

Life or Death

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Life or Death

by [AmberAstra](#)

Summary

Hey folks! Welcome to Life or Death, the fantastical game that's totally not some kind of trap! Contestants who successfully make it through all the challenges will receive their heart's dearest desire. Those who don't will be, you know, dead. Good luck!

Notes

So, apparently, this is what happens when you relisten to one of the most traumatic arcs of your favorite podcast, and realize, hey, a character from my current obsession made his own deadly gameshow too! I wonder how much more upsetting I can make this by combining them. So yeah, welcome to the Suffering Game themed Beetlejuice fic. Buckle up kids, this is gonna be a weird and wild ride.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Prologue

“Is this the place?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“...doesn’t really look like much.”

Lydia heard the footsteps coming up the stairs and quickly stuffed the spellbook under her mattress. It wasn’t so much that she thought her father wouldn’t approve of her trying to learn magic. He’d probably be pleased she was taking an interest in *something* again. But she doubted he would approve of what she wanted to learn magic *for*.

It had been almost a year now since Lydia’s mother, Emily Deetz, had passed away. Even between healing magic and modern medicine, there had been nothing that could be done to save her. And Lydia and her father had been a mess ever since. He’d moved them to some tiny town called Winter River, in the middle of absolutely *nowhere*.

“A fresh start,” he’d called it. “We’re moving forward.”

Lydia hated it. How could he expect her to just forget their home, their whole life? To forget Dead Mom. Not that that seemed to be a problem for *him*.

A knock sounded on her bedroom door.

“Lydia,” her father’s voice called. “Sweetie, Delia’s here for your session.”

“Yeah. Fine. Okay,” Lydia replied unenthusiastically.

Delia was Lydia’s “life coach” that her father had hired so that she would stop being so sad about Dead Mom already. Delia had a small amount of magic herself, enough for basic spells, and for convincing people the stuff she said about crystals wasn’t a complete hoax. Magic may have been real, but the validity of the “healing power of crystals” was... debatable. The general consensus was that it was more of a placebo effect than anything else and that the rocks themselves had no inherent magic, but when magical power is strengthened by belief, that kind of thing was a trifle difficult to entirely disprove.

Lydia *supposed* she could ask Delia for help with this whole magic thing, but the woman was so disgustingly cheerful and positive that even the slightest hint that Lydia might be interested in anything remotely “dark” would probably cause her to freak. Plus, she was dating Lydia’s dad. The two of them thought she didn’t know, but neither of them were exactly the most *subtle* individuals. Gross.

Whatever. It’s not like it mattered anyway. None of it mattered.

Because Lydia Deetz had a plan.

“Oh boy, oh boy, oh boy! Looks like I’m gonna have some new *friends* to play with!”

Make A Start

Chapter Summary

In which apparently nobody has enough common sense not to go in the creepy tent in the woods, and we meet a certain green-haired demon.

Chapter Notes

Life sucks right now, so here's a new chapter while I wait for one of my professors to get back to me about some stuff and I try not to dwell on how very badly this week has gone.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

The three humans stood, looking skeptically at the building in the center of the clearing. Well, perhaps “building” wasn’t the correct word. “Circus tent” was probably closer to the truth. It was huge and ostentatious, with large black and white stripes running from the top down the sides. Directly in front of them was a closed flap that seemed to serve as an entrance to the structure.

Lydia looked back down at the flier in her hand. On one side was a map depicting the very clearing the three were standing in, and the surrounding forest. On the other, in a very *dramatic* looking font, were the words, “The Solution You’ve Been Looking For!” emblazoned above an object that could very well be *exactly that*.

A resurrection stone. That mythical object that could bring any soul back from the dead. Officially such things didn’t, *couldn’t*, exist. But Lydia knew better than to just blindly trust the official word on something like this. It was possible, and she couldn’t afford to not take this chance.

