And Unto Your End You Shall Go (2025)

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The owner of a Discord roleplay server is transmigrated to where it began.

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Intro

001 / QUIZ!---Will it be worth the candle?

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author's note

Notes

Sunday or Saturday updates

First fic. My English second language. Please construct criticism.

Stellar: hey

Stellar: *uploaded quiz.exe*

tzutzutzu: eh?

tzutzutzu: did u get hacked lol

tzutzutzu: virus

Stellar: No

tztzutzu: mhm

(replying to: *uploaded quiz.exe*) tzutzutzu: what's this?

Stellar: quiz tsu sent me!

Stellar: take it its cvnty

tzutzutzu: cvnty

tzutzutzu: lol not hacked are we

tzutzutzu: ok

I clicked on the red dot as soon as it came up on my screen—a message from Stellar, the co-owner of the server. "Hey."

On most days, my life consisted of scrolling through Discord, worrying about school, dealing with my family, et al, etc. until the end in which I slept for six hours and then did it again. This—being talking on Discord with friends more than with my actual family—was nothing new. Anyway.

The interface of the quiz was rather barebones. And, I mean, it was community-produced content for the server—I'd have to thank Tsuchi for making it. Cause really I *was* grateful to have a community so interested in the roleplay.

Right, right! The quiz!

If you were transported to the Labyrinth, what would you need to survive?

20/20 Trait Points.

Oh. Basically, the quiz was telling me to create a character build for *me proper* (puny modern day human) were I to be isekai'd into the world of the Labyrinth, which in all aspects *was* horribly grimdark (even though the tone in-RP floated around high fantasy for a good portion of the time). Which meant: realistically, mental survivability was a must.

I was monologuing, though—to the trait list I scrolled. Most were overall rather niche or useless—the ones I found

interesting I pulled out for further thought on.

Meta Traits

5: Squashed Butterflies: Slows plot divergence decreasingly until the Sundered King.

Interesting. Basically, a guaranteed method of knowing where the plot would be going up to a certain point, which was... right around three years in-roleplay from the starting point of the server.

(The Sundered King himself was a big bossfight that took ages to complete, not least because of the 10+ players and the scheduling that ensued. It went through a whole GM swap, as well, as the first owner lost motivation for the server and transferred ownership to an admin because of a political crisis ... but I'm getting ahead of myself.)

5: Rise To Power: Guarantees an opportunity to ally with a powerful character or to become strong as a lone wolf. Does not guarantee the power itself.

7: Narrative Armor: Moments in which you would die more often turn out to be nonlethal. However, injury is more common, and bad things happening by chance will occur more often to you were the plot judged "better."

Better by who?

10: Deus ex Machina: Once in a moment of guaranteed defeat, the plot will literally shift around you to instead turn it into a moment of full victory. Happens only once, ever.

I probably wouldn't be picking that one, I already knew. I'd prefer my self-insert to be competent rather than particularly

lucky, and it was 10 Trait Points, and ... it could only be used once, which was the real reason I was unenthusiastic.

(On top of this, the wording implied that I wouldn't be able to choose when it was used. Which was less than ideal.)

Physical Traits

5: Bloodforged: Start with a trait of your choice.

Traits in the server were essentially small multipliers to stats. I probably wouldn't take it, as a trait was easy to earn through simple suffering and combat, and I was, after all, trying to optimize.

5: Custom Attribute: Start with one of the canonical unique magic attributes of the server.

7: King Arthur: Start with a powerful S-Tier Artifact!

10: Double/Prodigious Ability: Gain a second ability, or have one ability start at Level 10.

Overall, *that* one was insane. And would be one of my picks if there wasn't something more interesting. Onto the mental traits I went.

Mental Traits

5: Historian: You have perfect recall of information.

5: Truthseeker: You can't be lied to.

7: Coldhearted: You're less susceptible to onslaughts of emotion in general, and in heated situations act logically. Pain has a dulled effect on you.

That one would realistically be one I chose.

10: Unbreakable: You cannot be reduced to inoperability mentally.

I'm sorry Double Ability. Prodigious Ability. That meme, with the guy turning away to look at the other girl passing down the street. That was me with Unbreakable.

Hmmm. But wait. If I chose Unbreakable, it would be naturally more efficient to load up on two 5-costing traits. Squashed Butterflies and Rise to Power would be good, I knew, but would I want to sacrifice Coldhearted for the sake of Unbreakable? Or maybe take both, and skirt along without keeping Rise to Power or Squashed Butterflies?

Nah , I eventually decided. Unbreakable was more worth it than Coldhearted, because it cost more points. Smart ape think smartly.

And maybe I wouldn't become a sociopath. That too.

I made my selection. Unbreakable + Squashed Butterflies + Historian. Unbreakable for obvious reasons. I wasn't a character in a story, so Unbreakable would probably pay dividends in the depressing horror grimdark world that the Labyrinth was. Squashed Butterflies so that the plot remained predictable, which would obviously help my survivability. Finally, Historian. I needed to remember everything to pair up well with Squashed Butterflies so I could manipulate the plot in my favor and maybe even get a pseudo-Rise to Power.

(I guess it wouldn't be a *guaranteed* way to mooch off of someone strong, but assuming my self-insert (me) was competent, I could probably manipulate one of the characters into taking me as a follower or something.)

The button appeared as I selected each of the traits.

Submit

Did Tsuchi have this on a server or something? "Submit" implied a form of uploading. Was this an online TFL TTRPG or something? I briefly alt-tabbed, and tapped out a message to him:

tzutzutzu: is the quiz connected to something online?

And swapping back to the quiz, I made sure my trait choices were good. Once over. Once over. Double Ability. Mmmm. Goodbye, Double Ability! Never to see you again...!

I mourned the loss of Double Ability as I clicked the submit button.

As I did so, the ping sound came. While the quiz loaded—*Calculating,* the banner read—I opened Discord.

tsuchi: what quiz?

Attached was a staring emoji I would sooner forget.

Stellar...?

The quiz shuffled itself to the top, above the Discord tab.

Confirmed, it read. *And Unto Your End You Shall Go.*

There was this feeling in that moment. It was... kind of indescribable, but much like a certain author of celebrated Christmas webfiction I would attempt to describe it anyway: It was like a betrayal, a surprise, maybe?—no, like seeing a big hole open up and feeling the *vertigo* from looking down at the

hole, but not from the physical distance. More from the shock and unreality of it.

The vertigo bent my vision; not like a physical effect but more something that affected my *memories,* painting them over with an emotional brush which tainted my recollection. It felt like my head would snap, and I realized it wasn't just an emotion, then, it was an external effect. And then it snapped into place.

All of it snapped into place.

I stared upward at a cobblestone ceiling.

I sat up.

Hah.

Hah hah hah?

Heh?

No. Don't think about it yet. Mmmm. Please, brain?

But the realization hit me all the same.

I was not in Kansas anymore.

The sounds of explosions came through the walls, and the keep? Yeah, probably a keep, the *keep* I was residing in shuddered from the force of it all.

Status check!! Status check!

Okay! I was a dude. Male body. That's one. I was human, too, I probably wasn't elf cause I couldn't feel the hypothetical massive goofy eartips of one, and I certainly wasn't Godborn,

which was just a variant of human but prettier and with better skin. I was significantly larger than I was in reality, in reality *alpha,* in my old world, whatever—well, probably not significantly, probably only, like, three inches… no, no, unproductive line of thought… I'd have to get used to this new body, *crap,* crap crap.

I was hugely regretting not taking Coldhearted.

I pulled myself to my feet. Let's sketch out a mental map. Timeline of what's happening.

So this was the Ant Arc. Also known as the introductory event of the server. I remember Ravenloft—the old owner—starting the event, and why we did it, to vampirize members from the old server. Ravenloft had known that to get the server up we'd have to start with a bang, and so immediately he had gotten to work on some really awesome novella-level posts alongside The Seaman.

Ant Arc was really short. It was divided into two threads, where lower-level and higher-level characters split, to hold the inside and outside sections of the walls respectively. Anastasia was here—this would be her last important moment, the *first event in the server,* before she faded away into obscurity.

Why was she relevant…? She wasn't. Anastasia was my character. Pretty archetypal overall, I guess. Depressed and quiet but not quite dour, she was an assassin who used a longsword to fight, cause at the time no one had any idea as to how to make a unique build. She was an elf, and so long-lived, and—

The wall to my right quite literally exploded, interrupting me from my ruminations. A woman with ram's horns and silky

black hair, with a beautiful face and curvaceous figure, threw her hand at me. "Get back!" she shouted. And twirled a silver spear in her hand. As if for show. I knew her name, it was *Dana,* she was another character who fell off the face of the planet after the event—

And interrupting my musings, she was swarmed again by six-foot-long ants.

Did Ravenloft seriously rip this from Earth Defense Force? I would have to...

...

I won't think about my friends right now.

I backed away from the tide of ants even as a plume of green blood exploded from their center, and the navy-blue-cloaked woman surged upward onto the pile of corpses, and the spear left her hand, floating through the air at a slow speed which was nonetheless fast enough to tear through the carapaces of the beasts.

Into a corridor I fled. The medieval-style furnishings did nothing to put me at ease— *every hallway looked the same—* and I had to trust that I was heading in the right direction, away from the tide of ants trying to burst through the gates to the city.

A heavy door blocked my path. It was wide and broad; with ornate metal ... greebles? Something like that, I swear, but regardless, on the other side I presumed it was locked, with a big metal barricade that was set on it. Historian failed me here— it had never been described whether or not this was the case, and so I was forced to guess, and trying to open the door...

Yeah. I was stuck in the hallway.

Okay. I had roughly ascertained the shape of the keep I was in—it was circular. I had woken up at point A, which was on the right side of the circle, run to point B, on the top side, which was where I saw the woman. And where the wall was destroyed and they were trying to fend against the ants. Finally point C was the exit and where the door was. I was guessing that point A *also* had a similar barricaded door, and now I was cursing myself for not checking because no way in hell was I going back to point B with the ants.

(Here was where another thought occurred to me: I was human, sure, but what about my ability and attribute and stat array, even? Stat box, open! Status! Character sheet! Dungeon Master I want to go home!)

(... No luck.)

So my only option if I wanted to be a coward to *survive* the invasion was to sit and wait out the ants, huh?

...

I got isekai'd into a grimdark death world.

I got isekai'd.

... Hah.

I slumped down to the floor, leaning against the barricaded door.

The inherent absurdity of being transported to another world, being handed the *keys to protagonist-hood,* choosing my fate, or whatever that was, in the character creation process, and then basically being forced to just hunker down and do nothing. Where was I even going with this?

For a long time in real life I had really wanted to go to a fantasy world. Really, really.

I don't know why that's, why that's relevant, sorry.

...

Okay.

I thought about it a little bit.

Sitting down and waiting to die. Or waiting for it all to be over. Screw that, right? The people inside the gate were weak. I already knew that, most of them were level 1, and level 1 was the minimum you could be in the server (In terms of the meta. Levels as a concept didn't exist; think of Dungeons and Dragons, I guess?).

... Hah, yeah, this was made for me, right? I could kill a few ants.

'Made for me.'

...

I stood up and faced point B. I didn't have a weapon, but that was fine. The ants made fine weapons in and of themselves. I wondered then and there: *How close to the server is this world?*

What was the point of that? Simple. Gamemasters in the Labyrinth were reluctant to kill. To kill anyone at all, in fact. Even if you screwed up *horribly* it came down to how everyone wanted to be cordial happy friends, and so you'd barely get a slap on the wrist.

Realistically, though, the world of the Labyrinth was *screwed*. In terms of danger, people should've died way more often—

heroes shouldn't really realistically appear, not in the way they do in roleplay servers. I could think of moments where GMs ignored stats and logic in favor of keeping people alive. People still died, but they would have to be actually *stupid* , courting death in literally intentional manner.

(In the Sundered King fight, a certain character walked away from a massive explosion literally a centimeter ahead of it. The explosion grew and subsumed them entirely, deleting them from existence and banishing them to Limbo, which was one of the afterlife planes.)

The train of thought I was going down didn't really have a point. It wouldn't be possible to tell, because if I was operating on a fictionalized roleplay... 'physics,' everything would be rationalized and I'd still feel like I struggled. Though I guess counting however many scrapes with death I had would tell me...?

Regardless, it was probably more productive to assume *yes* I can die and *yes* it's easy *to* die.

I took another step forward. Hey, my legs weren't even shaking. I had rationalized myself out of fear. I am the Methods of Rationality, fear me Rowling!!

One step forward, another step forward.

The passage went away too fast. I was greeted with chaos. But the line of ants had been pushed far back. I drew a breath in, and stepped out of the great hole in the wall of the cylindrical keep. Bending down, I took a sword from the bloodstained ground in my hand—ignoring the corpse beside it. And the smell of it too.

