is her hushed response.

"Ru- what now?"

"RUVIA" she howls *"that vile enchantress, that foul glamour, the conniving witch that took my kingdom from me, my rightful domain. The faceripper who left me for dead, begging for scraps at her feet."*

Kyu rears back like she's going to hit someone *"She's **here**, tethered to the white haired one."*

She continues raging and screaming obscenities. He feels her seethe and tighten her grip around his brainstem until she suddenly stops, and settles uncomfortably like a bruise.

"Vincent darling." She whispers *"I am not yet strong enough to challenge her. We will surely perish at the hands of the ghastly boy and that **bitch**."*

"Woah now Kyu, you can't just assume that about Leon" Vincent reminds her

Kyu goes silent for a few beats before sighing *"You and your kind are frustratingly tiresome Vincent. Do you or do you not use gendered descriptors to describe your species? It is quite simple, yet you all make it so utterly **complicated**."*

Vincent offers her a half shrug. Lillith stares at him shrugging at nothing.

Vincent vaguely recalls Kyu talking about Ruvia when they first met. Some other spirit who could shapeshift that had ruined her life.

Ruvia was who Kyu had warned him about before opening the front door. She'd *begged* him to run away, she'd never begged him for anything before. But he couldn't. Not when he could hear Addie's and Dusk's minds screaming out for him outside.

He thinks about Lillith saving his ugly mug. How he'd have been helpless to avoid getting shot to pieces unless Lillith acted like she did, tackling him at the perfect moment. He didn't know her genesis. Foresight of some kind maybe? Only thing he could think of, even if the most famous examples of foresight were stuff like visions 24 hours in advance or some shit like that. But she'd been just as surprised as he was to hear that doorbell. Her thoughts attested to that. Then again, what the fuck did he know?

Whatever it was, it came with a lot of baggage. Being a mindreader meant being a part time empath. Reading minds meant instinctually understanding the *tone* of each thought, the *feelings* and *associations* that came with thinking something. Lillith, amidst her terror of not being able to talk, had been wailing about how Vincent was going to die and that she needed to do something, and those thoughts came with feelings of déjà vu so strong that whatever foresight she had, it was clear she'd been intimately familiar with it spelling out death.

Vincent felt for the kid. He really did. She'd saved his sorry ass. She was probably the only ally he'd find in this *contest* of theirs.

He shifts his gaze from staring at nothing, to catching Lillith's eyes. He'd tuned out her thoughts to give himself some space to breathe and her a little privacy. But she was currently thinking about the message she and Vincent had both gotten, how, picking through the specifics of Leon's wording; they'd said "*some of us*" instead of "*all of us*" which implied there were actually quite a few Visitors but not all of them were chosen for the competition. How it was weird that the messages came at different times for 'Chosen' as Leon already knew about being a 'Chosen' before the two of them got their messages at the same time-".

Vincent tunes her out again, before grunting "penny for your thoughts?".

He tried to not be so utilitarian with his powers, yeah he *could* sit here and just absorb whatever she was thinking and learn about everything she was saying faster and more efficiently than waiting for her to talk, but that felt weird. Reading people's minds all the time took the fun and mystery out of things. Also revealed horrific things about humanity that Vincent refused to acknowledge. *People were nasty.*

Vincent knew Lillith would tell him anyway, because he'd overheard her debating with herself over telling him but felt embarrassed. (he did *not* miss being in his 20's.)

"I was just thinking about a few things. Some of them are kind of stupid though." She mumbles. Lillith's still in rough shape but he can tell she'll feel a little- nevermind, a *lot* -better if she talked.

"Yeah? Like what?"

"Like how this proves the existence of a higher power, how multi-world theory was right. That the weirdness surrounding us meeting this morning was because we've been ripped from our respective worlds and forced to meet alternate-universe versions of people we might not have ever personally met before." She takes a breath. "Also, for the record. 19-year-old you is a fucking dick"

Vincent laughs heartily at that. That tracked.

Lillith, like most kids her age, is a stoner (shocker) and when she gets high with her friends, they discuss multi-world theory a bunch. (real original stuff)

She explains it comes up a lot due to her genesis. She doesn't elaborate on what it does. She does tell him that reality is flexible, that forces like fate cannot be real, because the existence of fate paradoxically disproves its absolutism. Similarly she talks about how alternate universes make more quantifiable sense if the existence of fate is proven/disproven.

