

## Hunter 1001

### Chapter 1001: The Magical Conference Call Begins

Meetings were unavoidable no matter what faction, even if it was one made up of beer-loving warriors who preferred a good battle to fix most problems. However, they did recognize there were situations where fighting would benefit no one, and everything happening in the Milky Way was one such situation.

At least it wasn't the time for a full-on war quite yet.

The entire reason behind the current conflict was to get rid of the Order of the Malefic Viper's influence over the Milky Way. At least, that was the excuse Ell'Hakan used. The real reason was, of course, for Ell'Hakan to help his Patron defeat the Malefic Viper by helping build momentum for the god through his efforts in the new universe.

So what if they offered Ell'Hakan something better than him having some minor victories and claiming a few planets? As Bobby put it:

"It'll look better for Ell'Hakan that he managed to make you surrender – or at least look like you surrendered - and switch sides rather than just outmaneuver you on the battlefield," he said, having quite good insight into these sorts of things. "Of course, that wouldn't mean the situation in the Milky Way would be resolved, but it would put a pause on things. Putting a pause on things would definitely be to his benefit, as once his Patron wins, Ell'Hakan will only grow in power and influence. While a truce is in effect, he'll also look like the winner and obviously communicate himself the winner, which should help weaken the Malefic One... especially with your announcement."

Jake nodded as he nurtured his beer, everything Bobby said tracking with his discussion with Villy and the others back on Earth. He felt like he'd had this exact meeting two times already, with the only difference being the setting.

But, hey, at least this time, they had an open bar with every kind of alcoholic drink the heart desired because even when Valhal held meetings, they still made sure to enjoy themselves.

"I just want to make sure, though, before we start doing anything... are you sure about this?" Bobby asked Jake with concern. "You will be taking an extreme risk by directly opposing your current Patron, and while I understand from Carmen you may have some plans of your own, wouldn't simply renouncing the Blessing you've been granted by the Malefic Viper be a safer option? If you cut him off, it may hurt you in the short term, but I'm certain Valhal will more than happily help you make up for any losses."

"Things are a lot more complicated than they appear," Jake sighed. "I'm not a huge fan of repeating myself, so you can hear why I'm doing things the way I am at the same time as Ell'Hakan does. I feel like that's safer, too, and I hope you will understand why when the time comes."

In truth, Jake didn't want to tell the story multiple times out of fear he would mess up or stupidly add some detail he would forget later on. No, better to tell the story once and once only. The excuse it could be dangerous to explain in the first place also wasn't something anyone could write off, as no one knew what exactly was going on between Jake and the Viper, and it was entirely possible they had some contract or that some conditional magic was in place.

"Alright," Bobby just relented, not pressing the issue further.

"If it's worth anything, I have a good idea what's going on, and I agree with him. Without the barrier in the communication room, he shouldn't be saying anything," Carmen added, crossing her arms. "Gudrun advised us to be cautious... we are dealing with a Primordial here, after all. A washed-up loser only coasting by due to his over-inflated ego and exaggerated reputation, but a Primordial still."

While Carmen flamed Villy quite harshly, Jake didn't fail to notice that nearly everyone was looking at him for his reaction. Usually, someone blessed by a god wouldn't like it when you talk shit about that

god, especially not a Chosen. The thing about Jake was that even if he wasn't a fan of people insulting his buddy... he didn't really care that much.

"I guess that's what happens when you coop up in your Divine Realm for who-fucking-knows how long without doing anything," Jake shrugged, clearly showing he was unbothered by Carmen's insults. "But I have been close enough to know I shouldn't underestimate the Viper no matter how much he's fallen behind all the other Primordials."

Jake could feel the relief wash over several of the high-ranking officials from Valhal. Perhaps they had all been wondering if Jake had truly determined himself to turn his back on the Viper, and this seemed to have served as an acceptable confirmation.

"True, so we shouldn't delay too much either," Bobby said as he adopted a serious look. "We already made some preparations to set up a meeting with Ell'Hakan, and we have a room prepared from our prior communications. Before you ask, no, we actively avoid meeting him in person as per the guidance of my Patron. His Bloodline simply poses too high of a risk to meet him in person, especially in any kind of negotiation. When you can't even trust your own emotions, how the hell are you supposed to know when you're getting a good deal?"

It was obvious that while the plan was to oppose the Malefic Viper, the people from Valhal certainly didn't like Ell'Hakan either. It was naturally totally understandable, and it boded well for what would come after the Viper's plan had hopefully been a success and Jake made his move to take down the would-soon-be former Chosen.

"Yeah, I've met him in person a few times, and he's an unsettling guy. I also reckon it's only gotten worse the more powerful he becomes," Jake sighed. "Not meeting him face-to-face would definitely be our best approach... No, the only non-moronic approach."

Nods from all around the room confirmed they were all on the same page as they discussed some minor matters of what was to come before heading off to the special communication room established by Valhal. As they had talked with Ell'Hakan before, alongside the Holy Church and most other factions, the place was already prepared, and they had already made some additional modifications before Jake got there.

This special room was constructed not deep underground, as Jake tended to prefer placing things like this, but instead high up on a mountain outside of the capital city. It wasn't even anywhere closed-off, but just a large wooden pergola on top of the flattened and tiled mountaintop. Anyone could easily see the place from all around, making it the least secretive communication room for secret communication Jake had ever seen.

At least, it appeared like that at first. Jake felt some powerful magic in place as they approached the pergola and an odd aura that didn't feel like it belonged there. He didn't feel much mana, though, but some other form of energy was placed upon the place. It was powerful, almost semi-divine in nature, and only once he got really close did he understand why they had called the mountain sacred on their way there. The top of it had been made into hallowed ground, effectively giving the place itself a powerful Blessing.

Valhal were known for these kinds of places, and they had a lot of rituals and customs related to shamanism and mysticism. Their abilities to channel the heroic spirits of the dead and their Records were widespread knowledge, but Jake was still surprised when he felt as if thousands of people were nearby when he stepped foot on the tiled platform near the pergola.

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Using his Sphere and Pulse of Perception, he quickly realized why. He also knew why this place was considered sacred in the first place, likely even before it became officially hallowed. At first, he had believed this a natural mountain, but now he saw it was an utterly massive burial mound purposefully made to look like a natural mountain. Within it, he saw countless bones of tens of thousands of warriors, remnants of their presence seeping into the very land he stood upon.

Taking in the atmosphere, he looked at the two other people who actually went to the pergola, as three was the agreed-upon amount that was allowed to take part in this meeting. The participants were naturally Jake, Carmen, and Bobby also joining them as the World Leader. Sylphie had gladly left as she was also allowed to kip out on the boring pre-meeting meetings to explore the planet a bit and have fun.

“Runemaiden, if you will,” Bobby said politely once they were all on the platform, Carmen nodding in response as she knelt down and closed her eyes, pressing her fists to the tiled floor.

“Mother of Valkyries, Matron of War, bless this hallowed ground and grant us safety and respite,” Carmen said as her energy drained into the ground, making the magic circles come to life. Golden light enveloped the entire mountain, and Jake felt a distinctively divine presence everywhere. It was as if a blanket of divinity covered the mountaintop, and Jake felt his connection with Villy completely cut off. In fact, everything outside of this now golden space was entirely cut off from them, as all he saw were golden walls in all directions.

“Damn impressive,” Jake muttered, as he truly had no idea how those magic circles worked.

“Just a small glimpse,” Bobby smiled before quickly putting on his serious face again. “Be ready, alright? Ell’Hakan and those with him will be projected here, while our projections will appear on his end using a similar magic circle. We cannot interact with them outside of talking, and elements such as karma are entirely filtered out. Only our appearances, actions, and words will communicate our intent here today, and the same is true for their side, so look out for anything you possibly can.”

Jake could feel just how nervous Bobby was. Once more, it was evident just how much the World Leader hated interacting with Ell’Hakan, but it was also clear he even feared it a little. As a World Leader, he could easily do and say the wrong thing that would land his faction and many people in trouble, and Ell’Hakan was no easy opponent on the political scene, Bloodline or not.

"I'll be observant, but truthfully, I have very little to hide here today," Jake said with a sigh. "Anyway, I'm ready when you are."

"Alright... then here goes nothing," Bobby said as he activated a token, making a smaller circle using clearly different magic methodology begin to shine as it connected to an identical magic circle across the galaxy.

The pergola didn't have any chairs or anything like that, and the meeting would be done just standing up. Jake wore his usual outfit, mask and everything else that tended to make him comfortable as he didn't want to give away anything unless absolutely forced to. He knew he wasn't the best liar and would need all the help he could get to make his half-truths seem fully believable and his outright lies not easily seen through.

A few minutes passed, and Bobby explained the formation would only fully activate once all six people who would participate were there. No one else would be able to take part but the six of them, and no one could watch what was happening either. They had activated their magic circle fifteen minutes early to be ready, and ten minutes before time, it appeared the other side also joined the magical conference call, both parties politely early.

Three fully lifelike projections appeared five or so meters in front of Jake and the others, looking exactly like the real thing to the level Jake would have doubted if they weren't really there if not for his Bloodline. At the front of the three newcomers was naturally the recognizable nahoom, Ell'Hakan, and to his left was a man Miranda had shown him a picture of before: King Iludar. A fellow newly promoted Administrator of the Seat of the Exalted Prima and representative of many of the factions who'd join Ell'Hakan and the Holy Church during the system event.

Jake had expected to see these two, but the third one wasn't someone he'd thought to be there. He'd known it would be a representative of the Holy Church to uphold their interests, but despite knowing

that, he was still surprised when he saw Jacob standing there, radiating his usual calm demeanor despite being only a projection.

"We meet again, Chosen of Yip of Yore, albeit under quite different circumstances than usual," Bobby said in a confident voice rather quickly after they appeared as if he wanted to get the first word in.

"Different circumstances indeed," Ell'Hakan smiled as he looked at Jake, not paying Bobby much mind. "This entire thing is quite peculiar. We haven't met since Nevermore City, have we? A shame, though I know we've both been busy. This is quite a tumultuous time for our small galaxy, after all."

"Certain people have indeed been causing quite the ruckus," Jake shot back as he glared at Ell'Hakan, not even having the time to marvel at how even Ell'Hakan speaking made it seem as if he was actually there right in front of Jake.

"Sometimes, chaos is needed before harmony can be achieved," Ell'Hakan continued before he finally stopped scurrying around the subject. "But I hear you want to stop this chaos sooner rather than later. You and Valhal, hand in hand, seeking to, at the very least, put a pause on the conflict for now."

"Right," Jake nodded, knowing the guy had already been informed of the basics. The guy also clearly wasn't looking to beat around the bush, as this meeting had gone straight for the crux of why they were there.

Ell'Hakan smiled at Jake's curt response. "Now, that does make me wonder... why? Why take such a passive approach? That doesn't seem like you at all. Let's be honest here: if you leveraged the elites of your planet alongside the warriors of Valhal, you could have escalated the situation and turned it around to be in your favor on several fronts. Yet you want to negotiate instead... do you see my confusion?"

"Is my desire to avoid needless deaths not a good enough reason?" Jake asked with his arms crossed.

"If the Augur had asked me that, I would have nodded in agreement, but let's not act like you actually care," the other Chosen said in a matter-of-fact tone. "So, let me ask again... why?"

Jake was silent for a moment as he remembered the plan. After a bit he finally sighed and looked Ell'Hakan directly in the eyes. "I don't like you. I will never like you. If you were standing in front of me in person right now, we wouldn't be talking at all."

Ell'Hakan was quiet as Jake spoke and clearly not surprised at anything he said.

"But there's someone I want to get rid of a lot more than you right now, and fighting will only jeopardize that," Jake said in a serious tone.

"And who might the target of such great enmity be?"

"The Malefic Viper," Jake said without missing a beat.

For the first time, Jake saw a flicker of surprise cross Ell'hakan's face at the sudden direct declaration.



“Why would one possibly wish to get rid of their own Patron? There are other avenues in the case of inconsolable differences,” he asked, clearly suspicious. And for good reason. As Bobby had already brought up, it seemed to make a lot more sense for Jake just to renounce the Blessing of the Malefic Viper and accept one from Valhal. It would be far safer, as every moment Jake kept his connection to the Viper was a massive risk.

“I could list a few reasons why one would want that... but before all that, let me do just one thing,” Jake said as he took a deep breath, and he even infused his voice with Willpower. “I, Jake Thayne, hereby renounce my True Blessing of the Malefic Viper. Oh, and I officially tell the guy to go fuck himself.”

The entire platform got silent as everyone stared at him, Bobby and Carmen included. They definitely hadn’t known he was going to do this, which really helped sell what was happening. Jacob was also surprised, and Jake noticed Ell’Hakan subtly checking in with the Augur for his reaction.

Before any of them could say anything, Jake spoke once more.

“As you may or may not be able to see, that clearly didn’t fucking work,” Jake said in a clearly annoyed voice. “So you asked me why I didn’t look for alternatives outside of having the Malefic Viper slain? Well, because his death is my only way to get rid of him and his damn Blessing... and perhaps even turn this situation advantageous.”

Ell’Hakan stared at Jake for a few seconds before he smiled. “Before, I was merely curious, but now I dare call myself interested.”

## Chapter 1002: A Tale of Half-Truths

Carmen just stared at Jake as he made his grand declaration of renouncing the Malefic Viper, even infusing his words with Willpower. She knew he and the Malefic Viper had been planning something, but

this was... wait, was it even possible to make that kind of announcement without some kind of backlash? At least it had to trigger some kind of system prompt, right?

When he then explained how he couldn't get rid of the Blessing, Carmen couldn't help but feel weird about it. Jake wasn't a good liar. He had never been. But when he said that he couldn't get rid of the Blessing unless the Malefic Viper died, he seemed genuine. The other Chosen clearly also recognized this as he smiled and affirmed his interest in the discussion to come.

"Oh, lovely that you find my shitty situation interesting, real flattering," Jake said in an obviously sarcastic tone before sighing. "But, fine, allow me to continue piquing your curiosity. I may not always do it, but I can admit when I'm wrong, and in retrospect, perhaps it was a mistake to jump into bed with a snake god who quite literally had Malefic in his name without properly understanding what exactly I was signing myself up to. But in my defense, I didn't have a lot of information to go on back then, and it wasn't like the Viper gave me a lot of time to think things over before instantly making me his Chosen. Say, do you know when I even became his Chosen?"

El'Hakan's face didn't change as he motioned for Jake to continue. "Do tell."

"While still stuck in his damn Challenge Dungeon while infected with a poison that would kill me if I didn't manage to cure myself in time. This was a Challenge Dungeon that had been made all the way back when the Malefic Viper was still active and had been purposefully made as part of an experiment to see if he could actually kill the challengers doing the Challenge Dungeon, and it had successfully killed every single other person who'd attempted it for dozens of eras until I came along," Jake said in a matter-of-fact tone, and Carmen couldn't help but keep staring at him as she hadn't really known any of this.

"So do excuse me for wanting to take any advantage I could get, and everything indicated that being blessed by the god who'd also poisoned you would be a good way to survive. Back then, I had no idea about the implications of a True Blessing either, and the Viper didn't even give me some smaller Blessing first but went straight for the True Blessing," Jake continued.

"Now, that is admittedly odd. Why would he do that? You couldn't have proven yourself much at that point, much less made yourself worthy of being his Chosen. He may be a washed-up Primordial, but he is still a Primordial and should have some modicum of pride," Ell'Hakan said, seeming genuinely interested in Jake's history.

"I would hope the answer is pretty fucking obvious," Jake said in a half-mocking tone. "Same reason I reckon Yip of Yore made you his Chosen. It's all in the goddamn Bloodline. Perhaps he knew about this entire Primeval Origins business back then and wanted to lock me down nice and early."

Ell'Hakan looked in thought for a moment before he turned to the Augur of Hope sitting behind him. "Your thoughts on this tale?"

"While I cannot comment on the thoughts of those involved, I can confirm the sequence of events," the Augur responded. "Jake walked out of the Challenge Dungeon with a True Blessing, meaning he must have obtained it very early on. I have also heard of the Challenge Dungeon in question from the Holy Mother, as well as others like it that were cleared throughout the eras. Many have fallen to them."

