

H10 had stabilized since Frost's last visit. The survivors that spilled over from the City of Spades were kept in a newly constructed encampment just off to the side of the Associations and Guild building.

To no one's surprise, there were questionable individuals amongst the survivors. They were residents of the City of Spades so it was only natural for bad eggs to be amongst them. Justia Arms had already thoroughly scraped them away from the masses, throwing these people them back into the smoking ditch to comply with the laws of the Nex Megalopolis.

While Frost had pardoned them from infracting ImpulseWorks' territorial laws, this was only true if it concerned the innocent. The Ateliers did not have prisons nor means of rehabilitating criminals aside from the Leviathans. Not to mention that the wrong doers were not condemnable enough to be put into the Lament Cycle.

The humanitarian in Frost did not fully endorse this approach, but neither did her tempered heart attempt to stop it. Crime in the Nex Megalopolis was rarely committed out of necessity to begin with.

For example, making enough money to live within the Outskirts was easy. Farmers were always hiring, and they paid generously too. Not to mention that the abundance of resources drove the costs down compared to other major civilizations.

Crimes were committed by the drive of cardinal sins according to Bartholo.

"Anger. Greed. Deceit. Envy. Fear. Gluttony. Lust. Sloth. Pride." He recited as he led Frost into the Guild. It was repurposed to hold the many criminals of the recent Atelier War, and deep within its core was where Mimicry resided. "They are the vices that dictate our actions. Temptations such as hypocrisy or the denial of self-assertion lead to these vices."

They stepped into the darkness of the Guild's atrium. The walls trembled as vibrations travelled underneath their feet. Between the clops of their boots was the subtle sound of a hideous groan.

Carpalis' figure emerged from the shadows to greet them. Beside her was the young Abigail who immediately threw her head forward to bow in utter respect towards the Amalgam.

"I'm a firm believer that people are a product of their surroundings. I can see things being categorized like that. But with how fucked up things are in this world, there's also a chance that some of it might be predefined. I sincerely hope that isn't the case." Frost greeted them with a pleasant smile after her ominous speech, causing Carpalis to hum in response.

"Predefinitions are real when it comes to Demons. The trick is to find your virtues to fight the vices. Or it'll trap you. Like a vice. Hehehe." She chuckled as she raised her arm above her head, snapping her fingers to summon an array of the orb-like Fairies.

"Carpalis. Your hand is better now. Abigail. Good to see you're also doing well."

"L-Likewise!" Abigail exclaimed, rigidly erecting her posture.

“It’s a miracle never seen by the likes of our kind. What remains adds to our character. Ahaha. Having it been undone is one way a virtue can erase a vice.” Frost missed Carpalis’ creepy way of speaking a little too much, because she couldn’t help but to wear a permanent smile as she was guided deeper into the Guild building.

“Ten thousand was the high estimate, right?” Frost asked as they moved through the same basement of the building, entering a hallway that led to Mimicry’s chamber.

However, Mimicry’s vacant chamber was only the entryway to a newly dug out section that was hidden away from the prying eyes of the world. A spiral staircase sat in the middle where Mimicry was once chained, and the vibrations of countless murmurs could be felt in her chest.

“More than that. A few ten thousand. The lesser ones are kept on the Leviathan.” Bartholow explained as they descended into the underbelly of the Guild.

The walls were lined with a slightly blue glow. These were the strips used by Caldera Industries to illuminate newly uncovered areas.

They were first in a bottled, liquid form which solidified as they dribbled down the walls. Unsurprisingly, it was a Serum created by Inflow Direct: Serum L – Luminescence.

“What remains are the Moons and Stars kept with the restrained CogitO so kindly lent to us. Furthermore, the ones that are suspected to be Corrupted, Impuritas or unspecified are also kept here.” Bartholow allowed the Amalgam to take the lead, paying his utmost respect towards her for she stood even higher than his Beholder.

They eventually reached a colossal pit that was filled with a bright green liquid. The liquid bubbled violently at their mere presence. It was the only source of light in this bleak place that smelt of rotting carcasses.

A metal catwalk ran around the inner rims of the well and was installed at precisely ten elevations. The tenth sat above them and was oddly pristine compared to the rest of the prison. The other nine represented each vice like the many circles of hell.

Etched into the walls were compartments that kept individuals only. Judging by the size of the pit, Frost estimated around a thousand individuals were kept as prisoners.

One other figure could be seen walking along the catwalks. It was a pale-haired woman with the appearance of a healer, save that she exuded a murderous air like that of a Black Wing. She wore black trousers and a buttoned black suit, revealing a white buttoned up shirt beneath. Her tie bounced around unnaturally.

If Frost didn’t know any better, she would have thought nothing of it. But she knew that the tie was the ‘tongue’ of that entity, and it licked the air in search of something.

