



PROMPT #1: Your polite new neighbors who just moved in next door have suspiciously pointed ears and speak a language that you can't find on Google Translate.

Devil Apartment Complex

by **Eric Yang**

His first thought was: *Lords of Kobol, I have to run.*

His second thought, the one that formed after a second of processing the chaotic scene before him, deactivated his flight-or-fight and instead activated his second-hand embarrassment, and for the part-time student plus part-time minimum wage retail worker plus part-time commissions artist plus part-time journalist, the black-haired scarlet-eyed twenty-two-years-old devil-without-powers Daemon Kang couldn't decide the worse of the two outcomes. It's not every day that his options on a cool fifty-degrees afternoon are limited between public execution or public embarrassment, and the shock upon finding out that the once-in-a-century elven heroes have followed him into the parallel world known as Earth would have sent him into a state of complete meltdown if it weren't for the fact that he held thirty dollars' worth of buy-one-get-one-free deals in his hands. And if the heroic elven twins that saved the world are a once-in-a-century talent destined for greatness, then the deal he got at the local supermarket is an occurrence that only happens every blue moon (which Daemon heard was very rare on Earth).

"Look," Daemon raises his free hand, the hand not carrying his precious haul, and his fingers twist into that semi-open-palm gesture that he picked up after living a year in the human world. "I don't know who this 'Demon King' that you're talking about is, and I really need to get back to my apartment before these mini-ice-cream bars melt. Really wish you good luck in finding that 'Demon King,' though! I would highly recommend the local police station."

"Don't bother yourself with those wretched lies of yours, Demon King!" The source of his embarrassment — the younger of the twins and a talented weapons expert that had mastered

every divine tool in existence — pointed the wooden stick that had fallen from the tree just seconds ago at him. The language she spoke was not the standard English, or any other human language on Earth for that matter, but rather the language from their homeworld. To any outsiders watching, it might well have been a foreign language from another country.

Daemon had no doubt she could easily kill someone with that three-inch-long and half-an-inch-wide stick that is barely staying connected together, but Daemon had also spent enough time listening to boring physics professors lecture about force and mass and acceleration to know that if force equals mass times acceleration, there is no chance in the thirteen planes of Kobol that the flimsy stick could inflict enough damage on him to warrant an emotionally and financially damaging trip to the emergency room.

Instead, there is a much greater and more probable chance that the crowd of onlookers gathering around them in the middle of a busy four-way intersection during rush hour will shatter his will to continue on. Daemon facepalmed. He has to disperse the attention before more people gather — or worse, before the police are called and he gets fined for public disturbance for the sixteenth time in a year. Not only is his wallet in danger, but his chances at securing that internship at the local research lab will drop to absolute zero if they find out about this.

“Let’s just calm down, okay —” Daemon started, but the hot-tempered younger twin that could never think before acting, Lumine Von Celestialspeareg, charges at him with the flimsy stick that suddenly looks much, much more menacing in the hands of someone who could make the Absolute Divine’s holy weapons look like those elastic sling-like toys that every demon, elf, and human played with as a child for no apparent reason. And despite being a student of the natural laws, he would be lying if he didn’t say that the speed at which Lumine charged at him was making his doubt whether or not force really equals mass times acceleration, or perhaps the revered Sir Isaac Newton, scholar of humanity, didn’t account for possible divine blessings, the metaphysical metabolism of elves, or in much simpler terms: the existence of magic.

“Begone from this world, wretched abomination!”

Lumine cried out those terrifying yet horribly cliché words as she halted to a stop a step before crashing into him, and in a move that would put to shame the Olympians that compete every four years for the chance to prove themselves as the best of the best, the blonde-haired and crazy-eyed elf launched herself seven-and-three-quarters-of-an-inch meters into the air (as part of his examinations Daemon had to estimate lengths by eye), spun herself enough times to break beyond three revolutions-per-second, before finally slamming the stick down with enough force to split the crust, the mantle, the inner core, and the outer core into two perfect halves.

— that is, if magic was a natural thing in this world.

The blow stung a bit because the splintered part managed to hit his arm.

