

## Hunter 421

### Chapter 421 - A Life Of Punishment

Infinite Academy Credits was honestly overpowered and something any academy student would dream of. It meant Jake could attend whatever class he liked at any point, drop out if he didn't feel it, or just give a lot a go at the same time to find the one he liked the most.

However, it did give some quirks. Normally one could transfer AC to others, but Jake couldn't as he didn't technically have any. He couldn't pay for others either. Well, not other members of the Order anyway. Because Jake found one interesting provision in the rules of Academy Credit usage: nothing said Jake had to be the one attending. Not in that no one would attend, but that Jake in person didn't have to. It was entirely possible for Jake to send a clone or an avatar or, perhaps, a servant or a slave.

A plan formed in his mind as he waited for Meira to return. He went over some lessons while he waited patiently, trying to find some of the basic ones that would be good for an absolute beginner alchemist.

Villy had made it clear Meira would be screwed if she was just released due to her lack of affiliation with the Order. However, what would happen if, instead of just releasing her to the hounds, he had her become a member of the Order first? No rule he had seen said that wasn't possible, and if he was told he couldn't...

Well, Villy did just tell him to do whatever the hell he wanted, so it really wasn't Jake's fault, but the snake god who gave him the idea.

Meira had not had time to familiarize herself with the library before her new Master had arrived, so it took longer than she had hoped to get all the requested books. She didn't want to miss any but get all the ones asked for.

It was lucky she at least had been given a spatial satchel to transport the books in by the warden. It was far worse than a spatial ring or a necklace or any true spatial storage and required one to physically deposit the items by hand, but it was surely better than nothing. Her father had a similar one back home too...

She shook her head as she focused on her work. The ingredients had already been gathered and placed in a secondary bag made for the purpose of transporting toxic materials. As she went through the library index to double-check if she had gotten everything, a stray thought entered her head: he probably won't be too angry if I missed one.

Meira instantly caught herself in the act and slapped herself lightly. She couldn't let down her guard, and she had to perform perfectly. She had miscalculated so much already and made so many blunders... but... how could she have known?

The Malefic One had descended right in front of her. Her new Master was the Chosen of the Malefic One... it was as if she had just become the slave of the Hall Master... no, the Lord Protector? The mere thought was preposterous, even if she knew that was the truth.

Moreover, clearly, no one in the Humanoid Department knew anything about this. Meira had been informed her new Master was a very talented black-Token alchemist who had been marked with the highest level of importance during the entrance test. That in itself was already someone who she seriously needed to integrate herself with, but the Chosen?

It was like going from being told she was to work for a local Lord only to find out she was actually under the employ of the emperor. No matter the metaphor, she knew she had potentially struck gold, even if she was also in a very precarious position.

The only reason she was serving the Chosen was due to him wanting to keep his identity secret for reasons she didn't even dare ponder on. As a Chosen, he could have anything he wanted. There would no-doubt even be S-grades willing to become his servants as long as it meant a direct connection to the Malefic One. Who was she in comparison to any of them?

No... you have the first-movers advantage, Meira reminded herself. She would do anything, and nothing was out of the question, just to stay. If she somehow managed to endear herself to him, perhaps she would even find a way to help her clan back home as well as herself. No matter what, her new Master was a ticket to change her path of life in its entirety and allow her to survive. As long as she played her cards right and got lucky, that is.

After packing up all of the books, she quickly hurried over with the two spatial satchels to the laboratory. She hoped she hadn't been too slow as she got closer and saw the door open. She peeked in as she saw her Master sit on a stool as his hand burned with a transparent flame. He looked deep in thought, and Meira was afraid to interrupt whatever he was doing.

She still peeked, though. Her Master didn't look as intimidating without the mask, and if she didn't know better, she would view him as just another regular human. Naturally, that wasn't the case, but she did at least have the interpretation he wasn't a bad person. So far, he had only been nice towards her, but there was still that tiny sliver of doubt. One borne from the reality of where they were and how the multiverse worked.

The Order of the Malefic Viper was not a nice place. The Malefic Viper was not a nice god, and the path the alchemists belonging to the Order walked wasn't a nice one. So how would it make sense for the Chosen of the Malefic One to be nice?

Meira was still thinking as her Master turned to her and smiled, catching her peeping. A bit embarrassed, she quickly bowed as she asked: "Where should the books and ingredients be placed?"

“Ah, just leave the satchels here,” he answered. “Tell me, have you ever done any alchemy before?”

“I have not,” Meira answered, a bit perplexed at the question, but she assumed it had to do with her ability to assist him in his work. “However, I have been trained in the knowledge of alchemical work and gardening. I have also been trained to be an efficient subject of alchemical experiments if desired.”

He frowned at her answer, making Meira instantly be alert. Had she been rude or disrespectful? No, she had not slipped up, had she? She had made sure to avoid using “My Lord” and “Master” as commanded and also naturally avoided using words such as “you” and the Chosen’s name. Even if he had told her to, Meira had a suspicion it was a test of sorts to see if she would forget her place. Either way, she didn’t want to risk it.

“Have you ever wanted to do alchemy?” he then asked.

A question Meira had honestly never even thought about.

Jake couldn’t help but frown at her mentioning being used as a test subject for alchemical experiments so casually. She didn’t even fucking blink when telling a poison alchemist to test his poison on her, making him wonder what she had been put through already to get that kind of mindset.

However, as fucked as it was, Jake had already learned she had Palate, so she had to have gained something from everything they had put her through. Moreover, he was also confident in another thing that would help her if she decided to become an alchemist: Him.

Jake knew enough of the system by now to know that him merely being who he was would impact her positively. Of course, she also needed the drive to actually want to improve.

So when Jake asked if she wanted to become an alchemist, he observed her closely. He quickly got the feeling she had never even considered this question before, and she looked conflicted. Jake understood why as he added:

“Alchemy doesn’t have to be about poison either. It is one of the most varied, if not the most varied, profession-archetype of the multiverse. In fact, most alchemists focus on restoration and beneficial effects, with it also being very commonplace within the Order,” Jake said. He one hundred percent pulled the line about it being the most varied out of his ass. Hey, it was mega-varied, so it couldn’t be far off, could it?

“If requested, I can learn anything wished of me to the best of my abilities,” she answered after she thought for a while.

“You misunderstand,” Jake answered, shaking his head. “Do you want to learn alchemy?”

She didn’t answer right away as Jake continued. “Let me ask you this, what would you be doing if you hadn’t been enslaved by the Order?”

“I would be working in the mines of my clan or have been sworn to serve another,” Meira answered.

Jake was about to open his mouth again, but he felt certain she was telling the truth when looking at her. Well, that was depressing, he thought.

He realized he didn't truly know anything about her, and looking at how long it was until the lesson on using cauldrons for combat would begin, he had some time to kill. Jake leaned back against the alchemy table he was sitting at and motioned for Meira to take a seat in another vacant chair.

"As you probably know, I come from a newly integrated universe, and I am actually quite interested... can you tell me a bit about how you grew up and life as someone born with the system?" Jake asked.

The phrasing of it being for him to learn about the multiverse was very purposeful as he didn't feel like it would go over well for him to ask her to give her life story. No, this was better. It was only natural her explanation would be heavily based on her own experiences, so it was a real win-win as he also did want some insight into how someone lived in the multiverse. As the conversation went on, he could then segue her into more personal details.

It worked as Meira, after only a bit of hesitation, agreed. She asked some clarifying questions and then began telling him about the life her clan had lived. She didn't say it was specifically how she had lived, but it was clear much of what she said was personal experience.

And... damn, Jake just got more depressed the more he heard. A clan of elves more or less enslaved by a more powerful faction because they happened to live close to a valuable mine. A life of servitude where the biggest concern wasn't progressing yourself and your own power but merely meeting quotas to avoid punishment.

In fact, Jake quickly began to notice a pattern of behavior and mindset in what she described. They worked the mine to avoid punishment. If a young lord – or just a lord in general – came and wanted something or someone, they would just give it to avoid repercussions. Levels were gained to keep up productivity. Professions and classes were chosen to be more efficient servants and make life less painful and difficult.

A lot of things regarding Meira suddenly became clearer to Jake. Many of her actions and why he repeatedly failed to make any headway made sense. He had a basic misunderstanding from the beginning based on his own mindset and worldview.

Meira didn't want anything.

Or, perhaps more accurately, the only thing she wanted was nothing. The only thing she wanted for her clan was nothing. Because to her, "something" had only ever come in one form: punishment. Her entire life, the life of her clan and everyone she knew, revolved around avoiding punishment. Apathy was the best they could hope for.

It revolved around survival and finding ways to not suffer. There was only external motivation that made Meira act as she did. Jake had believed Meira wanted something out of him from the beginning, but that now seemed wrong. Maybe she wanted him to help her clan, elevate her own status, or gain levels and such just by being close to him. But no, he got the impression that what she truly wanted was for Jake to just be accepting of her presence and otherwise leave her be. Perhaps view her existence as having some minor value, at least enough to not get rid of her.

Meanwhile, Jake acted purely on internal motivation. He didn't need power; he just wanted it. Meira needed power, for, without it, she would be punished. Even now, she didn't try to improve her situation with Jake, but only not to sour it. He realized his plan of making her warm up to him would never work as things were.

Jake kept listening as Meira talked. Her voice was rather emotionless at all times, and even when fucked up shit happened, she acted like it was pretty commonplace. With some pushing, she even talked about her training from the Order, and while she tried all she could to not talk negatively, it was clear she had viewed things like training her Palate as something to endure and survive. It reminded Jake of how he had done the Trial of Myriad Poisons, which was similar but far more extreme and deadlier.

But while Jake had viewed it as a great way to improve Palate, she had viewed it as torture she needed to endure to survive. The difference could not be starker, and the thing is, Jake understood why. If Jake didn't view any power he got as truly his own, would he have been fine? Because Meira clearly didn't view her skills and her poison resistance as more than mere tools of survival that belonged to those in charge.

All in all, Meira didn't know the meaning of having agency. She had lived with fear of punishment as her primary motivator in life so far. Considering Jake had no plans on continuing that trend, she would have to find new motivation.

A bit more time passed as Jake just allowed her to keep talking. He didn't stop her at all but only answered a few of her questions. Questions that were all naturally related to if he also wanted to know about a particular subject.

When she was done, she just sat there quietly. Jake saw her nervousness and slight fear return when he didn't do anything but just looked at her a bit. He got up, and when Meira was about to also stand, he motioned for her to keep sitting.

"I think I have some understanding now. I am heading to a class right now, and while I am gone, I want you to go over these lessons and choose five you personally think are the most interesting," Jake said as he waved his hand and summoned a stack of papers. It took only a moment to imprint the simple information provided by each lesson using mana, as more than three hundred lesson descriptions were put down before her.

"May I ask under what parameters?" Meira asked, a bit unsure.

"What you personally find interesting," Jake said. "Nothing else. Just choose five of them that you believe a novice alchemist should learn."



She frowned a bit but didn't ask. Instead, she just nodded and began going them over. Jake looked at her before he left the laboratory and went to the entry-area of the mansion, where a large magic circle was placed on the wall. Jake merely mentally poked the token in his inventory as the magic circle turned into a gate leading straight to where the lesson would be held.

Jake smirked a bit to himself as he prepared to finally learn how to bonk people in the head with cauldrons. In the meantime, he would even have Meira choose her own upcoming alchemy lessons, so he was truly being efficient.

#### Chapter 422 - First Lesson

Jake stepped through the gate as he appeared at the back wall of what looked like a massive lecture hall. The hall had nearly a hundred meters to the ceiling and a large stage down at the bottom where Jake saw a dwarf that he assumed was the teacher. He was currently talking to a few scalekins as he showed off a cauldron to them.

The rest of the hall was already pretty filled. Jake looked around and guessed there had to be at least a few thousand present already, with more coming every second from other gates opening up all around him. A brief scan revealed around half of those present to be scalekins of different variants, with the rest a mixture of all kinds of races.

Everyone was E or D-grades, too, with the majority in D-grade. Jake decided to just find somewhere vacant as he took a seat, very curious as to how a lesson in the Order of the Malefic Viper would function. He did see many others already had cauldrons out and were tinkering a bit with them.

About ten minutes later, right at the assigned time, the lesson began.

The dwarf down on the stage stood before everyone as he spread out his hands. “Welcome to the first lesson of Blaze it! I ain’t gonna waste your time with pleasantries but just get to the core of it. You all want to learn how to kill people using your cauldrons and Alchemical Flame, and I am happy to oblige!”

Instantly the very informal mood was set.

