

Audience with the King
By Angelus

Lunchtime was always bustling for the various cafeterias around Chaldea, and Zanna made a point of eating lunch when it was busy so that they could see as many of the Servants and staff as possible. They felt it was a great opportunity to bond with everyone in a more peaceful environment than the Singularities afforded. Today they had been joined by a couple of the Command Room staff, in addition to the boisterous Iskander and an exasperated Jeanne Alter.

Iskander finished off his drink and slammed it on the table with a booming laugh. "Bah-hahah! So you're telling me that Master and yourself were trapped in a week-long time loop for months, and instead of enjoying the vacation, you all worked yourselves to the bone for a comic book? Hahahah!"

"Ugh, it's not like I wanted to work that hard on it, but BB didn't really give us a choice." Jeanne rolled her eyes. "BB had cursed Robin so that if we didn't make some sort of effort, he'd turn into a pig." While that much was true, she HAD enjoyed working on the doujin. She just had no intention of letting a loudmouth like Iskander know about that.

"Hah! But the island was full of Chaldea's Servants, was it not? Surely it would have been a trifle to band them together to defeat this BB woman!" Iskander spoke between huge bites of food.

"If only it had been that simple. BB is trickier than she looks, and turned some of the Servants against us as soon as we arrived. There's no way we could have banded everyone together long enough to fight her off," Zanna said, waving a piece of meat around on a fork before popping it into their mouth.

"Exactly," Jeanne filled in while Zanna's mouth was full. "She turned Heroine XX against Hokusai and Abby and had us fight her, then managed to turn Ibaraki against us, and by making us compete in ServantFes we automatically made enemies of Medb. And don't even get me started on having to deal with my goodie-goodie half, ugh." She gagged at the thought of her non-Alter version and pushed her plate back, having lost her appetite.

Caster Gilgamesh had been passing by the table as they spoke, and he had stopped to listen with a tray of food in hand. "Oh, are you speaking of the events of this summer past? Surely you wouldn't neglect to mention how crucial my assistance was in resolving the matter!" He grinned, proud of himself, and tossed the tray of food onto the table next to Zanna. The employee seated next to Zanna scooted over almost automatically, and Gilgamesh took a seat between them.

"Ah welcome, King of Heroes! It's been some time since we last sat together!" Iskander sounded glad to see Gilgamesh, and he raised his mostly-empty cup to him.

"Indeed, King of Conquerors! This table may be unfit for kings, but the company is pleasant enough." He met Iskander's gaze with a smile, then looked over to Zanna.

Zanna looked back and returned the smile, though with a bit of anxiety. "Happy to have you join us, Gilgamesh." Caster Gil was more laid back than his Archer self, but he could still be exceptionally difficult to deal with. He seemed to be in good spirits today, at least.

"Oh hey, if it isn't Gorgeous P. Been steering clear of squeaky hammers lately?" Jeanne stuck her tongue out at Gilgamesh and leaned towards him over the table, propping herself up on her elbows.

"Hmph! Mock me all you like, it won't change the fact that you would have been stuck in that loop forever without my help printing your manga at the last possible moment." Gilgamesh snubbed Jeanne's comment and started on his meal.

"Yeah, and without our manga, you would have been stuck thinking you were Gorgeous P for who knows how long."

"Alright you two, come on, we're all eating here." Zanna tried to tamp things down before either Jeanne or Gilgamesh started to get heated.

"Haha! Not to worry Master, it will take more than a few barks from the mad dog class to get under the king's skin," Gilgamesh said, shooting a side glance at Jeanne.

"What did you call me?" Jeanne stood up with a growl, and a wave of heat washed over the table.

Iskander clapped one of his huge hands onto Jeanne's shoulder, and with an "oohf!" she was forced back into her seat, and the air cooled down.

"Now now, there is to be no fighting at a feast. If you two have a problem, you can take it to the training room," Iskander said, busying himself with the last dregs of his drink.

"Ugh, it's fine, I'm fine," Jeanne said with a groan. "I lost my appetite a bit ago anyways, so I'm gonna head off. See you later Iskander, Master, Goldie." She picked up her half-eaten tray and headed off, soon disappearing into the crowd of Servants.

"I'm just about done here myself." Iskander set down his empty glass and rolled his shoulders before standing. He towered over everyone else. "Take care Master, King of Heroes." Iskander vanished into his spirit form in a shimmer of gold. Zanna was left with the staff members and Gilgamesh, all of whom were nearly done eating.

"Ah, that's right, Master..." Gilgamesh began, speaking in a low voice so as not to be overheard over the din of the busy cafeteria. "Would you mind coming to my room after we finish eating? I have a matter I'd like to discuss with you in private."

"Oh?" Zanna's pointed ears perked up, and their tail swished under the table. "Sure, I can do that, I'm just about done here anyways." They stabbed the last few bites onto their fork and stuffed it into their mouth, pushing the tray back to signal that they were finished.

"Excellent, I knew you'd make time for a private audience with the king," Gilgamesh said as he finished up the last of what he had as well. He nudged his tray towards Zanna's, and with a playful roll of their eyes, Zanna stacked his tray on top of theirs and grabbed them both to take them to the tray drop-off.

With lunch behind them, Gilgamesh led the way to his room. His was further into the residential area of the hall, away from the heavily trafficked areas of Chaldea. He had adorned his room to be more like what was familiar to him from ancient Mesopotamia. He had paid to have all of the walls and floors redone in clay, and the decor included many lush, potted plants and colorful silk drapes. It was a familiar sight for Zanna.