The sword didn't fit my hand. It was still too big and too heavy, and I didn't feel skilled with it at all. In fact, I doubted that I would have been able to even carry it in a way which I could use it to fight with at *all* had this body not been somewhat well-taken-care-of.

...Am I a body-snatcher? The thought occurred to me.

...How different do I look from before? The next thought occurred to me, lightning-fast.

I was really hoping I'd be ported in with my old body, but considering the physical dissimilarities between the two, I supposed physically it would've been more of a downgrade.

I cast away the monologue. Begone, foul introspection!

An ant neared me. I'd let it get close in my monologue. Now I had to deal with it.

I stepped forward, surging with motion, and brought the blade in my hand down in a heavy overhand strike. It whistled, falling downward, and slammed... into the ground, as the ant *dodged* with agility unbecoming of a massive ant. It lunged toward me, and sank its teeth into my arm.

The pain was *unbearable*. I considered myself someone with a decent pain tolerance. In the modern day world. I did not cry when I stabbed myself with a knife. Accidentally. I did not sink into pits of despair when I exercised because my body burned.

This hurt like nothing else had ever hurt. Venom coursed through my body, not that I could feel it, but I *knew* it did, and the thought *maybe I'll just die a slow and painful death of poison* jolted me into action.

I shook my left hand like an idiot, and dropped the sword in my right, squealing. Gore exploded from beside me as half of the ant was evaporated in an instant by an unknown force to my left. I glanced.

A black-haired woman with a cursory swiping of her hand had annihilated a swath of ants; each and every one. Not even in a flashy way—space curved around them and they each *popped* like berries. She moved briskly toward another one, and space bent as the ants each attacked her. They phased through her body, and spatial distortions, like bending in the ocular lens of a camera, spilled out around her. Like a puddle. Then she stopped phasing, suddenly, and her body matter was mixed in a gory red spray with the ants. She fell down and curled into a ball, probably sobbing. … Was that even in character?

Her nondescript appearance had stopped me from placing her, but I knew who she was. Arelis Auditore, a noble scion. She was… really strong, especially early on in the storyline. And just like in the server itself, she telefragged herself here, with a phasing spell gone wrong.

Sucks to suck, I guess.

The battle was over soon as the humans mopped up the rest of the ants, their champion—which was just a big ant, Ravenloft not having really changed his recipe for combat encounters—having been taken care of outside the gate. In the original continuity, Dana had slain a champion inside the gate, but… I guess not here.

"Fall back!" A man shouted from above the busted wall of the keep. With my arm rapidly swelling, I followed his lead, and the

stampede of soldiers and adventurers at my back pushed me forward.

It was time to see a healer.

Kenny stared down at the poisoned arm with a concerned expression.

"Yeah... how did you even get this much venom in your body?" He asked, staring down at the wayfarer in front of him. He was a fairly nondescript boy, with odd spun clothing, like robes—he was almost definitely a porter. And a massive, swollen left arm, pumped full of venom.

The boy looked away. "I, uh. I got bit while I wasn't looking, and the ant held on pretty hard. Really really hard."

He nodded. Not necessarily disinterestedly, just... it wasn't really anything particularly unique, and so it didn't necessarily need to be replied to.

He looked down at the arm, which was connected to an artifact which *itself* was connected to a battery. The swelling appeared to be going down, but...

"I can't really feel my fingers," the boy observed. "It's..."

Kenny was silent. How would he phrase it? He put his thoughts in order. The venom had likely done irreparable nerve damage already. Perhaps the boy would regain usage of his arm, perhaps he'd have to pay for a prosthetic from somewhere (and Kenny did hope that if he needed a prosthetic, the boy would come to his workshop). Whatever the case, Kenny held sympathy for him, it was just...

"Yeah. Your, um, your arm," Kenny began. "Wait. How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

"Okay."

He'd just have to broach the news quickly. Wincing, Kenny began.

"There's a chance your arm is permanently damaged as a result of the venom."

I looked at how Kenny hemmed and hawed.

"Okay," I replied.

"... Do you want a place with me to recover? You're a porter, right?"

("Porter" was an OOC term that became an IC term meaning a character who had crossed universes to enter the 'Stone,' which was the name for the Labyrinth's universe. My best guess was that it came from the verb 'to port,' because characters were being transferred from the old server —which was itself a saga— to the new one.)

I paused for show. I had already made up my decision. "Yeah. A-and, thanks, it takes someone special to offer their home to a stranger, so..."

He flashed a brief smile. "Don't worry about it. All goes well, you can work for your keep until you get your own place."

I smiled back, and nodded. And I didn't say anything more.

002 / Killing in the City 1

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author's note

Summary

Setup for the next chapter. Our main character monologues. Talks to a mailman.

Alright. Now that all this is through, I guess I can put down some of the stuff I need to put down.

This world—universe, sorry—is called the Stone. Within it is the Labyrinth.

It is my own creation. Not wholly, certainly, but it is of me as I am of my mother and as she is of her own mother. I am its mother, in a sense.

I... came onto the team, I guess, for the systems. The systems that drove the server invisibly. Categorization, all numbers which we would use to, to drive and enumerate the server's plot. Us, rather, me, the one who did systems—we, he, was important, deathly so, and yet at the same time disconnected and negligible.

It didn't matter overall.

As the server grew larger and Ravenloft grew further away from us, and our relationship turned from friendly as if we were peers

to acerbic and biting, I stepped more and more into a position of ownership of the server. Calling decisions on lore, acting as a public face, etc.

In many ways I feel like the decline and necessity for resurrection of the server was as a result of my mishandling of the situation.

...

There were a few of us left after Ravenloft went away. Decimated as we were by the Great Rework, the server was only barely afloat; Stellar, Quartz, and I pulled much of the weight. For a while no one was willing to run quests or events because of that period of high-stress after Ravenloft went. Him and Void.

Oh, Void. I haven't introduced you, I guess.

He was Ravenloft's friend. He had two characters on the server; one was particularly plot-relevant, and his absence hurt. He felt sour over how the Great Rework had left him far weaker than before, and Ravenloft told him to leave. After all, Ravenloft was going too.

...

Whatever.

Kenny was Void's character. The really important one, anyway. I remembered him as being less soft-spoken than he came off as to me. I guess it'd remain to be seen.

...

I stared upward at the wooden ceiling. Look at the rafters. Now would be a good as time as any, I guessed. To test my attribute.

In-lore, there existed two primary power systems one could have. There was magic, firstly, and there were abilities, which were more esoteric. Magic was divided into eighteen attributes, each some form of element which could be controlled. Abilities, on the other hand, were based on your will, and as a result could be anything.

The intent was to give a lot of freedom when it came to building characters.

All I really needed to do to test my attribute was to flex whatever organ magic flexed from. In this case it'd be in my head, as that's where the gate organ sat, which channeled the mana inside your soul's metaphysical wellspring into physical form.

I sat and squinted as I tried to give myself a headache.

I'd like to say that it happened immediately and showed me as a prodigy. It didn't. It took... manipulation, I guess, of the 'scrunch.' Over and through my head, until I felt it fall into a groove in the circle, and pressed downward. And...

There was nothing. I had found my gate, exactly as described, and found I could not channel my will into it, because I had no attribute.

My right hand flopped down onto the rough bed I had been given. I felt no ability; they were instinctively found rather than learned. Maybe it was a passive, or something: but I doubted it.

'They,' 'He,' or whatever placed me into this world, were telling me to go get my attributes and abilities myself. For full freedom, or something. At my level—assumedly low, considering how I

felt like a normal person, rather than a superhuman—it wasn't like having an attribute nor an ability would be particularly helpful to my progress. That wasn't how it was in the server, anyway.

Okay.

"I need a piece of paper," I said aloud, the thought broadcasted into my mouth from my humming brain.

Stumbling out of my bed, I made my way down the stairs. Kenny stood at the storefront—this was a craftsman's shop with a house basically on top of it, in the middle of a large district of the city which was delegated to merchants.

"Hi," I said. Blearily. And raised my left hand, which was wrapped thickly in bandages, to greet him. Then I winced from the pain, because that was stupid. Kenny turned. "What do you need?"

"Do you have some paper? Need to write to get my thoughts in order, and..."

I trailed off. But Kenny nodded, producing from the desk a thin sheaf of paper and a pencil. More than what I'd need. I took it anyway.

I retreated to the batcave. The guest bedroom was comfortably dark, slightly humid, and altogether less stimulating than anywhere else I'd been so far. Now to write.

I divided my problems into problems of the present, future, and past, in order of importance.

Problems of the present were of the immediate variety, *what would I do next*. These included fixing my arm, or getting a new one, getting a character build set up, and making my way to the next plot-critical event. I didn't want to mooch off of Kenny for very long.

Problems of the future were due to Squashed Butterflies. While if I could survive long enough to get to the Sundered King I'd be in a good spot, it'd be really hard to get there. Luckily, the way the various hyperpowerful threats (of which there were a few) were structured did not *require* reaction, only action to engage with them, meaning I could safely skip going to the hard fights or places.

(The threats included the Fault-Star King, which was ... he was like a lich, but he had gravity powers, alright? And there was the Rail, which was a series of ordeals in order to gain strong loot and a lot of experience. And after that came the True World.)

(...)

(I wouldn't be going to True World.)

Problems of the past probably weren't immediately harmful. They included figuring out how I got here, and ... yeah, that was probably the most important of them. There were obviously more than a few options, because weird stuff *happened,* but I knew I couldn't be a standard porter, an isekai'd figure in the lore.

Porters kept their old bodies. I woke up in a new one (thinking of it, it was *extremely* odd I had no body dysphoria or discomfort in this form at all. Couple that with how quickly I was able to acclimate to getting transported here). On top of

that, porters had no knowledge of the Labyrinth —I had experienced its plot as a form of multimedia. Discord roleplay.

There was the option of the dream-skewer. In a certain piece of webfiction I had read, an explanation for isekai was proposed in the form of the dream-skewers—basically, nothing you knew was real, and it was actually a delusion that struck you and overwrote your memories at random.

If that was the case, it didn't necessarily explain my lack of abilities and attributes (*unless* those two were shafted by the dream-skewer as well). And I had a grasp on who everyone was, and that much seemed unlikely for a dream-skewered individual.

Wondering wouldn't do much, anyway. Whether or not I was simply delusional, and Earth had never existed, none of it mattered. I had a goal.

Take out the problems of the present.

My most pressing concern was my arm. The ant venom, especially the stuff from the ones inside the gate, wasn't really that strong, which meant that losing my hand wasn't something that was a done deal. All I'd have to do was find a decently strong healer. A stronger healer than was available in the military. I knew who: Wren, who was played by Shiro. She fell out of the story eventually as Shiro lost interest and disappeared from the server.

(I guess this brought up another tangent. Would characters fall in and out of relevance as according to the plot of the server? I assumed so, but it'd have to be seen how that was handled.)

Anyways. Wren had the highest magic power in the server at this point. The problem was that I didn't know her location, or even what she was doing at this point in time—because Shiro joined late.

...

But other people would. Particularly the other person who came in as a compatriot of Wren—Wyland. He would be distinctly recognizable; a human turned into a dullahan with a big magic bow. And I knew where Wyland would be going.

The first quest in the server ever run was titled "Killing in the City," and took place only two days from now.

I was the one who GMed it.

I stood outside the massive board on which were pinned jobs for adventurers. When I was initially doing the worldbuilding for the server, I hadn't necessarily put much thought into how it'd really work, though.

In the initial iteration of the server, all anyone needed to accept a quest from the board was to react OOC just saying they were taking a slot for the quest. Then they'd do it, posting up in the roleplay channel, finish the quest, and collect rewards.

My point is that it was highly abstracted. Here, there had to be some measure of security for the board. Sure, we could leave our names on the board, and...

If I worldbuilt it, I guess it'd really come down to the following process:

1. The quest would have to be posted, whether by the poster or by some other party (likely the quest board system or the mail system).

2. Leave your name on the board to show up. Obviously, you'd have to have some sort of dedicated tracking system for all wayfarers—this existed in-lore as the registration system. Porters were given temporary registrations as low-tier wayfarers, which meant that for now I didn't

have to register, which cost money, which I didn't have.

3. Appear in a given meeting spot to interview for the job. Show your ID, or the equivalent—your license—and pass over money for payment. The job offerer would have to log this, so that the wayfarer could be tracked for quest completion.

4. Complete quest.

5. Evaluate the quest completion. It could take place on the offerer's side, but that would open up pathways of abuse because they were allowed and even obligated to pay less for worse completion. This meant that money would have to change hands from offerer to quest board

system to adventurers.