“Acedia has been using her Blessing to find what you call the Originals and the Impuritas. So far none present are Corrupted.” Carpalis hummed, glancing down at Abigail who immediately added:

“M-Mimi – I mean, Mimicry has discovered fifty-seven Originals. All of them were Corrupted from across the Nex Megalopolis!” Abigail spoke as if reading from a card. “Their original Corrupted forms is unspecified. We’ll be having people from Minu Auditors and ImpulseWorks Unit Managers from the Main Branch to investigate.”

“As for the remaining?” Frost slowly asked as to not startle her. It made her sad that Abigail didn’t see her as a friend.

“Impuritas. Seven hundred. Most are normal people that were affected by the ‘light’. One hundred and eighty-five are unspecified, likely just Impuritas. The last fifty-eight are Scarlet Logic’s Stars and Moons.”

“I see. Thank you, Abigail.” Frost reached out to pat her head. She recoiled slightly but melted cozily in her touch. “So these people came back from their incomplete wishes. May I see them?”

“You’re the Head. Permissions are merely suggestions.” Carpalis smirked.

“Indeed. Our places are yours to roam.” Bartholow agreed, and Frost went around the several circles, peering through the cages where beings that could vaguely be called people were kept.

They were distorted, twisted forms of their former self. They were indeed Impuritas, and their bodies reflected their incomplete desires. From people with a body that was draped in bandages, to one that bled razor blades from their eyes, and another who was an amalgamation of limbs reaching towards a light within their chest.

But these people were not innocent either. The innocent ones were kept elsewhere by the Golden Index. Since their Atelier was primarily made up of Impuritas, it was only natural for them to end up there. Frost could only imagine the difficulty of living with such a body.

She would have accused them of being a Corrupted were she none the wiser. Unlike L.S and Broker, their forms were clearly mangled. It was a miracle that Nav ended up with the body she had if a wish resulted in such tragic forms.

The unspecified group were regular people that were slightly shifted, just like Ara whose gender was changed by the Piece of the Fallen Star. These ones were kept at the very top of the prison. Like everyone here, they had an extensive history of crime that justified keeping them here.

In fact, those within this prison were candidates to be introduced into the Lament Cycle.

“Not this one either.” Mimicry smirked to herself, grinning at a man who was literally torn from inside out.

She did not pity him, nor did her eyes convey any semblance of empathy.

“Neither you. Not you. Or you. Oh. My... My Amalgam!” Her eyes lit up upon noticing Frost’s arrival.

She was several floors beneath them. As a Corrupted, she could have easily thrown herself up to their level. But instead, she took the stairs, walking at an agonizingly slow pace.

“You’ve finally come to visit me. I’m flattered. You look beautiful as always. Would you like to hear what I’ve learned?” She spoke as slowly as her movements, but there was a sudden childlike glee in her voice.

After all, Frost was her very aspiration.

“Please do. I’ve come for you after all.” Frost easily tamed Mimicry with such simple words, causing the entity’s smile to tear, revealing the many rows of teeth and tentacles that constituted her body.

“For me... How wonderful! Abigail! Did you hear that! The Amalgam wanted to see me!”

Abigail nodded with a small smile. Unlike with Frost, she did not show any signs of fear or nervousness towards Mimicry.

“It’s because you’re always working so hard to learn to become like everyone else.” Abigail praised.

“Precisely. My efforts have been validated. Amalgam. I have learned the meaning of empathy.” Mimicry claimed, causing Frost to gulp for she had seen the lack of it in Mimicry’s eyes. “It’s the thing that doesn’t let you kill. These people are like pets, right? You don’t kill a pet.”

“Empathy is what lets you relate with a person’s woes. Tell me, do you see normal people as pets?”

“They’re not?”

“No. They’re not pets.”

“Then I don’t understand.” Mimicry tilted her head to the side in confusion.

*... why do these concepts always end up being twisted?*

With a heavy, mental sigh, Frost began moving again.

“I’ll teach you about true empathy as soon as I’m finished here. Acedia.”

“Yes!”

“I’m going to cross check your investigation. You’ve been mostly correct from what I’ve seen.” Frost gave her some additional praise. Additionally, the fact that it was also documented according to Carpalis meant that Mimicry has also gained important administrative skills.

“Then I want you to take me to the Blood Moons and the Red Giants. I’m long overdue for a meeting with those traitors.” Frost commanded.

“The red ones... I will. It greatly displeases me that they are allowed to live.” Acedia hummed, walking alongside Frost as Abigail and Carpalis followed.

Bartholow on the other hand had come far enough. It was not his role to harrow this section of hell. He was only a temporary guide, and most of all, just wished to accompany the Amalgam however briefly it was.

“The news of above has not spread to their ears. I can only imagine how they’ll respond to your presence. That is if their minds have not yet been syphoned away. Hehe.” Carpalis eerily giggled. “Amalgam. I will not question your choices. Nor will I judge them.”

“... is there something you want me to consider?”

Carpalis didn’t utter another word.

But Frost could tell that Carpalis had warned her to be more understanding. It was a tall order for these people that mercilessly slaughtered for the sake of it, but Carpalis was a moral compass that she could not ignore.

And so, she took those words to heart.