The flyer had arrived at the house a few days ago, just as Lydia was beginning to feel discouraged over the lack of progress. Turns out, there’s only so much magic you can learn out of books while still keeping it a secret from your dad and your life coach, especially for the type of magic that Lydia needed to know to bring back her mom. And there *certainly* wasn’t anybody else in Winter River who was un-boring enough to help. So when the flier had shown up, addressed to her, she knew it was probably her last chance.

Now, Lydia wasn’t stupid. The timing of the flier’s arrival and the specificity of its contents just *screamed* trap. But what else could she do? She didn’t *have* a choice, not really. This was

the only way to make things right again. Besides, she knew enough magic by now to look after herself. Probably.

And Lydia had packed some supplies and stolen away in the middle of the night, like some overly dramatic protagonist in a teen novel.

Along the way, she had run into Adam and Barbara Maitland, who had received a similar flier proclaiming the perfect solution to their problems, personally tailored to them. Lydia had snuck a look at it. It looked completely different from hers - all soft colors and gently swooping calligraphy. If the maps hadn't led to the same place, Lydia would've thought they were from completely different senders.

Lydia... didn't really think the Maitlands knew what they were getting themselves into.

They were nice enough people, certainly. Honestly, they were probably *too* nice. They'd fussed over the teenage girl traveling alone when they'd encountered her on the outskirts of the forest, and when they'd realized she was going to the same place as them, Barbara had *insisted* on traveling together.

"Safety in numbers!" she'd said cheerfully.

As Lydia hadn't had any real reason not to, she had agreed. And now here they were. Standing outside of some weird *circus tent* thing. Adam was looking between the map and the tent, frowning.

Yeah, I'd probably be confused too if my flier had looked like that, thought Lydia. *They probably thought it'd lead them to some cute little witch's cottage or something. I mean, it's not exactly what I was expecting either, but at least it's interesting.*

"Well, what are we waiting for?" she said aloud, and took a step forward.

Immediately, the flap lifted out of the way to reveal an entrance. An eerie green light spilled from the opening, casting a sickly glow on the humans' faces.

Barbara took a step back. "I'm not so sure about this...."

Lydia rolled her eyes. "Really? You guys are gonna chicken out on me already? We haven't even gone *in* yet."

With that, the teenager strode forward into the otherworldly green light.

"Wait, Lydia—"

The Maitlands looked at each other.

"We sh—we should follow—"

"Yeah, just to make sure—"

And gripping each other's hands tightly, they followed Lydia through to the other side.

Despite the light coming through the entryway, the instant that the Maitlands passed the boundaries of the tent, they were plunged into complete and total darkness. Hesitantly, they took a few more steps forward, not wanting to trip over anything or crash into Lydia. Out of the darkness, they realized music was playing from somewhere, faintly at first, but becoming louder as they slowly inched forwards.

Suddenly, the room was flooded with brightly colored lights as the music built to a crescendo, then cut off. Squinting against the unexpected change in lighting, the couple could make out Lydia standing a few feet ahead of them, and beyond her was a raised platform almost like a stage. Standing atop the stage and grinning at them in a rather unsettling manner was a green-haired man in a striped suit.

“Hi!” he said cheerfully. “You three must be our *lucky* new contestants oooooon... (drumroll please)” - a drumroll sounded from somewhere out of sight - “LIFE OR DEATH! The thrilling game of skill and determination that will let you win your ~heart’s desire~”

As he spoke, he gestured dramatically behind himself, and a large neon sign bearing the words “LIFE OR DEATH” was illuminated above the stage.

“And *I* am your (g)host with the most, BJ!”

A stunned silence followed these declarations. The strange man sat down on the edge of the stage, crossing his legs and looking at them expectantly.

Lydia raised an eyebrow. “...BJ? Isn’t that old person slang for blowjob?” she deadpanned.

“Lydia!” Barbara scolded.

BJ blinked at her in surprise, then started laughing. “Holy shit, kid. I can’t believe you’re the first person to actually make that joke.”