1. ... Which itself, I guess, meant that *that* could be abused. So it necessitated an ambivalent fourth party.

I was monologuing, though. A man had stepped up to the board, which I leaned against. Attempting to farm aura with a massive, swollen arm was impossible, and therefore I did not try.

"It's pretty early to be hanging around the quest board," he commented. It was true. The sun was barely beginning to rise.

As for the man himself he wore a forest-green trench coat and a white button-up shirt beneath it. Strapped to his back was a large, metal, white trunk with a green line traced down the middle.

He worked on pinning papers, which appeared in his hand with a flick of his wrist, to the wooden surface of the board. I assumed that the green line denoted how much mass was inside his trunk, because with each paper said line got slightly smaller.

(I knew this because of Historian's perfect recall ability.)

"All the better to quest you with, or something," I replied with a smile. *That was terrible. I should be ashamed* . "I'm looking for a specific type of quest and I don't want it to get snagged."

He nodded. There was silence for a little while, and he seemed disinterested in continuing conversation. So I tried to fill the silence.

"I'm new here."

"I can tell."

"How does the quest board system work? Security-wise, I mean. So that none of the parties can over- or under-pay."

His eyes—a grey-blue—met mine, even as he drew another paper from his trunk.

"There's two different associations run by the city which handle the board system. There's the Quest Board Branch and the Wayfarer Branch. While the Quest Board Branch is nominally within the Wayfarer Branch, it isn't under their control and it's best to think of them as two separate agencies."

He pulled another paper out, and set another nail up to tap in. With his fingers, I noticed.

"The Quest Board Branch gets paid by the people offering the job a small amount of the reward that they're offering. Five percent normally and ten percent for rewards over one hundred thousand splinters. Then they hold the rest of the reward money in escrow."

(One hundred thousand splinters was a lot of money to get from one quest. A *lot*. I don't think even rich people commonly paid *that much* for a high-level quest.)

"On top of their normal budget, this is how the Quest Board Branch manages to bring in money while remaining a nonprofit public service by name. That money goes to the Wayfarer Branch—and this is why they're not separate entities, so that the government at large doesn't get a part of the money transferred between agencies—which oversees interactions between the job offerers and the wayfarers themselves.

"If the job isn't completed, the wayfarer gets a black mark, and the job offerer keeps the other 95% of their money.

"If the job is completed, and the job offerer doesn't think it is, the Wayfarer Branch evaluates and decides what happens."

I nodded. It made *sense,* too, for an in-server explanation. I already felt my plot-creation gears churning; it'd be a really cool quest to run where, imagine: You get hired by the Wayfarer Branch to untangle all the plot strands of a job where it's unclear whether or not completion was full, or something, or…

…

Right! I had to focus on getting stronger, and all that jazz…!

The man went back to his business, and then stepped away.

"That's this week's quest lineup," he stated in satisfaction. "Hope you find what you're looking for," he said, turning to me, before stepping off the dais which the board was on.

(The board was about fifteen feet long in total, and though it wasn't *sparse* in terms of what was posted, it wasn't particularly dense either. It made me wonder about the population dynamics of the city—how many people existed, and how much needed to be done at any given moment? It logically followed that this was just the moderately wealthy commons' quest board, but it felt to me like for a normal city's population there wasn't enough to be done, especially if this was a cultural thing.)

(It occurred to me that private contractors could also definitely be a thing—no, *were* a thing. I had run quests centering around contract corporations that specialized in various questing needs. I guess this was only for outsourcing stuff... kind of like a gacha of mercenaries? Once you had found a good, cheap, up-and-coming one you could just repeatedly hire them.)

I spurred myself out of the monologue. Begone, foul monologue!

Stepping up to the board, I examined what was there. Construction jobs (which were never actually ran in the server, cause they were too easy to make boring), the rare monster subjugation...

Killing in the City

Desc: *There's been a murder in the city - an important nobleman of the army named Ser Tobias Ruceumonte. Your job is to find his killer, of the seven people there the night he*

was killed. There will be a member of the city military to assist and keep an eye on the case. ***Rewards****: Variable, depending on helpfulness.*

Bingo! And I remembered the quest exactly, too. I could march in, say what happened...

And then get a bunch of scrutiny placed upon me. I guess it wouldn't necessarily be a bad thing, not *outright* , but since I was weak, I'd prefer showing my hand as little as possible.

Additionally, I was wanting to make friends with Wyland, so that he could take me to Wren—who I was reasonably sure he'd be able to introduce me to. Which meant that it'd be more efficient, anyway, to keep up the charade.

I guess I'm doing a murder mystery, then.

---

author's note

Thanks for reading!!!

Tell me if I should make a discord server or something.

003 / Killing in the City 2 (They're not all NPCs)

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author's note

Summary

Stuff starts happening

Notes

Sorry for the delay

Short chapter because it's a better place to end it

To Do:

Problems of the Present

Ally with Wyland.

Find Wren and get my hand fixed.

Pay Kenny something for his help.

Test whether or not OOC systems translate to world. (For future reference, OOC = in server but not in the world of the server, IRP = in server and in world of server, IW (in world?? better term needed) = in the world but NOT in the original server Get a build started. Probably thinking high mobility/high power physical, but that requires high artifact support; high magic skill mage is probably the easiest way to get strong enough to take on difficult threats here.

It would be really excellent if I were able to obtain something close to Arin's ability. (The interesting part of what he could do was see physical representations of other people's stats. Though stats weren't a canonical thing that existed in the server, it wasn't some cringey Korean fan club, this guy named Arin had an ability that allowed him to see the attributes of other people above their heads—which was *extremely* useful, and I wanted it.)

(Not just because it allowed helpful reconnaissance. It would help to prove some theories I had about whether or not OOC systems translated into IW space. I could still test that myself, but it'd be a lot less easy without something like Arin's ability.)

Problems of the Past

What did Stellar do? Why am I here, what was the quiz, etc.

Did anyone else come with me?

Wait, shoot, even if no one was isekai'd in the same manner I was, there *were* Porters who came from an alternate, in-universe version of Earth. But they showed up ... super late, probably a year or more in. I had never taken note of the date one was submitted, so Historian wasn't helping out; without knowing the date of approval I wouldn't know the date of porting because I couldn't convert the timescale of the server.

(We had a bot that sent a month passing message, along with the new date, every 7 days. I had programmed it in the baby's-first-python language the bot used.)

Problems of the Future

Not really a problem, but I knew that the auction took place a few weeks after the murder mystery. That would be a good

opportunity in which to grab gear which could be used on the hypothetical high-mobility build (I had a specific spear in mind which could create columns of wind and boost the user's momentum).

I returned to Kenny's place for an hour before the deadline for the quest had elapsed. He greeted me as I came in. I nodded in return, quickly ascending the staircase upward. And—

I was stopped by a girl standing at the top of the staircase, bathed in the unlit shadow of the upstairs. She had jet-black hair, and her body was wrapped in bandages below the cloth shift she wore. Her eyes were completely, sheerly apathetic.

Arelis Auditore—the girl I had watched telefrag herself on the battlefield.

"Hey," she said after a second of waiting between the two of us. "So you were at the ants, right. Inside of the gate."

I paused, and then nodded. "Yeah. You sort of saved me. I mean with the ant that was bit—"

"I don't care," she interrupted me, shifting on one heel. The slight movement caused her body to wobble and face to twist, and she coughed.

Huh?

"... I don't want you to tell anyone about what happened, and don't attach it to my name either." Her mouth grew into a thin line. "You know who I am, obviously. Everyone does."

Literally no one did. I was cheating with my isekai hack powers.

"You're Arelis," I said.

She tilted her head. Her linelike mouth curved upward at the corners, and she expressed a slight amount of enjoyment from that smile. It came off as cruel, almost; Arelis had been written in a comically unsympathetic way in the server, but I'd never really clocked how... really unfun as a person she was to be around.

"Arelis Auditore," she finally said. "I'll be the queen of this world too, before long. Hm. That's all I needed. We have an agreement."

And she retreated back into the room which Kenny had apparently given to her.

She's delusional.

They sat in a circular formation.

Seven suspects, a junior detective (though apparently still a wayfarer), a boy with a wrapped arm, and Wyland himself.

There was a blonde-haired maid, a brown-haired man in a soldier's uniform, a long-eared elf diplomat, male, a Daedalian priest with straight-combed brown hair and an ornate uniform, and two blonde women who looked eerily similar, like cousins.

And Wyland stood, a man in a suit of armor (which did not betray his lack of a head, due to the false helmet which itself was

possessed by a flame that illuminated the eyes) like a bulwark. Against what?

... Truthfully speaking, after that brief scuffle with the ants, Wyland had not found himself in future troubles, not those that required combat. While he was sure they would come, they were not yet here, and, once more truthfully speaking, Wyland was really getting bored of not having to *fight* something.

Call him a battle-hungry adrenaline junkie, he supposed, but it was the truth—not that he would admit it. It helped him, in a way, to have something to rail and fight against, and soothed his itchy, furious mind. In the same way that manual labor did, really.

The junior detective beside him cleared her throat. She had shock-white hair and blueish eyes, with a great *animation* to them unusual for someone under the employ of the government, at least in Wyland's limited experience as a porter.

"Well. I want to make sure all of you are... situated as you'd like... comfortable, and all. So if anyone needs refreshments or the likes, feel free to ask me. In the meantime, since our wayfarers are here, we can begin! Let's start with introductions."

She placed a hand on her chest. "I am Shan Chao. Human. Twenty-four. Wayfarer, specializin' in detective wor *k* ." She ended the word with a light click of the *k*.

I eyed the other nine people in sequence suspiciously as Shan spoke. And I eyed Shan, the penultimate one, the most. I hated this worldbuilding, personally, on a *logical* level, though it was fun.

(How did this place run with such a... gig economy approach to it all? Having wayfarers do *literally everything* was cool for lore in a roleplay server but it started to fall apart when it came to how it'd logically function.)

(My best guess was that it was all very tenuously held in place by the verification system/a culture of honor on the job. But that seemed like such a *cop-out,* that people stop being people and trying to game the system and do bad things if they're taught that's wrong.)

(If that were the case, wouldn't there be no crime in the world I left? I supposed that our society *did* glorify a culture of dishonor to a degree, but... still, this didn't sit right with me, and read to me as unrealistic and supported by the 'game.' It lent credence to the thought that maybe this world was made for me to ... to be *isekai'd* in, rather than being a real world in and of itself, but that seemed arrogant, and logically speaking the dream-skewer was a... *somewhat* valid theory as to how the isekai happened in the first place.)

(It didn't explain my abnormal porting condition, lacking an attribute but having a gate, and having no ability.)

Shan stopped talking, and looked to me. I was between her and Wyland; the only of the wayfarers to be sitting on the graciously-offered sofa—I would be damned if I didn't rest my aching legs while I had the opportunity.

An awkward silence passed before I realized I should speak. I jumped a little bit. Then I cleared my throat.

"I'm,"

I stopped and realized I had no name. *I've never introduced myself; not even to Kenny.*

I wasn't ready to pick one, either.

"I don't have a name, not one that I've picked, at least. So call me what you please. Wayfarer is fine, if you must address me. Anyway. I'm a porter, with a temporary wayfarer license. I hope I can be of help," I said, ending with a bright nod.

Wyland began to speak immediately after I concluded, in his own slightly distorted (and compressed as if it came from a modern-day speaker) voice. "And I am Wyland Oaklynn Wayfinder. Porter, as well, and registered within the mid-forties i-factor range."

i-factor, originally on in my worldbuilding, was... something that I'd stolen from a webfiction, essentially representing the 'impact factor' a given weapon/person/object held on the world. The wayfarer's guilds (because of course those existed) evaluated the power of wayfarers to give them a rating (and therefore a maximum recommended quest level they could undertake).

I'd be in the low teens of i-factor range. As a base human, there wasn't much power I held over the world at all. (Though I guess if you considered my knowledge of the future, that'd be enough to massively catapult me upward in i-factor—but I wasn't gonna reveal something like that just yet.)

This was a boring monologue though and as such I resolved to abandon it. "Well," I said brightly. "Now for you seven, hm? Right to left."

Shan glanced at me but my expression did not waver. *Rushing?* I could hear her as if I were a telepath.

The rightmost girl jumped. She was young, definitely a child, with blonde hair that fell down in locks. She wore a maid's outfit —a French maid outfit—and stood rather timidly. Her posture was *terrible*.

"Um. I guess I'll go first?" She looked around. No one gave any indication she should stop. "... Okay. I'm Aira." She stopped.

I tilted my head. "Maid of the murdered guy. I presume. Well. One second, Aira, I'll get to you. Miss Shan!" I said her name rather sharply, and she glanced at me once more. "Will you permit me to take charge? You are the most experienced of us here when it comes to investigation, I presume, but I would like to try my luck. Call it... job experience?"

