

The Nexus bustled with activity as the end of the year neared. Stalls were set up within the Nexus for the first time since the Blessed were welcomed into its heights. With the approval of the Head and the endorsement of the Moons and Stars, the Blessed were allowed to celebrate the coming end of the year.

The open pillars and rings above the Reception were decorated with banners and paper lanterns to celebrate the final day of the Blooming Week. The five days since Frost's outing with the triplets saw the Nexus explode with activity.

All stores of the Common Hub closed that faithful morning on the 50th of the 10th. But behind those empty counters were families that worked their kitchens like it was their last. Many had awakened hours before the break of dawn to prepare for today.

Insectids stirred several pots at once on a flaming stove as Demi-Humans scurried around to taste and season the food to perfection. Outside Avians with bird-like hands finalized the décor of the Common Hub, draping everything in golden and red ribbons.

Dragonids flapped their wings for what was the first time inside of the Nexus under the direct supervision of the Stars who watched on with support. Their presence was made known to all as people flocked to them as they usually did. They were deities in their eyes, but before that they were guides who ushered people in the right direction.

Strange beings such as those with a canvas for a head strode along a group of Elves as they made one last check before the Nexus awakened. Ayel approved of everything with glee in his voice, all the while an Elf explained how the gold symbolized a new beginning, and how the red was a reminder that they were all not so different from each other.

Giant Lamias made last minute scrubs along the blackened pathways as people set up long stalls in every street. Succulent food, refreshing beverages, and all sorts of dazzling confectionary were arranged along the stalls, free for the taking.

All expenses were covered by the Head.

It was not long before people arrived in droves from the Central Relay. The morning was as packed as the afternoon. Musicians played their songs as members of the Ateliers paraded down the central street in the first ever public showing of their unity.

Stella, Aster, Sana, and Revy explored the streets to their hearts' content. The tiny palm that had once helped many was loved by countless. Though Stella could not see anything, she knew how vibrant the world was in these heights.

"Next year you'll also be able to see how beautiful our home is." Aster promised her as she had heard of Ignis' progress. "Everyone's working hard so that you can enjoy the life you missed out in the Derma Layer."

"What about you, Aster?" Stella whispered just out of earshot as Aster fondly smiled at her adorable friend.

"I'm old enough where it's too late to change anything. But you're still so small. You too Revy. It's not too late for you to make good childhood memories." She spoke soothingly like an older sister, tightening her hand around Stella.

The festivities of this place were nothing like the cruelty of their old home. What were once games of painful sacrifice were now memories born from their happiest moments. A prize as small as a plush doll caused Stella to smother her face into it to hide her welling tears of content.

"It's so fluffy... and warm... A-Aster... Do we really deserve these happy things?"

A suddenly scrubbed her head. It was Sana, and she messed with the poor girl's hair with a small groan.

"A kid shouldn't be thinking whether they should be happy or not." Sana spoke coldly.

Then, her coarse grip loosened.

"No point in wondering about anything. Leave that to the adults."

"That's right. Stella. We're your stars. So please, just leave all your worries behind because we all just want to see you smile." Aster assured her from the bottom of her heart, parting the clouds of doubt that overshadowed Stella's happiness.

"Mhm. I'm sorry... Then can I..."

"Yes?"

"Yup?"

"Ask away."

All three of her friends stopped to look down at her. The girl peeked a closed eye from the side of her cuddled plush toy and gave into her childish selfishness for the first time.

"... a pet. I want something fluffy like this. I remember when the triplets let me touch their tail for the first time. Back when I thought they were going to kill me after taking me back to their camp... It was... it was why I was able to trust them. Because I thought that there was no way that someone so warm and soft could be a bad person."

"See? You really are just a kid!" Aster pinched her cheek.

"Wanna hold onto my tail?" Revy offered with a smile.

"A pet... I heard there were fluffy creatures somewhere in the Nexus. We'll ask the Amalgam if we can adopt one of them." Sana approved before warming patting the girl's head.

"Aaaaah. I'm hungry. Let's go eat something. I'm in the mood for bitter melons."

"... is it bitter?" Stella removed the plush further away from her face this time.

"Oh yeah. Enough to make a Healer want to put down the idiot that snuck it into their plate. Anyway, so what if it is?" Sana teased, giving Stella the push to choose something she wanted.

And finally, those quivering lips gave way.

“Then I want something sweeter.”

Moons of the Nexus participated in the festival. They wore uniforms tied to their role within Time Reverberation and subsequently, the Head. Blessed did not immediately recognize them, especially those outside of Hora Therapeutics. Furthermore, Moons were not easily as approachable as the Stars so large cavities formed wherever they walked.

It never bothered them. Their jobs were never rewarded with gratitude to begin with. If anything, they were thankful that the Blessed were able to smile so freely. However, in rare instances, children and Adventurers approached these Moons to express their heartfelt thanks for their service.

The Moons were the most powerful individuals, second to the Beholders. As a result, so many saw their role to fight against the Corrupted was seen as natural. That they were born and built for that sole purpose.

But only few knew how difficult for Moons to go against those living nightmares. Even fewer were able to picture the extent of it. These same people never took the Moons for granted and expressed their thanks as they told tales of the Moons to their kin.

The Aspiring that accompanied them never let them dwell in the silence for too long. It was a strange relationship where they filled the lonesome void of those Moons, some even being seen as something they never would have dreamed of having before the rise of the Head.

What did this mean exactly? Only those Moons knew as they smiled to themselves in the company of their chosen disciples. The air of utter superiority always followed a Moon. Unfortunately, no amount of help could bring them down far enough to blend in with normal people.

But even so, they didn't mind it for they had a place where they could elsewhere in the Nexus. Morning turned to noon. And noon to evening. The presence of the Ateliers had grown significantly, as did the Head. Black Wings took to the streets, parading their weapons to showcase the might of the Head.

Healers joined them, conveying the Head's command over both life and death; kindness and strength; peace and deliverance which promised to defend the Nexus and all its inhabitants. Banners of Atelier insignias, the Head's symbol, and all relevant bodies were raised into the air.

A Black Wing draped in a black, heavy militaristic garb spoke on behalf of the Head as thousands of Blessed gathered near the Reception. The reason why Frost, Jury and the Three

Heads of Security were not present was to ensure the Head was strictly viewed as an entity of the Nexus, rather than as a person.

The Black Wing's had a multitude of golden feathers that ran up the side of her coat; an indication of her rank amongst the Black Wings. The more feathers one had the higher and stronger they were.

Reverent cheers and patriotic roars filled the air on the eve of the 50th of the 10th. Only a few hours remained until midnight so one had to wonder:

Just where was Frost and Jury?