“Alchemical Flame is a cornerstone of alchemy that anyone who reaches E-grade as an alchemist possesses. We use it to control the temperature of the cauldron, salvage material, control concoctions, brewings, and so many other things. It is darn versatile, yet it has the weakness of being as useless as anything can get when it comes to killing things.

“Despite the name, the flame isn’t actually related to the fire affinity whatsoever. However, that doesn’t mean it isn’t related to the concept of flames. Flames can come in many shapes and is more an expression of form, movement, and phenomena than anything else. A flame can be hot or cold, it can be corrosion incarnate or so full of life it can near-revive a damn Risen, but even then... it can’t kill for shit, and even if you have a flame full of vitality, you won’t be able to heal anyone with it. Because the Alchemical Flame is conceptually not made for combat, no matter how powerful it gets. Ah, but of course, we found ways around that, which is where combat cauldrons come in.”

The dwarf wished over a cauldron as it appeared before him.

“Ya see, I ain’t got shit talent in fire magic and never did, but I was pretty good at controlling my Alchemical Flame. This is why I began working the path of combat cauldrons. We spent so long honing our flames that some have even been able to integrate a Soulflame to make it even more powerful, so not using it for self-defense or killing is just a damn crime.

“It is also a way to address the oft-seen disparity in class and profession level of a creator, and an even better method for those who only have a profession. Now, the design of the cauldron will naturally depend on what kind of flame you-“

Jake sat back as he listened to the dwarf explain more about what one had to look for. He displayed a bit with his own cauldron as he activated it. An odd brown flame was emitted from the combat cauldron, and he had someone bring in a beast trapped in a cage.

The brown flame moved over, and the moment it touched the beast, it began turning to stone as it was petrified within seconds. The dwarf then displayed how the flame did nothing to the bars around the beast and explained how one would need to carefully make sure the type of flame deployed would work against different kinds of lifeforms.

It was all very intriguing, but Jake quickly began to realize none of this was truly something he needed. There was nothing about the flame itself, but instead, it was purely how one could create or commission cauldrons capable of changing the nature of the flame and then use the cauldron as a catalyst. There would also be later lessons about how one could make use of the inside of the cauldron itself to further empower the flames by mixing in poison or other ingredients.

The funniest part of it all was when the dwarf explained one other thing, though... how to use the cauldron as an actual weapon. How the flame could be used as a tether, and he displayed himself attacking with the cauldron telekinetically and how one could infuse the inside with flames and release it in surprise attacks. The flames inside would also be able to infuse the cauldron with certain properties if it was well-designed, such as if one had a cold flame, then the cauldron itself could give off an intense ice aura and give frost burn to any it hit.

So, to answer Jake's question, yes, part of using combat cauldrons was to bonk people with them.

However, finding it entertaining was all it ultimately was to Jake. It was clear this was aimed at individuals who were truly pure alchemists to give them a fighting chance by using their alchemy skills in combat directly. It required a special cauldron to function. Even if the dwarf teacher did say it was technically possible to make magic circles or tattoos in later grades to fulfill the same function, the reality was that what Jake already had was far better.

Jake could just make an arcane flame at any point using mana, and if he wanted to actually focus on improving that, he could get something far better. He had already mentally checked out when the dwarf mentioned something that caught his attention.

“Now, let me be clear, it is possible to integrate a Soulflame with innate combat potential that can be directly used as a weapon without any auxiliary assistance. However, these Soulflames will inadvertently also be far less useful in the alchemical process, so they are heavily de-incentivized. The only ones who should ever consider getting them are alchemists who have chosen to pursue paths where the Alchemical Flame is no longer vital.

“Not to say there aren’t Soulflames able to do both, but good luck getting one of those, much less control them. Leave those to the seniors, eh?”

There it was again. Soulflame. He had seen it mentioned in the descriptions of the lesson from the A-grade dragon too, and here it was again. The thing is, Jake had no idea what a Soulflame was. Granted, he hadn’t looked it up either, but it seemed pretty important.

Either way, the rest of the long lesson continued as there were a lot of practical demonstrations. Jake was not that into it as while the dwarf was at a higher level than Jake, and his skills in using the Alchemical Flame were phenomenal, he was still weak for his level. Clearly, a very pure craftsman, which Jake was definitely not.

When the lesson was over, Jake left along with everyone else. He could have gone earlier, but he wanted to stay out of respect for the teacher and also to give Meira some time to check the lessons and decide.

Going through the gate back to his mansion was as easy as getting to the lesson. Honestly, it was almost too convenient. Jake could go to any lesson and straight back home easily at any point. This did mean Jake had no fucking idea where he was or went on any geographical or even spatial level. He would have no way back if the gate didn't activate after a lesson.

Jake walked back towards the laboratory, where he found Meira already awaiting his return. She bowed when she saw him, as he took the initiative to speak first.

"Did you choose the five most interesting ones?" he asked.

"Yes!" she said as she went over to him. She knelt down as she held up five pieces of paper like they were the holy grail. Jake groaned internally at how she acted but took the papers nevertheless. He looked them over quickly and was in two minds about it.

The first one she had picked was called Concocting For Beginners: Tricks and Methods For Novice Alchemists. Which was, for all intents and purposes, a damn good choice. The second one was, however, not as good:

Etiquette & How To Identify the Ideal Master.

It was a lesson about how one could get the best teacher and how to act properly around them. Jake had not even skimmed it before handing Meira the paper before, but it was really some weird shit. It

included details of how one should endear themselves to a more powerful alchemist to learn from them and even included tips and tricks on some unsavory stuff to gain favor, aiming specifically at males and females going for a master of the opposite gender. How the hell Meira thought this qualified as “interesting” was above him.

Actually... it was kind of interesting, but not in a good way.

The third lesson was about the importance of finding a path in alchemy and what you were good at. Jake also agreed on that one as a good choice. In fact, it was the best of all the options. It was more a philosophy lesson and workshop to realize what you truly desired and practical tests to see what one was talented at.

The fourth was about gardening. A bit boring, but Jake could see it make sense. Finally, the fifth one was a bit... well... Jake understood, kinda, but that didn't mean he agreed on a lesson named “Walking In the Divine Shadow of the Malefic One: Power Through Devotion.”

Jake had taken his time as he looked them over. He then regarded her and asked. “Can you explain your reason behind why you think these are interesting?”

He had chosen the word interesting very purposefully. He had not said required or even useful, just interesting.

“I chose the first one because it touches on essential subjects an alchemist of the Order will no doubt need down the line, and it can help create a strong foundation.”

She had clearly expected this as she explained herself. Jake agreed on the first one, but he did notice one issue. Meira had misunderstood who it was supposed to be interesting for. She maybe had the assumption this was for some subordinate of Jake or something, and while she wasn't entirely wrong, she was off by a good margin.

"And why is it interesting?" Jake asked clarifyingly.

"Fundamental knowledge is naturally essential for an alchemist starting out, and with the Order's focus on toxins, it an ideal choice," Meira explained.

She still doesn't get it, Jake sighed. She simply didn't seem to get what interesting meant. She kept talking about the usefulness and not why something was interesting. Jake would have said it was interesting because concocting more effectively would allow him to make better poisons that would then allow him to hunt stronger prey. It would expand his horizon of game.

"Let me ask you this, why would you want to learn to concoct poison better?" Jake asked. "And in this case, "you" does refer to you in particular. Why would Meira want to take this lesson?"

This question seemed to effectively stunlock her as she failed to answer for a good five seconds. She finally spoke after half a dozen seconds with confusion: "I am not sure this one understands the assignment? If it is wished of me to learn concoction, I will naturally do my best to--"

"No," Jake interrupted. He waved his hand as he sent the five papers with lessons on them back on the pile on the alchemy table with the others. "Take the lessons again and look them over. Choose five you think are interesting. Not that you think will be interesting for an alchemist of the Order. Choose five and explain why they are interesting to you. You have three days to pick them, and you can come to ask me questions in the meantime if there is something you are unsure about, okay?"

Meira looked even more perplexed, if not downright scared, especially after he had interrupted her. She quickly bowed after he was done talking. "I apologize that I failed my task and will accept any p-"

"I never said you failed or that you did anything wrong, just for you to do it again in a different way," Jake interrupted her again. "Now, is there anything you don't understand?"

She was silent for a while, clearly hesitant to ask before she finally built up the courage. "If I may... this one fails to comprehend why her insight will have any meaning or value in identifying lessons?"

Jake felt a bit happy as she finally had the guts to question something. Sadly for her, this was not a question she would get a straight answer for, at least not yet.

"You will understand in time; just know I have my reasons," Jake said.

Which seemed to be a perfectly adequate explanation for her as she nodded and bowed in acknowledgment. She went over to pick up all the papers but looked a bit lost as Jake quickly knew why.

"The western residence."

She looked at him questioningly as if expecting an order.



“From now on, the western residence is yours to use as your personal living space. Go there and fulfill your task, alright?” Jake asked, knowing she would naturally agree, even if she didn’t seem comfortable. Jake could kind of get why.

Each of the residences was their own mansions full of luxury, and she probably didn’t feel like it was right for her to get one. But it wasn’t like Jake had other people who needed them, and if he was honest, he didn’t want her shadowing him all the time or hanging around outside whatever room he was trying to chill in.

It may not matter for others, but with Jake’s Sphere of Perception, it was just distracting and unsettling.

She luckily didn’t try to argue this point but just picked up all the papers. She bowed one final time as she spoke. “Simply call this one if there are any tasks to be done, and I will come immediately.”

“I will call you. In three days. Now go and look them over and truly consider the choices as if you were choosing the path of a close friend, a relative, or even yourself,” Jake once more clarified.

Meira bowed one last time as she left, finally giving Jake some alone time as he did what any young, healthy male would do when alone.

He picked up the spatial satchel of neurotoxic material and began making a stew in his cauldron using the Alchemical Flame to heat it up as he played with it a bit with inspiration courtesy of the lesson earlier. At the same time, he also began looking over the books Meria had brought as he decided to get some light reading and poison eating in before it was time for his second lesson on the Alchemical Flame.

But this time, it would be with dragons.

Or, well, at least one dragon.

#### Chapter 423 - Willpower, Flames & Dragons

Meira sat and stared at the pile of papers within the western residence as she had been ordered. However, she was utterly lost as to what was expected of her. The assignment simply didn't make any sense. She had done as asked the first time around already, but that was clearly unacceptable.

The problem was she couldn't figure out what would be acceptable. She began shaking a bit at the thought. She hadn't even served her new Master for a few days, and she was already disappointing him and failing tasks. Perhaps she simply wasn't good enough to comprehend what he asked of her? Was there some profound reason or deep meaning behind the task he wanted her to see?

There was only one thing she felt relatively sure of: this was a test. It had to be. Was it a way to scout out her thought process and evaluate if she was suited to serve? Maybe it was just as simple as him wanting the insights of a nobody like her because he valued perspectives widely different from his own?

She recalled the final thing he had said about if she had to choose a path for a sibling of hers. She had two sisters and five brothers, but her brothers were already set in their paths as builders and miners, while her two sisters were naturally trained to be married off or sworn to another faction or influential family.

But, what if she had to pick lessons for them? They didn't know anything about alchemy, but would it do them good to learn? Were they even talented enough to learn it? Her one sister was pretty good at mana control and a promising mage, so maybe?

Meira began looking at the lessons again. Her sister was still free, and if she learned some useful things, she would be able to increase her value. Maybe even enough to be viewed as more than just someone to be married off. Skilled alchemists were valued nearly anywhere and by any faction, so that would be a good path. If she was talented in it.

Turning her gaze to the pages, she picked up one of the lessons she had picked before about finding the path suitable for yourself. If she had to pick for her sister, brother, or even herself... this had to be one of them, right? She was certain it would be good for anyone starting out on any new path to truly learn what they were good at.

The problem was... wouldn't the other lessons be based on what it was discovered a person was talented at?

She thought again and remembered she had to answer why it was interesting. Meira thought about it and decided to write her reasoning on a separate piece of paper. As she prepared to write, a wild thought entered her head... wouldn't it be interesting if her sister was talented enough to not just learn alchemy but even become a member of a faction? Maybe even the Order of the Malefic Viper?

That would mean she would not only be able to uplift herself but everyone else. If she was good enough, she could even buy or acquire their father, who had also been turned into a slave... maybe have some influence over the clan back home?

Don't be stupid, she reminded herself as she slapped her own chin a few times, enough to draw blood. She wiped it off quickly before she sighed and wrote down that it would be interesting because it would allow someone to be more useful and have a better future. It was far more realistic her sister could become a valued servant or find work somewhere if she was a talented alchemist. Not by the Order of the Malefic Viper standards, but just for a small place like their village.