"There was probably a reality in which I didn't make it in time to save you, that you got shot." She says while picking at the seat seams. "But it isn't this one."

“Just like how there was a reality in which I met you when I was 19 but also in this one I met you when I was 35?” Vincent supplies, keen to get away from the topic of him dying.

Lillith bobs her head.

Here goes nothing- “Anything you'd change about your reality back home?”

Vincent holds his breath.

Leon laughs at something Ira says in the front. The kpop album on the aux switches track.

“...Yes.” is Lillith's hushed reply.

Guess she was gonna be cashing in that IOU sooner than he thought.

Chapter 4 - Egomancer

POV: Delta

Delta, was on top of the world. Not literally of course, but he felt like it.

It was a heady feeling, and one he held on to because something deep and primal in him oh so craved the chemical rush.

Something to note about being an immortal being, is that being in a human body and living day to day as a person, was incredibly tiring. The mind was woefully inadequate for a thousand years of knowledge.

Delta had overseen the rise and fall of empires, worlds and galaxies. Followed humanity as they first made their way off of earth and set about conquering the cosmos. They had needed him and his guiding hand, working from the shadows to orchestrate what no pitiful 100 year lifespan was willing to accomplish. Delta would continue his work until the heat death of the universe. Humanity would need him if they were going to survive that long.

When Delta had received a message from the outer gods, it had surprised even him. Outer gods were hardly beings that bothered with such a small existence like humanity, much less in offering a multi-dimensional gladiatorial death match. And yet, they had spoken. Offering a power so great that Delta had dropped everything in favour of pursuing it. He had a few ideas about the types of champions the Outer Gods would select. Their reasons for being selected as champions didn't matter, Delta simply understood that he needed two things if he wanted to win: intel, and fire-power.

Reality had already shifted before he had realised it. He was not in any way connected to an Outer God. But harbouring the curse of one was enough to give him a vague sensitivity to their

interference. Delta had lived a long time, in many different bodies with many different minds. One of the weaknesses of living for so long was forgetting. Losing touch of the present because it was a blip on his radar in the grand scheme of things. It didn't quite help that his immortality was particular in its mechanics. Needing time to reorient himself upon reincarnation in another body was a time waste, but an unavoidable one.

In all his time he spent working with the Service, playing puppetmaster in the shadows, he had only ever remembered a handful of operatives at a time. Currently, if his memory wasn't shot to pieces; this generation of the Service was missing the second half of his two step equation for victory. They were severely lacking in raw fire-power.

No matter, he had work-arounds.

"I need to talk to Eulogy and Death Count please-" he remembered people more by their genesis than by name. A quirk everyone in the Service was used to. "-send them to me" The spirit he asked responded. "Sir, we do not have any Operatives with those genesis's under our employ"

Tsk. That didn't seem right. But memory is notoriously fickle.

"Send for Mortal then, I have work for h-"

"Mortal has been missing for the past 14 years sir." They interrupt on purpose, if their grin is to be believed. The spirit is masculine and has angel wings that push out of the holes cut in their coat. They were his secretary in this reality.

Delta closes his eyes. He would definitely have noticed the crippling loss of his best Swiss army knife gone for that long. The man who could level the playing field no matter the opponent. So something wasn't adding up.

"Sir. What should we do with the 'Visitor' prisoner?" angel-wings asks. "We lost a lot of good operatives wrangling him up" Their smile holds mania untold. "You owe me for detaining him FYI"

Delta opens his eyes and spares a glance for them "Leave him to me, I will personally talk to him"

—

Delta descends deep underground into their facility prison. Dark all the way down save for industrial red emergency lights. He taps his foot on the elevator floor as it whirs. Things were not looking good right now. Losing access to his favourite intel-gatherers had been one thing, but he couldn't possibly take on anyone with a high level genesis without an asset like Mortal at his side.

Reality shifting meant he could no longer trust his memory. Just like when he reincarnated after death, he needed to reorient himself in the present and figure out what his next steps were. A vagabond had appeared in his halls, yelling about how he was here for Delta, attacking anyone who got in his way. The Service had managed to detain him in the end, as they usually do even without his help, but they had suffered considerably for it.