The teenager smirked back at him. “Alright, well if that isn’t it, then what is?”

“Mmmnnope,” he said, hopping down off the stage and booping her on the nose. “Not telling ya that, kid. Don’t have high enough clearance.” He straightened back up, “BJ’s good enough while you’re here.”

This close to him, Lydia could see that both his teeth and ears were slightly pointed. Her eyes widened.

“You’re a *demon*,” she said.

“Wow, I’m impressed, kid. Most breathers don’t catch on anywhere *near* that quickly.”

By this point, Adam couldn’t take it anymore. “What? What are you—what do you mean, demon? This isn’t—I don’t—*THIS IS NOT WHAT WAS INDICATED ON THE BROCHURE.*”

In his hand he was clutching the piece of paper he and Barbara had received that had led them here in the first place. Suddenly, the demon was standing right behind him. BJ snatched the flyer from Adam, pinching him on the ass as he went past. Adam yelped and scooted closer to Barbara. BJ looked thoughtfully at the paper for a moment, before crumpling it up and tossing it over his shoulder.

“Yep. Bullshit,” he declared.

“Wha—do you, do you mean to tell me, that we were lured here under, under *false pretenses*?”

BJ pretended to think about it. “Yeah, pretty much!” he grinned. “And it’s not like *everything* was a lie. You can absolutely still win the prize you seek. You just, you know, really have to *earn* it first.”

“And how exactly would we do that?” Barbara asked cautiously.

“Oh, I’m *so* glad you asked!” BJ replied. “The rules are simple, you just gotta successfully make it through all of the challenges, and you get to walk out of here with whatever it is that your tiny little human hearts desire most.”

“And... what happens if we lose?” asked Lydia.

“Well,” he said, “if you *lose*, then you *don’t*. Walk out of here, that is. Cause you’ll be, you know, **dead**.”

“I don’t know about this,” Barbara said. “Adam, Lydia, I’m not sure this is worth it, I think we should go.”

“Ah, c’mon!” the demon cajoled. “What’s the point of a prize without a little risk? And besides,” he continued, the shadows darkening around him, “there’s nowhere for you to go to. Once you’ve passed through, there’s no turning back. The only way out is to play. My. Game.”

The Maitlands clutched each other in fear. Lydia looked at the demon consideringly.

“Fine,” she said. “I’m in.”

“...you know, kid, you’re being surprisingly chill about all this,” he said, his voice returning to normal. “What gives?”

Lydia shrugged. “Eh, I figured there’d be something like this. Not *this*, obviously,” She gestured at room around them, “Cause this is just *weird*. But *something*.”

“...I mean yeah, fair enough.”

BJ adjusted his jacket, snapped his fingers, and a door opened at the far end of the room, beneath the neon sign.

“Right! Whenever you folks are done freaking out and decide to grow a pair, your first challenge is just through that door.”

He turned to Lydia and dramatically placed a hand on her shoulder. “Kid. Good luck.”

“You two...” then he was between the Maitlands, who looked extremely uncomfortable, an arm slung over each of their shoulders. “Stay sexy.”

He grabbed Adam’s face in both hands and kissed him, a third arm still holding on to Barbara, and then he was gone.

Chapter End Notes

So, something to note about the versions of the characters here, is that they're not starting from quite the same places as their musical counterparts. The Maitlands, for instance, are a little closer to their movie versions in that they want children, but haven't been able to have any. Beetlejuice too is going to be a little different from how we first see him in the show. We'll get to that more in later chapters, but for now I'll just say that while the Maitlands are essentially further along their personal timeline (had they lived), BJ is basically the opposite.

Anyways, hopefully it'll all make sense later.

Oh, also, the music playing before BJ shows up is 100% the pre-show music.

The Whole "Sacrifice" Thing

Chapter Summary

In which rules are explained and small sacrifices are made.