With this mindset, she tried to put together a proper list. She had been given three days, and she was certain it could not be this simple. Clearly, there was a deeper reason she had to realize, which was why she was given this much time.

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Jake felt damn good finally having some alone time. No one bothered him for over a day as he just relaxed, ate toxic materials, chilled with books, and overall had a swell of a time. The mansion itself was filled to the brim with different things to explore, including some board games that reminded Jake of chess and even a damn television of sorts. A 3D television one could buy lessons for to enjoy on their own time.

Soon it was time to leave for his second lesson. The first one had been a very low-level one where it was entirely possible Jake had been the strongest one attending. He had no interest in going back for a second one either.

The lesson he was headed to would be on an entirely different level, and Jake was extremely interested in seeing how it would work out. Before he went, he decided to actually change things up to hide his identity in case he somehow met someone who knew of him.

He changed how his level displayed all the way down to 100 and shifted the color of his cloak to appear entirely dark green. He also took off his armor and put it in his spatial storage as he shifted to something more casual. Jake was pretty sure that most who attended could easily kill him if they wanted to anyway, no matter what gear he wore.

Changing his level to 100 may seem weird, but the reason he did so was apparent: it made it damn obvious it was changed. It led to some doubt that Jake could be far stronger, likely not even in D-grade, and coupled with his Bloodline and immunity to presences, he had great confidence in faking it.

The clothes he wore were ones he had found in the mansion. It was just a casual shirt and pants that he covered with his cloak. He even went as far as to change his boots. As for the mask, Jake thought a bit as he mentally tried to change it, and to his surprise, it responded. Jake could slightly warp how it looked and even change the color just with mental commands. Perhaps it was part of that Living Wood enchantment?

With everything ready, Jake stepped through the gate to his second lesson.

Instantly he felt the wind upon his face as his environment changed completely. Jake found himself standing not in a lecture hall but atop a large flattened mountain with shaped stone pavilions on pillars surrounding a large lowered center stage.

Jake saw different creatures already lounging on the different pavilions all around him. On one was a raging inferno that sometimes took on a humanoid form, on another a large wyvern, with others close by having even god damn dragons on them.

In fact, Jake felt like the majority of those in attendance were dragons, and looking about confirmed this feeling. Down on the center stage sat a single being in meditation too. It looked like an elf or a human except for the slightly twisted horns coming out of his forehead. There were no scales covering his body at all, which surprised Jake quite a bit.

Villy had scales at all times and did not look at all like this dragon in human form. Jake wondered why that was but decided to just write it up to gods probably being able to customize their form more. Or maybe it was that the humanoid form was just highly customizable to begin with?

When Jake appeared on his own pavilion, he got a few glances his way from surrounding platforms. A few dragons and wyverns, a human, and some other scalekin were among them. It was all a bit of probing as they saw someone who was seemingly a D-grade appear.

Jake just ignored them. He did feel a slight tinge of presence worm his way as one of the dragons got curious, and the moment it impacted him, Jake glanced the way of the dragon. He met its eyes as Jake just stared. A second passed before the dragon averted its gaze, with Jake doing the same.

Their exchange had been observed by others, and after it, all probing coming his way dispersed. It was like he had passed some weird test to be allowed to stay there. Not that Jake thought a normal D-grade could manage being surrounded by C, B, and A-grades all around. He had no idea how to actually determine the grades of others present, except he knew true dragons had to be at least B-grade.

Nothing more interesting happened before it was time for the lesson to begin. The dragon teacher sitting down on the platform opened his eyes as he slowly stood up.

"Welcome."

His voice echoed throughout the entire mountain as Jake felt the inherent power in it. Not a shadow of a doubt was in his mind that the A-grade below could erase him from existence with a mere thought. It was almost exciting.

"Creation and destruction. Fundamental forces and concepts we all inadvertently touch upon on our paths to power, even more so for any alchemist. The Alchemical Flame is a fundamental force in itself, the basic version a marvel at the concept of destruction. It can destroy objects far too powerful for the user to otherwise break. Melt a slab of metal even one's own Dragonsbreath cannot leave a mark upon. It ignores anti-magical properties and can heat a dragon scale as easily as a piece of coal. However,

contrary to what one would believe based on this, the Alchemical Flame is not only made to destroy but is also a catalyst of creation.

"The purpose of this lesson today is to improve not only the aspect of creation and destruction but the very nature and connection one has to their flame. The Alchemical Flame is something each of us has wielded on our path as alchemists. A loyal companion that has been at our sides since we began walking this path. Such prolonged use leads to familiarity and understanding at a level beyond regular comprehension."

Jake was listening as he followed along well in the first part. The second part was also something he understood, even if it clearly led with an assumption of having done alchemy for a long time.

"Like the breath of a dragon, this flame is an integral part of us. It is borne from the depths of one's soul. At first, this flame is merely another skill and a tool, but as with all other things, it changes the more one uses it. In many ways, the flame becomes an expression of your identity as an alchemist. Perhaps it may not look like that, but the influence is there.

"Willpower impacts the usage of all skills. Due to the malleable nature of the Alchemical Flame, the impact of Willpower is even greater; due to the conceptual nature of the Alchemical Flame, Willpower is more impactful. However, the unconscious effects of Willpower will result in changes to your flame outside of your own intention at times. Many attempt to alleviate this by increasing their level of control and focus during crafting sessions, but I would like to propose doing the exact opposite."

There was almost a shift on the mountaintop as if what the A-grade had just said was very revolutionary, or perhaps just went against what many presently did. Jake, of course, was mostly clueless about what the guy was on about, even if he did know Willpower impacted all kinds of magic and energy control.

"If your Alchemical Flame becomes so ingrained within you to synchronize directly with your will, a new path opens. I hold this lesson because I recently experienced enlightenment in my struggles to improve my flame. I did not believe it possible, but one day, while I worked with my flame, it appeared to almost oscillate in tandem with my will. It began moving without input as I felt it be controlled not by my mana but by my will alone.

"The level of control reached higher levels than ever before, and for a brief moment, I felt like I had grasped the cradle of creation and the vessel of destruction incarnate within my palm. It faded as the flame ran out of mana, but the enlightenment remained. Allow me to demonstrate."

Instantly the entire center stage was bathed in deep red flames. It swayed in odd patterns as the dragon stood in the middle. He opened the palm of his hand as the flames gathered and took the form of a statue depicting a dragon.

"First comes creation," the teacher said as the flames parted and spread out, revealing the dragon statue. However, it was not made of flames but from what looked like marble.

"Entirely a production of the concept of creation born from the flame."

Jake stared as he felt confused... had the teacher just made something from nothing using the alchemical flame?

"This statue is as real as anything else, created only from Willpower and my Alchemical Flame. Of course, creation as a concept is nothing difficult with sufficient power. However, my method varies from such crude methods. Usually, the expenditure of such a task would be significant, but with the Alchemical Flame, I can tap into the system-created concepts embedded within to make use of the innate properties of creation embedded in the Alchemical Flame.



"The same is true for destruction."

The flame swept over his hand as the statue disappeared. It continued on behind him where it swept over a mountain range in the distance that likewise seemed to simply disappear the moment it made contact with the flame.

"Once more, it is all application of Willpower to amplify innate conceptual properties of destruction. However, as I said before, all of this was brought forth from achieving true resonance between your Willpower and your Alchemical Flame. This is where the importance of the Soulspace enters. Do note that the ability to access and actively influence your own Soulspace through conscious thought is a requirement for the following to be done. If you have not already reached the stage of condensing a Soulshape Avatar or something similar, that is something you should begin work on as soon as possible either way."

Jake felt like a few in the surroundings were disappointed, but Jake didn't really get it. He knew his Serene Soul Meditation was him entering his Soulspace, and he could enter it anyway if he wanted. Maybe giant lizards were just lazy with that kind of thing?

Then again, it was possible Jake had kind of cheated being able to enter his Soulshape. He had gone there during the Trial of Myriad Poisons, and he knew why. It was all the influence of Jake's Bloodline that seemed to effectively simplify things for him to understand them better. That is why what back then was essentially a fight of Records was transformed into Jake fighting another version of himself.

The same concept applied with the sky of stars he had made to represent Shroud of the Primordial. The entire Soulspace was like a conceptual place where Jake's understanding was given a metaphorical form. So, surprisingly enough, he wasn't completely lost during the lesson so far.

"However, there is one more crucial step. As most of you have no doubt noticed, my Alchemical Flame is not pure. It is instead my Soulflame that I integrated long ago, created from an ember granted to me by an elder from my Dragonflight. But fret not, for even without a Soulflame, there are methods to mimic one, just be aware you will never achieve full oscillation before you get a Soulflame of your own. "

By now, Jake was really kicking himself for having not actually looked up what the hell a Soulflame was and how to get one.

#### Chapter 424 - Mysterious Senior

Jake had so far wondered one thing during this lesson so far. How the hell was it worth 420,000 AC? Like, sure, it sounded like it was an interesting viewpoint and application of Willpower merged with the Alchemical Flame, but it didn't seem that special. It was basically just a trick most would probably figure out at some point themselves and definitely not worth paying that much for. It was also possible that those at higher grades just got a shitload of AC.

Luckily, after the first hour and the introduction was complete, his answer was given.

"To achieve this oscillation and resonance between your Willpower and Alchemical Flame, I have set up a number of methods and training exercises. It will primarily be done within the Soulspace and will depend on if you possess a Soulflame or not. The first parts can be done either way," the A-grade dragon said.

He waved his hand as crystals appeared on each pavilion at once. Jake inspected it for a moment as he walked over and held it in his hand after a brief scan.

"This information crystal will hold several exercises to be done as well as my own insights during the time of enlightenment, as well as even experimental reports of prior testing I have performed. There are certain magic scripts within I would highly recommend looking into as well as a formation I would advise either making yourself or commissioning. The formation will allow you to practice controlling the flame

without using mana but only Willpower. Most potent anti-mana formation will make do, but the one included in the crystal is specifically targeted towards mana control without limiting Perception-based detection skills.”

Finally, it was getting somewhere. Jake had not expected to be handed an information crystal, and from the looks of it, the thing was filled to the brim with insights, blueprints, and exercises. His brief scan did reveal it obviously required a very solid foundation, and Jake had a strong feeling practicing anything within would be a dead-end instantly for him simply due to how damn weak he was.

The practice in the real world, at least. Because a large part took place within the Soulspace where Jake had far more confidence in competing with near-anyone. Some of the scripts and magic circles were even to be placed within the Soulspace for practice and looked complicated as fuck, and as they existed within the Soulspace, Jake saw no way of getting help for those.

”As mentioned earlier, this state of harnessing your flame as an extension of your will is suited, if not made, for a Soulflame. Due to the Soulbound nature of a Soulflame, there are few other ways of establishing the metaphysical conceptual connection between your will and the flame regardless of all other circumstances. There are methods within the crystal to mimic a Soulflame, and while this may seem like a waste of time compared to simply just waiting till you acquire a Soulflame yourself, it is most definitely not.”

This seemed to instantly pique the interest of everyone once more, making it quite obvious many of them didn’t have a Soulflame yet. It also made Jake pay more attention as he, of course, didn’t have one either.

The dragon down on the platform smirked at the interest displayed by everyone.

"In fact, this may be the most valuable aspect of this lesson. Through practicing with my disciples and juniors, I learned that simply learning this method will result in a significantly improved ability to integrate a Soulflame as it touches on many of the same concepts as the integration process. I would go as far as to say it will almost double the chance compared to attempting it before fully comprehending my method."

Now that got a response as a wave of disbelief and skepticism went through the mountain peak. Jake himself didn't know if getting a Soulflame or whatever was hard to begin with, so he didn't even react but just sat back and listened to why this was the case.

To paraphrase, it was down to similarities of methods and the fact that a Soulflame in itself was apparently very dependent and heavily impacted by Willpower, so if one began learning this method, one kind of began learning to better control a Soulflame too.

The lesson continued as hours slowly passed, and the dragon teacher summoned magic circles and began displaying different examples of how one could create certain arrays to ease the initial process. He even spoke about certain flasks or potions one could brew to speed up the process and some poisons with what sounded like psychedelic properties. Those seemed to be a big hit in the Order when it came to comprehending high-level concepts.

Jake also quickly learned this knowledge had not come cheap. Well, it was cheap for the dragon but not his assistants, disciples, and even slaves. This is also where Jake learned that this entire technique and many of the formations and practices could also be dangerous and lead to adverse effects, perhaps even making the Alchemical Flame worse.

