

BNA 09 – Hot Stuff

Description

SCENE: INTRODUCTION

ENOCH: Be not afraid. You're not in any danger, you're just a prophet. That means you have a very important mission on your hands. And you'll be experiencing some convulsions and headaches for the next few days. The voices you'll be hearing are totally normal and part of your very safe experience. You are about to receive the next part of Asmodeus' adventures with Solomon. Listen closely, prophet, for there is great wisdom contained within.

SCENE: THE FORGE

ENOCH: After spending the night in the garden, the spirits who do sleep are rudely awakened by the sound of trumpets. With militarized precision, each spirit is called forth to state their name and their skillset. Based on this sliver of information, they are put to work. Asmodeus showed his hand by threatening to pull apart the King's molecules with his bare hands. "That's an impressive skill but the King's magic won't let you do that." Said the guard. "I bet you'll do great in the forge though!"

And so he finds himself in the doorway of a forge. A dozen demons are already hard at work, all at different stages in production. He spots the only human in sight, who he can only assume is the responsible guard. Quite small in stature, the young man looks around nervously.

FX: metal banging, water hissing, fire whooshing

ASMODEUS: Hey. Is this the place I'm supposed to be at?

YUSUF: Ahem. Are you the shaper?

ASMODEUS: That's what they told me.

YUSUF: Then yes, this is your station.

NAAR: Great, you're with us! This is gonna be fun.

YUSUF: Now that all of you are here. Welcome to the forge! Here is where you will spend your near and distant future. Your new home, in other words. See this beautiful brass bottle here? This is what you will be producing. Notice the exquisite curvature of the body, and the intricate carvings around the jewelry here at the neck. A most beautiful sample indeed. No? Oh, I didn't expect you to be impressed, but you don't even seem half as impressed as I thought you would be. Anyway, you're here for that very reason. You can create things better with your magical touch than any of us regular people could ever hope. Don't worry, even though I'm a guard and you are prisoners, it doesn't mean we can't have fun while we're here. Work is boring enough as it is, so, let's try to make all of our lives a little bit

easier.

NAAR: You want us to pretend like we are not prisoners?

YUSUF: "Prisoners" sounds so depressing. I will consider you my guests instead.

NAAR: Whatever you say.

FX: Walking, forge sounds in background

YUSUF: So. Which one of you is the smelter?

NAAR: That would be me.

YUSUF: Splendid! Guess what, djinn. Bet you'll be really surprised to hear this. You will be powering the furnace. Make it nice and warm for the ores to get all close and personal with each other.

NAAR: Just because I'm a djinn, you think there's nothing else to my personality? I have dreams, visions!

YUSUF: I know, I know. I don't make the rules though. Around here we're fulfilling the king's vision.

NAAR: (*deep, shaky inhale*)

FX: Naar's fire crackles

YUSUF: And then we have uhhh (*nervous*) the shaper.

ASMODEUS: Hey.

YUSUF: So, about your job. Once the ores are all hot and moldable you will extract the essence of the copper and zink and mix it into a brass alloy. Then you will shape it into bottles. You've got the specification tablets over here. Should be easy.

ASMODEUS: Sweet! Can I—

YUSUF: Unfortunately you will not get to use your creativity. Don't deviate from the designs, the king had a hissy fit last time someone did that. That's all for this station. Over here we have the last one. You must be the jeweler.

ZIK: Yep, That's me, that is.

ZAK: I am Zak.

YUSUF: Which face do you prefer I talk to?

ZIK and ZAK simultaneously: Mine.

ZIK: But mine more so.

ZAK: (clears throat) Mine

ZIK: Mine

ZAK: Mine

ZIK: Mine

ZAK: Mine.

ZIK: Yours.

ZAK: Yours. What? Dammit.

YUSUF: Alright then, I'll take turns. As I told your colleague, you have your specifications here. Don't get creative. And remember everyone, we work better if we have fun doing it!

ZIK: Right, fuck this.

ZAK: Have a nice life, human, I'm off.

YUSUF: You really shouldn't.

ZIK: What are you gonna do?

ZAK: You can't hurt me.

FX: heavy whip snap

ZIK & ZAK: (*blood curdling scream*)

YUSUF: The spell that the king used on you makes you experience pain and every other discomfort the same way we do. Us guards have been instructed to punish you if you don't do as you're told. Trust me, I don't want to use this, but I will if you make me.

ZIK: What in the world is this? Sort of—

ZAK: Burning, yeah.

YUSUF: That's pain. I just said. Don't make me do it again, please. I want to treat you as guests, but you have to be responsible and do your job. Do you understand?

ZIK: Yes

ZAK: No. I mean yes.