"You say you won't comment on the thoughts of those involved but do enlighten me nevertheless. Do you truly believe Jake here could have been tricked by the Malefic Viper?" Ell'Hakan asked the Augur, making Carmen genuinely afraid. If the Augur began to shoot holes in the story, things could easily get ruined faster than-

"Very possibly," the Augur answered after only a moment of thought. "Jake had very little information to go on and was in a perilous situation. The Malefic Viper never truly gave him a choice and colored his view from the early days with the system. What's more, and this is perhaps a bit speculative, Jake would gladly accept the True Blessing if it gave him power. His Path is a simple one, focused solely on the pursuit of furthering his own personal skills and abilities. It wouldn't be difficult for the Malefic Viper to take advantage of his fact."

“Which begs the question,” Ell’Hakan said, still speaking as if Jake wasn’t even there. “Why would he be willing to denounce his own Blessing, knowing the loss of power such a thing would incur?”

Carmen once again had to hold herself back from sweating. Yeah, he wouldn’t do that, right, and-

“Because there is no power without freedom,” the Augur answered without hesitation. “Should the True Blessing end up becoming a shackle, Jake would gladly cut off his own foot to escape, as long as doing so means he would be able to live on his own terms.”

“Not entirely accurate,” Jake pointed out before smiling. “Before cutting off my own foot, I would at least try to take down my captor whenever next he was dumb enough to give me the chance to. Also, pretty rude of you to discuss me when I’m standing right here.”

“I apologize,” the Augur said with a small nod, not trying to give any further excuses.

Ell’Hakan looked at Jake once more as he seemed serious. “Am I to understand this correctly: you claim that the Malefic Viper effectively tricked you into becoming his Chosen because he wanted your Bloodline, relied on your innate nature and lack of knowledge to keep luring you in, and now you are effectively shackled to him and looking for a way to escape?”

“Tried to escape already,” Jake said in a cold tone. “You know why Yip of Yore chose to attack now, right?”

“The Malefic Viper used his Transcendent Skill in this universe and suffered the backlash for doing so,” Ell’Hakan answered.

“Well, what do you think he used it on? Who he used it on?” Jake asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Because I know, and the aftermath of him fucking around in my Soulspace using his Transcendent skill left me with severe soul damage for months, and without the Chosen of the Lifesoul Daolord, recovery would have taken even longer.”

Carmen could only stare into empty space as Jake spoke. Everything he said seemed like the truth, and while the magical conference call didn’t allow one to use lie-detecting skills or anything like that, the people present tended to be really good at sussing out lies... and they also viewed Jake’s words as truthful.

Assuming everything so far, and the stories of how the Malefic Viper and met and their interactions, even Carmen couldn’t help but question... maybe the Malefic Viper really was the baddie?

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This is going way fucking better than expected, Jake thought as he kept trying to stick to the script as best as possible. He’d missed a few things and included some extra stuff here and there to not seem like he was actually following a script, but the discourse had flowed in the right direction.

Stolen story; please report.

Jacob coming in with the assist was not expected at all. The Augur was on the other side of the conference call, and yet he’d helped Jake immensely by pretty much corroborating everything Jake had said while giving him a great segue to continue the conversation. ~~ANÓBES~~

Ell'Hakan also seemed oddly receptive. Sure, he was skeptical, but he clearly allowed Jake to control the flow of conversation for the most part. He wasn't fighting Jake and his attempt to get out of his narrative, which made Jake both confident and a little afraid. Confident because it made it seem like the other Chosen believed Jake, and afraid because he wasn't sure if he should be believed this easily.

Then again, as the Viper had said, this was the kind of story Ell'Hakan and Yip of Yore would both only benefit from. They had the motivation to believe what Jake was saying, and besides, why would the Viper want his own Chosen to openly shit-talk him? The only reason would be if they wanted Yip to grow stronger in the first place, which shouldn't make any sense.

Ell'Hakan, who had been getting progressively more willing to just listen, kept looking at Jake before continuing.

"What exactly did the Malefic One do with his Transcendent Skill?"

"I don't know," Jake said truthfully, shaking his head. "The system blocked out any knowledge about the details. What I am certain of is that he altered parts of his Legacy within me, leaving some things broken still. Things I'm not sure can be fixed without his assistance, and he knows that. Even told me I'll need his help."

Again, more truths. Jake didn't know how to fix Palate and would need help from Villy. The framing was a bit off, sure, but it was still the truth.

"I see," Ell'Hakan muttered. "What triggered him to use it in the first place?"

“Because he detected I was trying to do something that he would prefer I didn’t,” Jake said, rightfully assuming Villy wouldn’t be a fan of Jake accidentally killing himself. “As for how he did it... this is where I’ll need to mention something else by the name of the Trial of Myriad Poisons.”

Ell’Hakan frowned, seemingly unsure what that was as he glanced at Jacob, who explained:

“It’s a trial certain alchemists part of the Order of the Malefic Viper undergoes, but it’s relatively rare due to its... problems. It essentially involves soaking the alchemist in a grand mixture of poisons to stimulate their Palate of the Malefic Viper by absorbing all the poison. It has a rather high mortality rate dependent on the potency of the mixture used, and seeing as it only brings any real benefits when the potency reaches a level where it’s potentially lethal, many tend to avoid it and instead go with absorbing poisons over a longer period for more gradual growth,” Jacob explained, admittedly knowing more about the Trial than even Jake himself.

“You forgot the part where sometimes the one organizing the trial decides to add a drop of their own blood containing their Records,” Jake added in a serious tone. “A drop the trial taker then ends up consuming and having inside their Soulspace ever since.”

The mood in the room turned a lot more serious when Jake said this. Ell’Hakan stared at Jake with a level of disbelief that Jake believed was genuine, and even Jacob looked at him with concern. Jake also saw Carmen and Bobby look at him oddly.

“Do you seriously mean to tell me that the Malefic Viper implanted a drop of his blood infused with Records inside of you?” Ell’Hakan asked with a frown.

“I’m just telling you what happened,” Jake said with a shrug. “This drop of blood helped the Malefic Viper manifest himself within my Soulspace and do what he did in there. I will not deny this drop has been a boon at times, but I also realize it’s a ticking time bomb. As long as it remains within me, the

Malefic Viper has a method to kill me at any time if he so desires. Shit, when I first had the blood implanted into me, I was overwhelmed with the Viper's Records and risked getting forcefully transformed into a Malefic Dragonkin, but luckily managed to avoid such a fate. That's something I don't ever wanna repeat."

"I see, I see... now, how does this drop of blood relate to your inability to denounce your Blessing?" Ell'Hakan continued questioning.

"It does, and it doesn't," Jake said cryptically. "I can't say it's one thing that's happened that led to the current state of things, but fact is, I cannot renounce my Blessing even if I wanted to. All I know for sure is that my only way to get rid of my Blessing is either through my own death or the death of the Malefic Viper."

"You did say that," Ell'Hakan nodded as he considered Jake's words. His entire demeanor had turned much less antagonistic and far more curious, interested, and trusting the longer the conversation had been going on. "Seeing as I doubt you aren't looking to see the end of your own Path, I assume you wish to see the Malefic One be the one to fall?"

"If one of us has to go, better him than me," Jake said in a curt tone. "Truthfully, I've never really held any faith toward the Viper in the first place, something I'm pretty damn sure he knew all along. My entire relationship with the Malefic Viper was one born out of mutual benefit. However, gods don't tend to like that. They prefer worship and loyalty over anything else, and they cannot fathom a mortal seeing past their divinity for what they truly are: just another person. To me, they truly are nothing more than people with a headstart. Was then, still is now."

"Your words sound, I almost wanna say, blasphemous," Ell'Hakan said with a light smile.



“Funny you should say that considering even the system has tried to brand me a heretic, but due to my unique circumstances in large part brought on by the Malefic Viper, the tag never fully stuck, and I remained a Chosen,” Jake said without missing a beat.

El'Hakan didn't seem the slightest bit surprised at Jake's words, making it clear he already suspected Jake was pretty much a heretic. He took a few moments to consider before he asked. “Would you mind if I asked what role Valhal plays in all this? I am beginning to understand you wish to be freed from under the thumb of a tyrannical Patron, but why do you need them?”

“Allow me to answer that,” Bobby said as he stepped forward and bowed. “Even discussing this is incredibly dangerous, so we rely on the protection afforded by Valhal to somewhat ensure the safety of Lord Thayne. Additionally, he will need our help for what is to come. Should the Malefic Viper fall, Lord Thayne will have many enemies as he will have helped lead to his former Patron's downfall, something we at Valhal will gladly help alleviate. As per the will of the War God, Lord Thayne also has a standing invitation, and I personally approve of him as a warrior, so we naturally wish to see him be one of us. Finally, in the event of the Malefic Viper's death, we have made preparations to assist him in the next step.”

El'Hakan directed his gaze back at Jake as he flashed a big, genuine smile. “You wish to usurp the Path of the Malefic Viper.”

“Wouldn't it be wasteful if no one claimed it?” Jake shot back, smiling on his own. “Besides, it's the best of both worlds should the Viper die. I get my freedom and no longer have a Patron and a faction I am forced to be part of, and I can reap all the benefits of the Malefic Viper's Legacy without the Malefic Viper being part of it.”

“That way, you won't lose out on anything, and with sufficient preparation, there won't even be any backlash the moment the Malefic Viper dies. Only an influx of power and Records,” El'Hakan nodded. “Of course, all of that requires the Malefic Viper to actually die, and should he survive, the consequences will be dire.”

“Well, isn’t it your Patron’s job to make sure history is made?” Jake asked and tilted his head.

“It is,” the Chosen nodded. “And I doubt he would say no to an assist, though it sounds like you already helped plenty so far.”

“Oh, and I plan to keep helping,” Jake simply said. “So let’s-“

“Let’s take five,” Ell’Hakan interrupted Jake. “No, make that fifteen. A moment for us all to consider what has been said before we gather once more.”

Jake was thrown off-course by Ell’Hakan’s sudden declaration as he felt all the momentum he had been building in the conversation halt. He wasn’t sure what the other Chosen could want or why he did this, but arguing against it would only look weird, so Jake just grumbled, annoyed.

“Seems like a complete waste of time for everyone involved, but sure, we can all delay needlessly for another fifteen minutes,” Jake said, not hiding how little of a fan he was of taking this break.

“Great,” Ell’Hakan smiled. “Let’s reconverge then.”

With that, the three projections disappeared, leaving Jake just standing there. He wanted to look back at Carmen and Bobby to get a feel for how things were going, but wasn’t sure if it was safe to... all he could hope was that things were doing well so far and that Ell’Hakan still bought Jake and the Viper’s schemes.

Ell'Hakan kept smiling as the three projections faded away, the perfect replication of the Chosen of the Malefic Viper fading from view. Naturally, the Chosen of Yip of Yore had thoughts on what had just happened, as he nearly shook his head by instinct but held himself back.

While there are certainly some interesting factoids in there, it's truly a tale of half-truths, reeking of deceit from top to bottom.

Nevertheless.

Turning around to King Iludar and the Augur of Hope, Ell'Hakan adopted a serious look as he regarded the two of them. "It may seem far-fetched... but I believe he's telling the truth."

#### Chapter 1003: A Suspiciously Productive Meeting

Jake waited impatiently for the conference call to restart. While Ell'Hakan and company likely had a lot to talk about, Jake and the others really didn't. Nothing said or discussed so far warranted any real conversation, so all Jake did was check in with Carmen and Bobby to hear their thoughts on how things were going so far – after Bobby assured Jake no one could hear or see them, that is.

"He seems pretty on board," Carmen shrugged. "But it's hard to say with slimy bastards like him. Either way, even if he doesn't believe us, he probably wants to just go along with the story anyway, right? At least until his Patron battles the Malefic Viper."

"I'm in agreement," Bobby nodded. "You just need the story to be somewhat believable. I'm sure Ell'Hakan will do the rest of the selling necessary to the rest of the galaxy and multiverse to help power up Yip of Yore from there, and when you do your official public denouncement of the Malefic Viper, nothing prior will have mattered. That in itself will be more impactful and benefit Yip of Yore more than

all the current ongoing schemes. From there, all we can do is sit back and wait for the gods to finish their battle while being ready for what comes next.”

Jake nodded at their input, fully aware. Right now, the only important thing was just to get Ell’Hakan on board and pause the conflict in the Milky Way Galaxy. Surely, he would spread information about what they had agreed on from there, laying the groundwork for Jake’s future renouncement of his True Blessing. Something that was bound to be a grand affair.

He was still worried about how everyone would deal with things back on Earth, but he didn’t really have the mental leeway to do that right now. The fifteen-minute intermission felt so damn long before it was finally time to restart things, but at last, it was go-time once more. Bobby reactivated the magic circle, only for them to see Ell’Hakan and the two others had already activated theirs and were ready and waiting.

“Right on time. I do apologize for requesting this short break, but I believed it wise to give us all time to digest all we had discussed thus far,” Ell’Hakan said in a calm tone, restarting the meeting.

“It was fine,” Jake shrugged. “Assuming the break led to anything productive and wasn’t just a waste of time.”

“I believe it wasn’t,” Ell’Hakan smiled as he turned to King Iludar and Jacob. “We discussed and agreed that assisting you in your quest to free yourself from the shackles of your tyrannical Patron would be mutually beneficial. We also agree to a temporary truce within the galaxy as long as the details regarding that are satisfactory, with full recognition that it’s only a temporary truce until the battle between Yip of Yore and the Malefic Viper has concluded.”

Jake nearly asked him to repeat all that, as he wasn’t sure if he’d heard right... because it sounded like Ell’Hakan had just agreed to everything they had been asking for thus far. Both a temporary alliance and

truce were accepted just like that, and it felt way too fucking easy. It was so easy that Jake got suspicious, but he couldn't exactly question why Ell'Hakan hadn't tried to get more out of them without looking weird. No... there was still time for Ell'Hakan to make demands.

"Oh, but I do have one burning question before we get to the details," Ell'Hakan said, tilting his head. "How will your fellow natives respond to all this? What will the Verdant Witch who serves the Order of the Malefic Viper say? The countless allies only there due to your title as the Chosen of the Malefic Viper? Because I have a hard time seeing them just going on with business as usual after you declare the Malefic Viper enemy number one."

This was one of those times where preparation really came in handy, as Jake had a quick response ready.

"I told them a story," Jake said curtly. "I informed them that everything is part of the Malefic Viper's complicated scheme, and for them to simply trust me. That everything I'm doing here, and everything that will happen, is all part of the Malefic Viper's plan. If all goes well, that story should stick until the bitter end or at least convince enough people long enough for them not to cause trouble."

"And if it doesn't convince them?" Ell'Hakan raised an eyebrow.

"One thing at a time," Jake waved him off. "I never said this was a perfect plan, and it doesn't have to be. As long as it's good enough, things will be fine. With the help of Valhal, I'm confident in handling the aftermath."

"Don't you mean confident we'll handle the aftermath for you?" Carmen said in a jokingly mocking tone, Jake giving her a mental thumbs-up for the natural assist.

"We have made preparations," Bobby added. "Lord Thayne's homeworld is one occupied overwhelmingly by humans and without the influence of the Malefic Viper, it would have been a prime target for recruitment. Will there be challenges should there be a switch of backers? Yes, but I would

reckon many of those who put their trust in the Malefic Viper will also find themselves scrambling in the event of his death and would gladly accept the helping hand of Valhal during all that turmoil. As for those who still oppose us... well, any excuse to pick up arms would be more than welcome.”

“I see, I see...” Ell’Hakan slowly nodded as he looked back at Jacob. “To convince them all that this is all part of the Malefic Viper’s plan sounds incredibly far-fetched, wouldn’t you agree?”

“The Malefic Viper is a notorious schemer,” Jacob simply said. “However, I would agree that it seems illogical to have a plan that includes increasing the power of your mortal enemy, who currently has you on the back foot and is pushing back your faction on all fronts.”