Daemon swatted her away, and she crashed down hard onto the concrete road that was only recently filled after a week of pipe repairs. “Right, okay. I thought I was a goner there for a second,” Daemon said, and if he were still the Demon King whose name acted as cautionary tales for all races alike, he would probably have scoffed and huffed out a snarky response like *is this really your best? Hah, the Lords of Kobol before me must have not been trying then*. But that convention of speaking doesn’t garner any friends in college nor does it make a good impression on any potential employers, so Daemon had left behind that side of him a long time ago, and immediately after he did, he managed to find a few close friends that helped him adjust to this world. They still tease him occasionally, but if it weren’t for them, he might’ve been spending his days strapped to an experimental chair by George Lincoln-Adams Roosevelt Junior the Third, the current president of the United States (who goes by the nickname Hamilton-Washington).

Someone tugged at his shirt. “H-How dare you do that to my sister!”

The older of the elven twins, Aether Von Abyssalspeareg (apparently the twins had been separated at birth hence the differences in their familial name), meekly pulled and pushed and shoved at him, but nothing really happened. To illustrate the physical difference between five-foot-two Aether and his own six-foot-one stature, imagine a pebble. Now, a physics question: if that one gram pebble were to be thrown flat at Mount Everest with an initial horizontal velocity of five feet per second, what would be the equal-and-opposite force resulting from their collision? Daemon made a mental note to study that question later, because he wasn’t sure of how to calculate it, but he did know at least that the force would be negligible enough to have not even existed in the first place. That was the difference between Aether and him.

“Please,” Daemon swatted at Aether the same he did to the blond-haired mage’s sister, and the fragile elf who was a genius in the magical field but not-so-much in anything else went flying beyond his sister. *Whoops*. “Leave me alone. I really don’t know what you’re talking about, and I really want to go back to my apartment and get my homework done before my roommate comes back and parties for another ten hours straight.”

But the world hated Daemon (rightfully so), and someone screamed from behind.

The exhausted student turned around with an expression that all-but-says *what now*.

A dozen cameras were immediately shoved into his face, and a dozen more microphones were poking him in places that surely violated the social convention of personal space. Daemon tried say something — or even tried to see past the blindingly white flashing lights and equally

disorientating *clicks* that could have easily been mistaken as an exorcism sent down from the heavens, for that matter — but his words are vastly overpowered by the intermingling words of the reporters that made it onto the scene only a few minutes after the event had begun.

“This just in!” One of the reporters spoke louder than everyone else. “A local student of Fann Tahsy University is seen bullying international students that do not speak English! The bully in question is twenty-two-year-old Daemon Kang, a first-year student studying their second semester as a Physics major. Daemon Kang was arrested nine months prior due to his involvement in various crimes such as public disturbances, public indecency, theft and intimidation, parking in staff parking spaces, assaulting an elderly—”

“How do you even know all of that?” Daemon groaned.

Right. As he said earlier, between the threat of total annihilation at the hands of the two prodigious heroes that managed to defeat the rulers of each of the thirteen planes of Kobol and a death of public image in the eyes of the media, Daemon would have chosen total annihilation each and every single time. At least then he wouldn't have to deal with second round of first-hand-and-second-hand embarrassment that will soon follow the very next day provided that he managed to survive this current round: everyone, and he meant everyone, at his university will be talking about him and whispering about him while sneaking all-too-obvious glances that are so badly-disguised that Daemon believed theater class should be a mandatory core class.

This time, he facepalmed with both hands. “This is the worst.”

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“Are you two satisfied now?”

The Q-Uiet National Park, the only national park and also the only park and also the only place that escaped the clutches of urbanization in the booming city of Mahkebeleeve, had always been Daemon's sanctuary. Even now, as the season slowly began to warm and as the wild geese that are ruthless enough to put even the toughest demons to shame come out of hibernation, the gentle song of the lake's tranquil waves washing ashore brought an indescribable amount of relaxation and free therapy to Daemon. The warm sunlight descended onto passionate fields like the unfurling petals of flowers in those widely popular timelapse videos on MeTube, the much nicer birds are conversing merrily away the most recent gossip, and the occasional butterfly lands softly onto his hands, its gentle touch like the soft caress of a lover underneath a starry night.

Really, it would've been the perfect distressing opportunity if it weren't for the two sniveling elves that are glued to his sides with a deathly glare that has scared away every butterfly and bird in the clearing apart from the geese, whom of which were still *honking* away

at the cars that drive by. Daemon always wondered which of the two was the real cause of noise pollution, and judging from how even the number of cars slowly faded as the afternoon romance darkened into the mysterious night, it seemed that the geese had won themselves another point.

Fifty-five points total for the geese; two points total for the cars.

