

THE DAEMON TIMES: MOONLIGHT TERROR

妖怪新聞社：月光恐慌事件

Somehow, the ever-lazy Omnicat has found himself in the worst situation of his life: as a rookie reporter amid a crisis of epic proportions! Luckily, a keen eye and a few old tricks up his sleeve allow this lackadaisical feline to get to the bottom of a scam that's causing mass hysteria and threatening the existence of his employer.

Omnicat can't quite figure out how he ended up answering a call for new journalists at the well-reputed newspaper, *The Daemon Times*. But now that he's there, everything has fallen apart: his editor is clamoring for a story, his colleagues are competing with him, and the rival paper has just broken a story that has shaken the daemon world to its very foundations!

Even though Omnicat just wants to curl up for a nap, the world's demands are too pressing: their competitor has reported that the moon, whose light sustains every daemon, is fading, and its light becoming more harmful than beneficial. But while everyone is running around buying special mooncream and moonglasses (conveniently advertised below), Omnicat figuratively smells a rat. Checking his sources, he finds that the article is fake, including the "expert" it cites. So Omnicat gets off his habitually lazy behind and goes in to uncover a story, a journey that will bring him more than he bargained for.

Wang Yu-Ching's brilliant wit pairs perfectly with George Wang's exuberant style of illustration in a story that employs cleverness to teach reader about the nature of truth and the value of inquisitiveness.

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A young, award-winning author of children's literature, Wang Yu-



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Ching's short prose can be found in a variety of printed forms. *The Daemon Times* is his newest serial work.

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Text by Wang Yu-Ching, Illustrated by George Wang
Translated by Gigi Chang

“Welcome to *The Daemon Times*. My name is Floramist, the Editor-in-Chief. As I’m sure you are aware, we chose you for your unique capabilities and obvious potential to become journalists worth our attention.”

Omnicat was impressed. He sensed instantly that his new boss was a formidable daemon, but he couldn’t discern her true being behind the veil she wore.

“Now, writers and photographers, find your partner. Two in a team.” The editor gave her first order.

“Jessica and I are already a team,” the dog daemon drawled.

“Yes, I’m with Snowsharp,” the eyeball daemon agreed, equally cool.

So that’s her name – Snowsharp. It rings a bell, Omnicat said to himself. Then he gasped, and his eyes widened, as if he had just recalled something. But whatever the thought had been, it was chased away by the single eye staring at him: Jessica’s twin, Jack.

“Each journalist must have a partner,” the editor said again, looking pointedly at the remaining two.

“Erm, nah, I’m alright alone...” Frantically, Omnicat waved the command away. He didn’t realize he’d have to work with other daemons.

If Snowsharp and Jessica are already a team, doesn’t that leave me with Jack? He seems nice enough...but the fact of the matter was that Omnicat didn’t want a partner.

Yet before he could say another word, Jack’s face – rather, the white of his eye – had turned pink.

A large teardrop fell.

“Erm...” Omnicat panicked. He had never imagined this eyeball daemon could be so emotionally fragile.

“Don’t – don’t cry. I’ll be your partner...” the words tumbled out before the flustered feline had time to consider their implication.

“That would be amazing!” Jack smiled, and threw himself onto Omnicat, wrapping the cat daemon in a big, wet hug. “Thank you! We’ll be a wonderful team.”

Jack’s tears were both profuse and sticky. They ran all over Omnicat’s coat and clothes, making him feel weird and awkward. Yet he knew if he pushed Jack away, the eyeball would probably squeeze out even more, so he stood stiffly and nodded.

So, from now on, I’ll have this weepy eye of a photographer stuck to my side all day long, Omnicat moaned inside. What a fuss this journalism business is! Maybe I should slip away while I can....

The editor-in-chief then explained the newspaper's work. She spent most of her time describing how she singlehandedly completed all the text and visual editing work, and how it all relied on her exceptional taste, great flair for writing, and keen eye in art direction, et cetera, et cetera.

So full of herself!

Snap. A soft explosion drew Omnicat's wandering mind back to the present. A purple haze faintly scented with flowers rose in front of the new recruits.

The daemons tried to refocus their eyes. One after another, small pouches materialized in the mist.

"This is the basic toolkit for journalists of *The Daemon Times*. Open it and look inside."

"Woah! That's so cool!" Curiosity had banished every thought of running off from Omnicat's head.

"I'm not keen on the color or the shape of this bag," Jessica said frostily.

Ignoring the criticism, Floramist flashed a smile. "This toolkit will transform according to its owner's personality and preferences....Oh, and, I made *every one of them* by myself. Who *wouldn't* want one?" The editor looked closely at each of the new recruits as her tone turned acerbic. Though the veil obscured her eyes, Omnicat couldn't help but shiver as a chill spread quickly through his body.

