



ISEKAI'D AND GYARU'D

The sound of rickety wood creaking accompanied by hushed whinnying from lax cart mules being whipped to motion echoes throughout the empty street as the first set of carriages begin to rumble on down the cobblestone path out of the still sleeping town cast in eternal orange from the ghostly light radiating from the unmoving satellite beyond the clouds, blocking out the natural rays of the sun with its immense frame, absorbing it to create the effect of an eerie eye with black sclera and a burning yellow iris that was the orb.



But an oddity like this was normal to the townsfolk below, save for one particular individual; a scantily dressed woman with tawny skin and a fiery orange head of frayed hair stares up into the faux nocturnal sky with a grimace on her handsome face, clutching a sleeping woman in her arms like a babe as she turned her attention back toward another waiting carriage that had arrived shortly after the departure of the first, ferrying her raven haired partner past the open door before setting her down near the rear of the boxy compartment, giving her one last look before turning on her heel toward the building they had exited from, stopping in front of a stack of luggage fit for two...and a hassle for one to lift all on their own...that is, if they weren't blessed individuals with the powers to command the elements as naturally as they breathed. People like the not so unsuspecting witch, muttering a single word under her breath with an index finger pointed towards the pile of luggage, lifting the bundle up into the air before securing it to the rear of the carriage. All without moving an inch from where she stood...

And once that was done, she'd simply strolled off to the side of the road, uttering another inaudible phrase midway through maneuvering her rear end as if she about to sit on something that wasn't there, only for a comically large pumpkin to appear with a puff of smoke, serving as a comfy cushion to rest on while she waited for the coachman to take them far away from this place, one that was as foreign as it was familiar to her despite her origins as a daughter of Sleepy Hollow.

While her flesh and blood form was indeed that of a regular human born into this strange world. Her soul was another matter altogether...

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Sighing wistfully with pale, leaf green eyes looking distant and thoughtful amidst the cloud of condensation flowing from between her lips, the witch holds out her hand, manifesting a handmade journal sewn together out of leather hide and old, yellow sheets of paper coupled with an enchanted quill nestled neatly away in a sleeve holder located just behind the tightly bound spine.

And on the first page just behind the cover of the simple book was a name that didn't sound anything like the typical inhabitant of Sleepy Hollow or anywhere else for that matter; *James Albertson*...nothing fancy like *Lukinari Vestworth*, *Lunateri Dovesworn* or the name bestowed upon her 'birth'; *Crimari*...without a surname like most families were expected to bear, 'Crimari' was simply the latest to join the mistreated population of Sleepy Hollow's slums upon her initial awakening in the town, cold and confused...

'All because of that stupid Goddess...or whatever the hell she is...'

Sighing with a notable hint of frustration in her tone upon the remembrance of that unpleasant memory, Crimari flips past the first page, intending to record her experiences of the last few days in the journal...until she decided not to, backtracking past gaps and scribbles to the first entry proper, where she had written down a genuine essay in the hopes that her memory of a past life would be forever saved in that wrinkled old book of hers in case she ever let it slip in her mind. A fear that was becoming all too real with each passing day, casting a sideways glance at the carriage and the sleeping passenger it contained in particular for her role in this personal dilemma she was facing.

Not about to waste more time pondering the current, Crimari turns her mind toward the past, burying her face in the journal to relive an old life long lost to a distant past...

-Entry 1-

In case anyone sees this, know that I'm not crazy or anything...well...if you are reading this then it means I either dropped the damn thing or you picked this up off of what's left of me...either way, means I won't be around to hear what you have to say about my life story.

In this world, my name's Crimari...given by the folk who found me in the slums of Sleepy Hollow. But in another time, I was someone else...at least...I think I was...it's been so long now my mind's starting to wonder if all that was just a dream...but if it's not, and I'm sure of it no matter what anyone tells me, then I wasn't always a woman...and I was never supposed to be here, in this town where the moon's always shining high up in the sky. Being born in another world where the sun comes up in the morning and sets at night? It was a nightmare getting used to this place.

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But no matter how much I tell myself it's just a game...everything just feels so real...and the people here aren't any different from those back on Earth, even if they look different and speak all funny.

Guess I've got a certain someone to thank for filling my brain with the know-how to speak their language...because I didn't come here by portal or coincidence...I had to die to get here, and best of all? Whatever deity these people worship couldn't even do it right!