NAAR: (tiny voice) Yep.

ASMODEUS: Doesn't look like the fun kind of pain, so yes, I understand.

SCENE: SAME FORGE, DIFFERENT YEAR

ENOCH: Time flies when you're having fun. Which is why the next year crawls by at a snail's pace. Asmodeus, Naar and ZikZak learn the arts of metalworking the hard way: through whatever instructions make it through the language barriers between them and the demons who were bound to the forge long before they were. So mostly through trial and error.

There are three things Asmodeus enjoys above all else. Pulling raw elements out of scorching metal and getting soot all over his celestial body are not on that list.

ASMODEUS: (*Humming on "Hot Stuff" by [REDACTED]*)

NAAR: You've been singing that all day. Is it Phoenician?

ASMODEUS: No, it's... Uh. Technically not written yet. It's about hot stuff.

NAAR: How imaginative.

ASMODEUS: Hey I'm just trying to not lose my mind over here, okay?

NAAR: So... your angel friends never showed up.

ASMODEUS: They're not my friends, and it's been over a year now. It never takes them this long, so we can't count on them. Ugh. This shit burns and I've got soot in most of my eyes. I'm going outside to wash up.

FX: Crickets, Water being splashed in a barrel

ASMODEUS: Eugh. Fucking hate water. So unclean. Smells. Ugh. At least I can see a bit better now.

ENOCH: Asmodeus turns toward the newly built palace. Its architecture is spectacular, with a gravity defying balcony overlooking what will soon be the resplendent garden. He sees a man leaning against the railing of the balcony, dressed in magnificent embroidered robes and a golden crown adorning his head. Solomon. Asmodeus shoots a rotting glare toward the king.

ASMODEUS: Enjoy it while it lasts, dear king. The sand in your hourglass flows steadily, but we are eternal. If we don't get you, time will.

SCENE: THE BALCONY

ENOCH: Meanwhile, up on the balcony, Solomon meets the glaring eyes of Asmodeus with unwavering confidence. He won't let it show, but looking at the demon still fills him with as much dread as he felt the night he summoned it. He normally gets used to the spirits fairly quickly. The voice of his trusty librarian brings him out of his deep thoughts.

BLÄDDRERSKA: Should we continue now, my lord?

SOLOMON: Yes, let's do that.

ENOCH: Have I mentioned that he likes to read? Well. "Likes" is an understatement. He practically dedicates every free second to reading. And the languages he can't read, he makes sure to learn, so that nothing remains unknown to him. Because reading one thing at a time is for beginners, he is surrounded by dozens of floating scrolls and papyri and even a clay tablet or two. But they don't hold up themselves, no. If you squint, you might make out the dark tendrils surrounding the king, each holding a secret writing of interest. There are sixteen of these tendrils, all gathering together behind the king, attached to a dazzling creature. Her many lure lights fan out in a chandelier-like formation, serving as an excellent fire free reading lamp.

His librarian is yet another enslaved spirit, who has aptly been named the Page Turner. Her real name being Bläddrerska, but the king doesn't bother with their real names. Despite being enslaved, however, she has found a way to thrive here. Her focused emerald eyes practically sparkle with excitement. She has always adored reading, and she absorbs the written word like a sponge. Now here she is, surrounded by texts that you don't find anywhere Below.

SOLOMON: Page turner. Mark that scroll. Let's take another break. What do you think of this new palace?

BLÄDDRERSKA: Huh? Oh, I... am at a loss for words. This design... It's unlike anything I've ever seen. It's so... artistically materialistic.

SOLOMON: Quite right. The earth has never before seen such splendor. And we have much left to learn from the realm of spirits. We are just beginning.

BLÄDDRERSKA: Yes, quite. But not all of us are architecturally talented. Quite few are, to be honest. And I've been meaning to ask, lord, do you think they're happy? Working all day, all night.

SOLOMON: They may look unhappy, but don't let that fool you. Look at yourself for example, you're not exactly the embodiment of happiness, yet you are content here, aren't you?. Every single one of these creatures are from the depths of hell. It's miserable down there, you said so yourself. They should be thankful that I am giving them a break from hell's torment.

BLÄDDRERSKA: Yes, that's what your secret angel helper told you, but that's what an enemy party would say, isn't it? And I didn't say it was miserable, just not great either.

SOLOMON: If you had met him, you would know he was telling God's absolute truth. I'll say no more on the matter.

BLÄDDRERSKA: Understood. So the plan is still...

SOLOMON: Yes. I intend to reshape this world into something extraordinarily beautiful. So beautiful, in fact, that the heavenly host will prefer living here with us to living in heaven. And when they come, I will perhaps finally meet my equal among them. The soulmate I crave and deserve. I will take an angel wife, as the men of old did.