Right on cue, the pouches in the haze began to transform.

Snowsharp's toolkit turned into a messenger bag, black as the darkest night, with a sprinkle of silvery snowflakes adorning the flap. Luxurious but elegant. Jessica's transformed into a light shoulder bag, emblazoned with lightning symbols in metallic purple and gold, as practical and shrewd as its owner. Her little twin brother Jack's bag morphed into a coffee-colored backpack of sturdy canvas. It was plain and undecorated, both solid and durable.

Of course, Omnicat's pouch also changed – into a snow-white cross-body belt bag embroidered with swirling clouds embroidered in blue and gold.

"Aiya!" gasped the editor. Omnicat couldn't understand her reaction, but was too excited to ponder why. He simply squealed, "Wow! I love it!" and ripped open the bag. It contained a small notebook, a pen, and a mobile phone. He immediately reached for the phone.

"Ouch!" He felt an electric shock, and heard an echo of yelps – Jack's cry was particularly exaggerated and shrill – as others got zapped too. This is clearly another brilliant invention of our editor boss, Omnicat thought. She's so much more than what she seems. I bet she's a daemontech expert; that boomerang of a hiring letter must have been her handiwork too!

When did daemoncraft and daemontech get so advanced? Omnicat thought resentfully. I'm really so out of the loop....But I can learn! I'll start now!

The thought brought him back to his happy-go-lucky self.

"The shock was part of the phone's identity authentication process. No other daemon but the phone's owner and myself can now use the device. Moreover, the phone is guaranteed to work, no matter where you are. No matter where!" Floramist said with great pride.

"So cool! The pen and the notebook must be really special too!" Omnicat whipped them out, full of excitement.

“Erm, no, they’re just ordinary.” Was the editor blushing behind the veil? Then the haughty voice returned: “Certain techniques can only be acquired through hard work.”

The atmosphere had now grown extremely awkward, the air frosty. Omnicat feared he had already got on the wrong foot with his boss. To everyone’s relief, Floramist broke the ice she had created with a dry cough. “Ahem. Let me show you around your workspace.”

“This is where you sit,” she announced, snapping her fingers as they arrived at an empty room.

Instantly, four wooden desks and chairs grew from the floor. Then reading lamps sprouted from the tabletop.

“Wow, the desk has drawers!” Omnicat and Jack were like two little children, running their paws over everything, purring and gasping in awe.

“Country bumpkins,” Snowsharp cast a look of disdain and turned up her snout. She picked a seat and started arranging her things. Jessica followed and sat behind her.

Realizing the other team had claimed their desks, Omnicat and Jack scrambled to copy them.

“Cor, this is comfy!” Omnicat exclaimed as he lowered himself into the chair. It had the appearance of hard wood, but it felt cushioned, soft. He sank into the land of dreams....After all, he was a cat who had grown very used to doing very little.

“Now, come with me, I’ll show you around the office.”

Omnicat hopped on to his feet, his sleepiness scattered by Floramist’s voice.

The newspaper’s office was huge. Apart from the working area for general staff, there was a Director’s Office, an Editor-in-Chief’s Office, an archive, a newsroom, a pantry, a napping room, and...their own print shop! The newbies walked past daemons of every shape and form, who only nodded a brief hello. Not one employee stopped to chat with them. Everyone looked incredibly busy.

Omnicat noticed they all wore the same expression of stern tiredness. He gulped audibly.

This is it. He could feel a wail rising inside. I’ll never get to laze around in peace again.

“Right, let’s begin! I’m sure with your experience and skill, you won’t have any issue.”

Oh, no, no, no!

After their quick tour of the office, the editor issued her next command: it was time for the new recruits to pull up their socks and go out to hunt for their first news story.

“Heavens!” Omnicat groaned. “How?”

Yeah, how?

Omnicat had never thought of becoming a journalist, nor did he have any related experience. But he did turn up for the meeting and tour of the office, so he couldn’t possibly say to the editor now: “I’m terribly sorry, I didn’t apply for the job in the first place. Would you mind telling me why I’m here and what’s happening?”

He couldn’t, right? So what should he do?

“*The Daemon Times* place the utmost emphasis on the truthfulness of our reports. And our unparalleled viewpoint.” A final reminder.

“Unparalleled viewpoint? That’s a bit abstract, no?” Omnicat mumbled aloud to himself.

The editor gave the cat daemon a death stare. “The deadline is one week from now. If you are late, there will be consequences. Dismissed!”

“Yes!” Omnicat jumped in fear and scabbled outside, his heart pounding. He couldn’t take his mind off the veil over his editor’s face. He could tell it was some powerful daemoncraft that made others “feel” the wearer’s mood change, as if the fabric could show emotions!

“Director, can we truly put our faith in this feline daemon, Omnicat?”