She shrugged. "Go ahead. We're here all day."

"Alright. One more thing; would you tell me some details on the case. Namely: type of wound on corpse, where was the wound, time of death, who lived with the victim," I parroted off the questions in the same way the player who I had replaced did. Same questions, same form, though slightly rushed to get everything on course.

She started. "Um, deep blunt wound to the back of the skull, with the instrument coming downward from an upper area, between ten-thirty PM and two-thirty AM, her, him," she pointed at a tall blonde woman and one who was obviously her son by virtue of resemblance, "her," and here she pointed at the maid.

"Thanks, that's all I needed to know," I replied drily. "Sorry for the disturbance, Aira, I'll get to you now. Relate your evening in as much detail as you can. With times, please. And tell us your attribute and ability, if any."

"Right... okay. You're right that I'm a maid. ... So, so all day until two in the morning I was cleaning and doing my duties, you know, helping with the party, and all of that, and it was somewhere around one-thirty I left, because housing takes a while to walk to even though it's on the grounds. Um, around one, I think, I was told not to come in to Tobias's room." She stopped, and then started to clarify: "By Tobias. He was awake and alive, and I knocked, and he said not to come in."

She stopped. And then: "Attribute-wise, I'm just a base fire gate, and I don't have an ability grown."

I nodded. "Thank you. I'll come back to you in a moment. Now."

Shan glanced at the armored knight, Wyland, and then at the brown-haired traveler, Wayfarer. He was a nondescript man, who carried himself with an air of comfortability and quiet... pseudo-intellectualism, perhaps. It seemed obvious he was just... doing a lot of things for show, asking questions that he *perhaps* already knew the answer to.

Obviously it followed he knew more than he should've. But with his eagerness to hop forward it didn't quite track that he was connected to the details of the case. She noted his behavior here.

She steepled her hands. Much like a certain terrible father from a well-known anime.

Wayfarer turned to Wyland. Shan noted then that they both had Ws at the beginnings of their names. *If this were a story, it would be prime fodder for readers to complain about the author having named their characters with negligence.*

He, being Wayfarer, opened his mouth, preparing to speak. She noted this. Speaking was, historically and intellectually speaking, the action by which a lie was told or incriminating information was accidentally revealed.

No. She was getting too far into the details. She had to pay attention to the big picture… *Gah, Wayfarer… you dirty, suspicious liar.*

"Wyland, would you please go into the victim's room? It's connected to the lounge and down the hallway. I'd like you to confirm with your mana sense whether or not there are attributes on the corpse. We'll wait here until you're done."

What is he doing? It was chaotic, the way he handled the investigation: first questioning then out of the blue asking Wyland to investigate the murder area. It was like…

Wyland shifted, standing up, and his armor nodded—it was frustrating being unable to read his face to tell what he thought. I smiled genially at him, and leaned back, feeling like a right mastermind. While he moved to the other room, I waited.

Every suspect in the room shifted uncomfortably. The maid, the two women, the soldier, the elf, the priest.

Wyland returned a moment later. "Fire," he said. "And—" But I stopped him with a wave.

Aira immediately jumped to defend herself, and I held out my hand. "Hah. No, you don't have to say anything."

The blonde-haired woman next to her turned with shock and fury.

Shan realized it.

It was like he was trying to speedrun through investigation of a crime he already knew the answer to, but needed to rotely collect the information necessary to solve it in order to not appear suspicious.

Wayfarer smiled. But it was brief.

"Wyland, with your *wall-piercing* mana sight, what else did you see?"

How does that boy know, Wyland thought.

How does that boy know what capabilities Wyland holds, Shan thought.

In Wyland's hand appeared a bloodstained candlestick, with an implement at the top of mostrite—a metal which could absorb a specific magic attribute and expel its effects when physically or energetically agitated. But he was silent, and I felt his overbearing gaze come down on me. I had gone a bit too far a bit too fast, heh...

"Aira is innocent," I stated calmly. "She is bright enough not to use something that matches her attribute as a murder weapon. And using such—a fire-mostrite-tipped candlestick—is evidently intentional, and evidence of framing. That's her cleared."

The priest started. "That doesn't clear her at all," he protested, with a gravely voice, likely torn up from years of public speaking. "She could have anticipated this response."

"She's too short," I replied instantly. "The wound on the corpse came from an upward angle, as Shan said. Aira is small, and Tobias was a medium-height man. Plus, you're missing motive, and we haven't even examined the case from a psychological angle. Aira has no motive to kill the man who employed her, and we see her in front of us, no? If we're going by who's collected, any of you seem more comfortable in this room than *her*. Finally, physically, if Aira really had anticipated this, she wouldn't have put the candlestick where it was: under the bed."

Shan pounced. She tilted her head, turning it to the left to stare at me.

"How do y*ou* know where the candlestick was placed?"

I paused. She kept going.

"There it is. This whole thing's been *sooo* suspicious. Like you've been rushing through it all, huh? You didn't even attempt to get the girl an alibi, and you're hopping immediately to trying to prove her innocent so you don't have to work too hard to debate through the middle section of the interview, *huh? ... Alrighty then,* tell us whatcha know. The whole thing."

She tilted her head.

"If you don't know it through some benign, normal, *fabulous,* alibific *reason,* then we'll have to assume, won't we?"

Aira stared at me.

"You killed Master Ruceumonte," she said.

004 / Killing in the City 3 (Watashi dekinai dekinai dekinai ko~)

I guess, up until this point, I hadn't been treating it all as fully "real." Even though I had made the resolution to treat it (it being my situation) like its own universe, rather than a game, I had really just focused on getting to the next yellow Story Quest waypoint, and tuned out of the rest.

I was a big procrastinator, *last* life. And on top of that, when I did do stuff, I really always put the minimum level of effort possible into it. I guess that had become my mindset.

Here I didn't even do the minimum. I expected that I'd scrape by within the margins of excellency like I always did, without having to put in real effort. And—I wasn't really saying that I was *excellent,* you know, more that the majority of what I had to do in life, excepting a few things from later high school, it was easy? It was easy to pass, to get high Bs and low As.

Early on in high school, in my freshman year, I had cheated on a class my family paid a lot for, and I got caught. It was a language class, an expensive one, the type that makes your transcript infinitely more valuable.

I was removed from the class immediately. Given no second chance. It was deserved, I was a stupid kid and shouldn't have done it. It was my first experience with the 'real' world.

Why'd I cheat at all? Was it laziness? Could I not do the material?

I don't know. It was a combination of everything.

But I was stupid. That's what—that's what *this* reminds me of. I didn't invest myself, I rushed unnecessarily because I wanted to get it over with, I didn't think of a plan, I suffered and looked stupid and revealed information unnecessarily because of it. Maybe this is a learning moment. Maybe, like always, I'll just—just screw up again.

Like always.

And, really, this feels so *stupid* to write. To put on the page. Melodramatic, I guess, self-aggrandizing, egotistical. Maybe there's a stigma where you can't show weakness, or you can't show it frequently, or you can't stick yourself in your self-pity and just... It's that one, the self-pity, and I know it's annoying, I do it on *reflex* at this point.

...It's fine. You're here to read the action, aren't you? Not about my problems. You want to know what happened. I'm not good at this, you know, relating stuff, you should just consult your models for *them* if you want to know what they thought... mm.

...

You want to know how it went after that.

Alibific isn't a word, you made it up, I thought. It was a ridiculous word to be focusing on in the heat of the matter, but something had to distract me from the total screwup I'd just made. I went too fast and committed the sin of too many authors—I did not give the readers (Shan) all information relevant to the investigation.

"I literally tried to get you an alibi," I protested, cocking my head at the maid. "It would've been easier to frame you if I killed him! And how would I even get in? The house is proofed, isn't it?"

That seemed to stymy Aira's accusing finger. "And, and why would I even kill him? I'm a random porter!"

With her index finger, Shan pushed her glasses slightly up the bridge of her nose. Their lenses glinted white, shining a ray of sunlight coincidentally coming in through one of the broad manor windows onto my face. *How does one even do that?*

She chuckled.

"Well, then, I suppose we're at an impasse, aren't we? You can't have killed him with the candlestick, unless you were secretly some sort of high-level Spatial archmage. You're not a high-level Spatial archmage, are you?"

I shook my head, and opened my mouth to respond:

But Shan cut me off. " Weeeell then. Well well well, hm ?" She smiled. "How did you know about the candlestick; how do you know about proofing as a porter—it's not a subject that comes often, and how did you know what Wyland's powers were."

Everyone's eyes were trained on me. Detective, dullahan, maid, wife, wife-doppelganger, priest, elf, and soldier.

I had to think.

If I reply that I have some sort of power allowing me to skim information off the minds of others. Shan could ask me to verify, by telling her what she was thinking, so I'd have to guess... or I could justify it like that character from a superhero

webnovel I read, and tell her that I can't justify it because it's essentially DM fiat. God is giving me the information. Shan could say that I have no proof, but then Occam's Razor would apply. It would be a neat and tidy resolution. Then I can run away and see none of them ever again.

I want to make friends with Wyland. Looking back, I realize that this is a terrible start. Horrible. No good at all. But that's fine! That's good! I rushed, but I can turn this around. But making friends with Wyland is the big thing stopping me from outright going and lying; something *will happen and it'll bite me later.*

Second option: I can pretend that in the case of my porting I was given an overview of what will happen for the next indeterminable amount of time. This is too early for them to know that it's particularly weird—well, I guess it's weird regardless, it's foresight, *but more importantly I DON'T WANT TO TIP MY HAND.*

"Are you going to. Respond ...?"

"Give him a second, he's thinking of the next lie to feed us," Aira said. Nasty little girl. Next time I won't try and give you an alibi.

Next time I won't be hasty. Next time I'll be normal. Let this work.

"Okay," I said carefully. "So, let me explain, and then we get back to the investigation." Shan opened her mouth, but I cut her off, "As long as I didn't kill Tobias Ruceumonte and my explanation is satisfactory."

I shifted, uncomfortable. My hand hurt and it was screwing up my ability to make decisions. But I began.

Wayfarer launched into his dialogue. "I made a deal with a Carni-Cervidae to sell off my ability and attribute in exchange for limited knowledge of the probable futures of important people in the world based on current probability modeling, in this case Wyland. I wasn't factored into any of the futures. But, anyway, this came with a *detailed* overview of what would happen on the object level in the lives of each figures. I wanted to get close to Wyland in order that he could bring me to Wren, another figure whose life I was given the opportunity to survey, so that she could heal my arm. To do so I wanted to solve the case single-handedly to grind up, er, to impress him."

Shan observed him. He spoke rapidly, like he was bursting to get the words out. It didn't give Shan the impression of a straight liar, but she knew Wayfarer was manipulative. And evil. And another pejorative descriptive adjective, she couldn't think of the word right now but it was on the tip of her tongue, come on...

"That seems like a rather one-sided deal," Wyland interjected. "Favored towards you."

Wayfarer paused. "What would it cost the Cervidae? Knowledge it already had? It got a chunk of my willpower and magic ability, and it lost nothing at all."

Shan spoke softly. "How did you contact the Cervidae, as a porter?"

"I met him at a bar," Wayfarer instantly replied.

No one dared to talk. Shan realized this was because they were expecting her to carry on the interrogation. She could play it off

though. She stared at Wayfarer from the adjacent chair, unblinking.

Totally still.

His expression didn't change.

"That's ridiculous," the wife's doppelganger said. Shan held up a hand.

It's super ridiculous. I don't want to be an idiot, to be the character a story relies on for plot movement out of their stupidity. Irrational, pointlessly doing things without a reason with which to do them. That means I'm at an impasse.

If I accept Wayfarer's words at face value, I'm stupid. It would mean that I'm accepting them because there's too much lie in his lies for them to be false.

If I say "no, you're lying," it means that we're at an impasse. The explanation Wayfarer gives is unprovable…

No it isn't.

No one doesn't have an attribute, not unless something's horribly wrong with them. And no one doesn't have an ability. That itself isn't a thing, maybe it's not grown or usable, but everyone has one seeded. I know what I'll do.

"Wyland," Shan finally said. "Would you use your mana sense to see what attribute is inside Wayfarer's gate?"

Wayfarer smiled.

Crap, Shan thought.

I am saved.

... But, I have to remember that I can't think of this as a game. I have to remind myself. I'm not gonna be saved.

I can't screw up.

"Attributeless," Wyland said to Shan, after a few seconds of stillness. "Not Attributeless, I mean, actually attributeless. No magic."

Stupid magic system.

I leaned back, but I was silent, and my rapidly beating heart didn't cease its movement.