“Don’t think that this delicious treat is enough to sway me to your side, King of Demons!” Lumine said in her usual shouting voice, her lips stained with drops of chocolate-raspberry-honeydew-caramel-ribbon-crunch-frappuccino-flavored ice-cream that are slowly being pulled down by gravity. If it weren’t for the fact that the twelve-dollar ice-cream kept Lumine talking fifty-percent-less by his quick estimates, Daemon would have gone into flames at how she was wasting food. But every second that passes without a noise from Lumine is an extra second of peace that Daemon has never enjoyed more until now, and every second that passes while Lumina is talking is a second in which Daemon contemplates updating the competition into a three-way battle-royal between her, the sleek cars with the road-raging drivers that love to honk at every possible opportunity, and the geese that equally love to honk.

Daemon sighed again. “I’m not trying to sway you. I just want you to leave me alone.”

“That won’t happen!” Lumine said un-ingeniously. “The Heavenly Court has ordered us to bring you back into our realm dead-or-alive. We cannot return until we either have you in shackles and paraded through the newfound kingdom for all to bear witness, or we have your head on a pike displayed in front of the Imperial Castle for the suffering villagers to spit.”

“You don’t have to do that though, right?” Daemon tried his best to give as sincere of a smile as he could to the person that declared his execution in not-so-veiled methods. Surely the twin heroes that saved the lands are reasonable enough to give him a lesser punishment if they ever do manage to capture him — or maybe even a second chance. After all, the university Daemon studied at had a one-tolerance policy, and if a human university can offer such grace and kindness, surely the righteous and moral and good heroes can as well.

Aether meekly interjects. “We do.”

Lumine huffs in agreement. “You are the scum of the land. Do you even know how many died because of your endless thirst for blood? How many children were left without their parents after you razed their village to the ground and burned every living memory of their existence? These citizens of our newfound kingdom of light, they all report to have the same horrible nightmares each and every night that you will return and shatter the peace that they have slowly grown accustomed to again. They deserve your life as compensation for what you have done.”

“Okay, you do have a point,” Daemon reluctantly agreed. It was true. Before the months he spent in the human world, he was — as the kids say nowadays — a trash (devil) being. But Daemon Kang no longer regards himself as a king of any sort, let alone the once-fearsome Demon King that nearly succeeded in plunging the entire holy continent into eternal darkness. He was now a student of natural physics who only wanted a stable income and housing. At least, that’s what Daemon Kang desperately wanted to believe. “But that was me in the past. I’m a changed man. For crying out loud, I volunteer at the local animal shelter every other Sunday!”

“Why, you— You clearly have not learned anything in the time you spent here. I ought to teach you another lesson, Demon King! This time, you don’t have another world to escape to!” Lumine said as she balled both her free hand and the hand holding the wildly-expensive ice-cream into fists, and when the Saint of Weapons turns everything she touches into a weapon, Daemon couldn’t help but wonder how effective of a weapon a crushed half-eaten ice-cream cone of a chocolate-raspberry-honeydew-caramel-ribbon-crunch-frappuccino flavor would be. Would it be enough to kill him?

Daemon stood up and crossed his arms. A part of him realized that the situation would grow into this. Although his words said otherwise, and although he no longer considered himself to be the person he was nine months ago, Daemon did feel an inch of guilt for all that he had done during his time as the Great Demon King; and the more he spent in this human world, the more people he met along the days and weeks he spent navigating through this new unknown alone, the more the people he met helped him unconditionally without knowing what he had done, the more guilt he felt for his actions in the past. Perhaps a part of him wanted this to happen. He wanted a fight to the death. He wanted a chance to kill the Demon King forever.

“Fine,” Daemon said after a long period of silence. His professors taught him to take any opportunities he could, and he intended on taking this one. “Let’s continue where we left off, then, before I escape into this world. A fight to the death between the heroes of humanity and the cruel demon king. I won’t run away this time. Whatever the result is, I accept it.”

“Great. No backing out now,” Lumine said, but the fury was gone.

Instead, a cold determination replaced it all.

Daemon could see in her eyes that she meant it. He didn’t blame her. There are countless like her back in their old world whose lives were destroyed by him and his whims. Whenever he would get bored, he would kill for his own amusement. Whenever that got boring, he would invent new ways to torture. He was truly a despicable demon king. No, not just a demon king, but a truly despicable creature. But Daemon Kang had a life here that he wished to live out, and regardless of his actions in the past, he will not die here before Daemon Kang lived out his life.