BLÄDDRERSKA: Well. I'm sure you'll find your perfect match. In the meantime, your – very much human – wives and concubines, are ready to see you now, according to your schedule.

SOLOMON: I– (sigh) ... That's right. I want to skip that today.

BLÄDDRERSKA: Yes, you said that you'd want that. According to your own instructions I must remind you that you have a reputation to uphold.

SOLOMON: (deep breath through nose)

BLÄDDRERSKA: Please don't hurt me, lord!

SOLOMON: Go and cross reference the marked scroll with the Egyptian texts, see if they match up! I'll tend to my wives.

BLÄDDRERSKA: The Jannes and Jambres writings?

SOLOMON: Of course that's what I meant! GO NOW!

FX: magic chime, rustle of papers

BLÄDDRERSKA: Yes, your majesty!

SCENE: SOLOMON PONTERS

ENOCH: King Solomon's magnificent empire never sleeps. Neither does he. He is wide awake, pondering. About ways to improve his kingdom. About ways to extend his time in this life. About ways to keep rumors from spreading. He fidgets and spins the rings on his left hand. He owes many things to that mysterious angel. On God's orders, it had made irregular visits ever since he was a boy. It was the same angel who presented him with the excellent idea of using demons for labor. Not only, it said, can they tell you anything you need to know, but they can do things for you better and faster than any human.

Solomon dreams of a kingdom where no one has to go hungry, where everyone has a house to live in and all the luxury they could ask for, where his people would never have to work again. There had already been vast improvements, and his reign had been peaceful. He wonders whether everything can be done by demons. Their collective talents seem to be limitless. He'll have to ask the angel for new ideas, next time it appears. He shivers at the thought. God's messenger had been invaluable to him, and he was grateful for its help, yes. But the spirits currently under his control, the horned and twisted beasts of hell... their menacing auras were nothing compared to that of his helper. It looked human, yes, but he knows a disguise when he sees one. Oh to be even close to that potential. Never aging, immensely wise, and with abilities beyond his comprehension. Beyond the terror, there's an enchanting sort of... appeal.

Solomon shakes his head, and decides to spend the night reading. He sneaks up, gets dressed, and makes his way to the library.

SCENE: DISCUSSING SOLOMON'S POWER

ENOCH: As Bläddrerska makes her way from the palace to the library, our friends in the forge are nowhere close to thriving, or in fact, being content.

NAAR: I'll never get used to this. Stuck, manifested in the mortal realm. I want to fly. I miss flying so much. This feels like invisible chains, you know? Have you ever been chained up?

ASMODEUS: Oh yes. But under different circumstances.

NAAR: Wow, you really don't stop, do you?

ZIK: Being corporeal is the WORST. How do they manage?

ZAK: And everything is so constrained. Since when is gravity a thing?

GUARD 1: Stop complaining, devil.

ZIK & ZAK: What did you just call me??

GUARD 1: Hey. Want the next latrine cleaning shift?

ZIK & ZAK: No.

GUARD 1: Then shut up.

(FX: Guard walks away, continues his round)

ZAK: Can't believe he just said that. I'm sick and tired of being called devil.

ZIK: It's just so... demeaning.

ZAK: I'm gonna... I'm gonna kill him one day.

NAAR: There, there. He doesn't know what it means. Humans see the horns, they go "devil!!!" and there's no reasoning with them after that.

ZIK: Should we maybe tell them the truth?

ASMODEUS: Absolutely not. That will make it worse.

ZIK: It's just... It would be like calling you, "as-MOW-deus".

ZAK: It is asMOWdeus.

ZIK: No, I'm pretty sure it's "asmo-dayus". Focus on the "dayus".

ZAK: That is just like you to correct me.

ZIK: Well you'd have thought after a whole year, you'd learn the damn thing.

ZAK: Ya know at times, it feels like we just skipped straight to the end of that year.

ZIK: I know right.

ZAK: Should we just settle on Asmo?

ZIK: Agreed.

...

ZAK: Now what about Naar? (*pronounced Nay-Arrr*)

ZIK: Oh, dear mortals.

FX: beat of silence, forge sounds

ASMODEUS: Ugh, this sucks! No afterworks, no pubs, no clubs, no nothing! I haven't had a drink in over a year! This is unheard of! We have to get out of here.

NAAR: If we could only find the source of his power. Isn't that how it works?

ASMODEUS: The Words always come from a source, yes. And I'm telling you, a human shouldn't be focused enough to keep a spirit captive for longer than an hour, tops. Hundreds of them, even less time...