Chapter Notes

Sorry this took so long. I was super busy with family stuff, and then I went and got sick. So hopefully this chapter's coherent.

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Beetlejuice watched as the three new breathers entered the first chamber. The kid was leading the way, which didn't surprise him in the least, despite only interacting with her for a few minutes. The two adults (her parents? probably her parents, it'd be weird if they weren't right?) followed like nervous little mice. You know, if mice were sexy.

Well, I'm sure that's somebody's thing.

Beetlejuice smirked to himself. It'd be interesting to see how long these humans lasted.

Back in the challenge chamber, Lydia was investigating the only other thing present in the room. It looked like a giant roulette wheel, with a nine symbols around the edges. On the other side of the room, directly opposite where they'd come in, was another door. Three lights were above it, currently unlit.

"What do you suppose we're supposed to do?" asked Adam.

"Spin the creepy wheel?" suggested Lydia dryly.

"Well, yes, okay. But I'd feel better if there were some kind of... instructions, or something."

Guess that's my cue!

"Alright! Let's give a big hand to our brave new contestants as they face their first challenge, the Wheel of Sacrificiiiice!!"

The Maitlands jumped as Beetlejuice's voice, with accompanying applause track, suddenly echoed through the room.

"Wha—where—?" squeaked Adam, wheeling around.

"Oh you are just too adorable," Beetlejuice snickered. "Buuuuut, ya ain't gonna make it very far if a simple disembodied voice makes you this jumpy."

Lydia looked intrigued. "Are you watching us from a different room, or are you just here but invisible?"

"Nah. Got more contestants than just you three to keep track of, you know. Can't give special treatment to any one group of breathers. I wanted to have one of my clones follow each group around to keep an eye on 'em, but the focus groups shot that one down pretty quick."

Lydia snorted in amusement.

"Yeah," Beetlejuice continued. "Apparently, having my ugly mug staring at 'em all the time is more traumatizing than the challenges themselves. Which seems a little harsh to me, but whatevs."

"Wait, hold on, back up," said Barbara. "Go back to that whole Wheel of *Sacrifice* thing."

"Right, right, right. *I* wanted to call it the Wheel of *Death*," Beetlejuice said cheerfully, "but PR said that would be 'too disheartening at this early stage of the proceedings.'"

"This place has a PR department?" Adam said skeptically.

"Yup, sure does! I mean, how else do you think we get those personalized flyers?"

"You know, he does kinda have a point," said Lydia.

"Again, can we please go back to the sacrifice thing?" asked Barbara in a strained voice.

"Alright, *alright*. Don't get your panties in a twist," grouched the demon. "Can't a guy enjoy a little friendly conversation, geez."

"But. Fine. The Rules are simple. All ya gotta do is spin the wheel. The symbol you land on determines the kind of sacrifice you'll have to make. Once you do it, one of those lights will light up, and once all three are lit, you're done and can move on to the next room. Uhhhh, what else? Oh, each of you has to go at least once, and you can't do somebody's sacrifice for them. People are always trying to do that martyr thing for each other, and it is *so dull*. But hey, I'm not a total monster, if there's a sacrifice you just absolutely cannot make, though I don't know why you *wouldn't* seeing as the prize for winning is *literally your heart's dearest desire*. Buuuut if you can't, you can always just take a penalty instead."

"What kind of penalty?"

"Oh Babs, now *where* would be the fun in telling you that?" Beetlejuice waggled his eyebrows, even though he knew they couldn't see him.

"Ok," said Lydia, stepping forward. "So we just have to spin the wheel?"

"You got it, kid."

And before Adam or Barbara could say anything, before they could protest or tell her to be careful, Lydia grabbed one of the spokes on the edge of the wheel and spun it with all her might. Slowly, it came to a halt on the symbol shaped like a skull.

The three humans and the demon all stared at the result in silence for a few moments. Despite not knowing exactly what it meant, the humans all felt that this did not bode well for the success of their endeavor. Beetlejuice, who knew *exactly* what it meant, knew for *certain* that it did not bode well for the success of their endeavor.