Daemon fished through his pockets for a small knife, and with the tiniest of incisions to his palm, a small white crystal emerged covered in his blackened blood. “I assume you brought one of these with you? A crystal that copied all your innate and magical abilities so they were not lost to the rules of this reality? Otherwise, this wouldn’t be a very fair fight at all.”

Lumine did not respond with words.

Instead, she bit her thumb and with the vibrant blood, a similar crystal emerged.

“I guess this really is the final fight, then,” Daemon said. Then, his teeth gnawed against the crystal, the familiar bloodied flavor filling his mouth, and the power he locked away months ago coursed through him after all that time. His horns regrew to their full length, his wings that covered the sun sprouted once again, and his blood boiled for the scent of combat.

It’s addicting.

Daemon shook his head. No, he can’t let the power take control again.

With a single swipe of his hand, he created a barrier around the park that blocked all from entering and leaving, and blocked all information from being transmitted in and out. As a safety precaution, he pushed all living beings — the geese included — outside the barrier into their own separate field. The Demon King may lust for blood, but Daemon Kang wanted a place to relax after all this is over. “There. Now we can battle without worrying about harming anyone.” Lumine nodded and she bit into her own crystal, regaining the familiar wings and sacred sword that was ingrained in the memory of the Demon King. The Demon King feared that ability — that was why he escaped. But Daemon Kang is not the Demon King.

“Any last words, Demon King?” Lumine asked.

By now, the sun had fallen asleep on the job, its light retracing back to the other side of the planet, and a full moon had revealed itself in all its passionately blinding glory. Daemon will miss it. He will miss the constant wade-and-wane of the sun and moon, just as he will miss this dance between hero and villain. Regardless of the result, whether he lives or he dies, Daemon Kang intended on burying the Demon King underneath this very park. After this fight, the Demon King that terrorized the world will be no longer, and if he still has a chance after all of that, Daemon will repay his debts to the best of his ability. But those are thoughts meant for after the fight. As of this present moment, the butterflies and birds have gone to sleep, and underneath the serene lighting of the smaller celestial object, the last dewdrop from an earlier rain falls. “None,” Daemon responded. “Let’s get this over with so I can put my groceries away.” Daemon moved first.

But before he could land a knuckle sandwich directly onto her scowling face (or before she could beat his face into an unrecognizable pulp. Truth be told, Daemon wasn’t confident in

his chances at winning the fight now that the martial twin is fighting with sugar in her system rather than on an empty stomach), Aether stands between the two of them with a panicked expression stricken across his face before a bright flash of swirling blue light blasts both of them a few meters back and into the perfectly trimmed bushes grown with love and care (but Lumine was blasted a shorter distance away, which when considering that force equals mass times acceleration, Aether must have used a lesser force on her than on him. How unfair.).

“Wait!” Aether exclaimed, out of breath. “Stop fighting for a second.”

“What is your deal!” Both Daemon and Lumine shouted at the same time.

Aether gave an awkward smile, but his attention was elsewhere. “Lumine, we have a problem.” Aether sighed. “I unsealed my magical abilities early on in our journey, and I’ve been in constant contact with the Heavenly Court the entire time using my power, and before I had to cut the connection off to preserve enough mana to reopen the portal back to our dimension, I heard very disturbing news. The spatial specter that all three of us used to travel to this dimension... It attracted unwanted attention. Whereas we can travel to this dimension and potentially others as we will, others too with sufficient magical abilities can travel to our dimension through the cracks we created during our travels. In other words—”

“— someone from a different dimension entered ours,” Daemon finished the sentence.

Aether nodded. “Right. From the sound of it, the situation is bad. It isn’t just one or two people that entered our home dimension. It seems that an invasion was planned a long time ago, and they were waiting for the moment Lumine and I left the world in pursuit of the Demon King. Then, with the two heroes gone, they have a much easier time invading the world. There’s a war ongoing in our world, Lumine. While the invaders have to follow the rules of our reality, we have just finished a war with the demons, and the world doesn’t have enough resources for another.”

Lumine glanced between Aether and Daemon. Through the years they spent fighting as enemies, Daemon could tell that the righteous hero was conflicted. Here, handed to her on a silver platter, is the opportunity of a lifetime to defeat the Demon King that ruined her life. But if she chooses to fight him instead of returning back to her world, nothing may remain of that world when she returns. Daemon pitied her. Out of the three of them, she was the one that cared the most about the people of her world. Aether followed what his younger twin believed in, and Daemon, well, he had his reasons for becoming the way he was, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t feel for the people in the world he came from after spending all this time as Daemon Kang.