The elevator comes to rest and Delta presses onwards into the dark, silent save for the click of his boots upon the metal floor.

There was a vague sense of instinctual knowing that came with being a champion that strengthened with proximity, they could seek each other out. There was no hiding from each other. Which is why Delta had to act fast and gather as much strength and information as he could before he was caught unawares.

He approaches a lone glass cell. In it, is a runt of a dark haired boy.

His eyes are already on Delta before he's even come into view, and his face twists in fury. *"You."* He hisses. *"I'll fucking kill you. I'll never forget what you did to me. To us."*

Delta certainly could. Because he had not the faintest idea who this little shit was.

The boy wears ragged clothes and a patchwork denim jacket. He is woefully small and thin. Delta could shove him over and he'd probably collapse into dust and atoms.

Delta can feel the pull towards him that denotes his status as not only a 'Visitor' but a *champion*. Delta had debated gifting him the mercy of death. But with few options available to him, he had to decide whether or not this prisoner was an asset or a liability. The boy would vehemently refuse to work alongside him, and not knowing of his existence prior meant he had no leverage over him. Perhaps this boy can be used as bait to draw out other champions? Perhaps some of these champions were allies of his. Staying with the Service was his best bet for winning this *contest*, better to consolidate his power here and force the others to play on his home turf.

"Who are you, boy?"

He gets a hollow laugh in response "Typical, you still can't be bothered to remember my name after all this time." He lolls his head back lazily "Call me Ergo."

"Tell me everything you know about Champions and Visitors"

The boy blinks. "Asking *before* torturing? You must be desperate."

Delta ignores his provoking "Where are the rest of your allies? Bold of you to come here alone."

"They're dead." He says. "But they won't be when I get my hands on this wish."

Delta resists the urge to roll his eyes. How short-sighted and small-minded. "So you're doing this for revenge?"

"Why else?" the boy challenges. "Not like *you* do anything for a good reason either."

—

Delta makes his way towards the elevator alone. He would send his interrogators to deal with Ergo in his place. He wasn't going to get anything more out of the boy.

In his earpiece, angel-wings informs him "Leon has returned, and they've brought the girl you sent out a search party for and another man we believe is a 'champion'."

Delta grins. *Finally*

—

Chapter 5 - Three of Swords

POV: Lillith

Lillith walks alongside Vincent, they pass through a very monochrome reception, a brown haired girl in a white labcoat at the front desk doesn't look up at them being frog-marched at gunpoint "Delta is expecting you."

Leon, who is leading the way, twists their head to thank the receptionist before turning back and wagging their eyebrows at Ira who has her arms linked with theirs. Ira snickers, bumping her hip against Leon's. Lillith would have found this whole exchange cute if it wasn't for the fact that they had tried to kill Vincent, kidnapped the both of them, took her and Vincent's loved ones hostage and were now being brought before the "big man" if she'd heard Leon right.

Leon waves his hand and the two suits holding guns- (who they'd called "Gospa" and "Raikanar") -waited by the elevator doors while the rest of them continued on. They pile into a large elevator. Leon hums a song they were listening to in the car. Ira moans about how hungry she is. The two cold hearted gangsters get into an argument over where they're going to eat later. Lillith so badly wants to flip the switch inside her and introduce her fists to their faces.

The elevator pings as they reach the top floor and the four of them file out. Vincent slicks his hair back nervously as they approach a man with his back turned, arms clasped behind his back. He has gunmetal grey hair and a long coat.

He's like, the definition of evil bad guy boss man. Fucking staring out of the highrise building windows like a goofy supervillain from shows Marie loves showing her.

"We're back Delta. Got that girl you were looking for. And picked up another Champion on the way." Leon calls out. "Your intel was good, reality warped so she wasn't at her address though. But we managed it."

'Delta' turns, and Lillith seriously thought he was going to do the whole *"I've been expecting you"* bullshit. She would have *fucking lost it man*. Instead, big boss man with dark-grey eyes who looks to be in his mid 40's, studies the lot of them with a frown that looked like it stayed permanently on his face.

