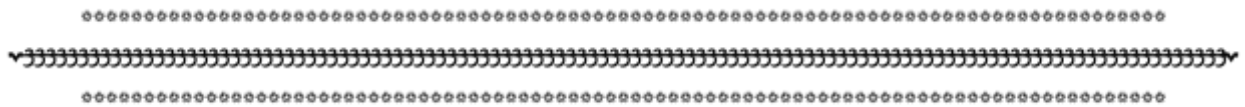


The wheelchair rattles and shakes as she pushes me across the deteriorating bitumen toward the well-kept wooden exterior which holds my home for the next— however long. She pushes the wide door open and shoves me forcefully through the frame into a dull, plain grey room, bright white light illuminating the entirety of the morbidly plain scene around me. “Lobby” is emblazoned on the front desk in neon-purple lights which cast an unnatural and harsh glow on the glossy white-marble tiles.

‘Welcome! Room 6-1-6 is available.’ The desk attendant croons like a mocking jay as the nameless woman behind me moves us by into a clinical-white padded elevator and presses the button for the ninth floor. The elevator shuddering as it heads— down.



The elevator halts with a jolt, the doors opening with a piercing screech akin to a knife scraping against a brick wall, as she starts wheeling me through. The complex maze of grey, dim-orange-lit hallways and corridors that lay ahead seemed to stretch into an infinite and eldritch abyss as we creep forward, the corridors eerily silent. On each side of the hall, “rooms” were neatly organised into sections of five before being split by another corridor. Each room holding one person, most just staring at the back wall, silently. It seemed as if hours would go by before I might arrive at mine, the dim-orange light straining my eyes until they go red.

We finally arrive at my room. The woman unstraps me from the wheelchair and drops me onto my bed, her footsteps then fading away into the distance. My body eventually allows me to move. I scan the room, the only light the orange glow from outside and the small LED light in the centre of the ceiling. From what I can see, the entrance is a wall and door made of clear fibre-glass. A small metal toilet shines dully in the corner, nearly invisible in-front of the grey-padded walls, the bed a firm pillow-less and blanket-less brick of foam. Before I can get up, the lights suddenly blackout, leaving me in complete darkness.

A single word escaping an intercom somewhere: ‘Bed.’

I wake up, hoping that this has been some crazy nightmare, but the same orange light greets me. I get out of bed, another disconcertingly calm message discharging from somewhere: ‘Breakfast.’ Another woman arrives at my “door”, opening it, motioning for me to walk out. I did. She had the same uncanny smile on her face, forced but natural. She leads me through the

never-ending labyrinth of doors and pathways, eventually taking me into what I assume to be a cafeteria. Mostly due to the giant “CAFETERIA” adorning the first wall I see. It seems unnaturally quiet, well, at least for a mental asylum.

Where’s all the screaming and crazy rambling?

I sit down at a near-by table and wait for my meal. A scraggly looking man with a long beard and a near-bald head sits down beside me.

‘Beware the food. It’s vitleysa,’ the man says with what I think is a thick Icelandic accent.

‘It’s what?’

‘Crap! I’m Vifill.’

‘Penelope Schyler, nice to meet you.’

‘Look, just whatever you do, don’t trust the Púkinn Tekinn.’

‘Uhh...’

‘The Demon taken, the so-called caretakers here.’

‘Why? Why shouldn’t I?’

‘Can’t you see the others? All silent and soulless? I gotta go, they might go *red* for telling you this and put me to *sleep* for good, best of luck.’ He runs out of the cafeteria and down the seemingly endless corridor.

This really is an asylum. I spend the rest of the day just trying not to go insane myself.



I wake up after a restless night on that torturous block they call a bed and get up. I pace around the room, staring at the depressing clinical grey and the unnatural dim-orange shine that feels like it is piercing through my soul. It dawns on me.

I haven’t had a single episode for at least a day! No voices or unintended actions! How come?

Bored, I think about what that guy said. *Why did he speak so weirdly? Was he really just crazy? Red? Sleep? What did that mean?*

I pace around the room thinking and thinking.

Sleep— The bed!

I examine the bed, seeing if there is anything off about it. I move the bed slightly, checking the wall behind. Right there is some text scrawled on the wall in something red.

*Púkinn Tekinn, the demon taken. Those who care. The followers of Abaddon.
Only those who they deem worthy are 616. Only those are set for their goal,
only those can begin the end or end the beginning of the end. Beware the
hidden room. F L F R R F L L B L R.*

I read this passage, becoming more confused with each word. I'm especially confused about the string of letters at the end. I choose to ignore it for now and move the bed back to its original place and wait for the caretaker to take me to breakfast. This time, a man comes to the entrance and motions for me, "breakfast" sounding in the same way as yesterday.

I reluctantly follow him out the door and through the endless paths. We walk forward through the empty hall and take a left into an identical hall. We continue forward, taking a right after a few steps, then taking another right turn after another couple of steps, which hall is so identical that it feels like we are looping into the same hallway each turn. Forward, left, forward, right, right.

It's that string of letters!

I realise too late though. He pushes me into the room, locking the door behind me. As soon as my body falls on the floor, the smell of formaldehyde and decaying meat burns my nostrils. The sound of pained ramblings and crazed screaming that I had expected to hear 24/7 echoes from behind, or in, the claustrophobic stone-brick walls. Each surface is covered in a thick skin of dust and grime like that of a dank-moist cave. A disconcerting amount of strange, dark stains are splattered about the floor and the shelves that line the wall. Large journals fill the shelves alongside various body-parts in glass jars, a cobweb covered chair sitting alone in the middle of the room. A different caretaker arrives and enters into the room with me, locking the door again behind him. He lifts my body, now limp from shock, up, setting me on the chair. His face is contorted into an eerily innocent smile and calm eyes, as if he is unable to see or hear the horrendousness and horror that fills the entire room. He waves to me as to say goodbye.

A terrible anxiousness fills my body as I wait in shocked silence. A thunderous pounding noise began to pulsate, distant. It somehow simultaneously sounds like it is both above and

below me. It becomes louder and louder, eventually drowning the drone of screams and mumblings. Cracks form beneath the chair, my body refusing to move and the screams I try to produce come out as the horrid laughter. The cracks branch into a hole underneath the chair and I begin to fall. Dim-orange and purple light flash before my eyes as I accelerate downwards. A creature flies past me — I recognise it. The shadowy figure with one crooked wing that I saw in my room, only, it looked like me.

What the hell is happening?