

Hunter 277

Chapter 277: Union Oath

Jake felt it before he saw her. A new presence appeared a split second before she was fully back. A small bird appeared back on top of his head, having shifted from a sitting to a standing position.

“Welcome back, Sylphie,” Jake said with a smile as he inspected the hawk.

[Sylphian Eyas – lvl 100]

Well, okay, not a hawk but an eyas, I guess. Level 100 and still a little kid, heh,” Jake thought, chuckling internally.

Hawkie and Mystie also jumped over, and he ended up sitting surrounded by the two hawks as they both inspected and made bird noises at their daughter. Jake kept smiling as she happily narrated something, and both of them kept making questioning screeches. While Jake was okay-ish at speaking bird, he wasn’t fluent at all, so much of the conversation was lost on him. He could only really read intent and emotions.

Jake waited for them to finish as he tried to piece together what it had been about. Luckily, he didn’t have to as someone else clued him in.

“So, I went ahead and got your little bird pal a blessing from my fellow Primordial by making her aware of the bird’s existence, and she was very interested. So yeah, the hawk has a Divine Blessing now and is a bit stronger and will likely get a few better skills and stuff like that moving forward. The one blessing her is called Stormild and is an elemental of sorts, so do note that she may begin developing more in

that direction. In case you didn't know, she is like half-beast, half-elemental," Villy came in from the left side, dropping a knowledge bomb.

"Oh, that's pretty cool, I guess. Is Stormild nice?" Jake asked back telepathically.

"Not at all; she is a living natural disaster. But she does like all elementals and spirits, and as your little bird is part spirit, Stormild likes her. She is an interesting little thing that hawk, which sure also helped. So yeah, the bird will be fine."

"I see. Well, as long as this elemental thing treats Sylphie properly, it will be fine. But, do tell her to treat Sylphie nicely, okay?" Jake answered. He hoped this Stormild was chill like the Malefic Viper. Sylphie getting another friend would be nice.

"No worries, you might just get the chance to tell her yourself dependent on what you choose," the Viper mysteriously answered.

Before Jake got the chance to ask, the Viper's presence faded. It was all very mysterious for about ten seconds... before Sylphie seemed done with her conversation with her parents. He noted they all looked at him. Mystie and Hawkie looked expectant but also a bit worried. Jake worried what the hell they had talked about to have those expressions, but he soon got his answer. Sylphie jumped down and landed on his lap.

She looked him in the eyes and began glowing. A magic circle coalesced in mid-air in front of her, and Jake looked at it a bit. Sylphie placed her wing on one side of the floating magic circle, and Jake quickly picked up what to do as he placed his hand on the circle.

Do you wish to begin the ritual to enter a Union Oath of Stormwild with Sylphie? NOTE: Both parties can exit the ritual at any point until the final Union Oath has been made

Jake looked at it for a bit. It was a system-prompt. System-prompts tended to be important. The issue was, Jake had no idea what this whole deal was about.

“Okay, Villy, get the fuck back here; what is this?”

Villy swiftly came back, almost as if he had been waiting for Jake.

“So, remember when I told you about the whole bond of equals during the whole slavery thing? Elementals and spirits, in general, are the most common users of this type of bond. Your undead pal with his Blightwraith girlfriend is an example, where he entered an equal bond with the wraith. Of course, you don’t need to do something like that; the type of bond can be very customized, especially the kind the Sylphian has. So no, not slavery. More a spirit contract. Just go ahead with the ritual for now, check out the details, and figure it out from there,” the Viper said, dispelling some of Jake’s doubts.

For a moment there, he thought Sylphie was trying to bait him into a slave contract or something. Jake wasn’t entirely comfortable with the entire ordeal. He actually considered rejecting the ritual for a moment, but the big hopeful eyes of Sylphie staring at him made him unable to.

He accepted it, and then everything kinda got weird.

Jake felt himself in two places at once. His consciousness and likely parts of his soul were dragged off somewhere along with Sylphie's, but his body remained behind, meaning he still felt his Sphere of Perception and all that. Well, it wasn't something he hadn't tried before, so he just rolled with it.

In his weird soul-form, he floated through nothingness for a while until he and Sylphie both came to a stop. Jake was a bit surprised at Sylphie's form. While Jake looked pretty much the same, except a bit more transparent, Sylphie looked like an ever-changing green creature of wind that eventually settled on her old shape.

Before the two of them was a tablet without any words on it besides a title at the top.

Union Oath of Stormild

Jake looked over at Sylphie, expecting her to do something. Instead, she looked back at him, looking equally perplexed.