A Soulflame was also dangerous to integrate, it seemed. Like, the dragon said the chance of the Soulspace being burned down and the soul destroyed was far lower after learning his technique, and that sure sounded dangerous. Jake was seriously going to look up what a Soulflame was after this lesson.

The lesson slowly passed as Jake sat there and took it all in. Towards the end, he had to admit he failed to understand about ninety percent of what was said, and all the nitty-gritty stuff about formations, magic circles, and whatnot just flew over his head.

As the lesson was soon coming to an end, the dragon appeared to have one final demonstration in the pipeline.

"Now, to finish off this lesson, let me show you the fruit of my labor."

A flame appeared all around him as it hung in the air and spread out to surround the entire mountain. It covered an area of dozens of square kilometers as the dragon spoke again.

"A bit of mana to summon the flame," he said as the anti-magic array he had just erected before this final demonstration activated. "Now, usually with mana cut off, my connection would fade... but my flame has already transcended the need for such a feeble bond. However, do not think that means it is any less potent."

The flame began closing in on all the pavilions one by one. It began burning into the stone that formed the pavilions like it was nothing as the destructive flame turned the solid enchanted stone to nothing. On every single platform, the flame closed in on those sitting there as some reacted by making barriers or shrinking away from it, while others just frowned, clearly unsure what the hell the dragon was up to.

Everyone except for one.

Jake stood up as he curiously touched the deep red Alchemical Flame of the A-grade dragon. His hand sunk into it easily, and he felt like it was slightly warm to the touch, and it felt a bit weird. It wasn't solid, but he did feel like he touched... something. He waved his hand around a bit inside the flame before he pulled it out again, not a single mark upon his skin. Jake did not wear gloves currently, but based on how it didn't harm his sleeves, those would have been fine too.

He hadn't really been thinking as Jake became aware of the attention of everyone present now being focused squarely on him. Even the dragon teacher looked at Jake a bit curiously, with a hint of surprise also there. It was understandable why. The flame had been shown to destroy the powerful enchanted stone Jake knew he wouldn't even be able to leave a mark upon with his full power, yet Jake had touched it so nonchalantly, clearly aware it would do him no harm.

As for why Jake touched the flame... well, because he knew it wasn't harmful to him in the least. His danger sense was silent even as it closed in, and all his senses indicated it was harmless.

"Oh, you saw through my flame?" the teacher said, clearly asking Jake. Jake then felt Identify upon him and naturally blocked it, but not before leaking through a bit of his own aura and presence. The dragon reacted as he smiled and bowed slightly.

"May I know what senior thinks of my technique and how he saw through it?"

Jake was a bit surprised but didn't let it show. He did feel the pressure, though, as everyone now focused on him even more, and with the teacher showing such respect, it indicated Jake was stronger than him... did the dragon think Jake was a high-tier A-grade or an S-grade or something?

Put on the spot, Jake felt like he had to answer as he tried to actually act way smarter and more powerful than he was. Also... he had a feeling he was right, and even if he made himself look like an idiot, he could just leave and hopefully never see anyone present again ever in his life.

"No matter how much you control it, it is still an Alchemical Flame and bound by its fundamental concepts. Additionally, with only Willpower, it will naturally act according to your will, and your will was clearly not to harm anyone. Both consciously and unconsciously. The flame is destructive, yes, but only to objects without souls. Naturally, this includes items bound to an individual with a soul, such as equipment," Jake said, faking being as confident as he could.

"So simple deduction based on intent?" the dragon asked curiously. "The Soulflame I possess is one with inherent combat potential; would it not be risky to bet on an assumption? Not that I believe senior would have been harmed either way."

"There are no issues if my ability to deduct and detect intent are good enough," Jake answered back. "Additionally, this flame is only powered by Willpower. It isn't made for a fight but to destroy objects that put up no inherent resistance. It is a conceptual flame, didn't you say so yourself? So it can only act within the confines of its concept."

"What if my intent and will was to cause harm when the flame is conceptually able to damage living entities?" the dragon asked again. It didn't seem like a questioning, but more like the dragon was legitimately looking for input on how to improve his technique.

Jake had to be honest; he was a bit out of his depth by now. However, he did still have one answer. Something he himself felt was obvious.

"How can anyone believe a flame based solely on Willpower is meant to cause harm when not a shred of killing intent or bloodlust enters it? It is driven by your will, and as said before, that is both your conscious and unconscious will. A bit of killing intent would leak in, even if it is only the most minute trace."

The dragon seemed to frown a bit as he asked. "I feel uncertain such a level of killing intent would even be detectable. If I even purposefully willed for it to be hidden, it will be undetectable either way, will it not?"

"Not to my senses. And without any killing intent," Jake smirked as he touched it again, "this flame couldn't even harm a D-grade."

A few seconds passed as the dragon nodded and smiled as he chuckled a bit at what he no-doubt assumed was a joke. Hey, the best jokes were rooted in reality, right? The dragon finally bowed as he gracefully thanked Jake. "You have my gratitude for your insights; I shall take it up for consideration as I work on improving my technique."

He said those words and waited for Jake to nod in acknowledgment before the dragon continued.

"Let us return to the demonstration. I hope none of you had a fright as the flame of destruction closed in, but as shown by the senior, the flame was indeed harmless. However, this is only one of its aspects. For after destruction follows creation!"

The flames that had been mostly spread out during Jake and the dragon's conversation closed in again, and in a wondrous display, it touched upon the broken edges of the platforms as new stone seemed to grow out. It did not have the same color as the old pavilion, nor did it seem to retain the enchanted nature, but it was still actual stone that appeared out of nothing.

No... it appeared from the flame. A flame of creation.



"While it may look like the stone appears out of nothing, we all know it isn't so. The environmental mana alone is enough to construct this stone as it responds to my flame. Once more, this does not consume my own mana, but the flame functions as a tool imposing my will upon the environment to amplify the concept of creation," the dragon said as he finished reconstructing all the platforms.

All of the red flame then just disappeared like it had never been there, and the dragon teacher dispelled the anti-magic formation he was standing in.

"Now for questions."

What followed was three hours of Jake just sitting there listening to questions he didn't understand with equally if not more complicated answers. Most were related to the formations and magical scrips, with a few being about complimentary alchemical creations.

Jake got none of it but felt too awkward to be the first one to leave. Clearly, those present had spent a lot and didn't want to waste even a second of it. He at least had this time to truly consider all those present.

There were only about two hundred present, far less than the prior lesson. Most also stayed in their beast forms or true forms without anyone batting an eye. Jake did not know if he should be surprised or not, but he did not detect a single Bloodline anywhere yet. Not in this lesson or anywhere in the Order so far. It appeared they were pretty rare, though Jake was certain he would meet some eventually.

When the lesson finally ended, and Jake was prepared to go, a figure suddenly teleported onto his platform. He didn't even need to look as he saw it was the teacher.

"I want to thank senior for attending this lesson of mine. Would it be of interest to exchange contact information? In that case, you can personally ask me if you encounter any points you want further elaborated," the A-grade dragon said.

Jake felt damn weird as it couldn't be more obvious the dragon thought Jake was some powerful hidden master who had graced the lesson with his presence.

By now, everyone else had already left, and it was just Jake and the dragon who remained. He considered for a while before Jake answered a bit truthfully. "I am not the ideal person to ask for advice from if that is what you are looking for, and I am certain you have a better use for your time than giving individual free counseling to strangers."

It was a polite rejection that the dragon accepted with grace. "I understand. May I at least know senior's name or title?"

He was put on the spot again as Jake considered making up some weird title or name on the spot. Maybe just a normal fake name? No, it would be weird to act like a super-powerful entity and then introduce himself as Bob.

In the end, he didn't quickly get on anything as he shook his head. "Who I am does not matter."

Jake opened his gate as he prepared to step through before saying one last thing. "Your lesson was very informative. Keep up the good work."

With those words, Jake stepped through the gate and appeared back in the mansion. Suddenly he felt exhausted as everything hit him, and he promptly went towards the bedroom where he flopped down

on the bed, feeling exhausted from getting so much damn complex information jammed into his head in one day.

He had learned more complicated magic theory today than Jake had encountered on his entire path of alchemy so far.

And the worst part was...

He still didn't know what the fuck a Soulflame was.

Chapter 425 - Soulflame & Exposed

Jake woke up in his new huge mansion bed after a well-deserved rest. He had taken a nap to rejuvenate himself and felt thankful that was still an option. Jake had learned some races didn't know how to sleep and never became able to, no matter if they gained human form or not. He was grateful that at least he would never lose his ability to, only the need for sleep. Sleeping was nice.

Sitting up in the bed, he saw he had slept only three or so hours. He stretched a bit before he got up and headed to the library to finally figure out what the hell a Soulflame was. He had already checked the Viper's drop of blood using Sagacity and found nothing, and the crystal he gained from the lesson didn't include a description either.

He would also leave Meira alone for her task, so he went to find the books himself. Not that he would necessarily have asked her either way. Jake was a big boy who could go to the library all by himself.

The library was huge and naturally came pre-stocked with books. All of them centered around D-grade alchemy and general knowledge. In the middle was a large tome that served as an index of sorts, and

Jake went over and opened it. A projection of a list appeared, and with mental commands, Jake searched for the name Soulflame.

It returned a few thousand results, so Jake tried with something more precise.

He narrowed it down a few more times until he finally found a book just called: Soulflames! Beware!

It was a picture book. For children.

Perfection.

Jake quickly tracked it down as he took it out from the shelf, and it truly was a colorful picture book. It had a picture of a flame on the cover with two small, scaled children, staring at it. Jake couldn't wait as he opened it and began reading it. Well, reading was a strong word as it was light on text and heavy on colorful pictures.

He skimmed it for fun but quickly found it wasn't what he had hoped for. It was more a warning than a guide on Soulflames for children not to absorb any. So, by context clues, now Jake at least knew Soulflames were something you absorbed.,

Deciding to not mess around anymore, Jake went and actually found a real book on the subject. This one had the far more normal name: Locating, Identifying & Understanding Soulflames For Beginners.

Could he have just asked Villy? Sure, but he had an entire library to himself, so why not make use of it? The library also came with comfortable armchairs, so Jake found one and took a seat as he started reading.

So... Soulflames.

Soulflames were not some skill rank or something you "made"; instead, it was something you found. Soulflames were a special kind of natural treasure found throughout the multiverse, but they were scarce and often quite dangerous and incredibly difficult to find due to appearing in dangerous places.

A Soulflame formed when an environment reached a certain threshold, and an elemental was about to be born and awaken spirituality, but somehow it failed and turned into a Soulflame instead. It was just not truly a living object, but somehow it managed to retain a fragment of a Truesoul from what Jake gathered, making it a potent item.

This meant a Soulflame did have partial properties of living beings. It did not have levels, but it could grow independent of anyone or anything else. It was not in the same vein that other items grew either. Items just grew with time and absorbed atmospheric mana while being compatible for upgrades, but a Soulflame needed to "learn" and upgrade itself. Because while a Soulflame did not live, it did have instincts that landed somewhere between a natural treasure with innate defensive abilities and a truly living thing.

These rare flames were incredibly valuable due to their special natures and something most alchemists desired, but it wasn't as simple as finding one. Firstly, Soulflames had rarities, and while they could be upgraded, it was difficult. The only way to upgrade a Soulflame was to have it absorb similar Soulflames in order to "learn" from them, as mentioned earlier.

So even if one got a common rarity Soulflame, it wasn't necessarily good. In fact, Soulflames below rare were often not viewed as anything worth ever absorbing. These flames should instead be used as fuel for other Soulflames.

Then there was the issue of also needing a compatible Soulflame. Soulflames came in all shapes, sizes, affinities, and with innate concepts. Jake would not be able to absorb a Soulflame of pure light magic, and while he could absorb a Soulflame of the water affinity, it would probably "nerf" him and his current Alchemical Flame as he would get a flame he wasn't good at using and didn't truly fit him.

Alchemists had found ways of absorbing these Soulflames and making them a part of themselves by integrating them into their Truesouls, like they were Soulbound items. This process also integrated the Soulflame with their Alchemical Flame and effectively permanently merged the two. Big focus on the word permanently because once a Soulflame and an Alchemical Flame were merged, it was viewed as permanent. The book did mention methods of undoing it and unbinding a Soulflame existed but also emphasized it would come with severe consequences.

So you shouldn't just merge with a Soulflame haphazardly. If Jake merged with a common rarity one now, it would downgrade the rarity of his Alchemical Flame to common, and based on the nature of the Soulflame, potentially make his Alchemical Flame skill useless for what Jake currently used it for.