"Lillith Moore" he says, voice gravelly and Lillith crinkles her nose. Of course they know her government name. Yuck. "It's good to see you again." He says without a hint of warmth.

Lillith is starting to get used to not knowing what's happening or who anyone is.

"-and Vincent Murdock. We have not met before." He says, sounding bored. "Thank you, Ira, Leon." He nods to both of them. Leon gives him a cheesy thumbs up and Ira pops some gum into her mouth.

"Lillith, since I already know of your ability, you will continue working for me as you have in the past" Delta says. Okay, cool man, guess she didn't have a choice in the matter.

"Vincent, your genesis, if you would"

Vincent stays silent.

Delta sighs when Vincent doesn't answer "Some time today, hmm? Your wife and daughter are waiting for you" He reminds him. "Barring that, we have access to some of the best torturers this side of the galaxy."

Vincent's lips press into a hard line. He seems to weigh up the pros and cons of lying in his mind. "I'm a mindreader" he says eventually. "From one of the last surviving bloodlines." *Woah, sick.*

Delta's eyes light up, but his expression is unchanging. "Your kind were presumed dead"

"Yeah, not all of us." Vincent shrugs "Don't bother asking where the rest of us are. We went underground and scattered. I was a baby when I left the commune, no idea where it even is."

"Fascinating." Delta says with something akin to emotion. "In my reality, we hunted down every last one of you and rendered your bloodlines extinct." He bows his head "My apologies on not remembering you, Vincent. There were a surprising number of you, hard to remember all the names."

Okay Lillith was guessing these gangsters and Delta were 100% team *evil*. God, were all the champions going to be like this?

Delta continues “Nevertheless, fortune smiles upon us, you too will work with Lillith to find out as much as you can about the other champions and report everything you find out to me. A reminder that failure to comply means forfeiting the lives of your loved ones.”

He looks past Lillith and Vincent to Leon and Ira “Our alliance has come to an end I’m afraid. I have no more use for you and your clans.”

Leon frowns “What? That’s it? Why?” Ira’s bubblegum pops in surprise.

Delta continues “With Miss Moore and Mr Murdock, I have everything I need to do this all myself. Death Count and Mindreading are both highly desirable abilities-”

Vincent looks at Lillith with new understanding in his eyes.

“-and far outstrips your intelligence network. Besides, your lot can hardly be trusted.” He chuckles “I can barely tolerate you scum. The Service has no need for middle management, and I *loathe* micromanaging.” He says simply.

Shit was about to go down. Vincent tenses beside her. Lillith clenches and unclenches her fists. Ira goes to say something-

Before anyone can react, Delta whips out a handgun from inside his coat and fires. Vincent grabs Lillith by her tank top and yanks her down with him. The first shot slams Ira’s head back, mid chew, and the blonde woman falls back and crumples lifelessly. Her timer reads “00:00:00”

The air *ripples* and Leon is halfway across the room before the second shot hits them in the hip and they howl, skidding to a stop in front of Delta who lazily trains the barrel of his pistol onto Leon on the ground at his feet. “Squad B” Delta says into his earpiece. “Execute.” They all hear the gunfire from Delta’s earpiece before he taps his ear again and silence lays uncomfortably atop all of them.

“Fuck” Vincent says, getting to his feet, bringing her up with him “Are you alright?”

Lillith swats at him “Yeah, I’m okay, let go of me.” She considers bolting for the door, but *fuck*-Ava, Adalle and Dusk were still very much hostages held who-knows-where.

“You motherfucker” Leon hisses from the floor, their pretty face scrunched up in absolute fury with tears in their eyes. It’s an ugly look on them. They hold their hip and blood pools through their fingertips.

Delta laughs. "Don't cry now, you can join your little friends in hell." His gloved fingers squeeze the trigger.

The air *ripples* again, Lillith sees a blue glyph she doesn't quite recognise flash in front of Delta and suddenly the older man is ripped off his feet, careening out of the window in an explosion of glass. The gun barks and Leon rolls to the side, dodging the bullets and getting to their feet as Delta plummets from the high-rise out of sight.

"Have a nice trip." Leon spits, their back turned to Lillith and Vincent.

She feels herself being yanked back by the scruff of her neck.

