

“Are you asking for sacrifices?” Frost wanted some clarity.

“Anything so long as it comes from the living. We’ve held off from the wars between our races because we had no need for the bodies. Now, the wars look like a ripe honeycomb. Scarlet Logic wormed themselves into each of our Ateliers, fulfilling a role that made them a crutch. I am not the only one who requires the same demand.” Beholder Umbra explained, causing Descartes 3 to respond.

“Not in the same way as pure biomass. We needed them because they were willing to offer large quantities of minds at a moment’s notice. Their absence creates a void where testing products becomes cumbersome, and the operation of larger installations becomes dangerous for existing personnel. The minds can be supplemented with biomass, however. The Reality Converter allows for the transmutation of materials that the Reality Manifester may not be able to create.”

The Reality Manifester was more or less an Aspect that allowed for the creation of materials, which Frost found odd in such a large world until she remembered that most of the underground sections were likely hollowed out by the Subderma and Derma Layer.

This was not correct either. As it turned out, it was due to convenience. This method expended less energy than having an industry dedicated to mining. Caldera Industries once held this role until they became a dedicated manufactory Atelier rather than a mining one, although, the latter does occur but never for minerals.

*That’s how the Site Cores are made, huh. CogitO and the Chained Theocracy supplies the materials and Caldera Industries manufactures them. I can’t help but wonder if biomass is integral to creating their chains. Fucking hell...*

Frost deeply sighed in response. She was disappointed upon realizing that these Ateliers required a high body count to even function properly. Safety? What was that?

She placed both hands onto the Arbiter’s wing which served as a desk for them and leaned forward with an imposing presence.

“I would rather the Ateliers don’t get themselves involved in conflicts when we have the Impuritas on our backs. I am disgusted that you require so many lives to be cast away for the sake of experimentation. Your core philosophy may not be able to change, but the way you center yourselves around your technology can. All I’ve heard is that now you’re likely to pluck people from the shadows.”

Frost’s voice became increasingly frustrated when she recalled the efforts of the Scarlet Logic Collection Teams. The people who were subjected to the whims of the Ateliers were absolutely unwilling individuals, but they were disguised under the veil of one of Scarlet Logic’s personnels.

Nothing made her blood boil more than this. Not when she recalled the stuffed toys and the belongings of the innocent, abducted lives that were burned away at the base of the spires in the City of Spades.

“What do you know? We were working with the bad guys all along.” Cer was equally mortified. “And you all thought we were crazy when we didn’t want anything to do with them. It doesn’t matter how much you hate Non-Blessed because it doesn’t change how fucked it is that Ateliers can get away with this, but when an Impuritas does it they’re evil. You know something? You’re not that different from them at all!”

Cer made herself heard.

“Dungeons can prop up wherever they please in the Nex Megalopolis and abduct whoever they want. How do you think Demi-Humans feel when Scarlet Logic arrives and takes them under their wing? You can tell me that it’s for a better life, but everything we now know shows us that it’s hell!”

Precisely. Looking at it from this perspective further carved a hole in Frost’s heart. She was unbelievably thankful that Cara’s Collection Team didn’t take anyone. Had they did, then Frost would have been unable to forgive herself for allowing someone to suffer through the replication cycles.

The very image of that world underneath the City of Spades was burned into her mind. The many writhing bodies that begged for their misery to end.

“I will create a Code of Conduct. What will be written and passed shall be law by my decree.” Frost’s voice was met with the quaking of the Nexus, and a curious glance from the Archivist. “We obviously don’t see things in the same light.”

“I think we can come to an agreement however.” Satania suddenly offered a resolution to their biological needs. “Not all criminals are going to be useful to us. While I do agree that their methods in scientific process is as crude as efforts in Galia’s world, what remains is an unchanging reality: people are required. They will suffer, and they will die. We can trim the excess that way. Believe me, there is far more than you can imagine.”

It was an interesting prospect, and one that Frost didn’t disagree on. However, their discretion could also be used as a front to cover their tracks if innocents were to be thrown into the meat grinder.

But that was why Time Reverberation was created in the first place. To ensure that such a thing was an impossibility.

“That will suffice.” Descartes 3 nodded.

“Wouldn’t a friend of yours be able to aid as well, Amalgam?” Galia suddenly inquired. “The one who can create colossal creatures in the blink of an eye? We found the remnants of a skeletal beast on the wall of the inner City of Spades. I’m quite impressed.”

*Ignis, huh. Her biomass ‘could’ be put to use, but I don’t know how to feel about it.*

*“Ignis is willing, but her priority is in healing efforts. She wants to find a way to put her new skills to use rather than having chunks of biomass used as a fuel. It’s better if she accumulates it herself.”*

*Yeah. It's Ignis' call, but I'd also strongly advise her not to. It's not necessary. They looked happy already when Satania brought up that they can use criminals from the Atelier War.*

"That will not be necessary." Frost shot Galia down. "My friend will be working closely with the healers. She does not have the time to spare to sate their hunger. I presume that this concludes it? Oboros Infintias has a solution to your hunger and manpower needs. If you burn through them too quickly then you only have yourself to blame. You've had *centuries* to avoid walking into this pitfall."

Spending even a fraction of that time on safety measures would have avoided this. Furthermore, it would have made cutting off Scarlet Logic far more bearable. The fact that they had no plan B baffled her to no end.

"They were so efficient that we overlooked it. They successfully made themselves a pillar in our Ateliers. Without them, it will be agonizingly slow." Beholder Knalzark groaned.

"But this also plays into your hand, doesn't it Beholder Jury?" Enoch hummed. "Ten times the acceleration. Ten times the slowdown. That sounds almost too good to be true, but there it is~ It also means ten times less consumption."

"It has minimal maintenance. My Isolation Sphere only requires only one major infusion of Nex to power it, and a small trickle thereafter." Jury used this moment to further sell her lucrative technology. "Is this round over? Have we reached a resolution?"

"No objections." Satania nodded to herself. "This is also a developing problem that can be solved outside without any intervention."

She was right. Frost would not have known about this if Umbra didn't mention it. She didn't know what the Demon's intentions were, but she was at the very least thankful that she did admit this.

"I don't know what you are talking about. I just offered something because it was my turn." Umbra giggled to herself.

Another resolution had passed, the promise locked in as the burden now lay on Oboros Infintias.

And now, it was Galia's turn to take center stage.