Without wasting any more time for fear that the giant tree demon might destroy another swath of the city, the three of us swooped in firing every spell we could muster. Igni, aqua, thundra, ventus, even Mira's necromantic mortis magic couldn't harm the creature. We were less than birds to it, possibly no more than insects buzzing around its burning branches.

Belle's unmatched firepower as a witch of wrath, empowered by her familiar Luna and the augmented soul stone of diligence, still wasn't enough to force it back. My empowered form's magic was just as ineffective, and within me, an irked goddess sighed with displeasure.

"Not so much as a scratch. This thing is much more resilient than the cerberus we fought in Lotherain," Belle said, wiping the sweat from her face. Mira came up and slapped Belle's ass, causing her to jolt and clutch her cheeks in agony. She glanced over her shoulder with fury in her eyes. "You keep doing that on purpose…"

"I do it *because* I know you're a pervert with that butt plug in you. What good is it if your magic can't defeat the demon?" Mira sneered.

"If you two channeled your antagonisms at the demon instead of each other we probably would have defeated it by now." I casted a ventus spell which blasted them apart from each other, then flew up to put myself between them. My colleagues crossed their arms and faced away from each other, pouting like quarreling school children.

The sound of creaking and groaning wood, like a tree toppling in the forest, was followed by a deafening crash as the demon took its second step into the city and destroyed yet another section.

"At the very least, we know it moves slower than it takes grass to grow. Are you not able to commune with it using the dryad's boon inside you?" Mira asked me.

"Unfortunately not. The tree is dead, which is strange because I do sense a powerful magic signature within it. What about you? Are you able to tap into it like you did the dead trees in the demon's realm?" I asked in return.

She shook her head, clicking her tongue at the hopelessness of the situation. "I *should* be able to, but I can't. It's as if something else is controlling—"

"That's it!" Belle exclaimed. "Our spells aren't hurting it because the tree isn't the demon. It's just a vehicle. Something must be controlling it. The magic signature inside must be the puppeteer."

We made circles around the tree but the surface area proved too great to scan. It might take us hours of careful inspection before we could find an entrance.

As luck would have it, I sensed the signatures of flying imps rising from the surface. A pair of them, each carrying an unconscious woman in their arms.

"Over there!" I pointed Mira and Belle to the demons.

"Have they come to stop us?" Belle readied a spell.

"Doesn't seem like it," Mira said, pushing Belle's hand down with her staff.

The flying imps appeared to know exactly where to go. We followed them, but kept at a distance hidden behind the burning branches to avoid from being seen. They entered the demon tree through a bookcase-sized opening along the upper trunk.

This was our break.

We gave it a few seconds and entered after them. The interior was a tight corridor purposefully carved or altered to form a spiral pathway along the edge of the tree trunk. Illuminating the way were firefly-like insects clinging to the walls and ceiling. Unlike the insects from our world, these had giant mandibles which nibbled on the decaying wood for whatever sap remained.

"If only we could just set this place on fire and smoke out whatever is within." Mira plucked an insect from the wall and crushed it between her fingers. Blue blood darkened to a sickly black which she flicked away from her hand.

The lower we went, the wider the corridor became until eventually a grand archway of gnarled branches opened up and led into a brightly-lit chamber.

A throne room was more appropriate. It seemed all the leaves that were burnt outside found their way in here and dangled like a forest canopy. Chandeliers hung from the ceiling, but instead of candles it was clusters of insects that illuminated the chamber. Intricately woven rugs and carpets, clearly stolen from the populace below, were haphazardly laid on the floor. Vines and branches gathered at the center created a throne seat, upon which sheets and cushions were thrown on to also serve as a bed, and hovering behind it were three life-sized magic crystals.

On that sovereign seat sat a handsome male demon with the horns of a ram, feathery black wings, and shoulder-length black hair that turned red at the tips. Four naked human women sat around him. Two leaned against the throne while the other two mindlessly performed fellatio on his erect penis. They had dazed looks of lust in their eyes.

His most striking feature was not the blue tint of his skin nor the jagged tattoos on his bare chest— it was the grin that showed of someone who had victory in his grasp.

All of us came to the same conclusion of what he was— an incubus, the male counterpart to a succubus.

"If we're not careful, he'll put us under a spell that cannot be broken from," I warned my colleagues.

Incubi were dangerous demons. Not as sexually ravenous as their sisters, but possessed incredible magic capable of bending one's will. Mira's memory altering magic and mind maggot hobbies paled in comparison.

My chest beat with a sense of revulsion. Vessyra reacted harshly to the sight of an incubus.

Creatures such as him do not love, only lust. Yet they copulate in my name. Show no mercy, my avatar, the goddess whispered to me.