“Right?” Ell’Hakan smiled as he turned back and looked Jake directly in the eyes. “That does sound unbelievable.”

Jake knew this was one of the more dangerous subjects, but this had been part of their considerations of what Ell’Hakan would question, and he quickly responded with one of his many pre-prepared semi-scripted sentences.

“It also sounds unbelievable that I would be unable to renounce my True Blessing, have a drop of the Viper’s blood implanted into my Soulspace, have the Viper use his Transcendence in that very same Soulspace, and all of that originating from me being made Chosen without knowing fuck-all about the system or how anything worked while still stuck in a fucked up Challenge Dungeon made to test the limits of the system... yet here we are, with all those things being truths I swear upon my Bloodline are true,” Jake said, perhaps coming on a bit too hard, but he felt like he needed to drop something like this to not lose momentum.

“You know, it almost sounds to me like you’re arguing all this truly is part of the Viper’s plan despite how ludicrous that seems,” Ell’Hakan said in a joking tone, shaking his head.

Fuck, Jake screamed internally as he kept a stoic look. Fuck me, why the-

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“But I understand what you’re getting at. Reality and fiction, especially when dealing with figures as powerful as Primordials, can be hard to distinguish for everyone, with no one truly knowing what they’re capable of doing or planning. If those on Earth have no reason to believe you were lying about it all being part of the Viper’s plan, they’re more prone to believe it than anything I or anyone else subsequently say,” Ell’Hakan continued in a calm tone. “You are the Chosen of the Malefic One, after all, and who is more trustworthy in matters regarding the Viper than that?”

... saved? Jake thought, honestly not sure how to take Ell’Hakan’s words. It sounded almost like he was trying to help Jake’s story make sense. Or maybe he’d overthought things... Jake didn’t and couldn’t know, so all he could do was keep things up.

“Not exactly what I was getting at, but close enough. They also wouldn’t want to believe I would betray the Malefic Viper, as that would be a very inconvenient truth to many,” Jake said, trying to sound convincing, though he decided to add: “I will admit this is perhaps the riskiest part of all this, but as I said earlier, even if many don’t believe I’m just following the Viper’s plan, I’ll deal with that after everything is over.”

“Fair enough,” Ell’Hakan allowed Jake to move on. “I’ll let you handle things on your end, and I’ll handle things on mine. I do take it you have thoughts as to what this truce and temporary alliance will include?”

“Do enlighten me what you have in mind,” Jake said, throwing the ball in Ell’Hakan’s court.

“Well, needless to say, the most important thing will be a joint declaration,” Ell’Hakan said, and Jake was about to protest about meeting up in person as the Chosen continued. “Meeting physically shall naturally not be part of this. I believe it best we stay away from one another for now and keep our communication strictly long-distance.”

“Probably safest for everyone involved,” Jake agreed, once more not hiding his dislike of Ell’Hakan. In all honesty, it made Jake a bit happy that Ell’Hakan didn’t want to meet Jake either. Ell’Hakan had to know that if anything could ruin a good plan, it was a punch to the face, and everyone knew Jake found the nahoom bastard very punchable. It hadn’t been part of the plan, but Jake’s dislike meant that he wouldn’t even need to argue against meeting Ell’Hakan and risking being exposed to his Bloodline, which was a great boon.

“Safety above all,” the other Chosen said in a lighthearted tone, shaking his head. “Besides a joint declaration, we shall also decide on how everything will be communicated. Also, what roles do Valhal and the Holy Church wish to actively play during all this?”

The question was directed at both Jacob and Bobby, with Jacob speaking first.

“The Holy Church will follow whatever declaration of peace is made and shall cease all activities that aren’t solely to retain our existing territory. For this, we do demand that the Risen and other formal enemies of the Church will also remain confined to their current locations and not make any moves,” the Augur said, proposing what Jake assumed was the bare minimum.

“Valhal shall not take any actions either during this period, not unless others break the truce first,” Bobby said in a strong tone. “Our goal in all this is purely to assist Lord Thayne in his matters, nothing



more, nothing less. His interests fully align with ours, and when the time is right, Valhal shall be the voice of authority to bring his denouncement of the Malefic Viper to the multiverse.”

“At which point, my Patron shall launch his final assault on the Malefic Viper, “ Ell’Hakan finished. “All seems simple enough on paper. Of course, there are some details to hammer out, but I believe we can find a solution everyone’s happy with.”

Jake slightly nodded, as he still felt some uncertainty from how easy this had all been so far, and how suspiciously productive this meeting had been. It didn’t feel as if Jake was trying to trick Ell’Hakan into an alliance and truce, but more like they both wanted the same thing, but for slightly different reasons. He almost felt that if he’d come to Ell’Hakan without any of his pre-planned stories and scheming and just asked him for a truce until Yip of Yore and the Viper settled their feud, the guy would have agreed.

He wasn’t sure if he should be complaining, though. This had been what they wanted, right? Yet Jake still had a nagging feel, no doubt coming in part from actually working with a guy he really wanted to just kill and be done with it. Alas, he would have to be patient and wait for the Viper to have his fun first.

Also, it was pretty damn clear Ell’Hakan had his own plans behind the scenes to be fine with this truce. Jake already knew he had dealing with the Holy Church that seemed mostly independent of Yip of Yore, and while the many allies he’d gathered were definitely strongly in part due to their Patron’s following Yip of Yore in his mad quest to slay the Malefic Viper, many also supported Ell’Hakan directly.

Without having any actual proof, King Iludar struck Jake as one of these people. During all their conversations, he seemed to never really react when gods were mentioned, making it appear he was quite neutral toward them. He also had a surprisingly clear gaze for someone Jake assumed to have been mind-fucked by Ell’Hakan over a long period of time. As for how strong he was... Jake had no idea. All he knew was that the guy was pretty good at politics despite not having talked much during this conference call.

What followed after they all agreed to a truth and temporary alliance was perhaps the hardest part of this all: discussing the details. Jake really missed having Miranda on his side here, and while Bobby was a good leader, he wasn't Miranda-level. Oh yeah, Carmen was also there, but she was in even deeper water than Jake.

Seeing as Ell'Hakan also directly asked Jake several things during this planning, he had to stay engaged and on his feet constantly to not let anything slip. He was lucky that Jacob was also there, and his suggestions tended to be very neutral and seeking compromise, at least in any matters not directly involving the Church. Because he did get Jake to agree to a few things that the Church wanted, mostly as an act of goodwill.

It helped that Ell'Hakan agreed to all these as it was part of a larger plan to protect innocent citizens and preserve as many lives as possible. What Jacob wanted was an assurance from everyone that those part of the Church could evacuate freely from any planet involved in this and later conflict, and anyone part of other factions could also return to their own homeworlds.

Considering the fact there apparently already were tens of thousands of prisoners of war – primarily in the form of spies and planted political dissidents – quite a few would be able to go free with this proposal.

Jake called this part the hardest in all of this as he genuinely had no idea if what happened was good or bad. Sure, he'd sat in on his fair share of contract negotiations and whatnot, but this was on a whole other scale. Trying to portray himself as confident and competent in things like this was extremely difficult, and after some time, he realized that having Carmen there actually was a great boon... because she was bold enough to ask the questions Jake felt like he would look too dumb to ask.

He also couldn't have prepared anything for this discussion but had to improvise everything, meaning there was a far higher chance he fucked something up. However, by mainly staying on topic and not discussing his story anymore, he believed it went pretty well overall.

As things seemed to be winding down, and everything looked right – at least Bobby seemed fine with things, and Jake didn't find anything outrageous, they reached the final part they had to get done... recording a joint statement.

Four people would take part in this. Jake and Bobby on one side, with Ell'Hakan and Jacob on the other, representing that Valhal and the Holy Church both endorsed and had helped broker this deal. They wouldn't go into many details about Jake denouncing his Patron quite yet, but keep everything vague and allow rumors to spread about why Jake would be with Valhal in the first place. It was better for people to reach their own conclusions than tell them outright Jake was looking to switch sides.

When the time was then right, Jake would use Valhal and Ell'Hakan to officially denounce the Malefic Viper and voice his support of Yip of Yore. With the seed of doubt already planted, this announcement would prove even more impactful.

However, before they got to the final announcement, Ell'Hakan once more had to take a moment.

"We need to make sure what we communicate outwardly is perfect, and before fully committing, allow me a moment to commune with my Patron," the other Chosen said. "So, let's meet back in... let's say an hour? By then, we should all be ready, and we will all have some time to consider if we missed anything."

And just like that, shit was delayed a little again... but at least Jake had a bit more to talk with Bobby and Carmen about now.

Chapter 1004: A Real Royal Mess

Jake, Carmen, and Bobby stood alone once more, now having an hour's break before it was time to continue, and they all had some thoughts.

"It does feel a bit too easy, doesn't it?" Carmen muttered, clearly also unsure of how things were flowing. "He definitely wants your story to be true, but he almost wants it too much. Pretty sure you could tell him that everything you're doing is with the express intent to fuck him over, but just add on a little giggle and a "hypothetically" at the end, and he would instantly ignore it, if not help you explain it away..."

"I do find myself surprised," Bobby also agreed. "But, and I must reiterate, does it matter? He seems to be going along with everything we're planning so far, and while he may be scheming and making his own plans in the background, we just need to be ready for those when the time comes. Who knows, perhaps our interests may even genuinely align. It's possible he views Yip of Yore's victory as a done deal even if the Malefic Viper is trying to put a struggle by using us, and he is thinking the same things we are right now, that despite our schemes, it doesn't matter to him in the end. Ultimately, it all comes down to who is more powerful in the end: the Malefic Viper or Yip of Yore."

"Out of curiosity, who are you betting on?" Jake asked with a raised eyebrow as he playfully smirked. "To sell our story, we will need to make the preparations for me to usurp the Malefic Viper, so if he does end up falling, who knows what will happen..."

Bobby took his words a lot more seriously than Jake expected him to and slowly nodded as he looked Jake in the eyes. "If the Malefic Viper does fall, everything we said today simply becomes truth. At that point, you will have no reason not to usurp the Path of the Malefic Viper and take whatever Records you can. As Ell'Hakan mentioned, there is a good chance it will instantly make you significantly stronger. We are talking about immediate upgrades to Legacy Skills and likely even an instant influx of a lot of levels. After that, without the god whose Legacy you are usurping being alive, progress will prove a bit more difficult, but in terms of immediate gains, it would be a huge boon."

Jake didn't really comment on what Bobby said, but he had read up a bit on usurping during the day he spent with Carmen, and Villy had also given him some details for him to help sell that he actually intended to usurp the snake god's Path. If Jake had a bad relationship with the Viper, he could totally have seen himself try to genuinely become a Usurper, but seeing as they were best buds, it all remained purely theoretical. Hopefully.

There was going to be some nagging feeling within Jake until Yip of Yore was dead that things wouldn't go as planned. The rising star coming out of the ninety-second universe was incredibly powerful; no two ways about it, and he was still rapidly growing even more powerful by the day. Even the Path he walked was one recognized as impressive by all the top figures of the multiverse and one that could take him to the top... Jake just hoped that as he got toward the top, he would encounter a Viper in the bush, ending him for good before he had to change to truly reach the peak.

"Say, I just had a weird thought," Carmen muttered as she looked at Jake and Bobby. "Here we are talking about Jake becoming a Usurper when Yip of Yore kills the Malefic Viper... but what if Ell'Hakan wants to become one when the Malefic Viper kills Yip of Yore?"

Bobby and Jake both looked at Carmen for a bit, both silent. She stood there, scratching the side of her head for several seconds, looking a bit embarrassed before trying to excuse her words. "It's just a weird thought, and--"

"Fuck," Jake blurted out as the cogs began to turn in his head. "Fuck me."

"No, fuck us," Bobby also said as he seemed to be going through the same thoughts and emotions Jake was right now.

It really was proof Jake had been all up in his own ass about the story he'd been cooking up that he'd completely neglected to consider that Ell'Hakan could also have some sneaky plot not aimed at Jake or the Viper in the oven. He'd also gone with the impression that Ell'Hakan was a loyal Chosen who wished to see the victory of his Patron, and while it was possible that was still his ideal outcome...

"He's totally the kind of guy who would, at minimum, have a backup plan in place should Yip of Yore lose, right?" Jake asked with concern.

“He totally is,” Bobby wholeheartedly agreed. “Though it is unsure if Yip of Yore would be okay with this, as he’s bound to know if Ell’Hakan has a backup plan.”

“Maybe he doesn’t care?” Jake asked, asking himself as much as Bobby. “Maybe he’s so self-assured he truly doesn’t believe it matters... shit, questioning himself by questioning Ell’Hakan may even be bad for him due to his story-teller bullshit...”

“Fuck...” the Valhal World Leader blurted out again, punching an imaginary table as he paced around. “It’s obvious if you really think about it... and it makes everything fit so damn well. Ell’Hakan doesn’t need to care who wins. He just needs Yip of Yore to be as powerful as possible at the end, no matter the outcome. If he wins? Great, Ell’Hakan will be the Chosen of the first Primordial Slayer and a figure of immense renown. Yip of Yore loses? He can become a Usurper, and seeing how cozy he is with the Holy Church, join them and use their faction the same way you would use ours should the Viper fall.”

“Also explains why that King Iludar guy isn’t some Yip of Yore loyalist. He’s sure that the people closest to him would follow him no matter who wins,” Jake continued as he sighed. “Fucking hell... this shit is so goddamn messy. We don’t even know if this is right, but just on the off chance that it is...”

Carmen stood a bit awkwardly as she muttered. “Now I almost feel sorry for bringing it up.”

“Don’t be,” Bobby comforted her. “It’s good to keep in mind as an option.”

“Do we even need to do anything different?” Jake asked, unsure. It really was still a gamble if Ell’Hakan was even planning something like that or if it was just their own imaginations going wild. Shit, maybe they were the ones overthinking everything...

"I don't think so?" Bobby said, not entirely certain either. "Just focusing on our side is probably for the best."

"Yeah," Jake nodded, as he was in thought for a while, considering things. "Say, how long yet till the meeting restarts?"

"Thirty-three minutes," Bobby answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Thinking of making a phone call," Jake said, still thinking.

"Contacting the Malefic Viper directly may be trackable if you do it here due to-"

The story has been stolen; if detected on Amazon, report the violation.

"I'm not," Jake shook his head, cutting him off. "I'm gonna quickly talk to Miranda. That shouldn't be suspicious and easily explained away with me doing so to keep selling a lie."

"Should be fine, then," Bobby said. "Just walk out of the barrier before doing so as no skills to contact her will work within. Carmen should be able to let you out."

"Sure," Carmen agreed as she allowed Jake through. He went outside and placed down the simple ritual to reach out to Miranda. It wasn't actually her he wanted to talk to, though. Instead, he wanted to be

put in touch with a certain mad scientist as he had some questions and a few matters to discuss considering recent potential outcomes of the conflict, as well as perhaps a few solutions.

Just short of half an hour later, Jake was back inside the barrier, and just in time for things to get started again. His conversation with Arnold had gone well and would hopefully lead to something good in the future, but as always with things like this, only time would tell.

On the dot, the magical conference call resumed, and this time, Jake spoke first when he saw the three fully lifelike projections appear:

“Good to see we’re at least all punctual people. How did your talk with your Patron go? Is he interested in our mortal plots?”

“He’s skeptical but optimistically so,” Ell’Hakan smiled. “He’s chosen to defer to my judgment in this matter, and I believe moving forward with our discussed plan is the best course of action. We shall make a joint declaration to establish this truce and plant the seed of doubt in the hearts of those who follow the Malefic Viper. Then, when the time is right, and I contact you once more, you make the true denouncement of your Patron, at which point my Patron will launch the final attack.”

“So we’re doing exactly what we agreed to an hour ago?” Jake asked in a curt tone, acting like he truly saw the break as a complete waste of time. “Guess this intermission was entirely meaningless, but I guess it makes you feel better to have gotten permission from your honored Patron. Can’t say I’ll miss being a suck-up myself.”