Jesus, who gets that one on their very first try? They won't last long at all if they keep that up. And I'd had such high hopes for them too. Or at least for the kid. The other two were probably too hopeless to get too far anyways. But still. Shit.

"Hey, BJ" Lydia called. "I got the skull thing, what am I supposed to sacrifice, or whatever? You're not gonna take one of my bones or something, are you?" she joked.

"Uhhhh," the demon replied, as wrong-footed by this result as the rest of them. Beetlejuice shook his head to clear it. *Whatever, it doesn't matter anyway, it's not like there aren't plenty of other breathers to mess with.*

Beetlejuice shook his head to clear it. *Whatever, it doesn't matter anyway, it's not like there aren't plenty of other breathers to mess with.*

"Welp," he said cheerfully, "The good news is, you don't have to give anything up this round!"

"And... the *bad* news?"

"Ehhhh, okay, so you *may* end up with a little bit of bad luck in a later round. But c'mon, you're a tough kid, I'm sure you'll be *fine!*"

This was neither convincing or reassuring to anyone present.

"Fine," said Lydia. The first light above the door lit up.

"Cool. Aaaanywho," Beetlejuice clapped his hands, "who wants to go next?"

Barbara took a deep breath and stepped forward. "I will."

She reached out and spun the wheel. It clicked to a stop on a symbol resembling an eye.

"Okay! Now that's more like it!" Beetlejuice said. "Let's see, how gross do we wanna get for round one?"

"Are you gonna take one of her eyes?" Lydia asked, just a trifle too enthusiastically.

Beetlejuice grinned. This kid was definitely unusual.

"Nah," he replied. "That's Round Two stuff. And since And since you're just boring old humans who don't have any Darkvision to take away, I guess we'll just go with your *color*

vision instead.”

“...I don’t understand,” said Barbara.

The demon sighed. “I *mean*, that if you accept the sacrifice, you’ll be colorblind. Permanently. It’s really not that complicated, Babs.” *Seriously, why were breathers so damn stupid?*

“So, what’ll it be? Gonna chicken out in the first round?”

Barbara turned to look at her husband, committing every detail to memory, from the exact shade of brown of his hair and eyes, to the greens of his plaid shirt. Adam smiled supportively at her, and reached out to clasp her hands. Distantly, she heard the demon make a noise of disgust.

"Alright," she said softly.

And that was it. There was no pain. All the color simply... faded as she continued to gaze at her husband. Above the door, the second light switched on.

Adam squeezed her hands one last time and said, "Alright, guess it's my turn now."

This time, the wheel stopped on an image of a sword.

"Huh. Got any weapons?" asked Beetlejuice.

"No?" replied Adam, sounding as though he wasn't sure if he was supposed to have brought one. Not that he would have known how to use it if he had.

"Right, right. Figured. Well, okay, how bout some other skill then?" There was a sound of rustling paper and the demon muttering under his breath. Eventually, he said, "Right, so this says you do some sort of woodworking thing? Yeah. Boring. That's gone."

"...What?" Adam said.

"You won't remember how to do it anymore. No relearning nothing neither. But hey, if that's too *upsetting* you can always take the penalty. All depends on how much you really want that prize."

Adam wrung his hands, but nodded. "Alright, Mr. Demon, I'll do it."

"Great! You know, I was really hoping you guys wouldn't wimp out on me in the first round here. We are gonna have so much *fun* together!"

And Adam could no longer recall any of the woodcarving skills he'd learned over the years. He still remembered projects he'd worked on, the crib he'd restored recently for the O'Briens, but details, the knowledge of *what* and *how*, were lost behind an impenetrable fog.

The third light illuminated, and the door beneath swung open, revealing nothing but inky blackness beyond.

Chapter End Notes

If you've listened to TAZ, you probably recognize the symbols on the wheel, but for anyone who hasn't, I'll go ahead and list the rest of them here.

