

Synopsis: Cupid's bow is getting too old and rusty. With the help of Japanese teenager Akane Heiya, the world is restored back to peace.

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The first dozen or so archers who tried out didn't quite suit the job; Cupid knew as soon as he saw their old and grimy faces, plastered with soot as if on some grotesque display. Naturally he tried to keep them entertained and displayed interest in their talents, but it turned out they took losses as well as he. At some point the god got bored and simply vanished; he knew he would have to find talent elsewhere. *His* talent, to be exact. Whether it could be attributed to visions or simply his imagination was hard to say, but every time he closed his eyes the void seemed to hear his call, even heed it, and a figure would approach from afar; his senses were blinded, and Cupid, curious as he was, would call out, and it would approach closer... he thought it might have been a woman, though its appearance could not really be discerned at a distance. Nevertheless, his heart would beat, slowly at first, then faster and faster until the feminine shape appeared in his line of sight — and vanished, and he would shout, “Wait!”

It was just his luck that it would be a woman. Cupid didn't have anything against women: being a god of love, he possessed a sensitivity to emotions that men often lacked, and Eros, his Roman counterpart, held even more feminine divinity than he. Whenever he shivered, he thought with relief and annoyance that the woman he saw might have been Artemis; but Artemis, as everyone knew, was completely averse to romance. Cupid had gotten curious and taken a look inside the maiden once, and what he had found had surprised him: Artemis had a steady love within her for everything from nature to the Pantheon. It wasn't that she wasn't capable of romantic love, she just *ignored* it, almost like taking on a burden — which helped him see all the pain she had stored in reserves, the despair and soul-crushing guilt.

Cupid thought about confronting her. But then decided against it: why would she have any reason to listen, anyways? She had no respect for his post. He found that among his followers, those who truly did not possess the capability for romantic love seemed to respect him the most — aromantics, as one might say. Cupid wouldn't mind if his woman was the same; it could even be argued that it took away the bias from his job, and provided more clarity. But...

The next hundred candidates he surveyed were of better quality. Some were young and some were old; a few did not even know how to shoot, but he happily guided them along. At the end of each one of these trials, Cupid would give some parting advice: “Shoot true, for it is your family's honor on the line,” “When you have conquered your enemy with your arrow, that is how you know you love them,” “Anchor yourself to the world in order to shoot straight,” and “Your posture sucks! Fix it.” Then the subject would inevitably try to shake his hand, fall to their knees and weep, or some combination of the two. Cupid would stare down with mild amusement, then reach for their bow and imprint its texture into his fingers as he stroked it, touch his lips to his fingers, and press them against the wood. Or metal. Or... bamboo string.

After the first thousand, it did seem that he had many more female candidates than he did male ones. Cupid struggled to figure out why; it didn't make sense, at least at first.

Akane Heiya was a fascinating individual. Cupid discovered after she had confided in him that she had spent a period of time in the Borderlands, a place where time didn't exist — not really. The way he interpreted it, the Borderlands served as a place between life and death, where people caught in a tragic event or after receiving a life-threatening injury went to get a chance at returning to the living world. For Akane, it was because a certain meteor shower in Tokyo created quite a bit of human fodder for the deities of the place to sit back, relax, and get a little bit of entertainment. She detailed her first game to him:

“I showed up at the stadium, and there was a crowd of people there. They were all middle-aged, but some of them looked younger than the others. They were all crowded around something I couldn't see, so I waited for them to make room before I followed. It was a table — and there was a phone left on it, the last one.”

“Wait. There's modern technology there? You guys had phones?”

Akane shrugged. “Yeah, I don't know. Anyways, it IDed me and the word ‘game’ showed up on the screen, along with the number of players. I wondered what was happening. Surely it must have been a joke? This guy next to me overheard my confusion, he was old enough to be my dad. He said, ‘You have to be quick on your feet in order to survive.’”

“Bleak,” Cupid muttered.

“Then the game registration closed, cause there's a limited amount of time for people to show up before the game starts. I see a Seven of Spades card on my screen, which is supposed to be its difficulty.”

“I was such a shitty person before then,” she whispered, tears trailing down her cheeks. “Up until the very last second, I was still worrying about guys and telling my friends about how I... well, broke up a relationship because the guy was cheating on the girl with me... and the whole time, *I knew about it*. Why am I so pathetic?”