Ell’Hakan just threw Jake a glance and shook his head as his mood turned serious. “Let’s just get on with it, shall we? If all goes well, we will not have to speak much once all this is after and can go our separate ways. You make it no secret you are not a fan of mine, and I have no particularly positive or negative



emotions towards you either. The only reason we are forced to oppose one another is due to our Patrons, so once that's settled, let's cut all ties there. Good or bad."

Jake looked back at Ell'hakan, meeting his gaze. "Can't say I'll miss being rid of you either."

By now, Jake had begun to realize one problem, though... one quite massive one. All these talks had made Jake think. Especially the part about Ell'Hakan potentially being a Usurper. If he truly was, the Holy Church was likely helping him set up everything. That means they had significant investment in him, and likely even a recruitment plan in place.

In other words, after Yip of Yore was dead, Ell'Hakan would likely end up being part of the Holy Church. Becoming a Usurper would also be him proving he never had any true loyalty to Yip of Yore in the first place, and any actions he did could easily be excused by the Holy Church as something he had been forced to do. They could spin a story of a hero who'd been manipulated to act the villain, all to protect their newest asset and remove anyone's excuse to go after Ell'Hakan.

All connection Jake would have left between himself and Ell'Hakan would be whatever personal enmity remained. It would be him one-sidedly attacking a member of the Holy Church due to personal hatred that they would no doubt believe had a very thin reasoning behind it. Shit was bound to turn into a real royal mess if Jake's theory was right and he really decided to go after Ell'Hakan, and many would likely expect him to back off. However... Jake wasn't sure he would be able to do that.

I'll cross that bridge when I get there, he thought, trying to focus on what mattered most right now: the joint declaration.

"It hurts my feelings to hear you say that," Ell'Hakan smiled. "Perhaps we could have been friends if we'd met under different circumstances. Alas. I just hope we can all let the past stay in the past after this and look to the future together, perhaps not as friends, but simply uninvolved parties."

Jake kept eye contact and saw the relaxed and confident gaze of Ell'Hakan, almost saying that everything was going as he wanted it to. It was the same look he'd had in his eyes the day Jake first saw him back on Earth... right before he threw Chris' head at Jake's feet.

Yeah, fuck crossing bridges; I'd rather burn them all down if that's what it takes to get his head on a pike.

Hours later on that same day, a grand announcement echoed throughout the Milky Way Galaxy. On one side, Ell'Hakan and the Holy Church, and on the other, Jake Thayne and Valhal, both agreeing to a truce through a recorded message with the two Chosen.

Instantly, the different factions made their moves to abide by the terms of the truce, clearly having been prepared. The Holy Church began to retract many of its spies and had their members who were causing local dissidence take a chill pill. Everyone knew this would only be a temporary truce, and conflict was still boiling below the surface, ready to erupt at any point, but for now, things would calm down, much to the relief of the average citizen who quite frankly just wanted people to stop fighting.

Still, even they knew the truce was clearly not one meant to last forever. Just long enough for a resolution to be reached between the Malefic Viper and Yip of Yore. It wasn't an equal truce, though, as the mere fact that the Chosen of the Malefic Viper had agreed to a truce was quite telling to many.

One had to remember that the only reason a truce had been needed in the first place was because Ell'Hakan made his move. From the outside, it looked as if the Chosen of the Malefic Viper had seen everything going on in the multiverse and the galaxy before quickly concluding he wasn't willing to put up a fight. Perhaps he was even looking for a way to use what he still had to negotiate, putting many of those who'd sided with him in quite a state of panic.

What only made it worse was the lack of answers. Miranda, the person many viewed as the de facto leader of the Chosen's alliance, simply told them to trust the Chosen and the Malefic One while refusing to say more publicly. Behind closed doors, things weren't much better either, as that could also just be boiled down to just needing to show trust and faith in them.

Despite there being a truce, that didn't mean everything was paused, though... because no one said anything about entirely peaceful decisions made by individual World Leaders to change alliances. The alliance led by the Chosen of the Malefic Viper bled a few members even on that first day, with little effort to keep them around.

Within the first few days, it also became obvious this entire truce was far more beneficial to Ell'Hakan and the Holy Church than Valhal and the Chosen of the Malefic Viper. It allowed them to continue cementing their own power in the larger territory they controlled while slowly enticing others to switch sides, all in a perfectly peaceful manner that adhered to the truce.

The state of things in the Milky Way Galaxy was obviously quickly leaked to the rest of the multiverse. While it didn't have as much impact in the ninety-third universe that the Chosen of the Malefic Viper had allied with Valhal to make this declaration, it sent echoes throughout the rest of the multiverse.

For the Chosen of a god to ally with an enemy faction to get a truce like this was... unprecedented. It created so many questions, all of which the Order of the Malefic Viper had no good answers. Valhal, on the other hand, gladly told everyone that the Malefic Viper's Chosen had approached them to make this truce and that they "were in talks about the future."

All in all, things were getting messier and messier, something Yip of Yore thrived on, as the Order of the Malefic Viper continued crumbling by the day, rumors now circulating that even their Chosen – who'd almost become the symbol of the Order's revival and the Viper's second coming – had now turned his back on them.

About a week after the announcement of the truce within the Milky Way Galaxy, the war in the rest of the multiverse took a turn. A base belonging to the Order of the Malefic Viper was attacked, and in what many came to view as a move of desperation, a low-tier god who'd been the one in charge there personally got involved. In one swoop, he killed over a thousand A-grades and several S-grades, and in response, a dozen gods descended from Yip of Yore's side, with the Order finding themselves forced to respond in kind.

The war had now officially entered its late stages, as the war between mortals had ended, and the duels between gods began.

#### Chapter 1005: Countless Considerations

Waiting always sucked, but sadly, Jake couldn't really do anything but wait at this point. He had no agency to decide when the next arc of this conflict would begin but simply had to sit back and wait for a message from Ell'Hakan before he and Valhal would make their grand denouncement of the Malefic Viper.

At least he had a few things to keep himself occupied, and the first he did after the truce announcement went out was to follow Bobby to inspect the ritual they had been preparing for Jake. It was a ritual Jake hoped he would never have to use but had been made anyway to sell their story. Professionally speaking, Jake did have to admit he was curious to see a circle capable of helping him become a Usurper.

From the vibes he got from Bobby, Jake also suspected that the guy low-key wanted the Viper to die. Jake wasn't entirely sure how much Bobby and likely a few other top people from Valhal knew about what he and Villy planned, but they did have some idea that the Viper had a plan of some sort, and they also kind of knew Jake was working with the Viper... but he also sensed some suspicion from Bobby that Jake was more than willing to become a Usurper should it come down to it.

Jake was a heretic no two ways about it. If he didn't at least have heretical intent, how could he even consider a ritual to help him become a Usurper? No, this was something they knew for sure, and it had

been confirmed several times. Yet he also seemed fine with working with the Viper, making it all very confusing in their eyes. All his heretic antics could always be excused away later by the Viper and Jake as some kind of trickery, maybe even using the Transcendence of Villy as the cause of Jake being able to leak the aura of a heretic.

From Jake's point of view, he saw no reason to elaborate on matters to anyone quite yet. He liked the ambiguity spawned from them having no real details and would hopefully coast on that until everything was resolved. It wasn't as if he planned on talking a lot with other people while staying at Valhal for the foreseeable future but would instead spend most of his time just doing alchemy with the excuse of preparing himself for the Usurper ritual.

While at Valhal, Carmen would be his primary contact person, and she luckily didn't ask that many questions, in part because she genuinely didn't seem to care much about what Jake was planning, though she had voiced that Jake joining Valhal for real would be neat. Her lack of interest was refreshing, though, and her disconnected approach to all the scheming was likely also why she saw the frankly quite obvious signs that Ell'Hakan could also be planning to walk the Usurper route, making her valuable to discuss matters with.

Anyway, seeing the huge ritual prepared by Valhal for Jake to become a Usurper was quite something. It was once more constructed atop a mountain, with it clearly being no secret they had made it, meaning its existence had definitely leaked. The ritual circle itself was over a hundred meters wide, with complex runes and scripts everywhere, making Jake wonder how long they had been working on it. Bobby seemed vague on the topic, while Carmen legitimately didn't know, and it was definitely a bit suspicious.

The magic circle wasn't done, though, and they needed some help from Jake to finish it, something he gladly helped do. He had been worried that he wouldn't be able to focus for the first few days while at Valhal, considering he knew a lot of shit had to be going on in the rest of the Milky Way Galaxy and the multiverse as a whole, but spending his time analyzing the ritual helped put his mind off things.

Over the next couple of days, Jake studied the circle, talked to some people who'd helped make it, and read some books about this particular brand of magic. It wasn't based on the same methodologies as

rituals by the Order of the Malefic Viper, but honestly, even if it had been, it wouldn't have helped Jake much.

Because one of the first things he learned was that no one truly understood what they had made. Hundreds of people had helped make the magic circle, each in charge of their own small areas. Everything was based on divine guidance and could be compared to them just tracing the lines and copying stuff down. Rather than solve some advanced math equation, they just copied from the blackboard, not knowing what the hell all the weird symbols meant.

Jake tried to understand the circle, but after those few days, he learned it was simply impossible for someone of his level to comprehend it. It was one designed by gods, with theories far beyond mortal understanding. Sure, mortals could still copy down the written formula, but that didn't mean they had the slightest idea how to solve it by themselves. Probably made sense that a god was behind the circle, as it was made to usurp the Path of a deity.

In the same vein, Jake wouldn't be able to operate this magic circle by himself. If it did come down to using it, the one actually activating the magic circle would be a god from Valhal – likely Gudrun, based on what Jake had been told. This did require a certain level of trust, as she could probably fuck over Jake if she so desired, but he wasn't worried. Firstly because he never planned on using the circle in the first place, and secondly, because what would she possibly gain from fucking over someone her husband actively wanted to recruit?

Either way, the thing Jake had to do to put the finishing touches on the ritual was more or less just to infuse his DNA into it. To make it into one attuned to himself and his Path, as well as the Path that he planned on usurping. This did end up taking a few more days, and just before a full week had passed since Jake arrived on the planet, the entire magic circle was completed and ready to go should it ever be necessary. Jake walked down the mountain, knowing he would be up there the day the final confrontation between Villy and Yip took place, with the hopes that the next time he was there, it would remain inactive and that the work he'd done on it would be a waste of time.

Heading back into the city, Jake soon met up with Carmen and Bobby. After getting the two of them into a private room, he asked with quite a bit of nervousness:

“So... what’s been happening?”

“Torben finished a new brew using these weird purple berries, which have a spicy taste that really compliments most fatty foods,” Carmen answered with a smile.

“Really? Great to hear that’s the only noteworthy news,” Jake commented in a dry tone.

“Is to me,” Carmen shrugged, and while Jake knew she did care somewhat, she definitely cared less about this entire conflict than most others.

Turning to Bobby for answers instead, the man sighed. “Where do you want me to begin? I’m sometimes amazed how much can happen in a week... either way, a quick overview is that the Order is getting openly fucked in the rest of the multiverse while your alliance is getting subtly fucked in the Milky Way Galaxy, though things have improved recently. In other words, everything is kind of going as expected, perhaps even a bit better than we thought. From what I do know, our core is holding strong, and that Kindroth pal of yours has been doing some solid work spreading a new narrative alongside the one echoed by the Verdant Witch.”

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“Oh?” Jake asked, not having expected Miranda to bring the elf into the scheming this early, but it sounded like she had. “Elaborate?”

“Well, a lot of people were worried about what would happen if the Malefic Viper did end up falling to Yip of Yore, expecting your alliance to fall apart entirely. You see, to the average World Leader, they truly have no insight into who is superior, so to them, this is a fifty-fifty kind of conflict. However, seeing

as Yip of Yore also has the Holy Church with him, he seems like a far safer bet because if Yip falls, he's still gonna have them. In other words, they believe there are more potential outcomes where you come out looking weaker. This Kindroth – or Voice of the One, as many also call him – is the source of another narrative. He's been really leaning into the fact you are now working with Valhal and he's actively leveraging our power and history. And while Yip of Yore, the Holy Church, and many other factions have great reputations, none of them can measure up to Valhal's," Bobby said with a high sense of pride.

Jake knew he exaggerated, being a member of Valhal and all, and it was only natural to talk up your own faction and to have bought into the propaganda that your faction was the best faction. However, that didn't mean there wasn't some element of truth to what he was saying.

Valhal was a rather unique faction in the multiverse in the sense that they didn't really have any enemies. Even other factions who claimed to be neutral tended to have some who called them enemies, or they had allies who made others view them unfavorably. Even a faction like the Patheon of Life, led by Yggdrasil, had its fair share of enemies, including a less-than-stellar relationship with the Risen due to the opposition of life and death. Meanwhile, the Altmar Empire had always worked closely with the Risen, making a few side-eye them.

No one dared side-eye Valhal. You didn't want to call them an enemy, as they were more likely than not going to see that as a challenge and take you up on having a fight – something no faction in the multiverse had confidence in winning. In the same vein, Valhal didn't recognize any faction as their allies either. They were far too focused on individuals to designate entire factions as allies but would instead have "friends of Valhal" amongst all kinds of factions spread throughout the multiverse. They didn't care what faction these people came from, just that they were recognized as warriors worthy of being friends.

So, if Valhal declared they would fight by Jake's side – emphasis on fight – it changed the entire dynamic of what would happen should the Viper fall. No longer would Jake be in a weak position, but potentially one even stronger than the one he had as the Chosen of the Malefic Viper. The Holy Church would be apprehensive about the Milky Way Galaxy, and even the daring Yip of Yore would take a step back. While the up-and-coming god believed he could slay the Malefic Viper, he didn't seem to be under any illusion he had a chance against Valdemar, and getting into a fight with Jake, who was someone Valdemar personally valued and would be a member of Valhal at that point would be a massive risk.



Even if Valhal right now had a very weak presence in the Milky Way Galaxy, the moment the universe opened up properly, they would gladly send in armies to retake it in case other factions had claimed it, all using the excuse of reclaiming Jake's homeworld – at least that's what Kindroth kept saying. Seeing as how Valdemar had cared a lot about reclaiming the planet he hailed from himself... yeah, many believed it.

From how Bobby described it, Kindroth was really leaning into the massive unknown that was Valhal and the role they would play, proposing several probable scenarios, making many of those who were wavering calm down. Bobby wouldn't go as far as to say that the elf had stabilized the internal turmoil in Jake's alliance, but at least he made many take a wait-and-see approach when they began to believe that siding with Jake wasn't as risky as it initially seemed.

Of course, no matter who you asked, shit looked bad for the Malefic Viper and his faction as a whole. Especially when Bobby described how gods had now gotten involved in the conflict. For gods to die in conflicts was relatively rare, but it certainly did happen. As for a war of gods, that had only happened very scarcely throughout the history of the multiverse. More often than not, when gods got involved in a huge conflict, they fought through duels, ambushes, plots to isolate certain gods, and pretty much any other approach that didn't include just throwing gods at one another on a huge battlefield. Gods were immortal existences and extremely valuable assets, so no matter the faction, they wanted to minimize losses.

Even when gods did fight, it more often than not ended with the losing party escaping to their Divine Realm, and once there, chasing them wasn't really an option unless their opponent was overwhelmingly stronger. And if they were overwhelmingly stronger, why would they even allow them to escape in the first place?

Knowing this already, it came as a shock when Bobby said there had already been casualties among gods in the conflict so far. It was only three, with two dying on the side of the Order of the Malefic Viper, and one from Yip of Yore's faction, but the simple fact any god had died was proof of just how much this conflict had escalated.

“Do you have any idea how much longer the Order has before they are fully pushed into a corner?” Jake asked.

“Hard to tell,” Bobby shook his head. “Yip of Yore is acting fast but ensuring he’s not recklessly rushing. He’s slowly building his achievements by proving himself completely dominant, even as a leader. I communed with Gudrun yesterday, and it appears he is using this opportunity to build himself a loyal faction of his own. A new Pantheon of younger gods, with the promise of creating a faction capable of standing up to the old guard.”