See, I was just this normal American boy living his life in highschool, having a good time with friends and living in a cozy suburban home with a lovely family. Besides a nonexistent girlfriend, I loved that life just fine. One step away from becoming a full fledged adult, ready to hit the ground running.

And then I got caught up in an accident on the way home from school. Just chatting it up with my friends and then the next thing I know, my vision just...goes out like a light.

Apparently the rest of my friends had been spared any physical harm (can't say they got out unscathed in the psychological aspects) while I'd been hit by an out of control car. One of those driven by so-called state of the art AI that could sense obstacles and pedestrians in the way. A three thousand pound missile of metal, plastic and rubber ramming into a kid...must've been a grizzly sight to see for whoever had to respond and clean up the mess. But if I was dead, how could I have known the details of my death, I hear you ask? Well, that brings me to the best part...or worse, depending on whether or not you're the religious sort. I'd be banging my head against the wall if I knew my prayers were going to a dunderhead...

Anyways, after that brief faint, I found myself in some sort of space, colored pale blue as far as the eye could see and the floor was just this thick white fog you couldn't see through. I thought I was dreaming, that maybe I fainted halfway through talking with my friends or something along that line. Until she appeared.

Red hair, tanned skin, dressed in thick white robes that hung in the air behind her like an aureole. She was beautiful to look at, and her voice as she spoke sounded divine, no pun intended. Introducing herself as a Goddess before delivering some grand speech about how I, a lucky mortal, had been saved from certain death and chosen to live out the rest of my days aiding the poor folk of the world she governed. I simply sat there with my mouth hanging open.

When I first heard all that stuff, my childish mind was excited. Imagining the things I'd be able to do, what I could accomplish...and then she fell silent, her narrow eyes wide open, looking at my feet. Following her gaze, I realized then why she looked so confused and scared at the same time.

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My feet weren't there. Well, they were, but the toes were a wispy mess and the meat up to my knees were see through, like a ghost from classic horror stories. I asked her what was wrong, and I saw her pour through books summoned from nowhere, flipping through them with the energy of a newbie on the job, muttering something about how 'things hadn't gone to plan' and how 'they must've gotten it mixed up'...while my mind was beginning to catch up with recent events, the implications behind my ghostly form and how it contradicted everything this woman had told me about being saved.

Apologetically rescinding her speech, the clutz of a goddess told me she had made a slight mistake on her end, claiming she couldn't send me as I was to this new world of hers. Because without an intact body to work with, it was impossible...unless I chose a new body, one the goddess was capable of forming. My old one, the me that was James Albertson, was finished to my dismay when the goddess had shown me a bird's eye view of my demise taken from my memory and a little Clairvoyance magic. It was so brutal yet so swift, I just couldn't say anything for a while.

Everything from James' life was done and ended. No chances to say goodbye, friends and family left to grieve...but over time, they would heal, the local news would move on from the incident, my name used by activists and manipulative corporations to protest, the surviving driver of the malfunctioning vehicle would lay down his regrets and the world as a whole would forget I ever existed, just a name to mark a headstone...but yet I still live...

"And in the Sleepy Hollow, time can be so hard to keep track of...I wonder if Ma and Pa are still doing alright?"

Taking a moment to catch her breath after that abrupt ending to the first entry, Crimari's gaze droops down in solemn consideration. Low enough to glimpse her well endowed figure and the revealing clothes that clung tightly to it. Thanks to her mind being predominantly made up of instincts and preferences taken from that of a hormonal, young adult male. Things like modesty and looks never really mattered much to Crimari, and before she earned her title as the Hollow's Eve Witch, basic garments were a rarity during her tumultuous first few weeks in the Hollow, dumped here soon after an altercation with the goddess she still frowned on had resulted in her being rudely ejected from her domain.

It happened soon after she delivered the news of James' irreparable body. Faced with two options; she could either choose to fade to the ether or be given a new body, one that would be born and raised from the essence of Legaiia, the world she had been dumped into. For as powerful as she was, the Legaian goddess could not recreate a body from another world, only able to draw a frame of reference based upon life from her flock.