NAAR: That means The Words are coming from somewhere else. Where could that be?

ASMODEUS: Hmm... Okay. Could be an item. Like a staff, amulet, or altar. You can charge practically anything with the power of The Words. Makes it easier for the practitioner to not have to remember all the songs.

NAAR: Songs? You lost me there.

ASMODEUS: That would be combinations of The Words. Formulas, recitations, hitting the right frequency to alter reality. A fast track to getting what you want. Think of it as cheat codes to the universe!

NAAR: What's a cheat code?

ASMODEUS: Uhhhh. Digital thing. There'll be games in the future. Forget it. SO ANYWAY it can be anything he's wearing or using.

NAAR: How did he even get something like that?

ASMODEUS: There are many stray artifacts out there. He could have found one, or he could have gotten it from someone.

NAAR: Like who? Someone from Above? I mean I've heard that angels are problematic but this is just way over the line.

ASMODEUS: Everyone is problematic, comes with being sentient.

NAAR: I guess it makes sense, Above versus Below. Everyone here is of Below. This is an attack from above!

ASMODEUS: No, there's a truce. This isn't coordinated. I've seen heaven's coordinated operations, and those are far worse.

NAAR: (sigh) Okay, so we just have to find whatever this thing is, right? So, how will you know if you're looking at a magical artifact?

ASMODEUS: You don't, unless you know where to look. Case in point, I don't like the look of your work there, ZikZak.

ZIK: Oi, what's wrong? This is a perfectly good bottle.

ZAK: I'm just followin instructions. Not my fault if it's not to yer likin.

ASMODEUS: I know, it just rubs me the wrong way. Something about the engravings- I recognize them.

NAAR: What does it say?

ASMODEUS: That's the thing, it... it looks like a variant of The Words, but it's unreadable as it is. Imagine the upper half of a text is missing, but... more confusing. But even the resemblance is alarming as hell. This is not a nice bottle, I can feel it.

NAAR: Maybe the source of his power is not just one thing. Maybe it's a couple of things bundled together. Maybe there's half a text here and half of it is somewhere else. Who knows how many magical items he has. Damn it! I need a smoke. Haven't had a smoke in weeks.

FX: Guards changing shifts in the background

YUSUF: Good morning everybody! How is my favorite team doing today? No bad vibes I hope.

NAAR: How long are we going to work here?

YUSUF: You get to work here as long as you want. Ain't that something to be thankful for? That hell place that you come from doesn't seem very nice. Woe the day when the king no longer needs your services. Then you'll have to go back there.

NAAR: Ah. Wonderful. (*Whisper to Asmodeus*) I can't. Do this. We have got to find a way to get out.

ASMODEUS: Stay calm. You're going to get so much older than them. In a few decades, this will just be a story to tell your grandchildren. We can wait it out.

NAAR: (*angry whimpering*)

FX: melting metal

YUSUF: I'm gonna go and submit my morning report. I'll be back in a minute.

FX: footsteps walking away

NAAR: (*Draws a deep breath through her nostrils*) Ahem. Would you look at the time? I have to go.

ASMODEUS: What the hell, Naar. You can't just leave.

NAAR: I'll be back in a second, promise.

ENOCH: Naar follows Yusuf down a desolate alleyway not far from the forge. Just as she is about to ambush the poor guard, Yusuf turns around.

YUSUF: I thought I heard someone. What are you doing out here? Go back to the forge!

NAAR: Yes, I will, excuse me. It's just, I'm looking for— wooaah noo!

YUSUF: What are you doing!?

FX: Two bodies falling to the ground and shuffling about.

INTERLUDE: REC ROOM 2

ENOCH: That's all the vortex wanted to unveil for now. The time has come for you to rest your weary head, prophet. Too many impressions may be your downfall. The rest of our story will probably unfold at a later date.

Now, in other news... Miracle of miracles, I've been invited to another little angel gathering. Pretty informal, 478 angels, nothing big. This time I'm definitely better prepared. I'll just be myself, no manuscript. I'm just going to wing it. Wing it. I should use that joke, they'll like that. Oh, and I've decided I'll treat them to coffee. A little human tradition. Not that we had coffee back in my mortal days, but still. They'll like seeing something from Earth. Now, as I ponder how to modify my coffee maker to accommodate for 478 angels...

We all have our prisons to bear, all of you prophets, as well as me. Asmodeus' prison is of the physical sort. Mine is a cultural one. You may think you're free, but you can't even leave the earth's atmosphere at will. It's all a matter of perspective. In fact, it is only once you realize that you will always be imprisoned by some circumstance, that you can be truly free. Be not afraid.

END OF EPISODE 9

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