"What are you waiting for, we need to haul ass *now*." Vincent sprints to the door, Lillith hot on his heels. Her heart hammers in her chest.

In an instant, Leon leaps over them, does an honest-to-god fucking flip and lands right in front of the elevator door. They rise slowly, leaning on their good leg, but considering they crossed the entire room in a second, Lillith is beginning to think the fucker has superspeed.

Lillith and Vincent stop in their tracks.

Leon shakes their head with a tsk. Blood drips down their black suit pants in ribbons. "Change of plans, you two. I'm going to have to kill you now."

Lillith felt her blood run cold.

Drip, drip, drip

The gangsters timer ticks down slowly "72:51:23", "72:51:22", "72:51:21"-

Vincent takes a halfstep in front of her, shielding her with his body. Lillith goes to protest, because she wanted a piece of this bitch too-

"Kyu" Vincent says, as Leon shucks off their suit jacket like the two of them aren't even there. They take off their tie, rolling up their white button-up sleeves to reveal neon blue sakura blossoms tattooed up and down their arms.

Lillith blinks as what appears to be a cross between a mermaid and a nymph appears, half-draped over Vincent's shoulders with a glossy pink aura. Lillith has heard of people who contracted with spirits for power, she was surprised to see a family man with his shit sorted with one though.

"Lend me your power." He says slowly, watching Leon like a hawk. On their end Leon doesn't look surprised to see the spirit.

"Oh Vincent, you know that is a terrible idea, Ruvia's lapdog is far more powerful than you, and she: far more powerful than I." She wails. *"We should have run while we still could-."*

"Take Addies bond" Vincent says after a beat, popping his neck. "I give you full permission"

Kyu pauses, hums to herself with a finger on her lip. *"My dearest, that will only buy you a few minutes at most."* Her expression turns predatory *"Maybe if you let me feast on little Dusk too you-"*

"No." He snaps. "A few minutes is all I need." Leon quirks a pierced eyebrow, Lillith quickly ties her grey flannel around her waist.

Just when things were starting to make sense, huh?

A tall figure appears behind Leon, she holds a red parasol marked with golden flowers, has nine fox tails and matching fluffy white ears with little red markings at the tips. She has a clear white aura and a sharp smile, she reveals razor-like teeth as she grins. *"Kyu? Oh my god it really is you, thought you kicked the bucket for good."*

Kyu sniffs haughtily at Vincent's side *"And miss the chance to strangle you, Ruvia? I couldn't possibly."*

'Ruvia' cackles *"Keep dreaming sweetheart."* She cups Leon's face tenderly *"Don't worry too much about this one. You might not even need my power"* and with that, she disappears.

What, did *everyone* have a government mandated spirit and she just missed out? She thought these cases were supposed to be rare.

Kyu rolls her eyes. She leans in close and whispers *"The Lovers, Reversed."* into Vincents ear and a pink glimmer runs over his body. Vincent rolls his shoulders like a weight has been lifted and grins at Kyu. "Thanks babe. Now-"

He turns back to Leon and cracks his knuckles

"I'm going to beat you to death." He grins.

—

Leon whips out a fucking *uzi* before Vincent can close the gap between them and sprays bullets at the both of them. Lillith drops to the ground with a cry, *Vincent!-*

The bullets ping harmlessly off Vincent's skin as a pink aura surrounds him, he continues charging at Leon and slams them into the closed elevator door. The uzi clatters to the floor and

Vincent kicks it aside. He bashes Leon's head into the door again with a *crunch* before throwing them across the room with supernatural strength. They crash into the opposite wall with a gasp and drop to the ground.

Vincent turns around and looks relieved upon seeing Lillith unharmed.

"Lillith! I need you to focus up" He barks. "I can't take them alone. You have to use your genesis. Start counting and *don't stop*."

She blinks in realisation, that's *right*, if she just kept relaying Vincent's counter in her head, he could read her mind and avoid fatal blows. Or at least, warn him ahead of time if he was going to die.

Drip, drip, drip

She focused on that familiar rhythm.

Vincent turns back to face Leon, who aside from some blood running down the side of their face and a bit of a limp, looks fresh and unbothered. A fact that is making Lillith *hella nervous*.