Sylphie, this is your damn ritual, he thought. He didn't say anything, though, but let her take her time. The reason for this was simple... everything he saw in his sphere moved extremely slowly. Like, so slow it was almost unnoticeable. This meant time in the real world was moving at a snail's pace during this whole ritual, so he would let her figure out herself.

Well, it turned out she wouldn't have to.

Two orbs of light suddenly appeared in the sky above. First, clouds spread as he heard the sound of thunder and saw flashes of lightning. Then, the entire sky appeared to catch fire as a new presence entered the weird space they were in.

It wasn't hard for Jake to guess who it was.

"Stormild, I presume?" he asked out loud.

"That's me."

The voice sounded like... a little girl? Not at all what he would expect from an incredibly ancient Primordial that had been around for billions, if not trillions of years. Then again, how was a being that old supposed to sound?

Also, it was interesting that she actually talked. It wasn't some magical telepathy or anything, but just sound. What was weird, though, was how the sound appeared or how he picked it up. Sound magic, maybe? The concept of sound? It was magic for sure.

"Ree!" Sylphie also said, flapping her wings happily.

"OOOOOHM!"

Jake heard an almost booming sound in response as he felt like everything rattled for a moment. Yet, he felt like it wasn't an attack or anything malicious. In fact, he felt a lot of... communication? At least Sylphie seemed to perfectly understand that booming sound and happily responded with even more screeches and wing-flapping.

"Are you talking elemental or something?" Jake asked. He didn't quite get what they were saying or doing, but clearly, it worked for them.

"Oh yeah. Super much better way to talk than stupid words. Actually, words are, like, the worst way of talking. Okay, not the worst, but one of the worst. I once saw this weird fishy thing that talked by writing stuff or something. It was sooo slow and bad. Also, it only worked with water, so when all their water went poof, they couldn't talk. Really silly those ones. The small ones couldn't even breathe without the water. Another silly thing. Why breathe? Never got why so many things like to do that..." Stormild replied.

"Yeah, I agree on that one. Not having to breathe is nice," Jake nodded, ignoring how the elemental just talked about killing possibly an entire race by evaporating all the water they lived in. "Anyway, why was it we were here again? Some kind of oath or something, right? What's it about?"

"I remembered! The ritual! Right. Just agree to serve Sylphie forever and ever and do everything she ever tells you till you die, but don't die until she tells you, and never leave her and go wherever she wants, and stuff like that, okay?"

He needed to take a moment to absorb that rant. He was about to protest, but Sylphie was the one who began screeching madly first.

"Ree! Ree!" she huffed and puffed.

"Not like that? Oh... oh!" Stormild said as the form turned into a smaller form.

A bird-like creature appeared before him, still nearly ten meters tall but now far smaller. Stormild looked down at him. She looked like she sniffed him a bit, and Jake felt like her presence poked his own. Maybe even his soul? It didn't really do anything.

"It is a bloodline!" the Primordial said, flapping her wings as thunder boomed and flames were left in their wake. "I totally get it now!"

Stormild turned to Sylphie and sounded more serious than ever. "If a girl likes a boy very much--"

"No!" Jake cut in. "Just no. Seriously, what the fuck?"

Stormild looked over at Jake, almost relieved. "To be fair, I did think it was a bit weird, but I try not to judge, ya know? I never quite get you fleshies, and some have hobbies quite hard to understand. Seriously, why do you do that with your fleshy bits where you--"

"I think we should change the subject. Now," Jake said, not leaving much up to discussion. Sylphie just looked confused between them, not quite getting what the conversation was about, and Jake would prefer to keep it that way.

The big burning storm bird looked down at Jake. "Okay, okay. So, what do you want to do an Oath about? I still think you should just do everything Sylphie says forever."

"Yeah, not gonna happen. So how does this oath work? Some kind of contract?"

“Uhm, yeah, of course, it’s a spirit contract. Duh. Didn’t big snake man tell you? You agree on stuff, and then you become bound to each other kinda. It’s a totally cool spirit thing only spirits can do; that’s why it’s called a spirit contract. My version is even better where I am the one to make sure everyone keeps their oath because I think promises are super important. Do you know how many elementals or innocent spirits used to get screwed over? It was super unfair, so I made a better version. One where if either party breaks the oath, I fix it,” Stormild said, happily explaining what the skill was about.

“Fix it how?” Jake asked.

“Death.”

The word was spoken with an intent that actually sent a shiver down Jake’s back. Everything told him that this wasn’t some usual contract. Not truly. While a regular slave contract or contract would result in death if broken... well, that is how it was meant to work. As with many other things, there were workarounds... but if a Primordial would appear to enforce an oath? Or at least part of a Primordial? That... was something. It also kind of added a subjective interpretation to the whole thing. Jake wasn’t entirely sure about the entire thing but went with it for now.