Jake slowly nodded as he remembered Villy mentioning something about that a while ago. On a side note, it seriously sucked Jake couldn’t contact his friend before all this was over due to the barriers covering Valhal’s planet, making it immediately trackable if he did. Being able to confirm Jake hadn’t fucked anything up while stumbling around trying to be schemer would be great... but oh well.

“Gudrun also believes Yip of Yore is taking his time to give the members and allies of the Order a chance,” Bobby said. “As you know, the Academy of the Malefic Viper is an institution that has members from far more factions than merely the Order itself, and it was one of the things that never lost its prestige or reputation even during all the eras the Malefic Viper was gone. Yip of Yore likely doesn’t wish to see it destroyed, much less target the ones within this Academy, so he is giving them a chance to evacuate their members or perhaps choose sides entirely.”

This was another thing Jake had kind of forgotten to even consider. In the Academy, Jake had met people from the Dragonflights, Risen, Altmar Empire, Endless Empire, and so many other peak factions of the multiverse. Attacking such an institution directly would create a lot of trouble for Yip of Yore for sure. Meanwhile, if he managed to take it over while not damaging it too much, it would earn him a lot of prestige. Of course, for him to take it over, he would effectively need the people in charge to betray the Viper, which Jake had a hard time seeing. However, he wouldn’t count out any possibilities.

“Do you think Yip will succeed in taking it over?” Jake asked, concerned.

“I don’t think he’ll try, at least not directly. He more than likely just hopes that with the death of the Viper, the leadership shall either defect or flee, leaving it ripe for the taking,” Bobby sighed. “And that I can see happening. If memory serves me right, many of the administrative staff of both the Order and the Academy are demons who primarily work for them due to contracts, and if these contracts are broken – and I’m sure they have a clause in there saying if the Viper dies all contracts are void – they will certainly be amenable to signing a new deal with whatever faction takes over.”

Jake took his words in as he considered how many factors he still hadn’t thought about during this massive conflict... which was also when another question popped up in his head. One he should probably have asked himself far earlier.

How are Meira, Scarlett, Irin, and all the others back in the Academy and Order dealing with all this?

Chapter 1006: Importance of Trust

It shouldn’t have to be said, but Jake’s friends and allies back in the Order of the Malefic Viper were having quite the... experience. Meira, Irin, and Scarlett were all known for having a close relationship with the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, so with recent happenings, they were put in an awkward spot. People like Draskil, who had interacted with Jake quite a bit, were also being looked at weirdly. Even Helenstromoz and other members of her Dragonflight had people temporarily distance themselves from the Order due to the scrutiny they suffered.

No one dared to say anything directly about the Chosen of the Malefic Viper... but rumors were spreading like wildfire.

Either way, after Jake’s announcement he’d made together with Valhal, Meira, Scarlett, and Irin were all brought to Jake’s private residence by one of the enforcers of the Order. The place had special barriers

placed by the Malefic Viper himself, making it one of the safest locations in the entire Order, and needless to say, none of them had any complaints about being put somewhere safe.

The mere fact they were brought there was cause for concern, though, even if it did seem like part of the reason was to hide them away without making it clear the Order was still officially protecting them. Fortunately, Meira's master was also there helping calm their hearts... by teaching them fringe alchemical theory he thought they could all benefit from.

It didn't really help.

"Teacher... can you tell us a bit more about what's going on?" Meira interrupted the lesson on what kind of frog poisons were best to synthesize to create ointments to put on trees you didn't want to be corroded when watered with or even grown in a bath of powerful acids.

Duskleaf seemed to understand that while the lesson was important, perhaps putting the minds of his students at peace would also be important as he spoke. "Yip of Yore is rapidly destroying the expansion and progress the Order has made over the last few years, and as of a little while ago, the conflict escalated to gods fighting with a few dying so far on both sides. Ah, but more on the side of the Order, so we're definitely losing on that front."

"That sounds... bad?" Scarlett asked in a slightly worried tone. Meira looked at her in agreement while nodding. She was happy Scarlett was there as the snake was far more honest and straightforward than herself, and she was especially more honest than Irin. Moreover, Scarlett didn't seem that suppressed by her teacher despite him being a god, perhaps because she had been blessed by the Viper and had interacted with Lord Thayne a few times. It was definitely also a factor that her overwhelming faith and loyalty to the Malefic Viper made her view all other gods as lesser – even if that god was the Viper's disciple.

“It does indeed sound bad,” Duskleaf agreed wholeheartedly before pausing for a moment. “Anyway, the best way to safely collect the poison excreting from the skin of the-”

“Can the Grand Elder share with us some of the contingency plans of the Order?” Irin asked respectfully. “Seeing as we will remain confined here till the end of the conflict without the ability to communicate with others without your permission, it would bring us comfort to be aware, and we wouldn’t be able to leak any secrets even if shared with us.”

Duskleaf looked at them for a brief moment. “Thinking about such things will not benefit you in any way whatsoever. What’s going on is far beyond the scope of what a few mortals like you should get involved in. It’s far better for you to focus on improving yourselves rather than worry about a reality you have no impact on.”

“But... just knowing if-” Irin tried as Duskleaf cut her off by raising his hand.

“Fine. Was it contingency plans you asked about? Contingency plans for what exactly?” Duskleaf asked with a sigh.

“If... should the unthinkable happen... should the Malefic One fall... what will the Order do?”

Duskleaf stared at her for several seconds before turning around and summoning a projection of an odd-looking tree, acting as if he hadn’t just been asked something. “As I said before, certain trees grow better in very acidic environments that don’t seem capable of producing any life in the first place, and while the roots can handle the exposure, the bark will often weaken, so you will need to-”

Meira looked at her teacher as he kept talking about alchemy after completely ignoring Irin’s questioning gaze. He didn’t give any answer, yes, but that in itself felt like an answer. She’d known her teacher for a good while and noticed one of his tendencies when he didn’t know the answer to something – and couldn’t find the answer through study - was to simply ignore the question and change

the subject. He would then come back triumphantly if he did discover the answer, but Meira had the feeling this wouldn't be one of those times.

For him to only talk about alchemy, especially with two of those there not overly interested in what he was talking about... Meira saw it as him just trying to avoid talking about the massive Yip of Yore problem in the room. All to avoid stating the obvious:

Duskleaf didn't know what was going on, and he didn't like not knowing.

--

The Lord Protector floated within the empty space, just over four hundred other figures behind him appearing as dark figures, nearly blending into the void. Every single one of them gave off the auras of gods, and every one of them were waiting with bated breath for the Boundless Hydra to speak after they'd said their own piece.

Once more, they had come seeking answers... and once more, the Lord Protector had none.

"Keep up with current tasks and continue to focus on the retreat while trying to limit skirmishes," he spoke, his voice echoing through the void. "Bring everyone back to Primordial-4 and prepare."

The many Hidden Ones – old allies of the Malefic Viper – were silent as they heard the order, many of them showing clear doubt. The last time they met, only a few days ago, there had been nine more gods than today. Two had died, yes, but the other seven had left. The Lord Protector noted which ones as he continued by offering some words of encouragement, as he truly had nothing else to offer.

“Do not waver. Do what you’ve done for so many eras already: trust the Malefic One.”

“My lord,” one of the gods spoke. A high-tier god who stood amongst the more powerful present. “May I know if the Boundless Hydra will take any direct actions? With your support, we should be able to-“

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“I am the Lord Protector,” the Lord Protector simply answered, waving off the idea. “My task is to protect the heart of the Order. As long as it remains, we shall remain. Your job right now is to protect the members of the Order as best you can as they retreat while not losing ground too quickly. Avoid needless fights, yes, but do not be cowards. We are still the Order of the Malefic Viper.”

Most of the figures simply nodded, while a few were clearly wavering. They’d already reported everything, and the Lord Protector waved his hand as there was nothing more to say that day. “I repeat, just continue as you are, and stop worrying about the losses of the day, as they are naught but building blocks for the future. You may bleed, yes, but that blood shall become the nutrients of the Order’s growth once we’ve overcome adversity, and your sacrifices and loyalty shall be rewarded. Now go, carry out the will of the Malefic One, and leave your useless doubt behind in the void.”

The gods present acknowledged his words and began disappearing one by one. He knew that the next time they met, there would be fewer than today as doubt overpowered their loyalty to the Malefic Viper. The gods kept fading away until only one more remained. The dark figure eventually floated over as Duskleaf – in his real body, not the plant avatar with the friends of the Viper’s Chosen – went to stand next to the Lord Protector.

“You heard anything from Master?” Duskleaf asked with a sigh, already knowing the answer.

“Nothing,” the Lord Protector shook his head. “Not since he went into isolation, and his divine realm remains closed off.”

“Do you think Master might choose to remain in there again for a prolonged period?” Duskleaf asked with concern. He’d spent several eras just hiding away once and had only been back for a few years... so many had questioned if he had perhaps simply returned to what many had come to see as the status quo.

“No,” the Boundless Hydra shook his head. “He is simply acting according to his true nature, in wait for the right moment to strike at his foe’s neck. However, only when the time is right, so we need to have patience.”

There was simply no world the Lord Protector could see where the Malefic Viper would not show himself when Yip of Yore came knocking. Even if it was risky, it was clear that the Order would fall entirely if the Malefic One didn’t show up to defend it even when directly challenged, as while the Lord Protector was confident in his own power, he knew a figure like Yip of Yore was not someone he had confidence in beating. This was not even mentioning the possibility of other powerful allies Yip of Yore could bring along, as he’d been working with both Valhal and Eversmile. If another Primordial came, only a Primordial could stand up to them.

The Malefic Viper would show and take on the challenge. He didn’t doubt it.

Yet he did understand why Duskleaf could harbor doubt in his heart. Duskleaf was no fighter and would always take the safest approach, and it was by far the safest for their master to simply remain in his Divine Realm while ignoring Yip of Yore entirely. While Yip perhaps had confidence in challenging the



Malefic Viper, he also knew he wouldn't stand a chance if the fight took place within the Viper's Divine Realm. If it was Duskleaf being challenged like this, he would likely just take everyone he cared about and all the experiments he could bring and stash them in his Divine Realm while just waiting out any problems. The Malefic One wasn't like that, though.

He had a plan, and the Lord Protector had faith in him. The Boundless Hydra wasn't fully confident, though, because there was a factor in this thing he wasn't sure about at all. An unknown element that he'd always been skeptical of.

The two were silent for a moment before the Lord Protector spoke again. "I trust in Master, more than anyone... but I do not have the same feelings toward his Chosen. If he has truly betrayed Master--"

"He hasn't," Duskleaf shook his head. "Of that, I'm sure. He's simply not the person to do something like that."

"I know his kind, and I watched the recording of when he defeated my image within the trial dungeon. I saw how he did it and felt the Records of Humanity and Valdemar, and I saw how he reveled in battle more than in any other situation. If he had not met Master, he would, without a doubt, be part of Valhal now, and they know it. He knows it. You also know that he is not like us. From the very beginning, he has never shown true faith toward our Master, so if Valhal and Valdemar himself give him an offer too good to refuse... he may just join his own kind to fight alongside those who share his race and spirit," the Lord Protector said in a severe tone.

Duskleaf was quiet for a few moments before speaking as he looked to where all the Hidden Ones had disappeared from. "You told us all to have trust and believe in the Malefic One. To leave our doubt behind. Like it or not, but Master believes in his Chosen. We should do the same and continue moving forward according to the final orders he gave before sealing off his divine realm. Even if you do not trust the Chosen, trust in the Malefic Viper's judgment."

The Lord Protector wanted to argue but truly couldn't. He just clenched his fists. "I hope you are right."

Perhaps their master had placed his faith correctly, and his Chosen was right now working hard to ensure their eventual victory. Who knows, maybe he was the one working the hardest of them all, being forced to act like an ally of Valhal despite his true feelings... if that was the truth, the Lord Protector would only have to apologize and recognize the efforts and sacrifice of his master's Chosen as he struggled on his lonesome, surrounded by potential enemies on all sides.

"Chug! Chug! Chug! Chug!" the crowd yelled as the two men were each emptying an entire barrel nearly the size of their own bodies, swallowing enough liquids to kill several people before the system, with adequate alcohol to get half a college dorm drunk.

One of them fell over backward before his barrel was empty, spilling mead all over himself. He tried to stand up but stumbled, unable to move properly, though he seemed in a more than cheery mood nonetheless. Meanwhile, the other one finished and slammed the entire barrel into the ground, cracking it in the process.

The entire crowd roared as Jake lifted his hands in victory while staring down at the unfortunate warrior of Valhal who had dared challenge him. Was he kind of cheating with Palate of the Malefic Viper? Fuck yeah, but it was their own fault for having such weak alcohol they couldn't even get past the legendary skill.

"Should've known better," Jake said with a smile as he offered the fallen warrior a hand.

The man took it and stumbled to his feet as he said something that sounded a bit like "I nearly totally had you," but his words were so slurred they were intelligible. Jake just shook his head and smiled.

“Sure ya did, pal, sure ya did,” he said, patting the way on the shoulder as he reveled in the spirit of the bar he’d made a mess not that long ago. He’d been told the place had been fully repaired not even a day after he broke quite a bit of it last time and that during his time analyzing the magic circle, at least three more exterior walls had been broken during fights. Maybe four, people weren’t sure as they were all too drunk to remember.

Jake’s original plan of just hiding away and sticking to alchemy during his stay at Valhal hadn’t lasted very long as Carmen came and dragged him to a bar after only a few days for him to “better sell the idea he was fully becoming a member of Valhal.”

In truth, she just wanted to try and get him drunk, but could Jake really argue with her logic? Well, he could have, but that would mean less alcohol. Sadly for Carmen, the alcohol the brewers of Valhal were able to create simply wasn’t capable of getting Jake properly drunk, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t enjoy the taste and experience. It could also get him a bit tipsy, which helped a lot with the awkwardness of hanging out with a bunch of obviously drunk people.

To clarify, while Jake did have some fun experiencing the culture of Valhal, he was also working. After he went back from the bar that day, he walked to the residence he’d been given, including the giant glass bubble set up for him to do alchemy. He quickly cleansed himself of the remaining alcohol affecting his mind as he entered the bubble and prepared to get to work.

Even if just waiting around sucked, that didn’t mean he couldn’t get some alchemy done in the meantime and perhaps even get a level or two under his belt. Besides, wouldn’t it be rude not to make use of all the potent ingredients Valhal had so graciously made available to him?

Chapter 1007: Valhal Alchemy Intermission

Sometimes, it was good to take a little break to take your mind off things and just chill. And Jake’s ultimate method of taking his mind off things was to really dive into doing some alchemy... so that was precisely what he did. Plus, being at Valhal, this was a great opportunity.

Different factions all had varying methodologies for their Professions and crafting in general. Their Legacies were based on prior heroes of the faction and what they passed down to the next generation through knowledge in the form of books, recipes, and still-living teachers, but also – and perhaps far more importantly – Records and skills.

The Order of the Malefic Viper was a good example of this. The Order was filled with alchemists because the Malefic Viper had been hailed as the greatest alchemist in the multiverse when it came to making poisons and certain branches of transmutation. The Records of the Viper was naturally passed down to the next generation, who often relied on skills granted by the Legacy, such as Palate of the Malefic Viper, and any research they conducted ended up with certain assumptions and lack of exploration in certain areas. The easiest example of this was how the Order didn't really have any methods to lessen the expulsion of toxic fumes during crafting, but instead even had ways to amplify it, as to them, these fumes just helped better understand what one was crafting. There were countless more examples, but it all boiled down to the same thing: how Legacies colored one's thought process and approach to something.

Valhal was the same. They had a lot of brewers because of Valdemar and his love of alcohol, and culturally, it was viewed as one of the "cool" professions to have. Valhal also had a lot more cooks than organizations like the Order or nearly any other faction, as they naturally needed good food with the booze. With how much they broke stuff, those focused on construction were also a must, and none of this mentioned their many special professions, such as the one Carmen had that revolved around making effigies and offerings to the warriors of old.