Above their white hair, their timer ticks down. The numbers have changed.

"00:09:01", "00:09:00", "00:08:59"-

"Nice trick. How long is that gonna last though?" Leon calls out to Vincent. "Spirit powers don't last forever and come with a cost. Kyu's all about love right? Did you really sacrifice the love between you and your wife for some girl you don't know?" They laugh. "Fucking cold dude."

Lillith freezes. *Oh my god, did he really-?*

Vincent's eyes flick to her "Lillith! *Focus*" He yells

It was all Leon needed. Leon appears in front of Vincent and *rocks* him with a punch to the face that has him staggering back, Leon unholsters the pistol on their hip, grabs Vincent by his shoulder before he can recover and fires three times into his stomach.

Drip, drip, drip

"00:00:09", "00:00:08", "00:00:07"

Lillith lets out the breath she was holding. Leon, who looks mildly frustrated, dances under Vincent's clumsy swing and holsters the gun.

“Seriously? You must be really afraid of guns, huh big guy?” Leon grins “Oh I get it, still scared of when I almost slimed you with that shotgun. What, was that your first time being shot at?” They laugh. “Well, luckily for you, I don’t need to rely on firearms for this.”

*This guy **sucks**.* “You talk too much”

Leon turns “Wh-”

Lillith introduces the sole of her boot to Leon’s nose with a meaty crunch. She flips the switch in her brain and goes to feed them their teeth, *9 minutes be damned*- before Vincent shoves her behind him, out of the way. Two bullets once again ping harmlessly off him. “Lillith, don’t do this.” He warns “Leave this to me, just *count*”

Her heart pounds, body charged with adrenaline because she almost bit the dust.

Fuck off, She seethes from the floor. “Fuck you, I’m not some damsel, I can fight!”

Vincent advances, slamming his forehead into Leon’s nose, buying the two of them a few sparse seconds. “I don’t doubt you-” he yells “-but this is *different*. We don’t know what they’re capable of.”

Drip, drip, drip

“00:00:01”

“Vincent!”

The air ripples and Leon throws a punch so blindingly fast that Lillith can hardly catch it, Vincent weaves to the side at the perfect moment with a grunt. *Holy fuck*.

His counter resets “00:00:03”-

Leon sweeps Vincent's legs from underneath him, Vincent tries to grab them on the way down but catches air. They hop forward and raise their leg high which is wrapped in blue glyphs Lillith only understands as *speed*, and go to crush Vincent's skull but he rolls out of the way just in time. Their heel connects with the marble floor and the tile *shatters* underneath them. *Holy shit*.

Leon looks irritated. Staring intently at Vincent, but not moving.

Vincent staggers to his feet and spits to the side. “Superpowered motherfucker.” He mutters, raising his fists.

Drip, drip, drip

“00:00:02”-

Lillith blinks and Leon *streaks* towards Vincent whose eyes widen at their *speed* and throws his hands up in front of him. Instead of connecting, Leon *phases through* Vincent's arms and body, reappearing behind him in a flash of blue. Smoke wafts from their body. They spin on their heel and would have caved Vincent's skull in if he hadn't thrown himself forward onto all fours. *What the fuck was that.*

Another reset, more time bought. Lillith thinks of Leon's earlier words about a time limit, *shit* how long can Vincent do this for? She had a sinking suspicion Kyu's "a few minutes" did not mean almost *ten*.

Drip, drip, drip

Leon doesn't let up, they kick Vincent hard enough in the stomach to flip him onto his back and they *stomp* on the crook of his elbow with a sickening *crunch*. Vincent howls out in pain. Leon grabs Vincent by his shirt and hauls him up, slams their knee into his stomach and decks him across the face. They hop back at Vincent's blind retaliation swing with his uninjured arm before stepping past his guard to slam their forehead into Vincent, who buckles, but miraculously stays standing.