It'd be a good time to explain the context, I guess. Carni-Cervidae were a worldbuilding detail which participated mostly in the background of the server arcs proper, but it became evident they were really moving the plot and orchestrating the events of the main storyline as it went. They were like... genies, maybe, or like those cabbits from that one magical girl show. They could use their own energy, which they had a lot of due to being ancient, to make binding contracts and buy and sell things from people who made deals or lost games with them. Another comparison point was the webnovel (written by the author of an extremely popular time-loop fic) in which the main character got the power of buying and selling things conceptually.

(I didn't really like the fic. I wouldn't recommend it, anyway. It had interesting ideas, but was couched in a very boring demon-wave-pseudo-isekai concept (like that one about the hero with the shield), and the main character felt like a prototype for the time loop novel that came later. Which I also didn't like.)

Shan inhaled, obviously thinking.

To be able to dialogue with these people—not even to outwit them, just to be able to interact—I couldn't treat them like scripted NPCs. I was kind of avoiding thinking about what they were thinking, and how that worked, like if they thought how I wrote them, or…

I'm going to go on a tangent. All of the six suspects were mine. My little Frankensteins. I created life, I knew them, but I didn't know them *intimately,* it was this feeling that I can't … I don't know if I can elaborate on it, but it was there…! They were mine, I created them using my brain, and now they are real, but since I never thought of how they thought, how they'd work, I only showed their surface level, I didn't touch them all with the hand of God…

I was realizing things I had not realized before, *could* not realize before—how truly dislikable Aira was, how each didn't *truly seem* like a killer. Just… horrible people in horrible little worlds.

But don't mistake intellectual stimulation for caring proper.

I had read a novel that was like a fanfiction of a thing that didn't exist. Its prose was odd, its dialogue stilted—it was really unique. The main character was a speedrunner for this edgy, grimdark, over-the-top postapocalyptic anime world, and he got transmigrated into the video game world he speedran. In the novel, he said he felt comfortable around these characters, that they were his comfort in the dark time of his life and so therefore even if they hated him, he cared for them.

I didn't care about Aira. Or the rest. I didn't care about the Ruceumontes.

Maybe intellectually, sure.

Maybe I felt a connection, maybe it felt interesting emotionally and intellectually to think about how they were formed from my flesh as I was formed from the flesh of my mother and she was formed of the flesh of her own, just as this *world* was formed from my flesh, just as all I created was—is the metaphor tired yet?

Regardless.

I couldn't feel anything about them. They gave me no comfort. They were vile, even, every person in the room I knew something about them that I hated, the soldier the only exception. Maybe Aira was the most unpleasant externally, but that was simply her defining trait which illustrated her own fall from grace.

The son: Juthir Ruceumonte. A manipulative sociopath.

The priest: Fr. Parthin. A masterminding liar.

The elf: Halaran Elokar. Leader of a genocidal tribe, complicit in that tribe's crimes.

The doppelganger: Iira Kayarun. Complicit in adultery.

The wife: Lhyse Ruceumonte. An idiot, manipulated into crime.

Even the victim himself was a horrible person. An adulterous man who distanced himself from his family, abused his maid—it was *cartoonish* how vile everyone was.

On the page it was different. I could like them all. But here, seeing them, knowing them, I couldn't bring myself to care. They were so dysfunctional, so dislikable, so evident in their sins yet pretending in innocence.

Aira, who found villains easily, and ached to stand atop someone 'evil' alongside someone 'good.' Because her master had hurt her.

The son Juthir, whose face was set in an easy and light smile. His chin always tilted up. Unbothered at the death of his father; who would rather sell his mother than face culpability for any hypothetical crime of his.

The priest Parthin, who lied by omission, and used silence as a weapon.

The elf Halaran, whose demeanor was cheery, yet justified the crimes of his people in private—they had it coming, he said.

And others.

None of them cared for anyone besides themselves. That was their flaw, that was the whole point of the quest, the points of the characters—as a point, as a Greek tragedy, it *worked,* but as people, all it did was make me *sick*.

Of these NPCs, of all of those who were not Wyland nor I, *only* Shan was a mystery to me. So I guess only she made me want to engage, even here. No one had made her. She was a person, rather than a construct-given-life. ... No, that's the harmful way of thinking that I've told myself not to facilitate—!

... Then I would focus.

Shan was thinking on whether or not to trust me. My story was unbelievable, yet I knew it could have grounds in reality— *later*. The Carni-Cervidae I spoke of, one who called himself 'Wishmaster,' he did appear for the first time in public at a bar. In months from now, but regardless.

Perhaps she was thinking of another te—

"Wayfarer," she said. Her eyes behind her glasses stared at me unblinking even in the spring rays of sun.

"Are you lying?"

"No," I lied. Fervency—I tried to instill it within my gaze. I tried to feel that emotion—but all I felt was rot. You see: I was a *liar,* last life and in this life both.

I lied so, so much. To my parents, to my friends, about stupid things, because like Aira I felt I had 'power' over them. What did they do to me?

Here, I could justify, I could rationalize, but what was the point of that? I lied to get out of my problems, still. And I would placate myself by telling myself that it would all return to nothing, *komm, süsser tod* —Ashes to ashes, dust to dust. That it'd all be over, that I wouldn't know them later! But what would that matter!

I'm telling, rather than showing, aren't I? I'm not a very good author. Bear with me.

"Okay." Shan smiled. "I'll believe your story, then. If you lied, I'll find out. But... I believe you, and I'll believe you until incontrovertible evidence comes up that you didn't tell the truth."

With a small smile, she looked back at the other eight people in the room.

"Then there's only one thing we have to do here. It's the thing we came to do. I've done it many times before."

She closed her eyes.

"It's time to catch the killer."

---

author's note

Another chapter should be published at the regular time. I split it for the sake of the cliffhanger.

https://discord.gg/xjQCr4cpW4

005 / Killing in the City 4 (Anew, a phoenix.)

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author's note

Summary

I hope you guys like it

In retrospect, I'm unsure about this chapter, but I'm posting it anyway for the sake of keeping the fic going. They say "You're always your own worse critic" and I've never felt that more than in this work

Notes

=== Dramatis Personae ===

IN REAL LIFE:

TZUTZUTZU: Our belaboring protagonist's online username, and the owner of the Labyrinth server.

STELLAR: The co-owner of the server. The one who sent **TZUTZUTZU** the quiz.

QUARTZ: A co-owner of the server.

TSUCHI: A GM on the server. Nominally the one who created the quiz.

RAVENLOFT: The prior owner of the server, who left after a debate on server reworks.

VOID: A friend of Ravenloft, who played **KENNY.**

SHIRO: A now-inactive GM on the server, who played **WREN.**

IN THE LABYRINTH:

WAYFARER: The egomaniac himself, our protagonist.

KENNY: The one who gave **WAYFARER** a home.

WYLAND: A player character who comes along with **WAYFARER** on a quest.

ARELIS: Elf who telefragged herself and swore **WAYFARER** to secrecy about the incident.

ARC:

SHAN: White hair, glasses, uses underlines, a telltale 'important character.' Also, a detective.

JUTHIR: The heir.

IIRA: The prostitute.

LHYSE: The wife.

AIRA: The maid.

HALARAN: The elf.

PARTHIN: The priest.

KANNIR: The best friend.

TOBIAS: The victim.

Now, that's out of the way.

"I'll take it from here," Shan said. Wayfarer seemed like he wanted to say something—he didn't speak up, so Shan didn't ask. According to his story, Wayfarer *almost definitely* knew the result of the interrogation, and who was the murderer; it

tracked with his attempt to quickly set up an alibi for Aira. Though, really, it took more time to go through this business than it would've to question the suspects normally...

Anyway, even if Wayfarer knew the result, and who was the killer, Shan didn't feel comfortable with asking him about it, nor with trusting him—though she had made a point of saying she would, in a lot of ways that statement was really just words.

It was kind of a tepid statement. Shan would, however, have to justify who she decided to arrest, and asking Wayfarer wouldn't be a good enough justification. On top of that...

She did this job because she loved it, she supposed, and just asking would defeat the point, as stupid and journeyist as it came off as.

Anyway, judging by how suddenly uncomfortable Wayfarer looked—sitting up straighter, with eyes that flitted between personages quicker, eyelids opened wider and pupils tinier—he was either lying or not telling the whole truth. Such was supported by what information blocks he had, and the charge she had spent to view their signatures.

'Trust but verify'—really more like 'never trust.'

"First, everyone's names and relation to the victim," Shan said. She smiled, genially: her own *genial smile* felt far less smug than Wayfarer's *genial smile*; so she believed, anyway. "We have you already, Aira. So let's go right to left."

The first blonde-haired woman, expensive Ruceumonte-green clothing—she believed it was the suspect's wife—spoke up.

"Call me Lhyse Ruceumonte. I was Tobias' wife—I—"

Shan tilted her head a bit at the woman's rapid speech. "Just names and relation. Now you."

The next response came from the suspect to the left of Lhyse. Another blonde-haired woman, wearing a silk shift like she'd gotten out of bed and immediately came here.

Mmm. They're like cousins. They have different noses, eye colors, and slightly different jawlines, but I could mistake one for the other were they swapped in clothing, moving swiftly, or that type of thing.

I'll keep it in mind.

"Iira Kayarun. I was, mm, a business friend of his."

Lhyse turned, questioningly. "I've never seen you around before, and Tobias never even said your name."

Her doppelganger shrugged. "... Yes, well."

Shan consciously filed this tidbit away, too. "Keep on."

The heir went next, a boy in his late teens. He wore an expensive green suit, had the same blonde hair, and green eyes—he inherited the softer looks of his mother, overall like he was bred to be handsome. And Shan guessed he probably was; rich families could afford safely using Nature magic on the DNA level. On his face was a soft smile, which his eyes absorbed into their totality.

"Juthir Ruceumonte. Son."

He had nothing else to say, and so followed Shan's order.

"Perfect, and now you," Shan said, motioning to the soldier. He wore a navy uniform, with two medals of various levels of honor

on it; his hair was coarse, short, and brown, and his demeanor was the most uncomfortable in the room. He avoided Shan's gaze till she set her eyes on him, and he realized he should meet her stare, but even then he still moved as if he wanted to snap the line of sight.

"Mm. I am Kannir Tals... I was his best friend for some years," and here he looked away.

Shan remembered this. "Okay, finally, the elf in the room," she said, enthusiastically turning to the final suspect:

"Halaran Elokar," the elf replied graciously, smoothly, even. "Visiting emissary, here to develop an economic deal with House Ruceumonte."

The Ruceumontes have a small hand in weaponry sales, specifically more archaic gunpowder weapons.

Shan nodded. "Priest?"

"Father Parthin. Old family friend."

"Okay. Now we all know each other, right? Well. Well well well—I'm going to attempt to–to *set* the scene, so to speak. It's the night of the killing. A party is set up, it's to celebrate the beginning of negotiations between elven blocking of trade. Drinks are being handed out. The servants have left, for it is late, and only Aira remains, due to the nature of her contract." Shan paused. Her voice swirled. Injected into it was a feeling evocative.

"The house is proofed. Well-proofed, too. There is no arcane way nor mundane way to get in, without slipping physically through, which would trigger the alarms which themselves are shielded by the proofs."

Her smile grew, internal, external, both. Standing in a field of flowers—sitting in a room boarded with wood.

"One of six people finds Tobias late at night, and sometime in the three-hour span after ten-thirty and before two-thirty, bashes his head, perhaps in his room, in with a candlestick they then threw under the bed. And now we're here, and all six possible people who could have done it are gathered here in this room. We have Aira's story already—err, maid, left at one-thirty, arrived home at two, Tobias alive at one."

Shan swept her gaze across the room. It alighted upon Lhyse. But her eyes kept crawling across the walls, breaking the sparse second of eye contact which she had made.

"I'm sorry, I'm thinking, it takes a lot of spoons to be able to sort everything out mentally... Miss Ruceumonte? I want you to describe your night."

Lhyse paused, on the spot. *Should've expected it: you're in the right-to-left order already established, hm?*

Lhyse had fairly standard information blocks; as did everyone in the room with the sole exceptions being Wayfarer (with the highest amount of blocks by far) and Wyland (who had about half).

This did imply Lhyse was in fact human; not that that was in question but it was always good to know! Shan always said to look on the bright side of things; if your house burned down at least you were alive, if you lost all your money at least you were alive, if someone stabbed you a lot at least you were alive unless you weren't at that point, and then at least you were dead (or something of the like, Shan would workshop that) so you

wouldn't have to pay for getting an operation done with healing magic?

The metaphor slightly falls apart with higher-stakes scenarios, but look on the bright side.