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Bitter and saddened, Crimari had opted for the latter, choosing from a select batch of bodies representative of every sentient race that inhabited Legaia. But none of them appealed to her. She wanted one that was as close to home as possible, directly asking the goddess after the tenth round of being given a humanoid with fins, tails, wings or a combination of the aforementioned traits, leading her to speed through the catalog, leading her to-

"Crimari...what're you doing out here?"

Turning her gaze toward the serene voice flitting through the air from the direction of the carriage, the witch snaps the book in her hand shut upon glimpsing the tired face of her associate peeking out from the open door, heavy eyes struggling to stay open, frail shoulders jittering in the chill of Sleepy Hollow's eternal midnight.

"Nothing, just passing the time before the coachman arrives...now go back to sleep. You look dreadful!"

Crimari wasn't critical about one's attire or dressing, but even she had to admit dreadful was a severe understatement at the sight of the young lady she'd ferried into the carriage. Lying down and asleep, the defects were hidden. But now that she was awake, her messy hair was free to hang down her exposed shoulders from the half done mage's robes barely clinging on to her waifish frame. The word for it was on the tip of her tongue, but Crimari was familiar with this disorder where the sufferer could just suddenly fall asleep at random times of the day alongside extreme lethargy, thought to stem from problems with the immune system. But in her partner's case, she could only assume her issues stemmed from something far greater than bodily issues.



"But I... *yawn*...can't sleep...when it's so cold...dangerous..."

"Don't jest with me Trestiri...you've been sleeping well up till now...hahh, alright, I'll join you..."

"Yay~ Big sister's pillows!"

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"It's *Miss* Crimari to you young lady! Now scooch over...it's cramped enough as is without you leaning over the side."

Moving over to join Trestiri in the carriage, the larger woman squeezes her way inside, taking one last look at the silent town before shutting the door, leaving the two of them alone in the dimly lit interior illuminated only by the warm moonlight pouring in from the thick murky glass windows.

And now that she was nestled right next to her, Trestiri wasted no time in slinging her arms around Crimari's exposed shoulders, rubbing her pudgy cheeks against them as if she were a teddy bear.

"There...now can you sleep?"

"Mhm~ What were you reading back there? I've seen you...*yawn*...writing in it a few times...is it a diary?"

"You could say that...no peeking!"

"Not planning to Miss! I tried...my clairvoyance on it when you were bathing last week...and-ow!"

"What did I tell you about respect Trestiri? Don't go poking around in other people's belongings..."

"U-Unless absolutely necessary! I remember! I didn't open it Miss Crimari! Honest! I just wanted to try practicing my clairvoyance on it!"

"Once we get to Venengrom, I'm gonna make sure your training schedule won't leave you with time for snacking...hahh...did you...did you learn anything?"

"Learn....nothing much to be honest...but...I did see someone...someone that...*yawn*...looks a lot like you actually! Even has red hair...but a bit younger and her skin's all snow like...oh! And she's wearing weird clothes! Is she a relative? Miss...Crimari?"

Crimari had fallen silent at that point, rubbing her chin with a furtive finger, slightly slouched over with a furrow in her brow, lips pursed tightly together. All signs pointing toward the Hallow's Eve Witch being 'in the zone' as she liked to call the state of mind where not even relentless tickling could snap her out of whatever she was concentrating on at the time. Except this time she was wondering what her apprentice had seen from peering into the imprinted memories stored in her diary. A girl that looked like her in strange clothing? She hadn't seen anyone that looked like that before. Even more so if they had red hair, because besides herself, no Legaian, at least the ones in Sleepy Hollow, had such a striking hair color.

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It was the second reason behind why she'd slashed her hair and kept it short besides finding long hair a pain to take care of.

"No...I've never heard of this girl you're talking about...Trestiri? Do you mind if...ahh..."

Falling silent as her facial features soften at the sight of her sleeping apprentice, Crimari gently slips her shoulder free of Trestiri's bearhug before sliding her down over onto her warm lap, jolting her shoulders a bit from the ticklish sensation of hair rubbing against her thighs while she ran her hand through her head like a mother coaxing her babe to sleep, reminding her of the first time they ever met in the alleyways of Sleepy Hollow.

'Just like a kid...damn it...I really am getting soft...'