"Welcome to my castle! Normally, no one comes here on their own so I must *invite* them myself. To whom do I owe the pleasure of receiving such lovely women?" the demon asked, his voice as regal and haughty as he looked.

Mira, unamused and unwilling to humor him, fired an icicle at his head but embedded into a branch that emerged from the ground.

"Ah! I see you are witches! My sisters Xana and Lorica have told me so much about the trio that ended Zertos' reign. Is Thelia still with you? I should like to have a word with her," he said.

"Thelia has a new master now. You'll meet the same fate if you don't surrender quietly," I demanded of him, pointing my empowered staff which bristled with Vessyra's energy at him.

"You wish to fight so soon? But we've only just met! At least allow me to introduce myself— I am Auren, and my duty is to finish where Zertos did not." He rose from his seat and bowed.

"We're not interested in making friends with demons unless it is to kill them." Belle smirked.

"Kill me?" The incubus cackled loud enough for his echoes to return to his ears. He waved his hand, dismissing the women to another room. "I've grown tired of them anyway. I shall break you witches and turn you into my personal love-slaves. Then the rest of his world shall follow suit to become my harem!"

Auren's eyes flashed red and a wave of magic emanated from him like a gust of wind. The three of us raised our weapons to defend ourselves but nothing happened.

"Now come to me! Gaze upon my glorious member and service me with pleasure. If you are good girls, I shall reward you in turn," Auren said.

The four of us stood there and stared at each other, frozen in place. A look of confusion fell on his twitching face, and I was sure we shared his puzzlement.

"Do you feel any different?" I asked Mira and Belle.

"Other than disgust? No," Mira answered.

"I feel fine. Was that supposed to do something?" Belle wondered aloud.

"But how? No, it must be a fluke. C-Come to me, my darlings! Let me shower you with my *love!*" Auren pulsed another wave of magic, this time powerful enough to cause the chandeliers to sway and spook the insects on them.

Mira began to walk forward. I reached out to her, but she slapped my hand away.

"No! Come back!" I shouted, fearful that a charm had taken control of her.

Belle clutched my arm to keep me from approaching.

"Wait…" Belle said.

"Yes… That's it." Auren grinned. "I can sense tremendous power within you, my lovely. Of course, you couldn't resist my charms— oof!"

The incubus was kicked back into his seat. Mira grinded the sole sole of her boot into his chest.

"How… absolutely… *disgusting!* Do not even dare think of calling *my* Ellori your darling, you filthy roadside mongrel!" Mira snarled.

The tension left my shoulders at once.

"But how?" I asked.

"Just before the demon tried to put a spell on us a second time, Mira gave me an order to do nothing." Belle twirled the leash in circles.

"As if anything could convince me to love anything other than you, darling." Mira glanced over her shoulder and blew me a kiss.

I suspected more was at play here. As for how I withstood the incubus' magic, it was likely due to my connection with Vessyra, sharing her loathing for the demon. Mira, on the other hand, by sheer force of will in her overwhelming love for me was her own protection.

"No, no, no… This can't be. You three should be lusting after me! I'm the one in power here, not— mmrrpphh!" Mira stepped onto his chest and stuck her other boot into his mouth. He began to whimper. The once arrogant incubus had been reduced to a sniveling coward.

I almost felt sorry for Auren. *Almost*.

"You do not talk until you've licked clean the dirt from my shoes," Mira said.

"If you don't want this to get ugly, I suggest you move this giant tree away from the city. Otherwise, Mira here might ruin that handsome face of yours," I warned.

Auren did as he was ordered. While he contained incredible stores of magic within him, he could not himself invoke the elements of our world, which was why he depended on the giant

tree to cause destruction. The giant magic crystals gave us an aerial view of the city from atop of the tree. We were a good few paces away from Ferellis when it came to a complete stop.

"I don't understand… thousands of years ago we were feared. Now…" the incubus muttered to himself.

Like Zertos, Auren also underestimated how far witches had come. Demons had been wallowing in complacency in their world for so long, ignorant of how far witchcraft and humanity progressed. Perhaps demons weren't a threat after all. Perhaps that was why Edith sought to bring them into this world as additional fuel.

"I think we're done here. What do we do with him?" Belle asked, pointing to Auren who, having lost control of the tree to Mira, was now bound by the very branches that once served him.

"My vote is to kill him. Once he's gone, the veil will be too weak for demons to come through." Mira tightened his restraints and caused him to howl in pain.

"Hmm. Not yet," I said, surprising my colleagues and earning their full attention. "As a greater demon, he possesses a deep font of magic that could be harnessed for our benefit. We'll find another way to seal the veil. I want to do with him as Eudora would any exotic captive in our grasp."