The editor crossed her arms over her chest and watch the sweaty, panicked Omnicat scurry away through the window of the Director’s office. “He hasn’t even read our paper. And he was almost late.”

An aged, faraway, throaty chuckle rose from somewhere behind the enormous desk that bore the label “Director,” though nothing could be seen behind it.

“Didn’t he find us in his own way? Besides, ‘almost late’ isn’t actually late.” Another laugh. “Give him a chance, Floramist.”

“Hm...” The editor turned the words over in her head. She was still baffled by the Director’s insistence on hiring Cloud Omnicat. She had been observing the cat daemon since he stepped inside the office. He appeared from every angle to be no more than two sleepy eyes’ worth of slothful lethargy. However, out of respect, she would hold her doubts back and be patient – for now.

Let’s see what this fleshy moggy with a stunted tail can do, she told herself.

Super major Challenge

The first thing Omnicat did after running from the newspaper office?

No, not dash into the streets to hunt for news. He leapt onto a nearby roof and found a nice-looking spot to lie down. He spread out in his favorite lazing position and stared at the drifting clouds in the sky.

“Deadline...I can feel the pressure already! Why did I get myself into this hassle...” he chided himself.

“Where should we go to find our story?” Jack popped out from nowhere.

“Why don’t you go by yourself?” Omnicat was startled by the eyeball daemon, but not enough to get onto his feet. Nothing to be done about it, Omnicat sighed to himself; he could tell that his first reaction to any kind of hassle was to get even lazier.

“I’ve tried already, but my legs are really short, so I run slow, and I don’t know this place or anyone here...” Jack had that tone in his voice, like he was probably going to cry again.

With that thought, Omnicat said, “Aaah, all right! I’ll go!”

Reluctantly, he got onto his feet and scooped Jack onto his shoulder.

A somersault, and they leapt off the roof together.

“Hey, watch out!”

As Omnicat landed he almost smacked into Snowsharp, who was walking past the very same street corner. She swerved away with ease, but her sharp tongue and dagger eyes lashed at the clumsy Omnicat without mercy.

“Sorry!”

“Jack, how’s your search for a story going?” Jessica looked out from behind Snowsharp.

“Nothing so far....” Jack seemed rather intimidated by his twin. “You?”

“We’ve found ours, and we’re starting work already.”

“Erm...may I ask what—”

“I fear we can’t oblige with an answer.” Snowsharp shut Jack down as she strode away, pulling Jessica with her.

“What should we do, Omnicat?”

So Jack isn’t just emotionally sensitive, he’s a nervous wreck, too! This is just great, he’s my complete opposite! Omnicat concluded as he watched Snowsharp and Jessica disappear down the lane. Those two are a perfect team, a match made in heaven. The two of us couldn’t be any more incongruous! The thought made the usually unflappable feline anxious.

“Jack, calm down, don’t panic. We’ll find a good story...I hope.”

“Really?”

“Of course!” Omnicat tried to sound certain by shouting, but his abnormal gait betrayed his insecurity.

Ugh, it doesn’t matter, the cat daemon grunted inside. One little lie is better than two fretting daemons!

Omnicat and Jack wandered around chatting without aim or purpose until the whole night was gone.

Where do I go to find news? The question had by now circled in Omnicat’s mind so many times, he felt certain his skull would burst any moment – that is, if he didn’t go crazy first.

Bling-ring-sing~ bling-ring-sing~

A melodious peal of bells. Omnicat’s phone was ringing.

He looked at the phone, wondering who it could be. He picked up, and out drifted Floramist’s voice.

“Have you decided on a topic for your first story?”

“Erm, no...not yet.”

Silence. It only lasted for five short seconds, but to Omnicat, it felt like at least ten minutes. His heart almost exploded from the tension.

“Don’t be late with the draft.”

The editor’s voice was calm and without a hint of emotion. A faint whiff of floral fragrance wafted from the mouthpiece.

“Yes, boss.”

Omnicat couldn’t fathom why he felt such fear and reverence for this editor he only met for the first time earlier that night. Perhaps it was because she radiated an irresistible aura of strength? Was that what made her so formidable?

After the call from Floramist, Omnicat and Jack knew any thought of taking a break would be futile. They trundled around dutifully in search of a news story.

As they passed the convenience store, they found a horde of daemons crowding around a newspaper. Apparently engrossed by a single article, they read it through, then scattered in a panic. “Quick, quick, quick!” They dashed away, letting the newspaper drift to the ground.

The whole thing piqued Omnicat's curiosity. He went up and picked up the paper. "Why the rush? What's *The Monster Source*?"

Nothing made sense. He felt he had been plunged headlong into a pea-soup fog.

"Huh? You haven't seen this? It's a really popular new print media outlet. It claims to always have the first scoop on the most monstrous...." Jack looked to the left and right, then whispered, "I heard the sales of *The Daemon Times* suffered a great deal because...."