However, in the same vein that the Order also had builders, cooks, smiths, and all other professions, Valhal also had their fair share of alchemists. Alchemists who had built knowledge over dozens of eras and developed their own approaches to the profession. They didn't have Palate; thus no natural poison resistance, and Valhal also didn't really do poisons in the first place.

Neither did they do much transmutation, acids, classical formations, or much of what Jake had learned a lot about. Instead, they focused on the far more classical alchemical creations: potions, flasks, and elixirs. To Valhal, potions were perhaps the most important as they were supportive tools to help you last longer in a fight or to boost yourself before it. Elixirs were pretty much mandatory for one to fill up

those extra potential stat points one could get, though there were many other ways to get those permanent bonuses than alchemy. Shit, on Valhal's planet in the Milky Way Galaxy, they had what Jake could only describe as a large gym filled with odd formations and training machines with the ability to permanently increase stats the same way as elixirs.

Anyway, the point was, while Valhal was far worse at alchemy in general than a place such as the Order of the Malefic Viper, they did have a different perspective and methodology on how to best use the profession. Having been told several times to broaden his horizons more to get new inspiration, Jake decided to take his time in Valhal to truly experience their alchemy.

With the help of Bobby, Jake got access to a lot of otherwise confidential material and, with a bit of pressure from Carmen, the ingredients he would need to do his experimentation. Jake had considered how to spend his time at Valhal the best and only really boiled it down to two options of what to focus on:

Potions or flasks.

Flasks were... tempting, if for no other reason than to try something new. Jake had never really learned how to make them, primarily because he didn't really feel a need to. Flasks had the ability to grant temporary buffs, but the problem with them was that these buffs pretty much always replaced or were overwritten by boosting skills. Jake could, in theory, make a flask that increased all his stats by 20%, but what the hell would that help when Arcane Awakening did it better?

Not to say they were useless, far from it.

Firstly, they were supremely useful for people who didn't have a proper boosting skill. While Jake kind of took it for granted as every one of his pals had one, they were far from universal. Boosting skills also came with a high risk as they effectively put you on a timer when used in nearly all cases, and overstraining the body for too long could be very unhealthy. Flasks did tend to be more gentle and perhaps more importantly, did not always make you consume more resources for the temporary power increase.

Secondly, they could be far more specialized. Jake had a boosting skill that increased all his stats, in part because he used all of them while fighting due to his style. However, others had more specialized ones. Carmen's boosting skill increased her melee combat power by boosting her physical stats, but it naturally didn't give her more Wisdom or Intelligence. While it probably wasn't relevant to her, having a flask in a situation where boosting one of the skills her normal boosting skill didn't affect could be incredibly useful.

Their third major use was in a form Jake hadn't ever encountered, though he had read about it. Valhal had some books that spoke about it, though. It was a form of flask Valhal called "Berserker's Boon," and while it definitely had another name in other places, they tended to have the same effect:

Allowing you to overdraft on your own potential without the same massive risk of blowing yourself up afterward... something that did tend to be quite the negative for people who weren't like Jake and had insane energy control.

Anyway, Berserker's Boons were liquid versions of Jake bringing his boosting skill above the safe limit, where it would begin to actively destroy his own body. These flasks that Valhal made were a bit different, though. They leaned into the concept of equivalent exchange, where one could trade one thing for another in order to gain more power with less cost. As the name Berserker's Boon indicated, it was a potion that also used the concept of Berserkers and effectively allowed any warrior who consumed it to turn into one... at the cost of also having the mind of a Berserker.

Jake had read about this kind of flask and after asking Bobby, gone to an alchemy lab where people from Valhal worked. There, he met the best alchemist Valhal had in the entire Milky Way Galaxy, who gladly showed off her magnum opus to Jake:

[Berserker's Boon (Ancient)] – A flask created by an extremely talented alchemist from Valhal. Allows the user to temporarily enter a Berserker's Rage, increasing all physical stats while lowering mental ones. +50% Strength, Agility, Toughness, Endurance, and Vitality. The effectiveness of Intelligence,

Wisdom, and Perception is significantly decreased. All mental faculties are additionally reduced. During Berserker's Rage, natural regeneration is significantly improved the lower the user's health is, all pain is ignored, and the user can keep moving for a short period of time even if Health Points reach 0. This flask lasts for a maximum duration of thirty (30) minutes. Duration is reduced based on the actions of the consumer. After expiration, the user may suffer significant backlash that could prove fatal, dependent on the user's health points.

Jake inspected the flask with interest as he scratched his chin. "Pretty good... but not sure how useful it is and if the tradeoff is worth the extra stats provided. Not being in your right mind can easily prove fatal to a warrior, and with the bonus being what it is..."

Stolen novel; please report.

The alchemist who'd made it clearly took offense as she crossed her arms. "You say a 50% increase in stats isn't worth it? It makes any warrior who consumes it become a powerhouse instantly, and sure, they might not act the smartest during it, but with the pain immunity and increased regeneration, taking one down won't be easy at all."

"Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying it's bad, just not sure about the actual use case," Jake tried to clarify. "Seeing as it's ancient rarity, I doubt they are cheap or easy to make, so it's not like you can give these to every warrior and turn them all into powerhouses, right?"

"Naturally not," the alchemist answered, motioning Jake to proceed and get to his point.

"So the ones who would usually use something like this are already pretty damn strong in the first place to be worth the investment... which means they likely already have a boosting skill able to compete with it. One I doubt has the same drawbacks," Jake laid out his argument.

The alchemist stared at Jake for a moment, genuinely confused. “What in the nine hells are you talking about? This is a 50% increase. 5 and 0.”

That’s when Jake was once more reminded he had an overpowered boosting skill, and that he could take a far higher level of stat increase than the regular person. As he used his own arcane affinity for his boosting skill, he naturally had a high level of resistance to it. His arcane affinity also just seemed fit for boosting him in the first place. Finally, Arcane Supremacy had only made the boosting skill even better.

Still, even with all that, Jake could only boost all his stats by 60% for a pretty limited amount of time, and even then, he would be taking damage throughout. He could boost his offensive or defensive skills by 50% without any real backlash, so his boosting skill was definitely better than this flask, but it wasn’t actually that far off.

This was what ultimately led Jake to not use his time trying to study flasks more deeply, though he did find it useful to learn more about them. Alas, he wouldn’t be able to make anything that could actually help him compared to his boosting skills, and he was a selfish bastard who didn’t want to spend a long time learning how to craft something he would never personally be able to benefit from. And, again, all his friends already had banger boosting skills, so they didn’t need it either. Oh, and if they didn’t have a great boosting skill... well, that was literally just a skill issue and something for them to fix themselves.

After apologizing to the alchemist and encouraging her to keep working hard on her berserk flasks, Jake went to visit some other alchemist to study something that would definitely help him as he chugged those down more often than an overworked salary worker consumed coffee: potions.

To be clear, Jake was already really fucking good at making potions. He could make better ones than any of the alchemists at Valhal, though that was in part due to his far superior stats compared to everyone else. Higher stats just made crafting easier, thus allowing one to faster improve one’s technique, and stats also just helped add to the final product, making Jake overpowered just from that alone. Coupled with his skills in crafting potions... yeah, he was pretty damn good, and one would be hard-pressed to



find other alchemists at his level capable of crafting equally as good potions. They could still be more skilled than him, though it was hard to determine.

That didn't mean he didn't have room for improvement. And while flasks only ended up being a novelty, Jake definitely had something to learn when it came to making potions. While Jake wouldn't say Valhal had a better Legacy when it came to making potions compared to the Order of the Malefic Viper, they weren't that far off. Only when it came to potions restoring stamina and health, though. Their methodology for making mana potions was the most basic of basic, with their primary approach to "just buy some if you really need it."

Either way, during Nevermore, Jake had continually improved his Brew Potion skill and gotten it to uncommon rarity when he crafted his first potion capable of restoring over 100,000 mana. However, even now, he still wasn't able to make a health potion capable of restoring the same amount... which probably shouldn't be that surprising, considering he still only had a bit over 200,000 health points total. Meanwhile, he had around 220,000 stamina and nearly 450,000 mana.

Jake being able to craft a potion capable of restoring 100,000 of any resource was already damn impressive, and many viewed it as a goal of C-grade to upgrade the Brew Potion skill – a goal many didn't meet. Jake wasn't satisfied with just making the easiest mana potion but also wanted to make uncommon health potions, and he wasn't super far off.

One had to remember Jake was helped along by making Arcane Mana Potions and Malefic Health Potions, both specifically suited to him and him alone. These potions did have the massive drawback of not being usable by other people, but again, Jake was a selfish bastard. It wasn't like he couldn't make the regular kind for others either – something his entire Nevermore party who he'd been consistently providing potions for during their decades there, would gladly attest to.

Meeting the alchemists who specialized in potions, Jake expected to see their methods of crafting health and stamina potions, but instead, he saw something else... because they weren't making a lot of those. Instead, they made what Jake first suspected to be rejuvenation potions, which confused him as they didn't need mana, so why would they make a potion capable of restoring all resources?

However, after seeing the final product, Jake understood. They were making a potion assumed would be possible but had never really come across. One that did restore multiple resources at once but focused only on the physical side of things.

[Body Potion (Common)] – Restores 21,222 health and 16,051 stamina when consumed.

The potion itself looked brownish-yellow, being a mix between the green from stamina and red from health potions. Being able to make mixed potions like this in the first place really wasn't that surprising, but what did surprise Jake was the efficiency. Rejuvenation potions were known for restoring more resources in total than if you consumed individual potions, but it wasn't that much more. However, when Jake spoke to the alchemists who mass-produced potions for Valhal, he learned that these Body Potions tended to restore between seventy to eighty percent in a resource of what regular potions would have restored to it. In other words, if one just counted the total resources restored, these potions tended to restore fifty or so percent more.

Instantly, Jake's interest was piqued. Due to Jake's insanely high mana pool, he often ended up having to pick between stamina and health potions while out hunting, so being able to consume one that did both things at once would be awesome. Moreover, with how much they restored, Jake instantly saw potential in making an uncommon rarity version. As long as the combined restored resources were above a hundred thousand, the final product should be uncommon.

Overcoming that barrier and making more uncommon potions was big, not just because it was useful, but it was also damn good for levels. Potions had always been a bit weird with how they upgraded, so every time one managed to do a jump in rarity, it came with a lot of Records and experience for the first crafts.

Of course, with only a few different kinds of potions available, Jake wasn't going to have a lot of experience to farm... that's until he was introduced to another product.

Jake had known about regeneration potions for a long time but never bothered with them. They were mostly made for people to recover after fights and not during a fight and tended to just give a percentage increase, which synergized well with meditation skills and whatnot that also sped up recovery.

What Valhal showed to him wasn't that, but something he instantly saw massive potential in... something called a Restoration Potion.

[Body Restoration Potion (Common) – Restores 17,315 health and 14,972 stamina. Increases health and stamina regeneration significantly for the next sixty (60) minutes, or until an additional 17,315 health and 14,972 stamina has been restored.

Less immediate regeneration than the regular version but more restored over an hour. Considering the cooldown of potions was also an hour... these were just pure efficiency. Now, the extra regeneration only counted for half toward the uncommon rarity upgrade requirement – meaning it had to restore 150,000 total at a minimum – but that didn't seem impossible at all... especially not if he found a way to combine these new kinds of potions with his unique modifiers. Turning them Malefic should be possible as that mainly relied on his blood, right?

It definitely should be... and if it was, it meant he had a lot of new kinds of potions to craft at uncommon rarity, which meant a lot of potential experience to earn while he had to wait for Yip of Yore to stop stalling and finally get his shit together and fight Villy. Alas, no matter what, Jake being at a higher level when that time came would only be better, so for now, it was time for a slight Valhal alchemy intermission.

Chapter 1008: Extreme Progress...

Man, it felt like so long ago since Jake really dove into a field of alchemy that had nothing to do with poisons or curses. It was almost foreign that none of the energies he handled contained any harmful elements but that everything was just... nice.

Sure, the ingredients didn't always agree with him, but the entire crafting process wasn't one that could result in a large explosion capable of spreading a toxic cloud capable of killing a few nearby towns. Valhal had clearly expected Jake to be doing poison crafting, though, based on the lab they had assigned to him. It was within the classic large glass bubble that was effectively just a big bottle.

Actually, thinking about it, this was perhaps the most used clever use of system mechanics in the multiverse. It made use of the fact that the system allowed one to quite easily create bottles capable of storing pretty much any liquid or gas created using alchemy. One could make a poison so powerful that a single drop could turn a planet into a wasteland, and yet a simple bottle made by a common E-grade would be able to contain it without any problems. Of course, any normal person would put it in more secure storage than just its glass bottle, but the mere fact that the bottle could handle it was ridiculous.

The fact that the bottles were a borderline cheat when it came to containing poisons was then used to just make bigger bottles. House-sized potions and poison bottles with entire laboratories within. Jake had one in the Order, one on Earth, and now one here. Making these special laboratories was such basic knowledge that even Hank back on Earth knew about it – or one of the people he worked with had known – way back when the lab was made.

As Jake worked within the laboratory, he thought about other common exploits that had just become normal and were used daily. It was possible some had become so darn common that people didn't even know it made use of what was effectively an exploit in the system.

Then again... was it really an exploit? If it was, couldn't the system just shut it down any time it wanted? Based on everything Villy had said, the system was effectively omnipotent. It actively chose not to interfere in some matters, not because it couldn't, but because it had decided to designate that thing as "outside the system." It was that or something just being the way it was due to system-fuckery.

So maybe the big bubble laboratories had always been an intended system feature? Or was it just like those bugs in games before the system that the playerbase ended up finding fun to use, only to then see them turn into official features?

It would be funny if that were the case... but just before Jake's mind wandered to the glorious history of bunny-hopping, his current brew was finished, drawing him fully back to the present. With a smile, he looked at the yellow-brownish liquid in the cauldron and, after bottling it up, used Identify.

[Body Potion (Common)] – Restores 41,222 health and 25,051 stamina when consumed.

Okay, the result was kind of shit, and he could get more resources from just creating a regular Malefic Health Potion, but he still wasn't that sad about the outcome. It was better than the last batch by a fair margin, and he was still using pretty low-quality ingredients to make the crafting process easier.

Better ingredients naturally meant one could make a better product, but the reason the ingredients were better in the first place was because they contained more energy and energy of higher purity and potency. This made them harder to deal with without fucking up, and while Jake would gladly be selfishly reckless with the Order's ingredient storage back in the first universe, that wasn't really an option here.

Even if Valhal wanted Jake to take the best they had, they didn't have that big of stock in the first place, as they couldn't get stuff from other universes but only had what they could gather themselves. So, Jake decided to save some of the better stuff for when he got better at making these potions to go for that uncommon rarity push.

He also needed to add one more important aspect: making the potion truly his own. He considered if he could modify using either his arcane affinity or by attuning it to his own blood and adding the Malefic tag, and after very little consideration, he settled on the latter. The potion already restored health, so it was the most obvious choice in the first place. It didn't really synergize with the stamina portion of the potion, though, but Jake saw that as a sacrifice he was willing to make, even if it would throw the balance off a little. He often needed more health points than stamina anyway, primarily because he had so much mana and that many of his skills used both mana and stamina at the same time, giving him a lot more longevity in fights compared to someone using purely one of the resources.

Anyhow, Jake crafted a few more mixtures of the regular Body Potion after that before he switched gears and tried experimenting by mixing in his blood and attuning the potions to his own body. From there, he tried many different things, with the mixture failing every time as he couldn't quite get the balance right. He'd only learned about Body Potions ten days earlier, so it was natural he still wasn't that good at making them. Alas, it wasn't like they were ultimately that hard, and after only three days, he found the right equilibrium and got a successful craft.

You have successfully crafted [Malefic Body Potion (Common)] – A new kind of creation has been made.  
Bonus experience earned

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 281 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

Jake smiled at his success as well as the gained level. It was frankly a bit overdue, and it had been way too long since he'd made some real progress due to all the damn soul damage and whatnot. Now that he was picking up steam again, though, he had a feeling he would begin to see a lot more progress.