Anyway, with Lhyse not seemingly hiding some quite impressive knowledge of the universe et al, that meant Shan would be forced to use one of her activations should she wish to verify anything Lhyse said with her Angelic Eye.

Lhyse started before Shan was done monologuing. *This infringes upon my flow.*

"First came the party. Until, hhhh... let's say ten-thirty, Halaran and I sat and chatted with my husband. He went to bed, and we stayed out. I retired at eleven P.M."

She stopped. What information blocks had entered Shan's head were sparse, not indicative of a lie nor withheld information, yet she did doubt this overview was fully itself indicative of what had happened on Lhyse's side that night.

As she was about to turn to Iira, the doppelganger—

"She lied," Iira said accusingly, staring at Lhyse; whose upturned chin—in superiority!—gave no respect toward the other woman. Miss Ruceumonte refused to make even eye contact with her lookalike.

The room, which was previously silent, drew an inward breath. Shan raised a finger to her lips as Iira was about to elaborate. "It's your turn next. So wait until I call on you, 'kay?"

She smiled. Iira was silent, but she gritted her teeth.

"Thank you. Now, Miss... um, Kayarun? Would you tell us about your night?"

"I wasn't even *in* the house. I was going over, for one of me and To—Mister Ruceumonte's meetings, scheduled to be around midnight," (and breathlessly: "we had made the plans early in the day, you see,") "and at the front door *she* locked me out."

Shan paused. "Alright ... Am I missing something? Why would she lock you out? Is there a possibility you're lying?"

Wayfarer gulped.

Wyland avoided eye contact. "I will try to... phrase this in a way that is not offensive. She is a woman, who looks like... a younger version of the master's wife, and in the nighttime came to the house of a wealthy man, and phrased her sojourns as business meetings, eh..."

Shan paused.

Wayfarer buried his face in his hands.

Iira wryly grimaced.

Lhyse had quit the superior smile, and stared at her lookalike with more intensity in her eyes than she had shown in the whole of the interrogation.

It clicked with Shan. She blushed and looked down. And then stammered. And choked.

"Ah—Ah, okay–well—n-ot to say—isn't that *somewhat* illegal—? —Do I have to–?"

Wayfarer kept hiding his face, whether sobbing or fake-sobbing, or even, most dreadful of the options, laughing. "It was made

legal with the Yellow Card act of nine ninety three," he said. "You're—" he drew a breath inward, and it was still unclear to Shan what emotion he felt (she suspected second-hand embarrassment, but the lack of clarity frustrated her), which made her somehow upset—he continued regardless: "A bit old to be so flustered, right? Like an adult…?"

Shan cleared her throat, brushing back her hair, and yet she stared downward still. *Recover, Shan! Recover!* The little imp on her shoulder cheered her on. "Ahem! Moving on… Miss Ruceumonte, do you have anything to say?"

Halaran, the elf, spoke out of turn. *These people are insufferable! Stop breaking turn order!!*

"*Iira is lying*. I saw her whi—"

His fist came down!! A loud noise sounded throughout the room, and Shan jumped despite herself. Her glasses almost slipped down her face, but she caught them on the bridge of her nose with a hand.

Wayfarer lifted his fist—*Doesn't that hurt?*—from the coffee table, which had slightly bounced at the sudden abuse.

"Even I can see the face Miss Shan makes when one of you speaks out of turn. Please, let's, um," (he looked to Shan for assistance, but Shan was looking at him, and so he continued after a beat) "Let's speak only when Miss Shan tells us to," he said, ending in a sprightly manner. That… *sleaze* which Shan felt around him, the *fakeness,* maybe, it remained, but the oily and offputting manner of his words here seemed to lessen, and Shan felt…

Grateful, perhaps?

Wow that hurt. Worth it, though!! Shan was so cute when she was flustered. Watch me fumble... Wow, I'm self-parodical, I'm not making that joke again, even to myself...

Shan took a breath. SHE HAD TO STEADY HERSELF.

"Mmmmh. Mhm. Mhm. Okay. Well. Um, where were we? Miss Ruceumonte...?"

Lhyse's face didn't change at all. Everyone watched, expectant.

"Iira is lying," she replied.

Wayfarer coughed.

Shan nodded. "Why? Explicitly, I mean. I would like to cut down on any needless assumptions."

"I had retired and was asleep for the night. As such I could not have been awake at midnight," Lhyse replied primly and precisely.

Shan nodded once more. Nodded furiously, habitually: she had to steady the glasses on her nose to be able to nod at such a rate, at such power as she nodded at! "Kay, thanks. Halaran, tell us why Iira is lying, from your point of view?"

With a slight smile Halaran began. "I saw Iira in the hallways at around one-fifteen. I am an elf; we have limited vision in the dark, and it allowed me to make out her face."

Shan clicked her tongue. *Halaran could have reason to deceive me if he and Lhyse were friends. They drank together, that's a thing friends do, right? Perhaps he's lying completely to give*

Lhyse a better alibi. The weak point in any case does rest on Iira, as the one person here without an alibi.

But then if Iira's story turns out to be true, and she gets more evidence in favor of her, the alibi instead reverse-confirms suspicion on Lhyse and Halaran's fronts. Why would they need to gain a better alibi than simply the truth? Lying to a prosecutor itself is a crime, too... I should have brought my clipboard! I was arrogant... !!

...Shit. I should've used an activation when Lhyse gave her story, to check its signature, and then compare against what Halaran just gave me, to see if they're aligned or if one of the two is mistaken—probably Halaran, if I had to guess. There's no use dwelling on it...and I only have four— maybe five— charges left after using one on Wayfarer. Do I spend a charge here? I could get Lhyse to restate her story.

I'll do it. No use hoarding.

Her left eye glinted white; it singled out the now unmasked *feeling* attached to the information she had just consumed; it matched this feeling with the feeling inside one of Halaran's information blocks, a match. Halaran was somewhat trustworthy, but she'd have to verify Lhyse next.

"Kay, understood. No—"

Iira started—her eyes pinpricks of alarm: "Are you really going to—"

"Am I gonna have to do this every time?" Wayfarer said. Loudly. Louder than he needed to say it. "Shan tells you to speak, you speak. She's the one leading the investigation, and she'll get it

sorted out. She's just collecting what people have to say! Is it hard to understand!"

I lied. I never fumble.

Shan said in response, first mutely: "Ah," Shan said in response, now tepidly: "Yes, thank you, that was what I was going to say," *He's playing with me!!! I am prey to his predator!*

But, Shan recovered—she spoke in a flood: "Hhhh. Okay, investigation, right? Right? Yes, that's what we're still doing, okay, next person down the line, Juthir, please rise, we pray tell us about your night!"

The heir nodded. "I do not drink, so obviously, I avoided the party. I read in my room, until around... eleven-thirty, when father called me into his room. We talked for some time about what I'd have to do as the heir. We talk sometimes, about that, and only that, and..." With a slight second of silence, Juthir continued. "Regardless. I went to bed at midnight, having finished the book I read."

"What book?" Shan cocked her head.

Juthir nodded his head vaguely. "*History of the Red Seal Act*. Like the wax stamp, not the animal."

"What's the Red Seal Act," Shan pushed.

"I can't see why it's relevant," Juthir said after a pause. "But it's a decree that allows the government to censor published materials for the sake of public safety."

That's less relevant than I had been hoping.

Wayfarer snorted. Shan had not a clue why; she gave him a questioning look but he didn't say anything.

"Um, interesting. Did you just read it out of interest?"

"I'm an avid reader and armchair historian."

Shan made a note of this. *I doubt the kid was connected. He seems genuine thus far and hasn't given indication of being suspicious—unlike Lhyse, who is my number one suspect.*

I've been put off balance so far. I need to finish the interrogations—then I reclaim the lead.

Aira raised her hand—the maid had been silent for so long Shan had almost forgotten she existed. "I can second his story—! Juthir reads *super* advanced stuff, all about history and law."

Wayfarer seemed about to speak, his eyes narrow. Shan held up a hand. "That one was fine! Not a disturbance! It's more the argumentative ones! In the future, dear, please, um, wait until I call on you? Yeah..."

She inhaled. "Right. This is my investigation. Aira, Lhyse, Iira, Juthir, that's who we've done? That means that it's the father's turn and the elf, Mister Elokar."

The priest nodded. He was a plain man, and his face was creased with thick wrinkles that made him look older than he likely was—judging by the scant grey hairs.

"My story," he began, "is the shortest of them all. I left before the party began, at nine. I was not in the house at all."

Shan stared. Wayfarer nodded slightly. "It's true," he said. "Don't waste your breath confirming it with anyone else. Speaking as so—"

Shan's mouth creased in displeasure. Her head snapped into alignment with his, locking gazes. "My investigation. Everyone here, you can attest to this? I assume the proofs support this? So why is he here?"

Wyland spoke softly. "Poison. Could've slipped something into Tobias's drink. But that does fall apart considering someone would've had to bash his skull in. And the autopsy..."

"The autopsy gave no signs of poison," Shan said. Robotically. *We can rule out the priest. Old family friend who... nah. Just him being here, it's... something about the total lack of possibility of it being him itself makes me feel like it was him. I'm gonna check. Justify it as a hunch.*

"You had nothing to do with the murder," Shan began, watching his eyes closely.

"Not at all," the priest replied genially.

Shan used a charge of her Angelic Eye. The most recent information block's signature corresponded to none in the priest's head. Her right eye ringed itself in white once more. Wayfarer caught it this time, she knew by the sudden jolt. *Two charges left.*

...

He had something to do with the murder, but all the proofs suggest he couldn't have. He could've attacked at range, somehow, but he doesn't have a grown ability. Only a seed. And the house is proofed, that's... the proofs stop it, completely.

This case...

Shan shook her head. "Hmm. Alright. Elokar."

"I arrived to the party at... ten, so I recall? Then I talked with Sir Ruceumonte, in peace may he sleep, until he went to the bedroom, at perhaps. Perhaps ten-thirty? Bad with times, sorry. I spent the rest of the night drinking with the miss, until she retired. Then was the rest of the night in quiet commune with my compatriots, until on the way to bed at one-fifteen, I passed by the prostitute in the hall. I thought nothing of it at the time, being more than a little inebriated, but my memory is perfect, I assure you. That is my seeded ability."

Shan kept quiet for the duration of it. "You have an artifact with which you can communicate with elves back home through proofs?"

Halaran nodded. "Here it is. It cannot do anything else, and only turns on for an hour a day."

He tossed her a stone with a glyph on it, marked to resemble an ear. It rested flat in the palm of her hand, a perfect size.

You don't need proof. Low on the list of suspects, anyway.

Shan wordlessly set it down on the coffee table. "Kannir," she said. One word.

"Like Parthin. I wasn't in the house after nine."

Should I use a charge here? Gah...

"Everyone else can confirm? And the proofs read as such...?"

Shan hoped for someone to jump in and say Kannir was lying. No one did.

Then it's time to think.

I still don't have a clear suspect, and there are way too many contradictions. That's fine, though—!! That's what this is for!

... This is the weirdest case I've done kind of ever.

Let's look at what I actually know.

Lhyse and Halaran's stories match. They both claim she retired at 11. But Halaran isn't lying , which means that whatever Lhyse says that Halaran can corroborate must be truthful.

Iira is the weakest link. No real alibi, instantly defensive when contradicted, doesn't even seem sure of her own story.

Juthir is a non-factor. Red herring. But I still don't know why Wayfarer laughed at the Red Seal Act. Why would that be funny? Am I reading too far into things??

Parthin is a problem. The Angelic Eye says he's connected. The proofs say he can't be. Literally every alibi I can think of is in his favor. That means he's involved in a way I don't understand yet. Which is impossible.

Kannir is just like Parthin. Not even in the house. But I didn't spend a charge on him, and I won't till I need to. It's just... weird.

Halaran's "perfect memory" could be bullshit. He's acting like his story is airtight, but if I pushed him on specifics, would he slip? ...But then why would he lie?

I made two mistakes. One , I should've used a charge earlier, when Lhyse and Halaran gave their stories, so I could compare

their signatures instead of second-guessing myself now . Too late for that, so I need to press them instead.

Two , I've been too focused on people—while I need to construct a timeline, I haven't actually looked at the scene.

The candlestick was found under the bed.

How convenient.

If someone just dropped it after the murder, it would be out in the open. But they went through the trouble of hiding it in a stupid, obvious location—hidden nonetheless. That means they wanted it found, but not immediately. Or they didn't care it would be found.

Which itself means it's probably a plant.

...How do I confirm that?

... Finally, Wayfarer is watching me.

I really don't like that.

I've let him control the room too much. Even with him helping me out, or whatever he's trying to do. He knows something.

...No, he knows everything, doesn't he? He already has the answer. He's watching to see if I'll get there too.