But now that she was asleep, Crimari didn't need to ask permission, figuring this was for the best since she didn't want her apprentice finding out about her past life, holding a hand shimmering with magical energy over the sleeping woman's head before her mind fills with white noise, blinding the witch for a moment as her vision is consumed by white, drawn into a world where images conjured straight from the mind of the subject could be viewed by the caster of the Mindskim spell, focusing on the memory of what Trestiri had seen last week when using clairvoyance on her book.

And before her eyes, the image of what was definitely a teenage girl wearing the female uniform of her old highschool appears before her, slightly muddled but clear enough to see everything on her person. Long curly locks of saturated red hair, knee high socks, a jacket tied around her waist and her eyes...were blue...specifically the same deep blue shade her old self boasted. Yet another tidbit from the 17 or so years of James she had almost forgotten about.

'But...what does this mean? If it's my diary she used as reference...that girls' uniform shouldn't be showing up at all...wait..that position...'

"Looks familiar right? How long has it been since we last saw each other?"

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A voice she had not heard in a *very* long time now wafts in nonchalantly from behind the witch, making her wince in irritation upon the many terrible memories it invoked, coming face to face with the very same goddess that had 'accidentally' plucked her from Earth before plopping her right down into Legaia.

'Seriously? A-After all this time?'

"Why not? You barely ever use mental techniques! And your dreamscape...incredibly hard to breach, even for a goddess like myself! After sensing your use of Mindskim, why I just *had* to jump at the chance for a visit!"

'Good to know my head's secure from clumsy goddesses like you...'

"Aww, don't say that! I'll have you know I've done very well for myself and the people of Legaia over these last few years! I'm not the same clumsy girl who couldn't save the body of a certain grump..."

'Years huh? That's how long I've been here on Legaia...so that thing you said about this image being...'familiar'...'

"Indeed, it's a current reflection of your inner self...and you've accomplished so much ever since you arrived; rising up out of the slums before showing those goons at the Academia...bestowing upon yourself a title that's spread far and wide enough for lucrative offers to flow in from lands far beyond Sleepy Hollow...and you've even managed to net yourself an apprentice! Yes, I see now you've sensed the initiative to take matters into your own hands now that you have the power to do so...that, and you've even been spending your free time helping the people of the slums, even though I specifically remember you telling me that you didn't have the slightest modicum of care for my people? Quite the change of heart I must say~"

'Yeah, yeah...jabber all you want...if you know this much, then you should know what goes on behind the scenes right? This world ain't as pretty as you make it out to be, Princess...'

"Oh dear, what happened to the curious young man I spoke to that day?"

'Call me if you see him...'

"Now, now~ You might dislike me, but I know a good soul when I see one! You've done well aiding the needy in Sleepy Hollow...and now you're off to do the same elsewhere...but...will that truly fix the issue I wonder?"

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'Hurry up and get to the point...I'd rather be up and about in the real world than being stuck in my own mind with you.'

Tutting with exaggerated flair, the goddess steps forward, circling Crimari who stood with arms folded over her bosom, eyeing the witch's attractive figure with moderate respect while keeping thoughts unbecomingly of divinity to herself.

"What I mean is; the divide between Legaians all over. You've experienced it for yourself right here in Sleepy Hollow; those without surnames, without credibility in the study and pursuit of magic, all relegated to living in squalor and poverty with only a rare few able to rise out of that pit and make a name for themselves...just like you did, showing the Academia folk a thing or two while you were at it...but it still doesn't change anything in the long run..."

'...unless I nip the problem at the root? I've tried that song and dance before but...politics ain't my thing. I go where I go and I help if needed. Sleepy Hollow...the people there have done so much for me, so I repaid the favor...the slums are in good hands now, and if the Academia or anyone else tries something. I'll be there to put em on their asses for trying...'

"Hmhm~ Well said my dear...the world is vast, its people equally so. Maybe someday the norm could change but one woman can hardly do anything on her own...it's interesting though...I half expected you to struggle when I sent you to the Hollow, seeing as how you were a boy and all, but...my, my, look at how you've grown!"

'T-The hell's that supposed to mean? You tryin' ta...arrgh! You're pissing me off on purpose aren't you?'

"What's the harm in that? After all, It's been awhile since I last saw the *Flaming Bumpkin* in the flesh~"

'That's...that was a long time ago...idiot boys...'