Hand

Eye

Brain

Swords

Backpack

Skull

Clock

Question Mark

Obviously I've tweaked the actual sacrifices for some of them, since this is just a fantasy based world, not actual DnD. And everyone's spins for this round were completely random, even if two of em ended up being the same as the first round of The Suffering Game. I even used the same site the boys did for the podcast. So BJ's reaction to Lydia's spin was pretty much the same as mine.

If you enjoyed, please consider commenting~

Tricks and Traps

Chapter Summary

In which there are very fake props and very real dangers

Chapter Notes

Hi. Wow, it's been... nearly four years since I last updated this! Fuck.

Welp, the short run down is that covid happened, I finished grad school, got a job that left me too exhausted to do anything other than eat or sleep, quit that job, got a better job that doesn't leave me completely burnt out all the time, also got completely obsessed with The Magnus Archives during all of this, started writing fic again for that fandom about a year ago now, and then the guilt at leaving this hanging finally caught up with me and so here I am again.

I can't promise that updates will be very fast, but I do still very much intend to finish this story!

See the end of the chapter for more [notes](#)

Lydia stepped through the doorway and immediately tripped over a rock to fall face first into the desert sand. Barbara helped her back to her feet, and she stood there spitting sand from her mouth as the demon cackled.

“I don’t suppose that’s the ‘bad luck’ that I’m supposed to get?” she said.

“Ehehehehe, oh man, *classic!*” he snickered. “But no. Trust me babes, when that happens, you’ll know.”

The room they now stood in was similar to the previous one, or would have been were it not for the slight fact that someone appeared to have dropped a desert in the middle of it. The floor was completely covered in sand, rocks, and cactuses sticking from the ground like fingers, and the noon sun was blazing in a cloudless sky overhead.

It would have been very impressive, if it didn’t also look *extremely* fake.

Screens running along the walls flickered to life, displaying further images of a desert-like environment, and clearly intended to give a feeling of immersion in the scenario, as though it were some sort of shitty holodeck.

“Okay,” said Adam, “so, what exactly are we supposed to do here?”

“Just make it across to the other side,” said Beetlejuice.

“That’s it?” asked Barbara skeptically. It wasn’t exactly a great distance.

“Sure!” said the demon. “Hey, we’re still on Round One, can’t do anything *too* complicated yet! Easy-peasy-lemon-squeezy.”

“Um,” said Lydia.

“Um,” said the Maitlands.

“Um,” said Beetlejuice. A tumbleweed rolled across the ground. “Can I pay you guys to forget I said that?”

“Oh not a chance,” smirked Lydia. Who’d have thought a demon could be such a freaking *dork*?

“Well, c’mon then,” interjected Adam, clearly looking for a return to normalcy. (he’d come to the wrong place if that’s what he wanted.) “This desert isn’t going to cross itself!”

No matter how long or how quickly they walked, they seemed to be making very little progress. Despite having very clearly passed by a number of cactuses (cacti?), they were barely any closer to the other side of the room than when they’d begun. Turning back, Lydia realized that in spite of their apparent lack of progress, she could no longer see the door through which they had entered.

She stopped walking with a frustrated huff. “There’s gotta be some trick to this. What is it, some sort of moving walkway under the sand?”

Adam and Barbara turned back to look at her in confusion.

Lydia waved an exasperated hand at the surrounding dessert. “I mean, look, we aren’t any closer to the door, and the stupid room’s been just cycling through the same set pieces. I swear, we’ve passed that cactus like five times now!”

And that, ladies and gents, is my cue for phase two, thought Beetlejuice. *Now let’s see. How do we wanna mix in that bad luck?*

Oblivious to the scheming demon, Barbara was taking Lydia’s comments under consideration. “I suppose that makes sense,” she said thoughtfully. “There must be some puzzle or something we have to solve before we can actually proceed.”