With a flash of crimson light, the barrier around them shattered into pieces. His horns and wings disappeared again, and his power, too, disappeared as quickly as it had flooded his

body. In undoing his transformation, he left himself vulnerable to any and every attack from Lumine and Aether, and with the time it takes to rebuild the mana in the gem, he wouldn't be able to defend himself this time. Still, Daemon chose to undo his transformation, and with it, his last fight as the Demon King who terrorized the world that forsook him had ended.

“Newton's Third Law states that any applied force will have an equal and opposite force. If the force I applied was the karmic debt I accrued over the years of slaughter, then the equal and opposite force will be this moment.” Daemon said, the memories of both his lives flashing through his eyes in the brief seconds of interlude. In the few months that he had lived as a normal human being, he had fallen in love with the lifestyle. Still, the death of the Demon King meant that all his sins needed to be repaid, and if this moment is the opposing force of his karmic debt, then he will gladly trade everything for a chance to live as Daemon Kang again. “I'll make this easy for you, Lumine. If you choose to take my life, I cannot fight back. If you choose to spare me, then I promise you that the Demon King of the Thirteen Planes will be no longer.”

A moment passes.

Then another.

Yet no longer than three moments passed before Lumine made her decision.

Her transformation was undone in a flutter of feathers, the gracious light dissipating into the strings of moonlight, and she turned away from Daemon. “The next time we meet, I will judge whether you are Daemon Kang or the despicable Demon King. If you are the scholar Daemon Kang, then I would like the delicious treat again, if possible.”

Daemon gave a small nod.

“Let's go back, Aether,” Lumine said.

Aether let out another awkward cough. “Sorry to ruin the mood, but there was something else I had to say. The spatial spector was damaged by the invaders during their invasion, and it'll take a higher amount of mana than usual to open a rift again. With my current mana reserves and the rate at which I can convert the elements in the air into energy, it'll take at least a month to synthesize enough mana to re-open the rift. Until then, I can reserve a bit of mana every day to relay communications with the Heavenly Court so we're updated on the situation.”

Lumine stared incredulously. “Are you saying... we're stuck here for a month?”

“At the minimum.”

That night, Daemon added one of the heroes of humanity onto his list of noise polluters.

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“This is the place?” Lumine and Aether stood in front of the wooden door with terracotta blue painted rusted and stripped over the long years of its existence. The ancient apartment complex, two stories tall and housing a total of thirty apartments with two bedrooms per apartment, was the same complex that Daemon lived in. A friend referred him to the apartment for a bonus and discounted rent for both parties, and now Daemon was referring the two of them to the apartment for the same bonuses. It was a nice arrangement and a win-win for both parties. They get to be neighbors with Daemon and thus could keep an eye on him, and Daemon gets to treat himself to extra fancy dinners for a few nights in a row.

Daemon gave them a thumbs up. “Yep. It’s secure, the first month of rent is waived, and best of all: the rent is a lot cheaper here than anywhere else because of how far it is away from the main universities. Besides, there are a lot less eyes watching this place compared to other places, too. It’s the perfect arrangement for the two of you who don’t even have a job yet and are in need of extra privacy for whenever you want to disappear.”

“Oh, and,” Daemon continued. He fished an old textbook from his bag — the same textbook that he had used when he first arrived on Earth. “Here’s an English textbook. I wrote some notes down in our language to make it easier to understand, but if you want to survive here for a month, then you need to know how to at least communicate the basic ideas.”

“You’re doing a lot to help us,” Lumine said with a raised eye.

Daemon shrugged. “It’s what others have done for me.”

Right. It is what others have done for him. Daemon stared into the morning sky where a canvas of blue and white opened up infinite possibility. When he first arrived on Earth, he was still the Demon King. He tried to brute force his way through living in the human world, but that got him nowhere. It was only after he set aside that part of him and accepted help from others that he became Daemon Kang, the twenty-two-years-old freshman studying physics at a university and the part-time commissions artist and the part-time journalist and all other labels that he can now confidently say describe who he was. In this world, he was not a villain, and while the road to redemption is a long and arduous one and making amends is much, much more complicated than any physics test he could take, he had a strong foundation to begin his journey.

Life, somehow, turned out good for a devil like himself.

“Well, if you need me, please do hesitate to ask.” Daemon grinned. “But other than that, I wish you a warm welcome, new neighbors, to the Devil Apartment Complex — an apartment complex of endless possibilities. May our remaining month together be a successful one!”

— to be continued.