This did mean many alchemists never got a Soulflame. Soulflames weren't necessary, even if they were good to have, and an alchemist with a Soulflame and one without at a similar rarity and level would be unequal. However, it was far easier just to upgrade your own Alchemical Flame to higher rarities and far easier to have one suited to you if you never absorbed a Soulflame.

To put it simply, a Soulflame was absorbing a natural treasure that merged with Alchemical Flame, adding another layer of difficulty to the upgrade process while "locking in" the nature of the flame semi-permanently. This did result in a better flame – assuming you got one suited to you, that is.

However, he did discover one thing... getting an Arcane Soulflame was not going to happen. Transmuting one was not possible due to their state as semi-living entities. Giving birth to one, while theoretically possible, would likely take Jake thousands of years and way more resources than it was worth. And that was from an optimistic viewpoint.

So, anyway. Now that Jake had an idea what a Soulflame was, the next question was obvious.

How did he get one? And should he even get one?

To the surprise of absolutely no one, the easiest way to obtain a Soulflame was to just buy one. Alchemists had devised methods of trapping Soulflames and sealing them for later sale, but even that process was difficult.

As the Soulflame had innate spirituality, it would struggle. It would try to destroy whatever sealed it, and often its power was not to be underestimated. Jake even read many examples of people dying to Soulflames that they tried to capture. The only thing more dangerous than capturing a Soulflame was to try and merge with it.

When the dragon teacher had mentioned the risk of scorching one's Soulspace, it was not a joke or an exaggeration. It was a common occurrence that people who had spent obscene amounts of money on a Soulflame would find themselves killed or crippled in the process of absorbing them. The book Jake had found did not touch on any absorption methods but did warn one against attempting without a solid plan.

The question of if he should get one was also tricky and one he couldn't truly answer. It was the kind of thing Jake would only know if he ever came across one, and when that happened... well, he would follow his intuition.

Albaromoz Emberflight returned from holding his first lesson in quite a while as he instantly took out a token and sent a message towards an Elder of the Dragonflight. The information he included resulted in an instantaneous answer as he was granted an audience immediately. However, not with the one he expected...

He headed to the teleportation hub as he went towards the territory of the local Emberflight Clan. The Emberflight Clan was a Dragonflight consistent of thousands of branches spread throughout the multiverse in many different sectors and planets. They had naturally also chosen to have a presence on Primordial-4 due to the vicinity of the Order of the Malefic Viper. Also, the fact it was a Great Planet just made it a natural space to set up a branch.

The Emberflight Clan was a Dragonflight that specialized in the concept of fire but also alchemy. The Order was a great place to send their young and for them to learn methods not taught anywhere else. In fact, the Dragonflight currently had well-over ten thousand of their young geniuses attending, and many higher-leveled beings like himself also make use of the Order.

Albaromoz teleported a few more times before he went towards the Firebound Peak, home of the local branch leader. It was a Grand Elder of the Emberflight Clan that had stepped into the realms of divinity dozens of Eras ago.

Flying towards the mountain, he felt the pressure from the flames that burned at the top. It pierced the sky like a pillar of the world, extending an impossible distance. The heat emanating from the Peak halfway up would be enough to kill a C-grade, and the chamber of the Grand Elder was something Albaromoz as an A-grade couldn't handle easily.

When he reached the Peak, he found himself before a giant golden gate leading into it. He kneeled before it as it swung open, inviting him in. This was only his second time there, with the first time being when he had been granted his Soulflame by the Grand Elder herself. It was a Soulflame nurtured by their clan only granted to elites, and Albaromoz had gained his shortly after reaching A-grade.



Through the golden gate, he entered a massive hall of gold with countless precious treasures scattered throughout. A single pillar of the hall would rival the wealth of most A-grades, and the treasures scattered haphazardly would be able to create wars in even A-grade empires.

It was truly a wonderous Dragon Cave, far better than Albaromoz's own.

"Child of Emberflight," a voice echoed as Albaromoz felt the pressure, and he instantly kneeled. A being appeared before him as he purposefully bowed even deeper.

"Patron Fireplume," Albaromoz spoke in reverence. Yes, the Grand Elder was not only his benefactor and leader of the local branch but also his Patron. He looked up and saw the horned woman, wearing a deep red dress that looked to be burning as she stood in the middle of the hall and regarded him.

"This knowledge you bring is not to be taken lightly... are you certain?" her ethereal voice echoed throughout the hall. Albaromoz felt the barriers fully up as their conversation was fully sealed from the outside world.

"I would not deign to use the word certain, but I do hold enough confidence to request an audience just on the chance I am correct. The ambient mana surrounding him was fresh, not from here. His knowledge seemed surface-level at best, even if he had deep insights into certain elements. Additionally, he somehow possessed enough Academy Credits to attend my lesson, which means he must have a backer within the Order. He was the last one to sign up for the lesson, too, despite it being available for two years... and he signed up the day the new batch from the ninety-third universe finished the entry-dungeon. He had the blessing of the Malefic One and was able to hide from my Identify effortlessly. What he did feed me was purposeful... and I felt a presence that should not belong to one such as him," Albaromoz explained.

"Elaborate."

"The presence was... and pardon my disrespect, more powerful than Patron Fireplume's, at least it felt as such. Yet he was no god as he possessed a blessing. Coupled with my belief, he is one of the newcomers from the new universe..."

Albaromoz had confidence in his theory. In fact, he was certain enough that he would bet his life on it.

His Patron naturally understood as she also answered in a serious voice. One that meant she also understood the gravity of the discovery.

A young human, likely only D-grade at best, able to hide his identity and remain unperturbed beneath the presence of an A-grade. One who could leak a presence more powerful than a god while also holding a blessing from one, meaning he wasn't a god himself. One with deep insights into certain elements of something while only having surface-level elsewhere. Newly integrated... the conclusion was obvious to Albaromoz and his Patron.

"It's a Bloodline Patriarch."

The conclusion was obvious. A transcendence was also theoretically possible, but passive transcendences were beyond rare. No, a Bloodline made far more sense.

Bloodlines appearing far more in new universes was a well-known fact. It was like the system had "stored up" Bloodlines until the generation that would be integrated happened. They were also always

Bloodline Patriarchs with entirely new Bloodlines as they came from a new universe. This was a golden opportunity, and Albaromoz knew it.

"However, he is already a member of the Order of the Malefic Viper," Patron Fireplume said.  
"Moreover, you failed to get his contact information. This is, of course, assuming you are correct. Something I have no way of discovering as he is hidden within the Order."

"With permission, may I direct the young mistress to evaluate him during a lesson? If my theory is correct, he is bound to attend some of the introductory lessons, and including her as one of the scouts would allow us to see if he does indeed possess a Bloodline," Albaromoz inquired.

The young mistress was a young talent of the clan who came from a prestigious line from the main clan headquarters. She also possessed the Bloodline of the main clan, making her an ideal candidate as those with Bloodlines could feel one another.

Patron Fireplume appeared in thought for a moment before she agreed. "Very well, but keep me updated at every step. If it is truly as you say, he may have a pinnacle-level Bloodline. And whatever happens, do not cause issues within the Order or overstep any boundaries."

That was a given, Albaromoz thought. He didn't have a death wish.

"Less than a week," Vilastromoz smiled in triumph.

"For it to be discovered he has a Bloodline... not that he is your Chosen," Duskleaf protested.

"See, the key is in the details. We made a bet how long it would take till his secrets were discovered by a public faction, and I said less than a week, and you said more than a week. By all metrics, I win," the Viper insisted.

"Fine, you win, congratulations, you are the best and most correct ever," Duskleaf said sarcastically. "Are you gonna do anything about it?"

"Why would I? Isn't this just gonna make things more fun?" the Malefic Viper said with a big grin.

#### Chapter 426 - A New Path

Jake spent the next few hours researching Soulflames a bit more but eventually put it on hold and shelved the entire topic. Choosing a Soulflame was something he didn't doubt he would eventually do, but he wanted to get a bit further on his path first. In fact, getting a Soulflame as a D-grade was generally viewed as a bad idea, and Jake had to learn how to make certain personalized arrays first anyway.

Due to that, Jake returned to studying neurotoxins. He also began actually selecting some lessons to attend in a week or so when the introductory lessons began. From a talk with Reika, he learned that another batch of new students had just arrived that day, and apparently, even more were coming. Not from the ninety-third universe, but just from across the multiverse. It seemed like the Order was really recruiting!

At least he thought so until he discovered this was just a normal occurrence every year. The real recruitment periods were far rarer and often had millions of new entries, while a few hundred every day were just the stragglers and transfers.

The reason it was like this was that – lo and behold – people talented in alchemy weren't born according to the recruitment schedule of the Order. Due to that, it technically recruited all year round, but with

just far fewer entering every day. Lessons for newer students were thus only held once a month or so when a good batch had arrived as teachers didn't wanna waste their time holding lessons for a few dozen students only.

So far, Jake had picked a few lessons that he wanted to attend. They were widely spread out and covered a plethora of topics, as he had taken to heart the words of the scalekin projection during the dungeon. He had a shallow base, and he wanted to solidify it by getting a good grasp of many different topics.

With Sagacity, he could more easily pick up and learn skills he didn't have the specific skill for as well. Jake still had no idea how to make some common alchemy products such as flasks and pills. Both of those were also mainstays, and Jake learned from Reika she already knew how to make pills. In fact, when it came to beneficiary products, she specialized in pills. So it looked like they would attend a few pill-making lessons together as Reika had gotten slammed during her own dungeon that her methodology was flawed, and she needed to pick up more traditional methods to shore up her weaknesses.

He did, however, notice one problem Reika also pointed out. The Second World Congress was coming up relatively soon, and he wondered how exactly that would work. Would he have to go back to Earth to attend, or would he get an invitation while in the Order? If he could enter while in the Order, where would he go, and didn't he need to select people to enter with like last time? Many questions, so little time.

Questions he would ignore until they came relevant. He did as always and kept things simple. Even if he did not attend the Second World Congress, Jake honestly didn't care much. He would go if he could as he was sure some important votes would prop up, but if it turned out to be annoyingly difficult to attend, he could just have Miranda handle it.

On the third day since he did his lesson with the dragon, a certain elf appeared. Almost on the dot, when three days had passed since she was given her task, Meira stood nervously outside the bedroom Jake had used to read in. What? Huge beds were great for reading.

She looked nervous as she stood with a small pile of papers. Meira kept looking down at them and even looked like she was on the edge of just leaving again.

Jake wasn't giving her the chance to.

"Come in," he said as he jumped off the bed and, with a string of mana, made the double-door swing open. She nervously stood outside and nearly jumped when he did so, clearly not aware Jake knew she was there despite Jake having shown to always know several times prior.

She quickly reacted as she bowed and presented the papers before her. "I have chosen five just as ordered!"

Jake didn't move to take the papers but just stood there as he asked. "And why did you pick those five?"

He was already partly prepared to send her away again, but she unexpectedly had a good answer. "Because I believe they can change someone's Path."

Raising an eyebrow, Jake motioned for her to elaborate.

"The lessons of the Order will allow even a novice to step into the realm of alchemy. Even if it is impossible to become a master or even remotely skilled in only five lessons, it can help build a foundation and set a path for later development and even give access to more potent classes and professions," Meira answered.

Jake nodded along with her words. However, he was not satisfied and threw her a look. He saw her grit her teeth a bit as she looked more nervous than before. Like she really didn't want to say what she was about to.

"If one does prove skilled... it can allow someone to find good employment and a safe future..." she began.

Jake was about to protest as she continued.

"Or, if really skilled, perhaps even join the Order or forge their own path."

Now, this is where Jake had to be perfectly honest about one thing... he was never sure what he actually wanted Meira to do or decide. He had no profound realization or divine epiphany in mind he wanted to subtly guide her towards. He just wanted her to, for once in her life, fucking dream a little and use her imagination.

He was already plenty satisfied as he nodded. "Leave the five lessons here, and I shall look them over. I will call for you if there is anything."

Meira looked reluctant but did as told and left the papers. Jake closed his eyes as she left to think as he subtly picked up a small voice she no-doubt thought he wouldn't hear.

"Maybe even a better life..."

Jake grinned when he heard it. It wasn't his fault she thought she could hide from a ten-thousand Perception D-grade.