The mixture itself had turned from its yellowish brown to a very deep red with a tinge of green in there, with the entire thing looking very toxic to consume. Nevertheless, Jake happily bottled it up and looked at his creation with a satisfied nod.

[Malefic Body Potion (Common)] – Restores 59,920 health and 27,711 stamina when consumed. Will cause damage to anyone besides the creator if consumed.

It was pretty damn good for a first try. His best Malefic Health Potions right now could restore just about 80,000 health, which meant this potion was technically better purely numbers-wise. Sure, it gave quite a lot less health in exchange for the stamina, but overall, it was an improvement for sure. More than that, it proved the potential for Jake to soon get his very first uncommon potion that didn't just restore mana.

Checking if he had any messages, Jake saw nothing important had happened in the wider multiverse yet, making him return to his alchemy as he began to mass-produce Malefic Body Potions with a focus on improving the process. He ended up failing about a third of all crafts, primarily because he tried something new that didn't work. When it did work, he saw quick leaps in progress, though, and as the hours turned to days, the progress was slow and steady.

What else was slow and steady was the depletion of high-value ingredients offered to him, and if he had more shame, Jake would probably have felt guilty for robbing them, but he was too busy crafting to worry about stuff like that. Plus, it wasn't as if Valhal didn't benefit as he, at times, had other alchemists come and talk to Jake as they were also curious about the different methodologies of alchemy within the Order of the Malefic Viper.

The tale has been illicitly lifted; should you spot it on Amazon, report the violation.

As the days passed, Jake also really began to feel the benefits of his improvement in mana control from practicing so much with the Puzzle Box of the Seeker, as it allowed him to pick up on any flaws far more quickly than usual, something that astounded the other alchemists at Valhal.

Jake also had his massive Perception making him even better at learning new stuff, as he could detect the flaws in what he was doing and adjust on the fly far more effectively than pretty much anyone his level. Perception was an important stat for pretty much all crafting professions, after all, and Jake had a lot of Perception.

The overall difficulty of making these potions also still wasn't that hard, perhaps because they had been designed to be made by Valhal alchemists, who didn't really have any Legacy classes or professions that focused a lot on Perception or alchemy in the first place. This was at least why Jake guessed it didn't even take him a week to have another major breakthrough.

You have successfully crafted [Malefic Body Potion (Uncommon)] – A new kind of creation has been made. Bonus experience earned

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 282 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 289 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

Jake reveled in the feelings of even more levels as he checked out his newest creation.

[Malefic Body Potion (Uncommon)] – Restores 71,015 health and 29,631 stamina when consumed. Will cause damage to anyone besides the creator if consumed.

100,646. A number that the keen eye would observe was above 100,000, and thus in the realm of uncommon potions. Due to promises he'd made, he went to the other alchemists – who were also the ones who restocked him with ingredients – and showed off his newest creation. This was the first uncommon potion any of them had ever seen crafted by a native of the universe, and besides the Malefic tag excusing why it was so much better than what they could make, it was just like theirs, just better.



What the other alchemists cared about more than anything wasn't Jake's unique crafting methods or even that he made something better than them. That was only to be expected, as even if he was on his way to being a Usurper, he was still the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, and the fact he wanted to usurp the Path of the Malefic Viper was proof he genuinely cared about alchemy. No, what surprised them more than anything was his rate of improvement.

They had seen his first Malefic Body Potion and could now see how much better Jake had gotten in less than a week. One of them couldn't help but question this as he looked at the uncommon potion like it was a mythical piece of equipment:

"What's your secret to achieving such rapid improvement? How do you eliminate flaws in the crafting process and increase the efficiency so much in such a short amount of time?" the alchemist questioned.

"The key is high Perception," Jake said teasingly. With his level-ups, he'd also gotten some extra potential stats to get from elixirs, which made him take out his Void Marble and give it a good lick while making sure five other alchemists saw him. "And, of course, a proper diet."

After fucking with the poor alchemists, Jake went back to work immediately. Only occasionally did he get interrupted with updates on everything happening with the Yip of Yore conflict or what was going on back on Earth, but it appeared that their strategy for the Milky Way Galaxy had worked out well, as nothing much was really happening everywhere. Stuff had stabilized as everyone watched the first universe with bated breath as Yip of Yore and his alliance were closing in on Primordial-4 by the day and things only continued escalating.

Jake, like everyone else, could only continue waiting as he kept doing his alchemy, now working toward making Body Restoration Potions and, of course, Malefic Body Restoration Potions after that. This would net him not only new kinds of creations but it would also be his first time properly making any kind of regeneration-style potion at all. If he even managed to make an uncommon Malefic Restoration Potions, that would just make things even better.

Days turned to weeks as Jake was making far more progress than expected, and not just when it came to making potions. His experience gain was honestly extreme, and Jake was astonished at the effects of not having crafted for a while and making new stuff... at least, he assumed that was the reason why he gained so many levels.

Soon enough, over a month had passed and Jake had long succeeded in most of his goals. On the forty-eighth day since he made his first uncommon Malefic Body Potion, Jake succeeded in making a second kind of uncommon potion.

You have successfully crafted [Malefic Body Restoration Potion (Uncommon)] – A new kind of creation has been made. Bonus experience earned

It also happened to be Jake's very first successful craft after he infused the regular Body Restoration potion with his blood, with the end result being far better than first expected.

[Malefic Body Restoration Potion (Uncommon)] – Restores 61,099 health and 24,703 stamina. Increases health and stamina regeneration significantly for the next sixty (60) minutes, or until an additional 61,099 health and 24,702 stamina has been restored. Will cause damage to anyone besides the creator if consumed.

Jake hadn't managed to make a regular Body Restoration Potion at uncommon rarity yet, though he was close. So, in that sense, it wasn't surprising to see the Malefic version of the potion get over the threshold, but just how much better it ended up being did shock him.

It restored 171,604 resources in total. With how the formula worked, that meant the extra regeneration over the hour only counted half, this one landed at 128,603 resources restored according to the uncommon rarity upgrade requirement formula.

Seeing how good it was, Jake decided then and there that he would keep improving on these Malefic Body Restoration Potions. He was the kind of fighter who was okay with drawn-out combat if he failed to take his target down in the initial opening attack, especially with his Hunting Momentum and high Perception, allowing him to identify flaws in his opponent the longer the fight went on.

So, having a bit of delayed regeneration wouldn't affect him much, and because of how potions worked, the extra health restored went straight to healing him quicker during the entire hour. Also, the wording was a bit ambiguous, but it didn't actually take a full hour to restore the additional amount; it was just an upper ceiling for how much could be restored.

After testing the potions by drinking one, he also discovered something else very neat. The Malefic tag didn't only make the potions better for Jake but also helped make them activate quicker to speed up healing after consuming one... and this turned out to also work with the delayed effect. The health portion of it, anyway.

Within not even ten minutes, he could consume the entire secondary health restoration effect if he was badly injured, nearly doubling the actual effect of the potion he was making. It was a result that surpassed all expectations... but it was nothing compared to the amount of levels he'd gotten. In one and a half months, Jake had earned so much experience it quite frankly felt unbelievable.

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 283 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

...

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 288 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 290 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

...

'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 292 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points

Jake had gained six whole levels in his profession. That was about a level a week, which was so extreme Jake considered if he should cripple his soul more often if this was the kind of progress one could make following it. Or maybe this was just the effect of learning a new crafting methodology? Either way, it was great.

With the uncommon Malefic Restoration Body Potion made, he naturally went to meet all the alchemists again to show off his creation. After showing it to them all and feeling quite good about himself, he walked back to his lab to continue crafting, hoping for some more levels.

However, before he could even begin to craft anything... he got a notification.

'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 289 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points

Jake stared at it in confusion. He... hadn't crafted anything? Why did he get a random level without crafting anything?

That's when realization struck. Jake hadn't been getting levels this fast because of all the new alchemy he'd been doing. Sure, it had helped... but the true reason was something entirely different, and as he stood there, contemplating if this could really all be because of the war between Yip and the Viper, a loud banging was heard from behind as Carmen rushed into his laboratory, and with a single sentence, Jake understood...

"Yip has reached Primordial-4."

... they were in the endgame now.

Chapter 1009: Dark Clouds Over Primordial-4

Jake ran through the city toward the same formation circle they'd used to communicate with Ell'Hakan. He knew the message would soon arrive, and on the way there, he got word that the other Chosen had been in contact while Carmen was on her way to fetch Jake.

It really was time... and Jake would be lying if he said he wasn't nervous as fuck. Not just for if he did a good job, but if everything would work out.

Primordial-4 was the final stronghold of the Order of the Malefic Viper, and it was time for Jake to help land the final blow to the Viper's reputation and fully exalt Yip of Yore as the hero and living legend he was... at least, that's what it was supposed to look like. Yip of Yore would for sure roll with Jake's words even if he performed terribly, welcoming the power boost.

Arriving at the mountain with the magic circle, Bobby was waiting there already, pacing back and forth making it evident he was as nervous as Jake. Jake saw that a few shamans were busy doing modifications to the circle for what was to come, giving Bobby some time to go over their plan once more the moment Jake and Carmen got to him.

“Alright, you’re here, good,” Bobby said with relief. “I have been in contact with Ell’Hakan and my Patron, and everything is ready on their end. You’ve probably noticed my fellow Valhal members at work, but don’t worry, they’ll be done shortly. The current modifications to the magic circle are to properly project you to the first universe using it but also to add a little something else. Before, it would entirely hide your aura and anything to do with it, but now, your aura should be on full display and even amplified on the other end of things. Identify should also work on you once you are projected. Naturally, other aspects, such as the volume of your voice, are also amplified so all can hear your words. I wouldn’t say I have stage fright... but admittedly, I would be pretty nervous if I had to stand on the stage you’re about to enter.”

Jake nodded, not really needing that last part to make him even more nervous. Alas, everything sounded like it was as it should be. “When do you think it’s go-time?”

“Once Gudrun initiates things on her end,” Bobby answered. “And that will be based on Yip of Yore and his actions. If nothing else, I’ll assume it will be at the most dramatic moment to get the greatest impact. A time where the highest number of influential figures are observing.”

Nodding once more, Jake took a deep breath. Spinning a story in front of Ell’Hakan had been hard enough, and now he had to do something similar in front of what was effectively the entire multiverse. At least for this one, he wouldn’t have to sell a lot of lies... in fact, the plan was to be nearly entirely truthful throughout, spreading the words of all the terrible things Villy had done to him while making it absolutely clear he held no faith toward the Viper.

It did feel a bit frightening to come out as a heretic in front of everyone, but he assumed the Viper had plans to handle the backlash once everything was over... of course, that also relied on the assumption that everything went according to plan.

“Just step in the circle once it’s done and simply wait to be called on,” Bobby said, taking a deep breath. “And prepare to launch a shockwave of an announcement across the multiverse with but a few words.”

Primordial-4. A planet that was simply given that name because it was a Great Planet in the first universe, the number holding no real meaning, as all Great Planets had been around from the very beginning of the system. The numbers were just there to distinguish them, with the name partly a homage to the Primordials and partly because Primordials tended to be in charge of the Great Planets in the first universe. At least they tended to control the majority of these individual planets, but with their sheer size, it was hard for a single faction to keep track of and rule everything.

Great Planets were simply so big it made no logical sense. Oceans the size of galaxies, deserts spanning tens if not hundreds of thousands of lightyears, mountains with more mass than the entire Milky Way Galaxy, trees taller than a dozen of Earth’s suns stacked atop one another... it was a scale not meant to be comprehended by mortal minds.

Because it was not a world made for mortals. It was a world made to be ruled by the gods. Somewhere where they could walk within the real universe, and with the appearance of god-level monsters – mostly mindless entities confined to certain areas and naturally spawned by the Great Planet – they were somewhere one could even see gods fight at times.

To really sell how impactful Great Planets were, barely any of their Planetary Cores had ever been turned into Planetary Pylons and claimed across the entire multiverse. It had happened, yes, but it was so rare only the real pinnacle factions had a chance to even attempt to claim one.

Primordial-4 was one such Great Planet that had an unclaimed Planetary Core. No one had been able to take it for all these eras, and for the longest time, it looked like no one ever would. The only ones who even had a chance to was the Order of the Malefic Viper, but they never made any moves, as quite frankly, they weren’t strong enough without their Primordial Leader to rule the entire Great Planet. Plus, the actual gains of claiming the Planetary Core weren’t that huge, and the investment required to do it would be utterly massive, enough to bankrupt all but a handful of factions.

However, there were some reasons to claim a Planetary Core and turn it into a Pylon, with the biggest being for protection. The Order had powerful barriers to defend its areas, yes, but compared to what a Planetary Pylon of a Great Planet would have offered, it was nothing. Plus, not truly owning the planet also made keeping track of everything more difficult, especially in a time of crisis where an attacking faction would run interference and disrupt communication.

The day Yip of Yore arrived with his forces on Primordial-4, many of the Order's allies were attacked. Several were wiped out instantly as enemy gods descended. Others surrendered if given the chance; some were left alone as they were viewed as too risky to attack, and others were left alone because they simply weren't worth attacking. It was viewed to be in bad taste to slaughter those significantly weaker, so the attackers didn't bother with factions who didn't even have gods among them, and even when they did attack, it wasn't with the intention of wiping out everyone.

They just destroyed the buildings, symbolizing the faction's power, as well as the leaders who ruled it, while instilling fear in every person who saw their actions. Meira's clan was lucky that it didn't have any powerful people in it and was placed rather isolated, resulting in no one laying a hand on them... but even if they had been a target, chances were they would have been left alone to try and keep Jake happy.

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This was not the first time the Order of the Malefic Viper had come under attack during the dozens of eras the Malefic Viper had been MIA. Far from it. Yet there was no doubt this was the largest and most powerful threat they had ever faced.

Branches could fall – and had fallen in the past. Allies could be wiped out. Gods could die. The entire Order could be under siege from all directions... yet the core had never fallen. The main base of the Order of the Malefic Viper had never let a single enemy lay a hand on the main structures. The vast underground cities were defended by barriers few gods had a chance to penetrate.



For ninety-two full eras, the Order of the Malefic Viper had their main base on Primordial-4, but today, Yip of Yore had arrived to challenge that. He had come for the Malefic Viper to kill a Primordial, but before that, he had to get through the final defenses of the Order and the powers that dwelled within... and the Lord Protector, who had been the end of all invaders who had dared to attempt to make history before.

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Dark clouds gathered over the Great Planet as over a thousand figures exited the void in unison. The vast Great Planet spread out beneath them as far as the eye could see, even with the Perception of gods. Below them lay a grand city that also marked the entrance to the underground complex, which was the true core of the Order of the Malefic Viper.

It was a city with a longer history than any of the gods there had been alive... well, any of them besides one.

Yip of Yore was naturally among this army of gods as he looked down at the Order. He had not come with the intention of destroying mortal's homes or even getting rid of the city at all. Yip of Yore was a great fan of history, and he knew the Records such a city possessed. To destroy it would simply be a waste while claiming it as his own would be a boon.

"This seems like a good place to set roots once everything is over, doesn't it?" Yip of Yore asked the inconspicuous god to his right.

“A good a place as any, if you’re fine with living somewhere with such messy karma,” the god responded, getting a few glares from the others around at his uncaring and seemingly disrespectful words, but Yip didn’t care.

“Not that long since we were here last either,” Yip continued, the other god shrugging as his form began to morph. The only thing that stayed unchanged was the eternal smile on his lips as he took the shape of an older man, all the other gods staring at the transformation now backing, many even bowing or cupping their hands in respect, with a few looking scared after having scowled earlier.

“It was not,” Eversmile responded. “But I want you to remember, I am merely here as an observer this time around. A scribe to record all that happens and make sure the multiverse knows what happened here today.”

“That’s all I ask of you,” Yip responded, having mellowed down a lot before he spoke loudly. “No matter what happens, this will be the birth of a legendary tale for the multiversal history books. Aren’t we all lucky to be part of it?”