"So, what did you want to talk to me about, Gil?" Zanna asked.

"Well Master, I believe it is no question that you and I are fond of one another in a way that goes beyond the relationship of a Master and a Servant," he began. Zanna's ears stood at attention as he spoke, but they let him continue. "I was wondering if you might, ah... No, give

me a moment.” He looked away and clenched one fist. He took in a deep breath, then looked back to Zanna, looking them right in the eyes. “There are ways a king can show affection to his people, and there are ways he can show affection to his favorites. I was hoping you might spend the afternoon with me, and as well, if you might accept this gift.” He held out a hand, and a golden portal from Gates of Babylon opened, letting something heavy fall into his hand. When the portal vanished, Gilgamesh held his hand towards Zanna.

He was holding a large golden collar, with a leather lining on the inside, and mother of pearl inland for decoration on the outside. It was open on one side and had a small hinge opposite the opening that allowed the collar to open and close. Zanna recognized it as a popular accessory the people of Uruk wore around their necks, and without thinking, they brushed their fingers along their neckline. They reached out and took the collar with their other hand. It was heavy, definitely real gold, and looked to be just the right size. Zanna turned it over in their hands, admiring the work that had gone into it.

“Eh-hem... I know that item is not commonly worn in this age. May I help you fasten it, Master?” Gilgamesh offered, as he took a step closer to Zanna.

Zanna looked up at him and nodded silently, swallowing. They lifted the collar to their neck and pressed the leather to their skin. Gilgamesh placed his hands over theirs, and he guided them, folding the collar around their neck, careful not to pinch their skin in the hinge. As he moved his hands to the back, they held it in place at the front.

The leather hugged their neck, offering a gentle, comforting pressure. Gilgamesh was able to clasp the collar with a smooth movement, and when he was done he let his hands slide down to Zanna’s shoulders, and then around their chest. He embraced them from behind, resting his chin on the top of their head. “It looks great on you.” He gently turned Zanna so they were facing the mirror hanging on one wall.

Zanna drew in a sharp breath at the sight of them together. While the ancient-styled collar didn’t match with their outfit, it matched with the man whose arms were draped around them and holding them tight. His hand with the clawed gauntlet was clasped over his bare hand, and the gaze of his sharp, red eyes was turned down to look at them. Zanna moved their hands from the collar to his arms, grasping his wrists and keeping his arms in place. The collar weighed on their shoulders, but they didn’t mind it at all.

“It’s a lovely gift, my king. Thank you.” Zanna closed their eyes and leaned their head back against Gilgamesh. Their heart was pounding, and they were certain Gilgamesh could feel their heightened pulse under his hand.

“It’s a suitable gift for the treasure I protect most fiercely.” He gave them a squeeze, then loosened his arms to hold their shoulders and turn them around. They came face to face, with Zanna gazing up at Gilgamesh. His red eyes almost glowed from under his golden bangs, and his bare chest was pressed against theirs. Zanna found themselves blushing, and Gilgamesh was doing the same and not even trying to hide it.

“Well, let me show my appreciation then.” Zanna swallowed, brimming with nerves even as they mustered the courage to speak those lines. One arm wrapped around Gilgamesh’s waist and the other lifted to his cheek, caressing it and tilting his head down. They felt Gilgamesh shiver at the touch, and their Command Seals itched with anticipation, almost like they were receiving feedback from Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh grabbed the back of Zanna's head, tangling his fingers in their crimson hair. He shoved them into a kiss, lips meeting, mouths lightly parted. Zanna felt their whole body tense up, and in response, Gilgamesh held them tighter, drawing in a breath through his nose as he held the kiss for as long as he desired. Zanna's tail twitched and twisted around his legs, returning the squeeze he was giving with his arms. He held that kiss until Zanna was dizzy before pulling away, both gasping for breath, bodies hot, hearts pounding.

"Gil..." Zanna barely had a chance to catch their breath before he kissed them again. His armored hand grabbed them by the chin and squeezed so they couldn't easily wiggle away, not that they had any desire to. He tugged on their hair, and his gauntlet scratched their chin. Zanna squirmed, ears folded back and tail trembling as they were kissed until they were lightheaded. Gilgamesh let them go before they passed out, and they gasped for air and stumbled back on unsteady legs. They tripped over their own feet, but Gilgamesh caught them in one arm before they hit the ground, but the brief moment of fear sustained their hazy, blissful rush.

"Careful now, my Master. I wouldn't want harm to come to my favorite subject." He lifted them back to a standing position and held their shoulders to keep them steady as Zanna panted to try and cool off.

"Of course, my king," Zanna said between breaths. They leaned their head against his chest, and they could hear that his heartbeat was as fast as their own. Their ears turned to listen better, and they nuzzled against his warm chest. "I will do as you ask."

"As you should. Now. I expect you to keep that treasure and wear it to our future meetings, is that understood?" He tapped his fingers against the golden collar, then looped one finger under the band to give it a tug.

Zanna nodded as they were pulled by the collar, making them stand at attention without a thought. "I would be glad to, Gil." They wrapped their arms around him and held tightly. Gilgamesh chuckled at that and returned the hug, looping his arms around their waist. For a long moment, the two of them held that gentle embrace leaned against one another. They felt each other's chest rise and fall, and they listened to their heartbeats, whiling away the afternoon together.