He cheated at my own game.

...Fine.

Let's play.

Shan rose to her feet.

Anew, a phoenix.

author's note

Join the discord

https://discord.gg/xjQCr4cpW4

006 / Killing in the City 5 (Blah, blah, blah, politics)

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author's note

Summary

Another setup actionbait chapter, this time seeing Wayfarer's method of solving the crime

Notes

i have edited this chapter a lot, and i'm sorry if that shows

So.

You know who did it, as a result of that *consumption* of what was mothered by me, which your models have been *created* by.

...

So I shall.

Mmm.

This is what happened in the original quest.

It hinged on a kind of terrible twist that wasn't really justified well diegetically. In short, the resemblance between Lhyse and Iira was purely coincidental. Halaran saw Lhyse in the hallways at night, and mistook her for her lookalike. Lhyse was the killer, trying to frame Aira with the Fire-attribute candlestick. Her motive was simple lack of love and want of remarriage and riches. Juthir was a total red herring. Halaran red herring. Iira

red herring. None of them actually had importance except as for exposition machines that did nothing in the murder.

It was probably satisfying to figure out in the server, but as a story I don't think it was particularly well-written.

Obviously, IW, I assumed that the twist carried over. The world had worked the same up to this point.

That's why it was a shock when the thought occurred to me:

Wyland doesn't have his flat-out intent sense that he had in the server, or he's not giving any indication that he does.

In the RP, a feature of the Dullahan subrace was intent sense. Obviously this helped with combat—*a lot,* due to being a nerfed version of future sight, but it also could ruin any sort of roleplay encounter's intrigue scenarios. You couldn't cleverly lie around it, because you'd be intending to lie. It was an instant win button.

Wyland should have been able to instantly solve this quest in *this world*, if we were following all the rules of the original server—in that, we just agreed not to use the *intent* sense part, and replaced it with *truth*sense for the duration of the quest (which was still awful).

So why, here, did Wyland not show his hand? Alternatively, why wasn't he the same Wyland as in the server?

...If this was a standard stations-of-canon affair, all divergences in the plot would occur *as a result* of my actions. No divergences in the setting would exist.

In the original quest, three people signed up.

1. Armada, an unimportant character—she quickly fell out of any sort of relevance in the server. She was conceptually pretty interesting, a bioengineered spellblade murder machine made by the government, but I guess the player had lost motivation for her.

2. Wyland, the one that was here with us.

3. Adara, a white-haired, golden-eyed character with the ability to take the souls of creatures and put them in physical space.

There was also a government investigator assigned to watch over all of the wayfarers.

Here, there were only three people—me, Shan, Wyland—and no government investigator. Would the absence of the investigator count as a divergence in the setting? Maybe Shan was taking responsibility? Maybe she took up both the investigator slot and the wayfarer slot?

One of the original questers would've definitely had to go because of my presence. That much was obvious, but then the structure of everything had to have been changed as a result of Shan, and...

All that was added for sure was a single new question, and whatever derivatives it created: *Are the stations of canon and tenets of the setting unbreakable? Does Wyland still have his intent sense? If so, why isn't he leveraging it? Is he trying to test me?*

What were the other failure points? In other words, where else could my current method of operation fall flat?

If the world didn't work the same, and the tenets of the setting were different, this meant that in turn the NPCs could be

different as well. Which would then mean how I acted shouldn't be based on my knowledge of the server.

The external presentation of the world *was* the same, though. I'd been given no indication that the tenets of the setting would've changed. But... *more* tenets of the setting had obviously been added. Look at the quest board, or how I could talk with any random NPC. Like Shan.

Extrapolating. In the quest, there was never any explicit confirmation that those who were guilty *were* guilty—it fell into chaos and the bad guys went away in chains, quickly suppressed by Wyland et al. And it was a good ending, it was *intended* to be the good ending: they had solved the quest *as I had intended it*.

But...

But something clicked within me: a theory bubbled to the surface. While the world had been consistent up to this point, it remained that it was only operating around *what had already been written* and it had been *avoiding going near points which were only debatably canonical*—that is, *my intended answer to the mystery was* not *necessarily the real one*. This was evident in the quest board system, which had invented new information to justify its existence, either *before* I asked, or *while* I asked.

... In essence, the theory stated the world operated off of a sort of quantum uncertainty principle: anything could have been the objective reality of the server, until and unless it was viewed via an *objective* deciding factor *by me*—whether that was in the world or in the original server.

And this meant that though the external presentation of these facts *was the same*—THE FACTS WHICH I HAD COLLECTED IN THE SAME WAY AS THE PLAYERS (further supporting or

at least not *refuting* my theory)—what could be the truth underneath the interpretation of the presentation *could be different*.

This led to a lot of conclusions: if this theory was correct, the world was possibilistic rather than deterministic (or deterministic-lite, like the real world). The server would be being *interpreted* by something that wasn't me (though our resolution to the quest board system was the same, if the true culprits behind the mystery were different, that would be all necessary proof to assume the theory was correct), and...

And this still didn't help solve the question of Wyland's intent sense.

I had to keep in mind, as well, that the theory was *completely baseless*—it could just as well have been that this world operated in the same way as I had *intended* the original server to work as well rather than being possibilistic, or even deterministic-but-gaps-were-filled-in. There was nothing telling me that my theory was correct, and if anything, Occam's Razor was saying that it was likely the opposite...

But how would Occam's Razor even apply to being transmigrated to a world based off of an RP server? At that point, the simplest option would just be some weird dream-skewer variant of a porting. Off the top of my head, anyway.

And yet if the theory held true it lent credence to the idea that maybe I was the chosen one. The one person who decided whether or not the cat was dead—perished!—or, in fact, alive. And I wanted...

Did I want to believe that? Sure, it felt safe, it felt secure, but it was infinitely creepier, more existentially terrifying—'this world

is completely fake. Manufactured for you. We stitched it together on the fly—you and I both.' *Who is the mother, in that case? The one who had the ideas, or the one who brought it into reality?*

It gave me this feeling, like … walking through a ghost town.

The theory was almost baseless, but I could find a base rather easily, if I wanted to. All I would have to do is prove via questioning someone… someone whose best interest would be to give a truthful 'yes' to something which on the server was a 'no.'

… And 'almost' carried 'almost baseless' hard, because as much as I repeated that sentiment over and over, my theory wasn't truly baseless. It was possible—likely, even—that if this wasn't a dream-skewer-type-isekai, and if, for instance, God really did decide to port me over, he was interpreting the server and the roleplay and lore there. Not anything outside of it. Maybe I was grasping at straws, but…

… If possibilism holds true, am I deciding what is 'true' or not?

That is, what if no one is innocent, and no one is guilty, and the world will simply shift around everything until a plotline emerges? The answer to the murder wouldn't be unknown, it wouldn't exist. *Is this a real world?*

I was spiraling. And I knew I was spiraling, but there was something—something *exciting* about thinking in this way—something about questioning reality like this, almost unfounded, something that really made my brain *tick*—

Would I prove the theory of interpretation?

…

I'm thinking about this too much. I needed to identify all the problems and variables. And I needed to identify the problems resulting in not knowing whether or not the theory…

There was no downside to knowing whether or not the theory held true. I was scared of confirmation, is all.

Then I'd confirm it—after—*after!*—I got the problems in order. Okay. In order of importance:

1. *Does Wyland still have intent sense, and if he does, why isn't he using it or revealing it?*

2. *Are the facts of the murder predetermined?*

3. *If not, is there a greater entity behind the world running this… quest for me? Like a game of Dungeons and Dragons?*

4. *What happens if I contradict something 'true' from the original quest?*

I knew what I had to do. I came into awareness of my physical form.

"Shan," I said, and looked at her. To my surprise she was already staring at me with an intent expression. "Can we—you, Wyland, and I—can we step out for a moment to discuss some theories we have on the–the—case—away from listening ears?"

Silence for a bit.

From this point onward, I was going to try to play as carefully as possible.

"Sure," Shan finally said. "Yep—yep, yep. We'll be back in a minute, all—" here she smiled—"Just wait for us to reconvene."

We stepped outside the room, exiting through the expensive, richly-decorated foyer. Silver and oak was the *theme*—the theme of the whole building, with its rimmed windows and lavish living room and little, ornate pigeon decorations which nevertheless did not add soul to the place.

And we stepped outside into the world, with its stacks of smog rising in the distance from the industrial district, but also its clear blue sky; its cobbled streets and the brick exteriors of the houses which had such memorable insides.

Shan cocked her head. "What did you want to say?"

I gazed up at the sky. "Wyland. You've barely said, what, four sentences across the course of the investigation?"

The tall man—clad fully in a suit of silver armor—gave a slight grunt of assent.

"Okay. I'm not good at manipulation, so I'll just outright say it. The cervidae which gave me the knowledge I have of this world told me that you have intent sense."

Shan's mouth twisted: a line.

"If you don't know—"

"I do," replied Wyland. He offered no further elaboration. So I tried to push, as gently as I could.

"I wanted to ask if you do. Have it, I mean—"

I couldn't see Wyland's face nor his eyes—he had none, after all: he was completely headless. Shan was rapidly clenching her fist (kneading, perhaps? I still don't know whether or not this is only applicable to a cat), looking between us, biting her cheek.

"Because if you do, this mystery could be over," I finished. "Or it would be. You would know who was the killer."

Wyland was silent.

Shan was silent.

"So, I guess I'm asking directly. Wyland: do you have intent sense?"

Wyland was silent.

Shan was silent.

I was silent.

"You have us at an information imbalance," Shan said. "Do you know what happens at the end?"

I'll be as honest as I can from here on out.

"Hehhhh..." I exhaled shakily. "I *did*. I thought I did. I'm unsure now. There's a possibility there's a difference in what happened versus what was *presumed* to happen by the cervidae's predictions. So, basically, I had a model that worked up until now, but only for specific questions... and I still have to test whether or not the predictions are completely off-base."

Shan tilted her head. I watched her irises for any hint of the white gleam I'd noticed—repeatedly—before. None came. *That's probably some sort of lie-detection ability.*

I turned: I wouldn't let this distract me at all! "But, anyway, I asked, Wyland: you have intent sense, right?"

Wyland seemed put off. "I had hoped to broach the topic after the investigation. I do have intent sense."

So why wouldn't he use it immediately? Is he trying to test out of suspicion for reality having changed?

If he has intent sense, couldn't he be used to prove it? Like he'd observe one thing, it'd be nailed down, then I (as a higher-level observer) would rewrite it, and... no, since it'd be end-justified, that would then mean that Wyland's past observation would be rewritten to be consistent with my current observation. In other words:

Wyland would have no reason to believe that reality is broken.

Shan turned, eyebrows raised. Alarmed: "And you never acted on it?"

"For two reasons, both of which were justifiable. First, I did not intend to override your authority. As such I did not act upon what I sensed." (This made Shan pause before her interrogative onslaught began.) "Second, I wanted to find corroborating evidence. I am not reputable enough to simply tell the government that my ability allowed me to find the killer, without evidence worked back from the knowledge of the crime."

The corners of Shan's mouth crooked. A frown stretched across her face—like a gash, even, a diagonal line at the right side of which tilted slightly but perceptibly downward.

"So if I'd asked you what you thought, or gotten my final decision wrong, you would've—?"

"Yes. I would have stopped you and told you about my ability," Wyland replied.

That's stupid, I thought.

"That's stupid," Shan said. "How does that help?"

"I didn't want to show my hand," Wyland replied simply. *That's ridiculous. I get the paranoid mindset, but... it just throws me off.*

"Alright," I interjected. "That's fine, that's what I needed to know ... here's a proposition. For all of us." I punctuated the statement with an arcing sweep of my arm. "Let's work together."

Wyland and Shan both seemed taken aback. I looked at them.

"What? Why are you lo—"

"Tell us," Shan interrupted. "If I'm gonna work with either of you on this case, both of you: tell me whatever information you're hiding that's relevant to the investigation."

Wyland was silent for a brief moment. Then, "I am not hiding anything else. Nothing that is relevant."

For my part, I tilted my head.

It wasn't like I hadn't shown my hand already. As long as I didn't give out the information pertaining to quantum uncertainty...

"Alright. First, I want to ask something. It's not meant to be creepy and it has to do with solving the case and verifying my knowledge."

This would prove whether or not the theory rang true. In essence, I would ask Wyland about a headcanon his player had about him, which was never explicitly stated or even implied in server canon. It wouldn't prove possibilism versus determinism

(which didn't matter. Unless it was particularly incoherent possibilism, determinism wouldn't appear any different in operation), but it would prove the interpretation theory.

The problem with it was that it was extremely awkward to ask about.