Guiltily, the two daemons let their eyes run over *The Monster Source*'s front page:

According to moonlightology expert Dr. Witchriding, the moon has begun to deteriorate after shining brightly for several million years. Its light now contains a wavelength that daemons cannot withstand. Long-term exposure is believed to cause genetic mutations. Mooncream and moonglasses are expected to become necessities in a daemon's daily self-protection regime.

"No!" Omnicat felt scared. After all, almost ninety percent of daemons were nocturnal, himself included. Now he understood – and felt – the collective panic he had just witnessed.

Underneath the story was an advertisement from Moonlight Wellbeing that took up a good portion of the page. It featured their best-selling moonglasses and mooncream.

"Should we get some?" Jack's nerves had become more frayed.

"For sure!" Omnicat answered immediately. While he could feel a kernel of doubt in the back of his mind, the fear of mutation soon overpowered his other faculties. He folded up the newspaper and sprinted all the way to the Moonlight Wellbeing store.

An unbelievably long queue snaked back and forth outside the shop. They waited a night and half before they managed to get their hands on protective glasses and cream.

Then they ran all the way back to the office. They had to tell everyone about their shocking discovery.

"Bad news, everyone.... Whoah!"

Omnicat and Jack both jumped back in surprise. Everyone was wearing moonglasses, and a tub of mooncream sat on every desk. Even Floramist was wearing moonglasses behind her veil!

"That's a bit much, isn't it?" Omnicat asked, but then thought of his own panic and felt too embarrassed to say more. He scratched one ear sheepishly.

"Our competitor broke the story, but it's too important to ignore!" The staff of *The Daemon Times* huddled together, whispering and arguing among themselves.

"Why are you two dawdling here? Snowsharp and Jessica have just confirmed their story and angle with me. How are you getting on?"

The dream team was checking sources not far away. Hearing Floramist's voice, they turned to give Omnicat and Jack an icy stare.

Jessica and Snowsharp were the only two in the office not wearing moonglasses!

"Wow! Yes.... we'll go now to look for our story! Sorry!" Omnicat was suffocating under the hostile gaze. He grabbed Jack and fled.

The editor frowned behind her veil, wondering if this clueless feline would ever hand in his story.

"Hm.... yeah, I should check it out," Omnicat murmured as he ran.

"Check what out?"

"The moonlight story!"

"Why? What about our story?"

"We can deal with that later. Something doesn't feel right to me. Do you want to come?"

"Erm.... OK." Pinned down by Omnicat's determined eyes, Jack didn't dare say no.

Can moonlight really cause us harm? Omnicat wondered. It was plausible that something might have changed in the moonbeam. After all, we daemons have been relying on it for our existence for millions of years.

But something about the story bugged Omnicat.

The first thing he decided to do was to confirm whether moonlight was harmful – as the newspaper described – or not.

How do I do that? Where should I start? he asked himself. I can check who wrote that report. Strange...no byline?

Omnicat tried another angle. If he could find out more about this moonlightology expert, Dr. Witchriding... Who was he? Where did he work?

He looked and looked but could find no information. Maybe he could call *The Monster Source* to enquire? Yet the call came back: "There is no subscriber at this number."

Let's go to the address printed on the paper!

No business of that name was ever in operation at that location. The newspaper's contact information was false.

Omnicat spent another night calling all the major daemonversities and research institutes. Not a single daemon was known to be researching a subject called moonlightology, nor had anyone heard of Dr. Witchriding.

"Fishy..." Omnicat found it uncanny that one news report, a single page of written words, could exert such great influence. Every single employee of *The Daemon Times* was a trained professional. They made discerned critiques and analyses of news stories every day. Surely they couldn't be so easily swayed?

"Unless..." He rummaged through his bag. "Where is it? Where did I put it?"

"Omnicat, what are you doing? Are you all right?" Jack watched his partner's frenzied digging, worried that the stress had broken him.

"Found it!"

"Huh? *The Monster Source*?"

Indeed, in Omnicat's paw was the very copy of *The Monster Source* that ran the story.

"Perhaps we'll find the answer here!" A strange glint came into Omnicat's eyes.

"Oh?" Jack felt even more certain that work stress had caused a mental breakdown in his teammate.

"Look at the words carefully." Omnicat thrust the newspaper right under Jack's iris.

"What about it?" Jack's eye widened, and confusion filled the eyeball.

"A simple news report cannot possibly create such a strong effect."

Omnicat's pupils grew very round and glowed with excitement. The paw holding the newspaper tremored with agitation.

“You mean...” Jack was confused, and still very concerned that his colleague had lost his wits.

“Come with me!”

“Aiyo!”

Omnicat grabbed Jack’s sleeve and whizzed away at a gallop.