“What are the benefits of this Union Oath?” Jake also asked.

“Usually, it’s a great way to bond. Get better at fighting together. Like, ya know, just do stuff together. Also, stuff that is usually only available to one of you as the other can be seen as a part of you. Kinda? You can even do challenge dungeons together sometimes. So yeah, become forever-friends.”

Jake frowned. This... he really wasn’t sure about this. Jake was aware of this kind of thing. It sounded a lot like a companion bond. A type of magic he had read about some classes got that allowed them to bind a beast. He assumed a spirit contract was the spirit version of that. It was usually a bond of equals

that more or less made them co-dependent. Many skills and types of magic would be unlocked, and a permanent bond would be formed. It was a lifelong partnership where they would spend their entire lives never away from each other... and Jake didn't want that.

Not to be misunderstood, he liked Sylphie. But he also liked being alone. He was a lone hunter, and he knew that. That didn't mean he could never work with others, he had a great time hunting with Hawkie, but he wasn't going to make a lifelong commitment to always hunt as a pair with Sylphie. It wasn't fair to either him or Sylphie. It would limit both their freedoms, which made it out of the question.

He looked over at Sylphie. "Is this really something you want? I am not saying we can't be forever-friends, but do we need to swear to each other we will? It will mean we will have to always be together. You will have to sit and wait while I do alchemy... do you really want that?"

Sylphie had seemed okay with everything until now, as her eyes opened wide when he mentioned that. He knew she wasn't a fan of him always sitting on his ass crafting and often tried to make him do stuff, so when she imagined having to wait for him... her distress was obvious.

"Ree!" Sylphie said as she flapped her wings in panic at Stormild.

"Wait, why would you need to do that?" Stormild asked, looking genuinely confused. "That sounds like a silly rule to have; why include that? Seems super silly. Just be friends, and all is okay and promise each other stuff and make the oath. Then Sylphie can enter the Treasure Hunt, and I get stuff just like big snake man."

She seemed very pushy as she even poked Sylphie with her ethereal wing. "You want to enter the Treasure Hunt with Uncle, right? I am sure you can find tasty stuff in there. Also, you will be able to do stuff more fun stuff with Uncle in the future if you want to. You want that, right?"

Sylphie did want that.

And Jake? Jake considered if this was really a thing one could just exploit.

“So, you mean to tell me we can just create this Union Oath, live our lives entirely independent of each other, but still have some benefits like allowing Sylphie to enter the Treasure Hunt with me? I assume this bond can even be harnessed to communicate and things like that? A bit like a blessing from a god? Any drawback if either party gets hurt or worse dies?” Jake asked clarifyingly.

“Sure, you can think of it a bit like a blessing. It’s kinda wrong, but you can. And sure, you can just get all the good stuff and not the bad stuff. Well, you won’t benefit as much as those who make a big Union Oath, but you will still get some of the good stuff. Also, it will be super sad if any of you die, right? But nah, you don’t need to include a rule about both parties dying if the other does. Many do, though. Dunno why.”

“What will this Union Oath need to include specifically?”

“A promise. You know, an Oath? The Spirit Contract needs that to work,” she explained.

“Alright, Villy, quick thoughts before I do something dumb?” Jake quickly threw towards the Viper.

“This is what I planned. It’s a good thing; Stormild’s contract is a bit.. exploitative. Towards the system and its rules, that is. It is the best kind there is, besides maybe some of the stuff Eversmile cooks up. To you, the benefits will be borderline non-existent with no real drawbacks at all, but it will help the hawk a

lot. Be aware that you can only have one such contract active at a time, though,” Villy answered promptly, dispelling much of Jake’s doubt. He knew all of this was partly orchestrated by the Viper... but not entirely.

He had a feeling Stormild wasn’t easily manipulated. She seemed simple and childish, but his instincts told him everything she did was done with purpose and deliberation. Stormild most certainly was childish and had a very naïve outlook on some things for sure, but that didn’t mean she couldn’t comprehend the intents of others. He was pretty sure she knew what this was all about from the beginning and had fun with them. The comments and jokes just her having fun and enjoying the company. At least he got the impression she was enjoying herself in their company.

“Well, let’s get to it then. If you want to, Sylphie?” Jake asked the small hawk.

She happily screeched and flew over to Jake, nuzzling up to him. He wasn’t certain of all the impacts this Union Oath would have, but he had a feeling it wasn’t something he would come to regret.