"Ahaha! I much prefer your motherly side so it's good progress you're making, toning down your impulses, tempering your fury...hold tight to dear Trestiri alright? You two have great things ahead of you...she might not look it, and I don't think she's told you, but the poor girl has been through alot. That is all I can say."

'What do you mean? If it's anything regarding Trestiri, I wanna know!'

"Stay the path...and you'll do just fine! Just like you did for yourself, help Trestiri nurture not just her magical talents, but who she is as a person as well! Compared to when you first found her, the near

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lifeless doll is but a distant memory...she sees you in a maternal light by the way! Hahh~ If only you could see me the same way she does...boo!"

Before Crimari could let loose another inflammatory remark regarding the goddess' irritating infatuation with her. The crimson haired lady gives her a warm smile and a little wave of the hand before her vision blacks out briefly, shutting out the dreamscape, erasing the image of her feminized soul and doing away with the goddess altogether. Leaving her alone just like the day of the accident, instilling a sense of terror in the witch's heart before her vision returns to the interior of the carriage, now rocking with noticeable movement.

"You alright back there ma'am? Ya didn't hit yer head or something did'ja?"

It was the coachman, not the goddess speaking to her, and the reassuring warmth of Trestiri still clinging tightly to her shoulders was enough to ease Crimari back into her seat, reclining into her seat with a haggard exhale while the faint sounds of the horses legs clopping along down the rocky roads leading out of town come through the walls like dull, gentle tapping to the ears.

"I-I'm fine...just had a bad dream is all..."

"Mm...if ya say so...yous headed to Venengrom right? Might wanna settle back in ta sleep, it's gon be hours fore we get there. Time's hard t'figure in this blasted place..."

"Could say that again...thanks again Mister!"

With her mind free to wander in peace once again, Crimari sighs with a mild frown on her face, thinking back on what the goddess had said to her, from the fact her soul, the one thing left of her old life as James, was starting to reflect her current appearance or the cryptic information she had left in her hands regarding Trestiri, cocking her head to the side to glimpse the sight of her still blissfully asleep despite the brief raucous. Compared to the day they met, it was like looking at someone else altogether.

On that night, she'd fallen asleep on her arms with a hesitant frown that seemed to fear the idea of waking up out of sheer exhaustion and mind breaking terror and her body was sapped of youth and vigor.

But looking at her now, the goddesses words about her maternal role in Trestiri's development rang loud and clear in her head, ruffling the smooth head of hair atop her protégé's head with a warm smile on her face, momentarily lapsing back into her old memories with a finger of bitter sorrow, wondering if this was how her mother had felt when she cared for her, shaking off the thoughts of the past with a resigned but hopeful look in her bright green irises. The past was the past, and here in the now, her worries were

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best reserved for the ones in her care, like Trestiri...holding out her other hand to store her diary back inside of her pocket storage dimension.

While it would still serve as a record of her second life in Legaia, the Hallow's Eve Witch was starting to think of it less like a repository for her old life but rather, how she would eventually change over time in the not so literal sense. If the vision was real, and she knew it was for the incredible power bestowed upon the young lady by her side saw no equal. Then James Albertson was never at risk of fading away...Crimari was simply an alias, yet his name as well. He was her, and she was him. The mature soul of a highschool boy sent from Earth to stranger lands with great expectations...and until now, she hadn't really moved on from being that naive young man, even if Crimari had thought she was disillusioned and about to forget it all.

Once they arrived in Venengrom, the Hallow's Eve Witch already had plans to show Trestiri around the city in a world where the sun was normal and the skies changed colors from calming blues to fiery shades of red. They'd eat out together, maybe go shopping for a change of clothes and then retire to a comfortable tavern bedroom.

And come the next morning, she'd start drilling the proper etiquette demanded of Trestiri if she even hoped to stand a chance at becoming the 'sidekick' of the Hallow's Eve Witch herself...yes, she liked that idea.

But for now, the exhaustion of packing, using her magic and the mental strain from the brief yet extended series of events was beginning to take its toll on Crimari, nodding off as heavy eyelids droop lower and lower. Until eventually, her shoulders slump and her arms go limp, falling asleep with her cheek nestled on her student's warm head.

...all while a certain clumsy woman watches with a smile on her face, far away from Legaia and all its tiny happenings...

THE END