“I do love a good puzzle!” Adam chimed in cheerfully.

“Wha—there’s nothing here!” Lydia exclaimed, frustrated. But both Maitlands had already wandered off to examine the nearest cactus prop. Really, Lydia knew that they were probably right, that crossing the room would never be a straightforward endeavor, not in a place like

this. But her clothes were sticking to her from the fake desert heat, and this did little to improve her patience.

She kicked at the sand in her annoyance, and only succeeded in further annoying herself at her own childishness.

Well. Not only.

Beneath the sands, something stirred. Lydia let out a yelp as the ground dropped out from under her, and she found herself sliding down into a rapidly deepening pit.

"Lydia!"

The two adults wheeled about to face where Lydia's cry had come from, but the girl was nowhere to be seen. They rushed to the edge of the pit that now stood where she had once been, and peered worriedly down. She was clinging to the loose sand, flailing her arms and legs in the desperate hope that she might find some measure of purchase. Adam dropped to his knees and reached a hand out to her.

At that same moment, something pushed through the sand at the bottom of the pit. Something with two rows of razor sharp teeth, and a dark maw beyond.

The blood drained from Adam's face. "O-oooh, oh goodness. That's—"

"What?" Lydia snapped, trying to twist around to see what he was staring at. "What is it?"

"Nope, nothing!" he said, utterly unconvincing. "Just... just grab my hand and don't-don't look back."

That was... probably bad. Lydia was irrationally overcome with an even stronger desire to see what horrible menace was threatening her, but as she didn't *particularly* want to end up between its jaws (she still had a prize to win, after all), getting to solid ground seemed like a marginally higher priority.

As her scrabbling hand came into contact with Adam, a bolt of flame shot over their heads and down into the pit. Barbara dropped to her knees and grabbed Lydia's arms, her hands still warm from the spell as the creature let out an ear-shattering roar. Together, Adam and Barbara managed to pull Lydia back to the relatively stable ground at the chasm's edge.

Rolling over onto her back, Lydia caught a brief glimpse of an elongated snake-like creature with black and white stripes rearing up in pain and anger, before it dove back beneath the sand.

"Whoa," she breathed. Pushing herself to her feet, she grinned at Barbara. "Hey, that was a nice shot! I wouldn't have pegged you as the evocation type."

Barbara did not appear to share in her enthusiasm. "I don't think that's the last we've seen of that thing. We should keep moving, my magic definitely isn't strong enough to hurt it for very long."

“Pssh, not with that attitude it’s not!” Beetlejuice’s voice chimed in from somewhere above them. “C’mon, hot stuff, show me how you handle a taste of danger.”

Fearing the consequences of the distraction arguing with a demon might bring, Adam lightly touched Barbara’s arm. “Let-let’s just keep moving,” he said. “Now that we know what’s out there, we can at least take the proper amount of caution.”

And, clustered together like a herd of frightened little mice (did mice move in herds?), the three humans once more began to make their way across the simulacrum of a lifeless wasteland. The two adults were twitchy, jumping at every simulated gust of wind blowing a swirl of sand across their path. And okay, yes, Beetlejuice could admit that *maybe* that was kind of a cheap source of amusement, so sue him.

Lydia, on the other hand, was a bit better at keeping her wits about her. She ignored the obvious ploys from the demon, retrieving a gnarled looking wand from the pocket of her dress and gripping it tightly. A dark shape broke the surface of the sand several yards away, and she caught a glimpse of black and white stripes before it sank back below the surface. It appeared again a minute later, on the other side of the group.

It’s circling us, Lydia realized. Like some sort of sand... shark. Sand snake? Worm?

She stopped walking, trying to track how fast the thing had been moving. She needed to be ready....

And... there!

The striped form appeared again, sand cascading gently from its back, and Lydia struck. A jet of greenish light shot from her wand, striking the thing square along its back.