As for the papers themselves, only one of the previous ones remained. It was the one about finding out what you were good at. It was the one Jake fully agreed with the first time around. The others were a bit different from what Jake had thought:

#### Metaphysiology For Beginners

A lesson about comprehending Soulshapes of other living beings and understanding how energy traveled in their body. It was a lesson Jake himself had looked at but ultimately filtered out for now as he frankly didn't need it. He could learn such things through infecting foes with poison and track it. Also, it was the kind of thing Jake knew he was way better at learning during live combat than in a boring classroom.

As for why Meira wanted it? Jake had some clues, but he wasn't going to ask. Considering it was a bit of an odd choice, Jake was certain it was made with consideration.

#### Internal & Touch-Based Mana Control I

Now, this one made more sense as, from what Jake had gathered, Meira was entirely self-taught. Well, so was Jake, but Jake was Jake, and he had learned it was a bad idea to use himself as a basis of what one could expect after he had assumed Neil and the others to be utter morons for not being able to freely manipulate mana as mid-tier E-grades. That it was touch-based also showed it was chosen with more consideration than just "mana control good." So yeah, a well-chosen lesson.



## Novice Potioneering

Jake honestly had no comments on this one... it just touched on how to make potions for absolute beginners, and the only real thing of note was how it seemed to almost target servants and mass producers.

The final lesson was the most interesting, and he truly meant interesting.

## Tempering Your Mental State: The Basics of A Stable Mind

There were a lot of lessons Jake had expected her to maybe select. He had assumed she would pick some he would very much disagree with, maybe one about how a servant could make their master like them more or how to be a better test subject.

What Jake had not expected was for Meira to select a lesson all about dealing with Jake's shit.

In more seriousness, it was a lesson to temper one's mental state. Jake read it over and had to admit it was probably a good idea, especially for someone like Meira. It was all about keeping a cool head and not losing one's head in a stressful situation or during a crafting session. For Meira, it would allow her to hopefully become able to also improve her mindset. Jake didn't know if she recognized this or if she seriously did just want to be able to not constantly be nervous around him. This is, of course, assuming she knew these lessons were for her.

When Jake was done looking at them all, he felt oddly satisfied. He felt like he had gotten through to Meira at least partially, and she had actually put thought into her selections. There were no lessons related to poison whatsoever, and only one that was even directly linked to alchemy.

He would wait a while before calling Meira again, but he was ready to “approve” them. He just wanted to make sure she knew the lessons were for her. Based on the selections, it could be anyone. It was entirely possible her interpretation had been to pick lessons a servant or a slave could take, but her final words as she left made him doubt that. Even if it was made for those... well, they fit Meira too.

Jake returned to his books as he called back Meira the next day for a follow-up. She appeared even more nervous than the first time proving she really did need that final lesson. Not that Jake had anything against her being an open book. In fact, he preferred it.

“Who do you think these lessons are suited for?” Jake asked her first thing.

“A novice of alchemy and someone generally lacking in insight and knowledge already possessed by most,” Meira answered honestly.

“And what kind of people would that be?”

“Workers, servants, slaves, or merely those from a weak world or perhaps a suppressed faction,” she answered promptly again. He wasn’t sure if she had predicted this line of questioning, but she sure felt ready.

Jake looked up at her as he asked again, more directly. “Do you think I made you select these lessons for anyone in particular?”

He really wanted her to answer herself. It would indicate she at least believed it a possibility. Jake hoped he had made it obvious by now it was for her.

“These lessons would be ideal if there are followers back in the ninety-third universe or others who serv-  
“

Jake looked at her with a raised eyebrow, his mask naturally invisible as he made it every time they spoke.

His raised eyebrow was enough to make her stop talking. She looked even more nervous than before. Jake could almost see the internal battle as she considered if she should truly speak. Meira finally clenched her fists as she asked in a meek voice:

“Me?”

Jake just grinned as the first step of operation: “get rid of elf slave,” was completed.

Miranda felt the air change as the ominous verdant light lit up the hidden cave.

A pentagram around a hundred meters across lit up the neatly decorated cave. In the corners of the pentagram were five altars, all giving off intense energy as they pulsed with power and burned with verdant light. It was a ritual circle of immense power, and standing within it, Miranda felt her own power swell. That is in addition to the passive effects it already had.

These altars were naturally the Yalsten Altars given by Jake.

[Yalsten Altar of the Damned (Ancient)] – An altar created by an extremely skilled crafter from the long-perished world of Yalsten, using a single unbroken piece of an unknown metal. The metal of the altar itself makes it near-indestructible for any being below A-grade. This altar has absorbed vast amounts of blood to empower it further, as countless sacrifices have been made upon it. It has been enchanted further to increase the effectiveness of all rituals made using it as a catalyst. The effect of all sacrificial rituals increased further. Faint Records and echoes of old rituals remain imprinted upon the altar, making it passively infuse anyone lying upon it with the life energy of those once sacrificed upon it. Requirements: N/A

On top of each altar laid eggs Miranda had gone far to acquire. They were not meant to ever give birth to anything but were simply vessels of pure vital energy. They looked more like obsidian stones than anything else and were currently just greedily absorbing the passive life energy given off by the altars.

The pentagram was done now, but that was only the first part as Miranda began working on the exterior walls with scrips and whatnot while also smoothening them out to more easily write on them. In fact, this was the kind of ritual circle Miranda would have to constantly fortify and improve as time passed.

Not that she complained... she had worked on it since the Auction ended and had so far gained seven levels just setting it up and working on it alone. She had already made a circle like this before, but the difference between the old and her new one was the difference between heaven and earth. Miranda was aware that while within the circle and her own domain that was Haven, she was near-unbeatable.

Miranda didn't know if it was some kind of self-induced Stockholm syndrome, but she had truly begun to enjoy being a witch.

She sat down in meditation as above ground, a projection of her body appeared in the office. Miranda felt her senses be transferred, but she only managed to touch a few papers on the table before one of them accidentally cut her and the projection dispersed.

"Could have gone better," she chuckled as she decided to just return to fortifying the circle. As a Verdant Witch, she was not a traditional mage of any kind. She was not the kind of mana-user who would be flinging spells at an enemy while teleporting around and throwing up barriers to protect herself. Instead, she was the kind to sit in a ritual circle on the other side of the planet as her spells manifested through mediums that could project her magic and kill foes before they even knew what happened.

Of course, such things were still too early for her, but Miranda had already embraced that path by now. She had genuinely not expected it, but she wasn't half-bad at being a witch, which probably wouldn't have come as a surprise to her first boyfriend, who called her just that the last time they met.

As she thought that, Lillian pinged her on a pager of sorts given by Arnold that the hawks had returned from the Undergrowth dungeon. Miranda was a bit worried as she remembered that place. They had only cleared it due to Sultan being present, even if Felicia and Roman also helped out tremendously.

In the final part, they had been made to fight some mechanical wolf by a projection too, which was honestly an odd experience. The projection had been a bit rude and short with them too, but that didn't mean that damn wolf had been any less dangerous.

She feared that the hawks would have met trouble, but it appeared not, as Lillian's message was short and concise, except for one small thing.

"Did she just say Sylphie was wearing a medal?"

## Chapter 427 - Windy Times Ahead

Blue crackly bolts chased Sylphie, but she zoomed too fast for the evil Metal Man to catch up to her. She couldn't out-zoom the bad laser, but Sylphie was super fast and super good at dodging those. Not that Sylphie was happy as Metal Man was the evilest Metal Man Sylphie had ever met!

Sylphie was happy mom and dad were at least not there, so evil Metal Man couldn't bully them too. Not that Sylphie also didn't bully back. It was just boring bullying. Metal Man didn't care about Sylphies whooshes at all but just kept running. Sylphie did see the weird shiny skin on Metal Man react, and the wind told Sylphie metal man did get hurt, so she just kept going.

She would make the large box slowly be filled with her own whooshy winds and slowly cut the evil Metal Man until his shiny skin stopped being shiny! It was just boring. But Sylphie knew getting impatient could get her hurt. She had learned that, so she kept being super careful and stayed away from the evil man.

After about fifteen minutes of slicing the Metal Man, he probably thought Sylphie was getting tired, but Sylphie had a super trick. She flew away as she used her gift from Uncle and activated what people called a "vest" and took out a small bottle from the big hidden pocket within.

Metal Man thought Sylphie would run out of wind power juice? Metal Man was wrong as Sylphie had a wind power juice bottle from Uncle that she quickly drank to continue!

She had to be super careful because Metal Man sometimes got in close and used many Metal Man tricks to try and catch her. At one time, Sylphie even had her wing whooshed off! It was super dangerous, but Sylphie was sure she would never get caught.

Sylphie was wrong.

Metal Man's legs suddenly seemed to disappear as he mega-zoomed towards her just as Sylphie was turning. She tried to get away, but a net of crackly lightning bound her as Sylphie was grabbed. Dad had warned her a lot about this happening... how if she was ever caught, she would be in trouble.

Sylphie never got why, though?

She turned windy and flew away as Metal Man couldn't hold onto her because holding onto wind was, like, super hard. She even managed to give him a good slap with her wing as she flew off! Metal Man kept chasing her after that, and it ended up taking a loooong time before finally Metal Man just stopped moving and stood still.

Sylphie tried to attack, but the Metal Man was still super tough. She tried to charge up a big attack, but suddenly Metal Man disappeared. Sylphie was confused and flew around for a bit before the big cube in the middle lit up and began blinking. Sylphie didn't trust it and flew away.

"Use the teleporter on top of the monument."

The stupid glowy dungeon man even tried to bait her into a trap!

"It is not a trap... the dungeon is over, but you need to go through for your final evaluation."

Sylphie was taken aback... it could even read her mind!? Sylphie knew she couldn't trust Glowly Man, who had made her fight Metal Man. They were clearly in it together. She kept circling the area, not trusting the bad cube. Until she got bored, that is, and decided to face the trap head-on!

She landed on the teleporter and was ready as she sent out wind blades everywhere when she appeared and even made a whirlwind to hide. Sylphie was super strong and tore apart the room filled with blinky things and weird metal stuff.

"There is no need for that!" Glowly Man yelled. Sylphie was still suspicious, but the wind was silent, and it didn't seem dangerous, so she triumphantly dispelled her super wind magic and stared at the Glowly Man, who had finally admitted defeat.

"Finally... Okay, now for your evaluation... I... I'm gonna be honest... I am a bit unsure where to rate you. On the one hand, your survival skills and speed make you near-impossible to kill, but your damage outside of certain instantaneous strikes are downright horrendous."

"REE!" Sylphie screamed as Glowly Man was being super rude. She knew it was a trap! It was those things Uncle called mental attacks, wasn't it?

"Alright! But, I simply cannot figure out what you are. Are you a beast or an elemental? Readings are inconclusive."

Once more, Glowly Man asked weird stuff. Sylphie was Sylphie.

"The tangible form displayed most of the time indicates beast, but the intangible wind transformation was not a skill or anything, but simply a natural change of form..."



Sylphie looked around the room curiously as Glowy Man was being weird.

"Moreover, while the magic displayed did belong predominately to the wind-affinity, it is not merely that. Measurement devices detect high-level concepts this dungeon is simply not designed to measure. The readings also indicate you are not even a year old, yet the magic contains traces of ancientness, which are contradictory. Perhaps it is-"

Sylphie began pecking some of the metal duds around the room as Glowy Man kept being weird and talking to himself. Uncle sometimes talked to himself, but not this much. Sylphie was getting pretty bored as there wasn't anything interesting in the room. At least nothing she could get to.

Finally, the Glowy Man stopped doing that weird stuff.

"Anyway, I will conclude this falls within the realm of the trial being inconclusive. You did not manage to defeat the Census Golem but only had it retreat as it ran out of power. Yet I cannot tell who the ultimate winner would be. Now, giving beasts rewards in a dungeon is a bit more complicated than with the enlightened, but we of the Altmar Empire do have means."

And that is how Sylphie got some tasty snacks and a cool medal with a weird squiggly thing on it.

Four more days had passed since Jake successfully made Meira realize she was gonna begin to take lessons, and she had just returned from her first one. It was the one about finding your own path, and she certainly looked deep in thought afterward. She had still gone to report to Jake, but he had just told her to go to her residence and reflect on the lesson instead.

Jake learned that Meira had her own token already, too, though it was quite a bit different from Jake's. He learned it was a "subordinate token" of sorts and was bound to his own. The reason for this was obvious as it would allow a master to send out their slaves or servants to buy things or even book lessons for them. To Jake, it meant he could have Meira handle stuff herself, though he did have to give permissions for her to sign up for any lessons or even make purchases. Luckily he could program the token to just approve any lesson bookings by itself.