Lazily, almost taunting, above Leon's head “00:08:33”, “00:08:32”, “00:08:31”-

Even with Kyu's power, Vincent was getting his ass *beat*. Leon was going for the kill. Lillith had to do *something*-

Her eyes land on Ira's body, and the shotgun slung over her back. She scrambled to her feet, breaking into a run-

The pistol barks and Lillith feels something rip through her shoulder. She cries out, but stays on her feet, she can't feel her arm. She spares a glance back and sees Vincent wrestling Leon for the pistol, eventually picking them up off their feet and slamming them into the floor. Vincent catches the pistol mid-air and tosses it over his shoulder before with a flash of blue, Leon is right back on him again. Vincent fighting for his fucking life to keep up with Leon's renewed onslaught.

She counts for Vincent as she books it. “00:00:05”-

Lillith skids to her knees and flips Ira over, trying to ignore the perfect hole leaking blood and brain bits onto the pristine floor. Bile rises in her throat. She clumsily tears the shotgun off its sling and sets off back towards Vincent. She makes sure it has shells loaded and cocks the shotgun. She resists the overwhelming urge to bite her nails. She could do this. She's shot a gun a handful of times, never a shotgun but same diff, right?

She trains the firearm on Leon, who flickers in and out of Vincent's range like a ghost. Leon darts to the left and Vincent takes a shot at them, before they disappear in front of her very eyes, reappearing on Vincent's other side accompanied by that same blue flash and smoke, landing a meaty uppercut, clicking his jaw shut. Vincent crashes onto his back with a groan. Leon rolls their shoulders and turns to face Lillith with a vicious grin, they read the question in her eyes.

"Momentum, bitch." They laugh. "Now put the gun down before someone gets hurt."

Red blares above them, the numbers scramble to account for her interference.

"00:02:01", "00:02:00", "00:01:59"-

Lillith fires before she gets cold feet but her hesitation costs her. Leon throws themselves to the side in a roll and springs back to their feet in an instant. Lillith cocks the shotgun- A glyph appears behind them and suddenly they're ripping through the air towards her, her instincts scream at her to duck and she obeys without question. Leon's foot sails harmlessly above her where her head used to be. A black glyph appears in front of them, and instead of sailing past her, they halt in mid-air. They spin and send their leg straight down as they land, kicking the shotgun out of Lillith's hands. It clatters out of her grip. Lillith staggers back as they land and she raises her fists. Oh my god she was so *fucked*.

Leon steps on the shotgun "I think I'll deal with you first." They say, cocking their hip like Ira had. "Your ability is pretty annoying. My bad, should have given you more credit."

Cunt doesn't know when to shut up. Lillith invokes her rules of combat. She lashes out with a stomp to their knee on Leon's bad side and connects with a crunch. They grunt in pain, bracing back on their good leg, stepping back off the shotgun.

She leaps at them, thumbs going straight for their eyes, but before she can tear into their iris's, Leon goes low with a jab that knocks the wind out of her. They grin maniacally, a blue glyph appears behind their cocked arm-

The pistol barks out two- three- four times and Leon spins, the bullets connect with an unnatural "thunk". She clutches her side and greedily sucks in air, looking over at Vincent, who lays on the ground, with the smoking pistol still in his hands. *Yes!*

Drip, drip, drip

"Hah! Good try" Leon says, moving their arms away from their face and chest. Revealing the bullets bit into their arms, their *metal arms*. *Of course they have prosthetic arms and legs, why the hell not?*

"Let's all agree, no firearms. Don't want anyone *important* getting hurt in the crossfire hm?" Leon says. "Someone like-" Their body glimmers like Vincent's had "-this?"

Leon's white hair *grows*, growing long and wavy, going from stark white to a deep ink black. Lillith steps back in shock. *Oh my god.*

Leon spares a grin for Lillith, staring back at her is Adalle who smiles in a way that looks wholly unnatural on her face. They turn back to Vincent.

"V." Leon says in *Adalle's voice*. "Won't you put the gun down?" They flutter their long eyelashes. "For me?"

Vincent looks horrified.

Get up man, stay with me! Lillith begs. She lunges for the shotgun, but Leon kicks it away without looking. She stumbles, desperately reaching out to yank Adalle-Leon's long hair, who whirls back around to face her, grabbing her outstretched arm and throwing her over their shoulder. Lillith yelps, covering her face with her arms as the ground rushes to meet her, instead, her whole world lurches and suddenly instead of falling straight down she's flying sideways towards Vincent. Who she crashes into with a groan. Vincent drops the gun with a swear.