Cheers echoed throughout the sky, more than loud enough for those below to hear. It was all very much on purpose. A show for the audience that Yip of Yore felt observing them from all around. All eyes were on them – him – and he was more than willing to give them the performance of a lifetime... but it was yet to be his turn on stage quite yet.

Below, protected by the barrier, a few hundred gods stood. The so-called Hidden Ones who were no longer very hidden. Most of them were outcasts or those who didn’t fit in anywhere. Many of them were even individuals deemed enemies of too many major factions and used the Order as a form of refuge. The fact these were the gods who stood at the Malefic Viper’s side only made Yip of Yore’s job easier. No one else was stupid enough to protect vampires like that, knowing the enemies such an action would create.

Staring down at these gods no one would miss once gone, Yip smiled. "Then, my friends, let us not wait any longer. Let today mark the beginning of what shall define this new era. Let our actions become the founding legend of a future no longer solely ruled by the powers of old but one where the next generation can stand by their side as equals. Prove yourselves. Prove you have power that does not falter before the ancient ones."

Energy surged all around him as the gods released it into the atmosphere. Their auras melded together and put pressure on the barrier below, making it shimmer. No one directly attacked yet, as the first blow would be the spark that started a slaughter, and Yip had yet to give that signal. Moreover, as mentioned, no one wanted to ruin the city. It was spoils of war, after all.

The fighting would come, but Yip knew most of the gods with him had already done their fair share. So had the gods below. Both sides had lost many, and now, their battle would be useless. It didn't matter if they fought because the victor would be decided between Yip of Yore and the Malefic Viper no matter what happened.

Sure, there were Godqueens and Godkings aplenty among the Hidden Ones, but none of them were any threat to Yip of Yore. He had long surpassed the Circles of Divinity and gone beyond... and after this, he would reach an even higher level.

"Even now, your Primordial hides away. Cowering within his Divine Realm," Yip spoke in a disappointed tone after a few minutes passed with nothing of substance happening as he was still waiting for all those who observed to have proper time to tune in. He was also waiting for another surprise for the Order that he would love to only show off at the right time.

"It's a shame... but if you do not come out, we shall come in," Yip said as he raised a hand. He still didn't want to destroy the city... but breaking the barrier?

Power gathered within his palm as he pointed it downward. Reality itself compressed as a wave of massive force slammed into the barrier, making cracks form all over it.

“The next one is stronger,” he spoke again, as power gathered and-

Finally.

Half a dozen attacks arrived, sending nearly a hundred gods flying back, as below, what looked like a flower of flesh bloomed. Yip of Yore looked on as over a hundred hydra heads erupted toward the many gods in the air, seeking not to kill but push them back as the most powerful person in the Order – at least the most powerful for a good while – had shown himself.

The aura of the many gods was instantly washed out as Yip of Yore felt the power of another entity that had surpassed the Circles of Divinity. The Boundless Hydra, Lord Protector of the Order of the Malefic Viper, and the reason they had managed to survive for this long despite the absence of their true Patron.

As Yip watched, the protective barrier that defended the city was replaced with a wall of flesh as the Boundless Hydra wrapped around the entire city. He couldn't see where the heads of the hydra originated from; all he knew was that there had to be hundreds of them in total and that they offered far better protection than some magical barrier.

“Aren't you going to release that?” Eversmile asked, looking at Yip of Yore's still glowing palm.

Yip of Yore simply returned the smile of the god as the light faded. “No, it would do much anyway.”

He had confidence in defeating the Lord Protector – naturally, he had – but he knew it wouldn't be anything fast. He was not the target of Yip's conquest and was incredibly powerful in his own right. Yip of Yore would win, yes, but he would waste a lot of energy in the process, and without using his preparations for the Viper, he wouldn't be able to ensure the Boundless Hydra wouldn't simply escape. The name Boundless also wasn't for nothing... because Yip was genuinely unsure how one would end the life of a creature with seemingly infinite heads. Alas, it wasn't something he needed to bother with.

"Then what will you do?" Eversmile asked.

"Nothing," Yip of Yore smiled. "Because I'm not the one who's gonna remove the Boundless Hydra as a factor."

As if on cue... everyone stopped. The many heads of the hydra that attacked the gods in the sky and even the gods flying froze as the sound of a horn could be heard throughout this entire section of the Great Planet. With it, a wave of golden light exploded in the sky as a massive, equally golden gate appeared.

The gate slowly began to open as one would expect an entire army to walk through... but only a single man exited, a simple axe hoisted over his shoulder. No one could move as his utterly overwhelming aura washed over the Great Planet, announcing to all the arrival of Valdemar, the God of War.

#### Chapter 1010: A Proper Greeting

The Lord Protector observed the sky as the aura of the human recognized as the War God bore down on him. The pressure was intense, but he did not submit despite the evident power difference. He was the final vanguard of the Order of the Malefic Viper, and as long as his master had yet to make his appearance, the Boundless Hydra was responsible for ensuring none would cause their members harm.

Dealing with Yip of Yore was already a matter the Lord Protector wasn't confident in, but now, even as it looked even more hopeless, he decided to go on the offensive. Hundreds of heads emerged from the living barrier and flew toward the many gods and Valdemar himself. Yip of Yore simply looked down as Valdemar smiled as he lifted his axe.

"This is not your fight, Guardian," his words echoed as he lowered his weapon slowly. The hundreds of heads were instantly crushed as the Lord Protector felt the shockwave from the impact permeating through his entire body. It hadn't done any real damage, as losing a few hundred heads meant nothing... however...

I shall-

"You've done enough, Snappy," a voice suddenly echoed in the Lord Protector's mind. The comforting words of his master. As these words were spoken, a lone figure appeared in the air between the Boundless Hydra and the attackers, emanating an aura surpassing that of the Lord Protector by a fair margin.

"Quite rude to come knocking without a proper invitation," the Malefic Viper spoke in a confident tone as Valdemar retracted his own aura. The Viper's words were addressed at not just Yip of Yore, but Valdemar and everyone else present.

The Lord Protector observed his master as he sighed internally, trying to squash the insecurities in his heart. For so many eras, he had trusted the Malefic Viper to handle things... what was one more time?

The Malefic Viper basked in the auras of the many gods who looked down upon him. He saw Eversmile stand next to Yip of Yore, aware the god would not interfere personally. He was the kind to prefer indirect involvement, after all.

Finding the right time to appear was always a tricky matter, but he believed things had worked out fine. He couldn't wait too long as that risked Snappy deciding to go all-out, which could risk everything, including Snappy potentially taking severe damage.

No, as the Viper said, the Lord Protector had done enough, and from here on out, it was all on the Malefic Viper.

"To think you'd come out on your own... I'll admit, I'd assumed we'd have to drag you out of your little hole by causing a bit of damage first," Yip of Yore spoke as the Viper felt himself be measured up. "Almost admirable for you to come out and save your pet hydra."

"Or perhaps I'm just tired of dealing with this annoying rat that's been gnawing at my ankles for a few years now," the Viper shot back as he shook his head. "You're far from the first who's come here, trying to make themselves a Primordial Slayer, and I wonder where you got this much confidence from... but I guess arrogance is a trait of the young."

Truthfully, the Viper saw little meaning in all this grandstanding and bantering, but he knew it was important for the story being told. What good villain wouldn't act a bit like an asshole when confronted? And it was for certain that Villy was the villain of this story, a role he embraced wholeheartedly as it quite frankly fit him far better than that of the hero.

"It's also a common trait for them to be daring," Yip of Yore responded as he launched into yet another annoying speech. "For them to be willing to do what none has truly dared to do before. To go where none have gone before. Look beyond the status quo and what the older generation believes is impossible. For too long has it been an assumption that the Primordials are infallible beings, unreachable by all. The Truth? All you have is age. For the Primordials who've continued to struggle and continued to reach for more power, I understand why they maintain respect... but you? You're just a relic of old, coasting on the reputation of those who were once your peers."

There was nothing new in his words, yet they still bore repeating due to the expanded audience this time around. The Viper could vividly see the conceptual energy gathering all around Yip of Yore. The many skills were working in concert, empowering him to act his role as the hero.

Even now, he had reached a level few gods ever could... and he was only growing stronger as his momentum would soon peak.

“Don’t get me wrong, if you had been a force for good and used your reputation to make the multiverse a better place, things would be different. But what did you do? What have you done since your return? The moment you stopped hiding away, you became a tyrant. You killed weaker gods and had your faction expand, crushing anyone indiscriminately who dared stand in your way. For so many eras, the Order of the Malefic Viper had been a mostly peaceful organization that kept to itself, and only with your return did they return to being the force for evil they were back then and have become once. To me, it seems like the Order of the Malefic Viper was better without the Malefic Viper.”

“I am the Order of the Malefic Viper,” Vilastromoz shot back. “Yet you are coming here, spouting nonsense to justify making a move on me just to prove that you are a strong boy in front of all your little pals. Pals that will only end up dying alongside you once you realize how big of a mistake you’ve made.”

“Mistake, huh? Let me ask you, what is the meaning of having power in the first place? Why have a faction?” Yip of Yore asked, clearly not looking for an answer as he answered it himself. “For the longest time, I saw no meaning in having a faction. I didn’t need one because I didn’t have a good reason to have one... but you inspired me. I knew you were a negative influence in the multiverse from the very beginning, a being of death and destruction that should be put in the same camp as Plague Spirits and cursed creatures. When such a fundamentally evil creature controls a faction, the faction becomes a force for evil, so I asked myself why I couldn’t make a faction that was the exact opposite. A force for good in the multiverse.”

The Viper kept quiet, allowing the guy to keep ranting with his long masturbatory speech.



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"I asked you what the meaning of getting more power was. For you, it seems to be able to continue getting away with evil. I found my answer, too. It's to make sure beings like you cannot roam free and keep destroying everything in their Path. You've done so many horrible things I cannot even begin to cover them all. Today, that will all end. If no one else is willing, I'll become the force for good that counteracts your evil, and if need be, show the Order that there is another way than following someone like you."

"Such confidence for someone hiding behind two other Primordials while claiming he is here to prove he's equal to a Primordial," Vilastromoz scoffed, playing into his role. "Or is this your definition of good? To have others do your dirty work while you take all the credit?"

"I'm not here to fight you," Valdemar spoke, his words almost having a physical weight to them. "I'm here to ensure the duel between you two happens and that no one else interferes. That's the term of my promises."

These words were clearly directed at Snappy, telling him not to get involved. Vilastromoz did feel a bit bad about leaving Snappy in the dark, but it was truly for the best. The Viper knew his Lord Protector would act accordingly even if he weren't told what to do.

"And Eversmile?" the Viper continued.

“Just here to observe and document,” the Primordial of Karma said in a calm tone. “This is not my battle. Instead, view it as a chance to prove you are still worthy of the title of Primordial... or if twelve shall become eleven.”

“A chance indeed,” Yip of Yore followed up to reclaim the flow of conversation. Or maybe because he really liked to hear himself talk? Either way, it didn’t matter much. “How does it feel? Knowing that even your fellow Primordials are doubtful if you’re truly one of them?”

“Funny, I don’t remember the title of Primordial being dependent on others recognizing you as one,” Vilastromoz scowled. “It does sadden me that they are willing to side with a new upstart, and it makes me question their judgment... but alas, that’s something we can settle later. Once I’ve dealt with you, we have an eternity for them to make up for their failure in properly assessing the situation, after all.”

“What I find funny is that you believe anyone is willing to put up with you anymore. Nearly as funny as you thinking you are walking away from this. Actually, tell me, how many of your so-called loyal Hidden Ones have abandoned you the moment things got tough? How many allies have turned their back? From what I see, the only ones who remain are those with no choice or other evil entities who share your wicked worldview,” Yip of Yore continued as he paced back and forth.

“Face it, everyone is abandoning you. They can feel the winds of change blowing through the multiverse. They can see that you are a withered husk of what you once were. Your isolation has only made you more bitter and cruel... you are so pathetic you can’t even keep your own Chosen loyal.”

This was it. The thing the Viper and so many others had been waiting for. The trump card Yip of Yore had prepared to truly show how far the Malefic Viper had fallen. Rumors had always made their rounds in the multiverse that the Chosen of the Malefic Viper and Valhal had entered some kind of agreement in the mostly closed-off ninety-third universe. No one knew the exact details of this deal, but the fact that Valhal clearly opposed the Malefic Viper as his Chosen made a deal made the situation very confusing and ripe for speculation about what exactly was going on behind the scenes.

Now, the time had come for the truth to be revealed. Never once had there been a scenario where a Chosen of a Primordial had renounced their Blessing, much less turned into a heretic, so the mere thought it could happen still didn't seem believable to many. Yet... the Chosen of the Malefic Viper was a rather unique case for a Chosen.

He had been given the Blessing at a very low grade, and he'd displayed a level of talent that was near-unprecedented. This wasn't just about his Nevermore performance, but his title of Harbinger of Primeval Origins. The C-grade human held genuine power and influence, and his existence had helped the Malefic Viper greatly when staging his comeback.

It was all a great story. The Malefic Viper returning to the multiverse with a one-of-a-kind Chosen able to stand atop his generation as the Malefic Viper – a god who once stood at the top as one of the first gods – would reclaim his position. The Chosen Ceremony was still fresh in people's minds and had been a major boost to the Viper's reputation among the many gods who had only ever read about the Primordial in history books. That ceremony had shown a Chosen and Patron united as the Order was on track to become a true pinnacle faction once more.

This was the story most people had come to believe. This was what the majority of all those who looked on at this confrontation believed. Innumerable people were watching this entire thing unfold, from all factions spread across the multiverse, all the way from low-ranking mortals to gods who ruled the peak factions.

To some, it was merely entertainment. To others, it was research, a third group, an event that would define their futures. They all had their reasons for watching, and all had their own theories and thoughts, but all of them knew that no matter what, they were witnessing history in the making.

The first clue that something unexpected was about to happen was the frown the Malefic Viper showed the moment his Chosen was mentioned. Usually, one would expect a god to show some pride or even to gloat when their outstanding Chosen was mentioned... yet he frowned. He was unhappy at his mention.

Then, as if on cue, the golden gate behind Valdemar began to glow once more. Five figures walked out, all five of them releasing auras that had surpassed the Circles of Divinity. Yet, it was the one who seemed the weakest who led them as she walked in front and took her place beside Valdemar, the other top-level fighters of Valhal staying behind the two of them.

It was Gudrun, the First Valkyrie and if Valdemar was the emperor that ruled Valhal, she would be the empress actually handling all the day-to-day politics.

"You brought your wife? Seriously?" Vilastromoz asked with a scoff as he ignored Yip of Yore and looked at Valdemar. "I thought you said you weren't getting involved?"

"I'm not getting involved," the bearded man shrugged with a smile. "Never said the missus wouldn't."

"Don't mind his words; none of us will take part in any fighting today unless we are forced into it," Gudrun said, clearly leaving an opening for Valhal to take a more offensive position based on what happened next. "No, we are merely here to deliver a message. One that I believe is long overdue yet has found its perfect time to be delivered. A message not just to you but to the rest of the multiverse. I would ask everyone to be quiet and just listen."

Gudrun lifted her hand as a giant formation appeared. The runes on it lit up as it connected to something far away, through the void between the universes, and unto the newest one integrated. An image slowly took form as a familiar figure appeared, projected as a lifelike illusion into the sky.

It was a familiar figure. It was someone most had seen pictures or even recordings of prior. It was naturally the all-time top scorer of the Nevermore Leaderboards, Harbinger of Primeval Origins, and last

but not least, the Chosen of the Malefic Viper... which was why many were shocked that Gudrun would be the one bringing his message.

Confusion would be an understatement as the projection slowly fully took form. Once it did, the aura of the Chosen also began to slowly be released... which only caused more confusion as it seemed off. However, not as off as his first words.

The projection clearly looked down at the Malefic Viper, the god frowning as his Chosen spoke.

“Didn’t expect to see me here, now did you? Why not? Did you think I would just lie down and submit despite everything, you manipulative, insane piece of shit excuse of a god?”

So, yeah, not the way most would expect a Chosen to greet their Patron.