"Are you even slightly polyamorous, as in, would you genuinely prefer a harem of women—something like that—to one woman forever," I said bluntly, somehow managing to keep my tone completely neutral and my face devoid of cringe. Wyland paused. I could hear the gears in his brain ticking: *tick tock tick tock ti—*

He was silent for a while. I felt a sense of increasing doom. He would smite me. And then:

"I don't think so," Wyland replied slowly, a note of uncertainty in his voice. He would've known at this time what his preferences were.

...

Dammit.

I had hoped he'd reply yes. This meant he was either lying (unlikely) or the theory was true. I'd operate from this point forward assuming the interpretation theory held true, even if he turned out to be lying.

I grimaced.

"Okay. I needed that to verify whether or not the cervidae's information was totally accurate ... And it wasn't. But, anyway. I just need both of you ... to trust me, to give me a second chance."

RULE 1: Any new fact must not contradict a fact already stated, as long as that fact is known to be undeniably true.

RULE 2: If an observation from a higher observer forces a change, past observations via lower observers will be retroactively rewritten to be consistent.

RULE 2.1: If observations are shared with others after being made to be inconsistent, those observations themselves will be revealed to be wrong.

That was the theory *if* I wanted to take self-centered possibilism to the absolute maximum degree it could go. I didn't think that was *necessarily* how this world functioned, but if I had to stretch, that's what I'd write it out as. To elaborate:

Take Juthir Ruceumonte, a boy who liked books.

Perhaps Juthir Ruceumonte was manipulative. Perhaps he was kind. Perhaps he was introverted; perhaps extroverted, ambiverted even: there were infinite possibilities! Infinite justifications, who knew how many ways you could make his behavior up until now retroactively make sense with a real personality completely different?

There were infinite Juthir Ruceumontes and while all of them thought, none of them truly had thoughts—not until it was required.

This version of Juthir Ruceumonte knew, however, that he liked books; or at least up until this point the plot had tried to establish him as such.

Such end-justification cleanly resolved all possible plotlines that those models could undergo.

Now take Shan, a detective.

What she saw within the heads of Juthir (and others) was end-justified; should the focus—me, in this instance, a higher-priority observer—necessitate that information being changed, it would be, and Shan would be none the wiser. It would always have been as she saw: or conversely, perhaps more accurately, and more simply to be sure: she saw nothing at all, and instead only invented what information was gleaned after my observation (of her observation).

If Shan told me about the information, what would happen would be one of two things. Shan would have either turned out to have been lying, or would have turned out to be completely wrong.

I didn't think, however, that the world functioned like this—off of 'narcissistic' possibilism. It was too much of a stretch for me to make an outright judgement, so I'd just have to operate off of the world being deterministic but interpreted.

Regardless, this meant that it was *likely* that my original intent with the mystery quest was false, since it was never explicitly stated that the players had gotten the 'right' answer.

And I guess that I could extend narrative logic here to try and justify whatever decision I made next, right? There were traits about narrative and stuff! And since Squashed Butterflies *seemed* to work thus far, those traits would have to work too. ... And Squashed Butterflies probably worked, even though it was early, because Historian worked perfectly fine. It had even pulled double effort, refreshing information I thought I had forgotten.

... Which wasn't on the trait description, but...

This was scuffed.

I couldn't extend narrative logic, I knew, because I had been given no indication that the world worked off of it. I wanted to, because it at least provided a base of operation for the divergence point from the world (though it would confirm the theory of narcissistic possibilism). So then what was the answer?

... Occam's Razor? I doubted it would be the same as in the original quest, because Iira and Lhyse looking so similar was never explained *well* beyond 'Tobias had a type,' and a simpler but more airtight explanation would have to be given.

But anything more than that would be convoluted. I couldn't think of a simpler rationale off the top of my head.

...

It was fine. Thinking about it any harder when we could just brute-force it... My hand was played, so I had no more investment in being subtle about my manipulations—my adversarial position.

We'd solve the mystery backwards. By knowing who the culprit was, via Wyland's intent-sense, we would collect information that would prove their culpability.

Up to this point, we'd just been gathering information. All that was left was for us to actually try to hunt the criminal.

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author's note

=== Dramatis Personae ===

IN REAL LIFE:

TZUTZUTZU: Our ubermanipulative, socially aware protagonist's online username, and the owner of the Labyrinth server.

STELLAR: The co-owner of the server. The one who sent **TZUTZUTZU** the quiz.

QUARTZ: A co-owner of the server.

TSUCHI: A GM on the server. Nominally the one who created the quiz.

RAVENLOFT: The prior owner of the server, who left after a debate on server reworks.

VOID: A friend of Ravenloft, who played **KENNY.**

SHIRO: A now-inactive GM on the server, who played **WREN.**

IN THE LABYRINTH:

WAYFARER: The egomaniac himself, our protagonist.

SHAN: White hair, glasses, uses underlines, a telltale 'important character.' Also, a detective.

KENNY: The one who gave **WAYFARER** a home.

WYLAND: A player character who comes along with **WAYFARER** on a quest.

ARELIS: Elf who telefragged herself and swore **WAYFARER** to secrecy about the incident.

ARC:

JUTHIR: The heir.

IIRA: The prostitute.

LHYSE: The wife.

AIRA: The maid.

HALARAN: The elf.

PARTHIN: The priest.

KANNIR: The best friend.

TOBIAS: The victim.

007 / Killing in the City 6 (One of two)

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author's note

Summary

get it, the title is a pun, because it's one of two and the suspect---

Notes

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Shan led the other two investigators back into the Ruceumontes' house.

Wayfarer did tip his hand, but not to the degree I had hoped. I don't think he's hiding anything more—what's relevant, anyway—than what he's already given up. His explanation about the cervidae doesn't hold water (and my ability proved it) but the effects of it seem to be similar or the same.

Wyland I'm unsure about. I can't quite read him, and though he doesn't seem... adversarial, I don't think that he's telling the

whole truth about what his abilities are.

It's fine, though. We have our plan, and the only thing we can do is to put it into action. Wayfarer wants to take point . Awful idea, in my opinion, and Wyland's completely neutral.

Consider! Consider, Shan!!

But they were in the common room already. Wayfarer looked at her. She looked back at him. He seemed to take that as an answer. *That wasn't an answer!*

He stepped forward. And—"I'll take it," Shan said firmly. "From here. Or I'll continue taking it, whatever."

Wayfarer glanced at her. She studied him. He was nondescript: with darkish brown hair, blue eyes, and a *somewhat* broad physique, although he was more thuggish than handsome in that way. His facial structure wasn't broad in the same way his body was, just… average. Forgettable in a lot of ways. If she had to, at knifepoint, identify some distinct features, his chin was somewhat blockish and his eyes were set a bit far into his head in a way that made him seem exhausted.

He broke eye contact first. She was satisfied.

"We're going to ask all of you the question," Shan said. "If anyone wants to confess, now's the time to do it.

"Were you directly responsible for the death of Tobias Ruceumonte," she said.

Wyland, Shan, and I stood outside the manor, away from the guests. The decoy questioning had gone well, nothingburger questions which didn't lead anywhere and were barely relevant

to the case at hand. The initial one was the one that mattered. Shan closed the door tightly.

"Who lied," she said to Wyland.

"Iira—the prostitute—and Parthin—the priest," he replied. "Both of them considered themselves directly responsible for the death of Tobias."

My brows furrowed.

"I expected… mmmh. We'll have to dig up the truth ourselves. It's established they have contradictory beliefs, we just need to figure out *why*. I guess it could also indicate that one of them has been brainwashed or convinced magically, somehow."

This was good, though. Since Wyland's intent sense wasn't known to the suspects, we would know that both believed themselves guilty—rather than what our default assumption would be without intent sense, that only one person was guilty, and whoever confessed *actually* did the crime.

(It *did* follow that confessing falsely did happen, but it was rare, and it seemed like most people here didn't hold real affection for each other, besides the knight Kannir—who seemed spooked.)

"Brainwashed? If it's a cursing or marking ability—let alone a magical effect—the proofs would've dispelled it." Shan tilted her head.

I was silent for a moment. "You're right," I said.

There would be two avenues for brainwashing anyway, as long as the proofs worked the same way they did in server.

Firstly, the brainwasher could just be insanely strong. Even though proofing works, against an archmage, even the strongest commercially available proofs fall flat.

But the other...

"We need to get both of them healers," I said absently after a few seconds' pause. Wyland and Shan both watched me deep in thought. "Basically, if one of the two was brainwashed, this would just undo that. It'd restore them to the 'right' condition, I mean."

Shan was silent. Then: "Oh. I see what you're thinking. I can bring one in... tomorrow, at the earliest."

Wyland looked between us. "What are you two thinking?"

"The effect of the ability or magic in question could stay. Like being injured, having your actual brain manipulated and the weights of what you value there changed permanently, that wouldn't be removed by proofs. However, healing magic would be able to fix it, since the attribute affects brain and soul," I filled in. Then I looked back at the manor.

"So healing magic, that could break a spell on either. And it's getting late, anyway, we could call it for here and put the suspects back in detention," Shan said. "There's not a rush."

I nodded. "But, anyway, brainwashing aside, the other logical assumption is that they worked together."

If that held true all we'd have to do would be to use Wyland's overpowered mind reading hacks to establish what happened, and then collect evidence in reverse. We were silent.

"Let's go back in and tell them that we're calling it here for the night," I said.

The next day snuck up on me quickly. I had sprinted to Kenny's house's upstairs immediately and flopped onto the bed, disregarding the watchful eyes of Arelis lurking from the shadows.

It was a thing I had noticed. The more you wanted to sleep, and the more you highlighted that 'sleep = good' in your own mind, the less easy sleep actually was to achieve. Using sleep as a passing time system was awful and flawed as a result of this.

I decided to think about next steps.

I'd want to grab Arin—his ability was to view stat numbers, which on top of being useful for intelligence gathering, would allow me to confirm whether or not server systems *actually applied* to the world, and if so to what degree. Would it be the pre-rework form? Post-rework? Switch based on era?

I hoped it would be the latter. However, pre-rework skills and systems were still *fine*. There were certain overpowered builds I would be able to pursue, even *with* them, and lower stats on both allies and enemies was good.

... Regardless, I was worrying too much, getting excited over things unconfirmed.

With Arin I'd be able to do testing. I could probably find him before Rail, and then confirm whether or not systems existed. If they did, I'd do Rail, because it was one of the highest-rewarding events in the server—and it was canonically *farmable*. If not, it would depend.

After Rail would come a span of nothingness. A few missions into the Sundered King's lands, and True World happening some months after the six-month period Rail took up. I would survive True World—by *not going through it*—and then the Lightrail, and then Sundered King.

I felt like Sundered King would kill us all. Butterflies would've fully lost its grip by then, which meant that his OP moveset no longer would follow the way the GMs played him—which was being made to be stupid artificially. Taking all of the worst attacks and no opportunities. But in this world, he could just curbstomp us, and there would be nothing we could do.

The reason for this was because his attribute was unique in nature and sheer power: Information Magic. If it was a meme it was accessible to the King, and without a stat check he was able to manipulate any information inside a character's head, at range, at will, without the usual incantation a spellcaster required.

I heard clattering from the room across from mine. My door was open; I saw a form pass by in the darkness. I stayed watching it.

Nothing more came. Eventually I fell asleep.

I arrived early the next day. Shan was there. She had a clipboard in her arms, hugged tightly to her chest. When I looked at her she seemed protective of it. I didn't question.

"We're waiting for Wyland?" I asked. She nodded. In the silence I dawdled.

I kind of wanted to say something—because it kind of appealed to me to at least socialize and interact with people. You know, they say friends are the spice of life. 'Friendship makes life more

beautiful,' I remembered the adage from one of those motivational quote macros online. You see? There was value in *feeling the feeling,* and I would be remiss to at least not try and make friends, not try and socialize and be an extrovert! And also Shan was a cute girl.

The moment passed, unfortunately.

Wyland arrived shortly, falling down... from the sky. Flying. The cobblestones somehow didn't shatter under his feet as he fell into a crouch. I didn't stare for very long.

Me and Shan turned to go inside. He followed.

We stepped inside the lounge. The suspects eyed us.

Heir, prostitute, wife, maid, elf, priest, knight.

As soon as the door was shut, Iira stood up. Tears fell down her cheeks in a torrent. My brows furrowed. She balled the sides of her dress up in her hands, her blonde hair overshadowed her eyes.

And with a choking sob, she said:

"I was the one who killed Tobias."

She looked up.

"I and I alone."

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author's note

So yeah. This story didn't go so well. What happened was I got mildly criticized by someone and that caused me to obliterate my

online presence. I did come back to it, in a Very different form, over a year later, in UYE 2026. But what this story could've been...