The remains of a blue glyph fade to nothing.

Adalle-Leon walks over to them like a predator who's cornered their prey.

"00:01:30", "00:01:29", "00:01:28"

Vincent rises slowly to meet them, but they're like lightning, they connect *left-right-left* with their glyph-enchanced arms. Leon knees him in the face again and Vincent *collapses*.

"I wouldn't get back up again." Adalle-Leon says, lowering their leg "I think we're done here." They put their hands on their hips and laugh "What was that about beating me to death, hm? Maybe if you could actually land some hits, *maybe*."

They crouch, grab Vincent by his hair and get in close.

"You're fucking stupid for blowing smoke out of your ass. Yeah, you know how to throw a punch, but you don't know *shit* about fighting Vincent Murdock. You're the kind of guy who bullied people weaker and smaller than you just to feel *strong*. You thought, because I was smaller than you, that I was *weak*" They hiss. "Think again, asshole. You probably think the same of blue bitch here too, huh? Didn't seem like she wanted your protection in the first place, tough guy."

They adjust their grip on a fistful of his hair and slam Vincent's head into the marble tile, wrenching his bloodied face up with a scowl. "C'mon, I really expected more outta you. You had

that determination in your eyes.” Their eyes gleam, still wearing Adalle’s face. “What, is your wife’s love not enough for you?”

Vincent's face twists in fury, he spits a glob of blood directly into their eyes. They step back, swearing, swatting at their eyes. The air ripples as they go in for another, momentum enhanced swing but this time Leon freezes. Vincent’s eyes have pink hearts in them, and Leon looks confused.

They shake their head like they’re clearing it but before Leon can retaliate, Lillith swings her steel-capped boot as hard as she can at their groin. Boot-connects-with-clit with a squelch and Leon gasps out air silently, leaning forward in pain.

Ready and waiting for Vincent's knuckles slamming into their face with supernatural, love-enhanced strength. Leon’s head snaps back as they are thrown off their feet, crashing into Delta’s desk.

Lillith spins and spams the elevator button with her good arm. Ignoring the lack of feeling in her other arm and the blood dripping on the floor. *Fuck* why did they have to be on the very top floor?

Vincent pants beside her. He sags like a boxer in the 12th round. His eyes are normal again, his body no longer glimmers, his mouth is bloody with missing teeth. He’s in *rough* shape.

Leon leaps to their feet still wearing Adalle’s face, twisted in vehement anger. Blood hardened on their face, dried blood on their pants from the bullet hole in their hip, their perfect nose is crooked and bleeding now.

Lilliths heart sinks. She wants to *scream*. Above their head: “72:48:23”, “72:48:22”, “72:48:21”

Vincent no longer has Kyu’s strength to aid him. Lillith dropped the fucking shotgun.

Leon snarls in Adalle’s voice “You *fuckers*. If you think I’m going to let you get away-”

A phone rings.

A peppy j-pop ringtone sings out from Leon’s pocket.

They pause, curse under their breath, before fishing out an ancient looking flip phone complete with a cute little rat charm.

“*What do you want?*” They spit into the speaker. “I’m a little busy righ-” They freeze. Their glamour drops, revealing Leon’s true face and short white hair. They speak in their own voice again. “What? Fazien, what about Gospa and Raikanar?”

Whoever 'Faizen' is, tells Leon something they don't like. "Are you kidding me? I have two *right here*."

The elevator pings, *thank god*- and Lillith leaps inside. She tugs on Vincent's shirt. "C'mon man we gotta *go*."

But Vincent doesn't move, he takes deep breaths and his fists are clenched white-knuckled at his side. He looks like he's about to go back and fight. Dread pools in her stomach.

Drip, drip, drip

"00:00:07", "00:00:06", "00:00:05"-

"Vincent..?" She laughs nervously "Hey man, you're scaring me."

His eyes flicker to her, they hold eye contact for a beat before Vincent takes another steadying breath, unclenches his fists and steps into the elevator.

The doors begin to close. Lillith watches Leon staring at them go, their mouth pressed in a thin line.

—

Champions Remaining:

Vincent, Lillith, Leon, ~~Delta~~, Ergo, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???, ???