Naturally, the token also allowed her to use all the teleportation gates scattered throughout the entire Order, and he also gave her all-access to those. So even if Meira wanted to consult him on things, he could avoid her as she could do everything by herself already.

Jake also had the excuse that his own first "real" lesson was beginning. It was a simple one merely called Essential Concocting Methods & Tricks: Aimed At New Members of the Order.

The name was a bit shameless and quite honestly genius marketing on the teacher's part. Jake also quickly learned this lesson restarted once a month while taking twenty-five days in total. Each lesson was only two hours too, so it usually fit well around other lessons. From the looks of it, it was also a constant thing that repeated every single month with no real breaks. The teacher was a C-grade scalekin, and the evaluation of the lesson was overwhelmingly positive. To put it simply, it was a must-have for most new attendants of the Order, and even Reika would participate. It was also mega-cheap at only 3 AC, but Jake reckoned the teacher made up for it by sheer volume through cornering the market.

When the time to leave came, Jake activated the token and stepped through the gate as the two prior times. He instantly took in the sight of the massive hall that was even larger than the one about combat cauldrons. Sure, it didn't match a freaking mountain top in sheer size, but it was still massive.

However, that was not the most noteworthy thing. The instant he appeared he sensed a presence in the room that was oddly familiar. He instantly whipped his head around as he stared across the hall, seeing

a woman standing with a red orb of sorts in hand. She stared down at it and, a second later, looked up as she made eye contact with Jake.

Jake used Identify as he felt one also impact himself, naturally showing his level at 183 – that's right, he had faked a level-up.

However, even so... the woman was powerful and had an unexpected race.

[Dragonkin – lvl 199]

Jake felt a bit confused as she did not at all look like a Dragonkin. She looked far more like an elf, pointy ears and all, with nothing indicating for her to be a Dragonkin besides the two small curved horns on her head, not unlike the A-grade dragon in human form.

She was clearly D-grade, though. Peak D-grade and Jake's initial estimation when looking at her were not in his favor if it came down to a fight. It was even worse than the damn Hydra by a fair deal.

The two of them stared at each other across the room as Jake's beastly eyes met the deep orange ones of the dragonkin. She smiled and nodded as Jake mimicked her nod of recognition.

It was not often you met others with Bloodlines. In fact, it was his first time since coming to the Order, not counting Villy, of course.

Neither of them made any moves to further communicate, but he did see her take out some kind of token as she went to take a seat. Jake did notice that a lot of people seemed to have taken an interest in her as she was practically swarmed, and it was only her relatively unapproachable aura that kept them at bay.

Looking about, he also spotted Draskil, who was having an even worse situation as he was utterly surrounded by a disproportionally female fanbase. Nearly as disproportionate as the male fanbase following the female dragonkin. Jake recognized grifters when he saw them, and it was almost comforting to know sycophants were a multiversal phenomenon.

Jake was also approached by a few people, but he didn't really engage as he found somewhere and took a seat. He found himself sitting between two young men, one of them a scalekin and the other an elf, both barely level 100. Both of them nodded in recognition at him. He had the fake Lesser blessing, so even if he wasn't a true standout, he still stood out a little bit.

There were quite a lot of blessings scattered throughout. Villy had really gone all-out in the way of blessing his followers, especially in the younger generation. Most were naturally minor blessings which Jake remembered Villy once mentioned he could give out like free samples at a supermarket. Yes, that exact metaphor.

A good amount of lesser ones were also present, a single Major blessing and then Jake's new good friend Draskil and his Divine Blessing, putting the majority of the spotlight on him. This meant Jake could relatively fade into the background. Well, besides the mysterious woman with the Bloodline, but it didn't look like anyone had noticed her and Jake's brief exchange.

This allowed him to just sit down and relax as the lesson began a minute or so later. Everyone shut up when a scalekin appeared down on stage. He had muted yellow scales, and Jake clearly felt the aura of a C-grade.

“Welcome to my first lesson where I will teach you essential methods and tricks to concocting. After years of researching and recognizing common mistakes and oversights by new members of the Order, this lesson has been put together and then further refined and improved over centuries. I am certain many of you will hear much you already know and perhaps find elementary. However, each of us comes from different backgrounds and paths, and what is standard to you might be novel to another. Just know there is no shame in ignorance, as long as you actively strive to eliminate it and improve yourself,” the scalekin said in an oddly soothing tone as he reminded Jake of a kind grandfather more than some powerful C-grade.

The words also set a precedent and a mood as he began explaining concocting in incredibly simple terms. He talked about the importance of mana control and practicing mana control even outside of alchemy and mentioned how many could buy puzzles and other training tools. He advised people to learn telekinesis if they hadn’t already, just by using mana to control objects.

He mentioned the importance of knowing your cauldron. How one had to eliminate unwanted properties in poison before using it, and how some remnants could stay in the cauldron if you failed to clean it adequately afterward. All of this was still incredibly basic to Jake, but he didn’t look down on anyone. As the teacher had said, being ignorant was just a temporary state of being if one was willing to learn.

There were some interesting comments on concocting in there, especially when it came to merging poison, and Jake even had a few times where he recognized he had made minor mistakes in the past. Like how he often didn’t properly consider the order of items added to a concoction properly, or how he missed out on some synergistic effects that were easily achieved.

As Jake was still deeply engrossed, the lesson was suddenly over.

“Thank you all for attending the first lesson. Today we only covered the most basic things, so if you feel disappointed currently, let us hope tomorrow will bring something enlightening. I sincerely wish to see you all again, and thank you for attending.”

The scalekin bowed, and without thinking much, Jake mimicked those around him as he also got up and bowed in return. Not that he needed to think. He had gone to university for five years, gone to dozens of seminars, and even attended two other lessons in the Order... but this one had been the first Jake had lost track of time during.

Not a doubt in his mind existed that the teacher on the stage below had skills related to teaching and speaking, coupled with an incredible natural talent. It was not at all a surprise why this lesson was so highly rated, even if it seemed so mundane.

People eventually began leaving, and Jake planned on too but felt a presence approach. He looked over and saw the female dragonkin make her way towards him, and Jake instantly cursed inside.

Please don't...

She didn't stop but went straight for where Jake was as those around him gladly made a path.

Well...

The dragonkin stopped before him as she bowed slightly and asked: "Excuse me, do you have a moment?"

Fuck...

Jake felt the gazes of hundreds of men upon him, hatred burning in their eyes. He tried to ignore them as he asked, hoping this would be quick. "I do, but I am not certain what for?"

He should at least be polite, right? It would be rude to just reject her, and he was a bit curious what her Bloodline was all about as he guessed it had to be about that. However, his answer earned him the ire of the fan group behind the dragonkin, something she somehow masterfully ignored. Her answer definitely didn't help either.

"I was hoping we could speak somewhere more... privately."

The hatred of men spiked as everyone around them heard her words.

"Just the two of us."

And Jake felt like his school life was truly not going to be a nice and peaceful time.

Chapter 428 - Bit Of Dragon Lore

Jake had been put on the spot, and while he had wanted to reject the invitation, his curiosity had eventually won out. And in hindsight, he was glad he did as he came to see much of the Order he hadn't before.

He had not gone home after the lesson but went with the female dragonkin through a portal to what was essentially a buzzing metropolitan area with bars, cafes, restaurants, and shops everywhere. All of them catered to members of the Order, and it was truly a massive area.

Passing the gateway had also shrugged off all the annoying followers who had stared after Jake like he was evil incarnate. No, he was not looking forward to meeting many of them again at the lesson the next day.

The two of them headed towards a café that offered private rooms to have their discussion. Using personal residences for discussions with people you didn't trust was rarely done, and Jake could see why. The rules of safety seemed to primarily dominate in public areas, and giving someone access to a residence also meant those people would potentially see your secrets.

What plants you grew, the laboratory, books in the library, or just something as simple as the atmospheric mana were all clues. That poison alchemists of an evil snake-worshipping cult were secretive didn't come as a surprise.

Jake and the dragonkin soon found themselves within a cozy room as an attendant brought them both a cup of some weird drink Jake didn't recognize. However, he felt the toxins within it. He had allowed the dragonkin to order for them, and he didn't think she wanted to poison him. Well, okay, she did want to poison him, but the good kind of poison.

"So, the elephant in the room?" Jake eventually said, his Tongue of the Myriad Races doing work to translate the figure of speech to something understandable.

"I believe an introduction is finally in order before we do that. I am Helenstromoz Emberflight, pleased to make your acquaintance," she said as she nodded.



“Hunter,” Jake just said, sticking to his fake name. When he heard the last name of the dragonkin, he already knew what this was about. “What gave me away?”

The dragonkin just smiled. “Many things... it is hard to hide from an A-grade even if you have means to perfectly mask your level and even possess a Bloodline. The mana lingering on your body is from the ninety-third universe, and the knowledge you displayed did not correspond to what a true master would do. Finally, during the brief discussion with you, he switched languages a total of seventeen times without you noticing... in fact, I have already spoken three during this brief talk. Even if you do have a translation skill, they don’t tend to be that effective, and more often than not, you switch language fluidly with your conversation partner. You did not,” Helenstromoz said with a light smile.

Jake didn’t even know what to say. He had never even considered Tongue to be a dead giveaway, though in hindsight, perhaps he should have. The problem was Jake had no counter currently, so he just took a drink from the poison the restaurant offered. It was tasty as hell, and he gladly just savored the taste for a few moments before answering. “That answered the how he found out, but not why you are here. Helenstromoz, was it?”

“He suspected you had a Bloodline and sent me to check for obvious reasons,” Helenstromoz answered. “And please, just call me Helen. The Stromoz suffix is used to communicate someone is truly a dragon or at least was a true dragon at some point. Us descendants of true dragons are allowed to also have it, so it is truly more about status than anything else.”

“While I am thankful for the dragon lore, it doesn’t truly answer the question of why you chose to come and stay for a lesson you clearly did not need and bring me here for a private discussion. It took you five seconds to confirm I had a Bloodline, didn’t it?” Jake said, shaking his head as he took another sip of poison drink. Yep, definitely a fan.

Helen seemed to study his responses quite closely as Jake enjoyed his drink. She also took a sip herself as she spoke again.

“Bloodlines are rare. I assume you know this despite coming from a new universe?”

Jake just nodded in confirmation, as while he didn't think it was common knowledge Bloodlines even existed back on Earth, it would be odd for him not to have found out.

“These Bloodlines come in various forms, and whenever a new universe is integrated into the multiverse, many new ones appear with it. There are few better ways for a faction to improve their organizational strength than quickly making contact and hopefully integrating such a Bloodline into their ranks. Though I assume you already have a backer or an organization you belong to? Besides the Order, of course,” Helen asked after more or less telling Jake she was there on a recruitment mission.

“I do indeed have a backer if you can call it that, but no faction besides the Order,” Jake said. He knew acting like he didn't would be moronic as he had just spent hundreds of thousands of AC on a single lesson, something he clearly couldn't afford on his own. Hence the only explanation – besides the truth – was that he had a backer who gave him points.

Helen smiled a bit as she wondered out loud. “I do wonder who it could be... not even A-grades can toss around that many AC on a single lesson they barely get anything out of. An S-grade? Gods are out of the question as the Malefic One has already blessed you... they must be quite a figure in the Order, are they not?”

Clearly, she was baiting him to reveal something. He also knew why she ruled gods out. Why would a god invest in him when the only ones to benefit would be Villy? The reason why gods helped mortals was to get rewards from the system based on the performance of those they blessed. It was part of the reason Jake didn't feel that guilty about his one-sided relationship with Villy as he knew he also helped his snake god pal, just in ways Jake didn't see himself.

As for Helen's questioning: "My backer does indeed have some influence in the Order, but why is that of any concern to you?"

"All I am looking to know is, are you associated with any faction besides the Order of the Malefic Viper? The Order does not restrict where one belongs or has any true requirements of loyalty to the faction itself, so if you don't, I just wanted to let you know there are many doors open to you. Of course, it will require an evaluation to know the true nature of your Bloodline, but if it is deemed of high quality and beneficial, these factions will gladly support you," she said as she also took another sip of her drink. "Naturally, this also depends on if your backer agrees. Just know that true multiverse factions can offer far more than any individual."

Yeah, I kinda doubt that, Jake thought. Probably didn't count if that individual was a Primordial.

"I have no interest in joining any faction as of the current time," Jake answered, shaking his head.

"Eventually, you will have to align yourself with one unless you plan on fully dedicating yourself to the Order. Tell me, how much do you know of the Emberflight?" Helen asked. She seemed amicable still, but Jake did get the feeling she wasn't happy he so quickly rejected her offer.