“C’mon, let’s go!” She pulled at Adam and Barbara. While it was distracted from her spell, they might have a chance to put some distance between themselves and the creature. Before they could go more than a few steps, however, the demon’s cackling laughter rang out above them.

“Not a bad shot kid! Too bad sandworms don’t mind a bit of poison!”

“*Shit,*” Lydia hissed. Why hadn’t she thought of that?

Adam offered her a weak smile. “Hey, it was a good try, though.”

Barbara shook her head, a worried frown on her face. “I don’t think we can fight that thing. What are we going to do? Our spells just aren’t powerful enough.”

“No...” Adam replied thoughtfully. “But maybe we don’t have to!” A faint grin was starting to spread across his face, disproportionate to their apparently dire circumstances. He bent his head towards the other two to share his idea in a hurried whisper.

“Uh, *no,*” Beetlejuice interjected, “you definitely need to fight the giant murder worm.”

This was thoroughly ignored by the huddle of humans. That wouldn't do, they couldn't just pretend he wasn't there. ~~It was bad enough that he was invisible to anyone outside of the bounds of the game.~~ "Yeah, no, time's up. Back to the action."

He snapped his fingers and the sandworm burst from the ground, lunging at the humans. Its jaws came together with an audible crash as it hurtled into Adam and dove back beneath the ground.

The tip of its tail disappeared beneath the sand, and all three humans could still be seen standing exactly where they had been, their images flickering like TV static. A sound like panicked breathing and pounding feet came from farther back in the room towards the door they had come through. A ripple in the sand indicated that, visible or not, the sandworm had found its next target.

There was a tense moment of silence. Even Beetlejuice was quiet, waiting for the inevitable screams as the sandworm's teeth tore through flesh and bone.

Instead, a muffled sigh of relief came from a spot only a few yards away from where the illusion of the Maitlands and Lydia still flickered, and the three humans cautiously stood from where they had been hidden behind a dune.

"...what," Beetlejuice said.

Lydia glanced towards the ceiling. The demon's voice seemed to come out of everywhere and nowhere, so it was hard to determine the best place to direct her words for maximum effect as she smirked, "Classic bait and switch. Oldest trick in the book."

"You see," Adam said. "Fighting doesn't always have to be the best option. In fact, I'd say it rarely is!"

Lydia groaned. "No, don't ruin this with *morals*." But she couldn't fight off a smile at his enthusiasm, ridiculous and dorky as it was.

"Well... shit," Beetlejuice said. It certainly wasn't what one would call a *traditional* end to this particular challenge. Hell, they'd hardly damaged the thing at all.

But...

But it had been a clever trick. And Beetlejuice was far more interested in those contestants that could mix things up a bit over the ones that just used brute force.

Ah, fuck it, he decided. If the boss didn't like it (and she wouldn't, she'd say he was being too soft) he could just say he was dragging things out, prolonging their fear and suffering. After all, there was hardly even a point in offing them so soon in the game.

There was a faint popping noise as the far door shifted into a plane of existence where it could be seen by the humans. Ever the perceptive one, Lydia noticed its presence almost immediately.

“Is this the way to the next challenge? Does that mean we beat this room?” she asked, hand already on the doorknob.

“Yup! Congrats, you defeated my, uh, sandworm puzzle? Wait no, shit, that sounded lame. Fuck, is lameness contagious?”

And with the demon’s exaggeratedly worried prattle filling their ears, the three humans put the false desert and its dangers behind them.

Chapter End Notes

Again, I am so so sorry to anyone who still follows this fic for leaving it for so long. I hope this chapter was at least enjoyable, and if anyone new's made it here, hi, welcome, thank you for taking the time to read my goofy little story~

End Notes

I've got finals next week, so I've no idea when the next chapter's going to be up. I wanted to go ahead and get this one done before I lost my nerve though, since this is the first time I've written fanfic since probably high school. Blame my best friend, she convinced me to go through with this madness. Anyways, thanks for reading!

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