"That it is a Dragonflight?" Jake just said with a shrug. He knew what Dragonflights were. They were collections of dragons, and he knew it was hard to be recognized as a Dragonflight. But to be fair, he had only done some cursory reading.

"The Emberflight is one of the nine Dragonflight of the Draconian Accords and is the most powerful faction of the red dragons. We have hundreds of publicly-appearing gods in our ranks and stand as a true top faction of the multiverse with a presence in all universes," she said proudly.

Jake got the feeling he was meant to be very impressed, but he had been firmly desensitized after spending too long with Villy. He was curious, though.

“What are these Draconian Accords?”

“A long time ago, the different dragon races were at war but were eventually brought together and formed an Accord under the leadership of the Primordial known as the Wyrmgod. The Wyrmgod later established Nevermore and no longer has any connection to the accords, but an alliance and close working relationship still persist. There were originally only five Dragonflights in it, the Emberflight one of them,” she explained, Jake really getting his fill of old dragon lore.

Helen also clearly enjoyed sharing it, as she was patient with Jake’s lack of what he didn’t doubt was general knowledge. She did take a jab, though. “I would recommend you take a few history lessons if possible.”

“I’ll think about it,” Jake took the jab. “However, my answer remains the same. I currently have no interest in joining a faction. I am not saying this won’t change in the future, but I am not the type to be loyal to factions, and I don’t tend to deal well with authority.”

He wanted to distance himself and give a reason, but she didn’t seem fazed in the slightest.

“I understand. Your Bloodline relates to resisting and somehow emitting a presence far more powerful than you actually are. That it has innate properties of pride and unwillingness to submit to those more powerful only strikes me as natural.”

Jake nodded along, gladly confirming that is what his Bloodline did, as he and Villy had agreed on that being a good idea a while ago. Better they thought that was all it did.

“You seem to understand my Bloodline well... but I have no clue what yours does,” Jake asked, finally getting to the part he actually cared about himself. So far, he only knew of two Bloodlines. His own and Eron’s. Learning more about different ones only struck him as helpful.

“I have a version of the Bloodline of the main clan back in the Land of Embers. I cannot share the exact details of the Bloodline as I am under oath, but I am authorized to say it involves the manipulation of fire magic, the concept of flames, and the concept of time,” Helen briefly explained. “Only members of the Order can know the true description of it, and mine is a bit of a mutated version.”

“They can mutate?” Jake asked, a bit surprised. Did that mean he could change or evolve his Bloodline? Why had Villy never mention-

“My father was a dragon while my mother was an elf. Both of them had Bloodlines, and they merged to form mine. You seem to not know much about Bloodlines. Did your benefactor never explain?” she asked, actually sounding a bit confused.

“Yeah, why didn’t he explain,” Jake sent to Villy right there and then.

“Because I didn’t bless you with the intent of having you act like a prize-bull and pump out children left and right. Preferably with other people who possess Bloodlines to hope for them not only to get lucky and inherit one Bloodline but get the Bloodlines of both parents and even have them merge into something useful,” Villy quickly answered. “It is gambling for a good result. The hatchling you see before you likely have tens of thousands of siblings who are little more than failed products in the eyes of the Dragonflight.”

“He only explained a little bit, but not many details,” Jake answered after listening to Villy’s explanation.

“I see,” she said, sighing a bit. She finally took out a small token with a red dragon on it and handed it to Jake. “I would like to at least invite you to a more formal chat. Even if you joining us isn’t an option, we can perhaps at least discuss some other arrangement?”

Jake looked at the token before picking it up. “I will think about it, but for now, I just want to focus on my lessons and, of course, the happenings of the ninety-third Universe and the opportunities offered there. Grow in power, you know?”

“Very well, we would prefer to see you at a higher grade too,” she finally relented as she got up. “It was enlightening to meet you... Hunter, was it?”

He just nodded as he also got up, but not before quickly finishing his tasty drink.

“Please do come by for a visit at the very least. In the token is also my contact information for the Order Token, so please feel free if your curiosity gets the better of you or if there is anything you need to know.”

With those words, she left, with Jake following after. Outside they split up as she headed towards a wall with a teleportation circle on. Jake considered staying and checking out the entertainment district a bit more but ultimately decided to just head back home as he wanted to check in with Meira, and he had another lesson in like an hour.

Also... he had some things he wanted to talk to Villy about.

When he got home, he headed for his bedroom again, and as he walked, he asked out loud:

"So... Villy... will this-"

A scaled god suddenly popped up beside him. "You were saying?"

"Can you just pop up like that now?" Jake asked. "Last time, you made quite the entrance."

"Well, of course not. I had to make a good impression on your new slave," Villy defended himself.

"Thinking back, couldn't you have just done as you first did when I got here and made yourself invisible or something?"

"Jake, the question isn't if I could or not. The most important thing is," he said, as he made a long dramatic pause, "I didn't."

Jake could recognize once he had lost an argument and proceeded to change the topic. "So, what I wanted to ask was if this kind of thing will keep happening if it becomes more common knowledge I have a Bloodline? Everyone who has a Bloodline can feel I have one, and I am sure some factions will put two and two together after dragon lady approached me."

"It is likely indeed," Villy said, nodding.

"That sounds utterly exhausting. And there is no way to hide my Bloodline?" Jake asked a bit desperately.

"Nope, not at all. Ah, but do note most in lower grades cannot feel other Bloodlines as easily as you do. Both you and the other one from Earth have at least partly Perception-based Bloodlines and can thus easily spot others, but not everyone does. That is why that hatchling carried an orb. They are able to create a resonance of sorts when someone with a Bloodline uses one and can scan an area. Pretty much all factions with Bloodlines possess them. Even without it, another person with a Bloodline will feel it if they are close enough or interact with you," the Viper explained.

"So that means I am fucked?" Jake asked with resignation. "What is stopping some faction from just kidnapping people with Bloodlines and using them as breeding machines?"

Villy seemed to get a bit more serious as he sighed. "I guess I should tell you a bit about Bloodlines and their storied history in the multiverse."

Chapter 429 - The History Of Bloodlines

Jake and Villy moved to the living room of Jake's mansion, and when Jake went to grab something to drink, the Viper just pulled out two beer bottles that gave off a response from his Sense of the Malefic Viper. Poison beer, nice.

They sat down across from each other as the Viper leaned back on the couch and began talking.



"Bloodlines have quite the history in the multiverse. As those with Bloodlines are often compared to Transcendents, it only leads to more scrutiny and interest, especially from those who possess neither. Bloodlines were a thing from the beginning, and many of those with Bloodlines in the first universe did grow up to be powerhouses who dominated, even if they failed to make it to godhood. Naturally, as time moved on, many also became gods... but their survival rate back then was just abysmal."

"Why?" Jake asked, a bit confused. Did a Bloodline not give an advantage if it was beneficial?

"Hm... did you know not a single one of us Primordials had Bloodlines? At least not ones anyone knew about?" Villy asked

"No," Jake shook his head. "I had kind of assumed someone did... though it is true I didn't feel one from Valdemar, and does the current Eversmile even have one? I didn't feel it. Not from Stormild either, now that I think about it..."

"Stormild does not have one as far as I know, while Eversmile does, his is just hidden due to the nature of his Bloodline. Well, he may have had it always, but no one knew, not even others with Bloodlines. The point is no one with a known Bloodline became a god during the first Era."

"That is odd," Jake thought out loud.

"No, not if you understand the landscape back then. You see, people are greedy. Beasts, humans, elementals, it doesn't matter the race. We are all greedy for power. So when we see someone with something we don't have, and we don't know how to get it... we try anyway to take it, no matter how futile the effort. If you had a Bloodline back then, you had a target on your back. In the beginning, because people wanted to capture you and try to extract it, with even rumors spreading that you could gain a Bloodline by consuming someone who had one," the Viper explained, shaking his head.

“That sounds fucking rough,” Jake said.

“Oh, it was. This was how the entire first Era went. Most with Bloodlines were slaughtered before realizing their potential, and those who survived lived as test subjects until their death. It was a curse more than anything else. Some with Bloodlines were used as Bloodline Detectors and were strutted around to find others with Bloodlines to capture them. Towards the end of the first Era, I don’t think a single person in S-grade even had a Bloodline.

“When the second Era began, people seemed to have gotten the message that you can’t steal Bloodlines, especially as we Primordials spread it with our nascent factions. However, it was discovered that they could be passed down, so I guess you can imagine the next step in the evolution of Bloodline hunting?” Villy asked grimly.

“Treat them like cattle?” Jake asked with a deep frown.

“Bingo. I would argue it was even worse than before, especially due to how propagation works with the system. Have we ever had the talk about the flowers and the bees?” Villy asked teasingly.

“No... but I have a feeling I know. You can’t force it, can you?”

“Nope, you can’t. Anyone in E-grade has enough control of their body to ignore physiological stimuli, and even if they don’t, you can’t make kids without both parties consciously wanting to. Giving birth to a new life takes intent the same as most kinds of magic. The female cannot get pregnant, and the male cannot impregnate unless they both wish for it to happen. In what should not have been a surprise to absolutely anyone, people with Bloodlines that have practically been turned into sex slaves aren’t

exactly excited about becoming parents. Women and men alike were forced into being nothing more than cattle for their masters or dying. It was a shitshow,” Villy explained. One could feel the disgust in his voice... as well as a wave of deep-seated anger. Jake knew Villy was trying to hide it, but Jake felt the bloodlust and hatred subtly leak into the god’s presence.

Jake also felt disgusted as he nevertheless asked. “Did that ever lead to anything?”

“A few times. If they captured them young and indoctrinated them into pretty much making them true members of the clan... some also just broke and began helping out of desperation. Ultimately, it wasn’t efficient in the least, and there is also the fact that you want the one with the Bloodline to be powerful. The Bloodline alone is nice, but the Records of the parents also matter a lot,” Villy explained, as he continued.

“No, the ones who got the most out of it were those who used a more diplomatic approach. The ones who genuinely made them members of their factions, nurtured them, allowed them to prosper, and even sometimes had them end up the new leaders. In fact, this is how many still-existing factions began. There was also a growing tendency to just leave those with Bloodlines alone, sometimes watching from afar and hoping for them to amass power themselves. However, as I said, these were the good ones. The number of hunters looking for those with Bloodlines was far more prevalent.”

“Wait, but only those with Bloodlines can find others. How the hell did they hunt them down? I doubt those with Bloodlines themselves would help, and unless something was drastically different back then, I don’t see every team of hunters having someone with a Bloodline enthralled, as you mentioned before...” Jake commented.

“That is the neat part,” Villy said. “They didn’t. Some kid has a weird hair color? Probably a Bloodline. Kid is talented? Bloodline. Odd affinity they are good at? Bloodline. Anything at all making you slightly stand out from the masses? Probably a Bloodline. It even expanded to beasts where variants were often confused as ones having Bloodlines... the entire situation was utterly fucked and in no way sustainable long-term. Yet it continued, and this craze came in waves. However, there was a shift as more with

Bloodlines came to be in power, especially when ones reached godhood. Bloodlines began to propagate, and blindly hunting them down became frowned upon, and it became an activity simply done covertly.”

“So me getting captured is still a possibility; they will just be secretive about it?” Jake asked a bit curtly.

“No. Nobody will dare try,” Villy said, shaking his head.

“Because of my Blessing, I reckon?”

“No, even without it. I said this was how it continued back then... until something happened that made it change. Until they went after someone they shouldn’t have, and all hell was unleashed upon them, leading to a treaty that still stands today, banning the abductions, enslavement, and coercion of those with Bloodlines for purposes of procreations,” the Viper said. When he got to the middle part, Jake felt the killing intent as the air in the living room nearly warped just from the leaked emotions.

Jake wanted to pry but knew better. Instead, he asked a question, slightly changing the topic. “Who was behind this treaty? And how will it be enforced?”

“The treaty was overseen and deployed by all of us Primordials during the seventh Era. It was signed by nearly all publicly acting gods at the time. All of us also act as executioners of any who breaks this treaty. The most known example was during the eighty-second Era when a Pantheon emerged that didn’t seem to care. They had many gods among them and were desperate for expansion. At the same time, a small clan that was rapidly growing to power appeared within their territory, all having powerful Bloodlines. The Pantheon’s leader was a god who was most known for having fought the Starsiezing Titan, another Primordial, and the fight having been mostly deemed a draw. He was confident, but he felt like he needed more. So he looked to this small clan and saw the potential of their Bloodline. He wanted it to expand his faction’s power. However, this small clan did not agree to merge, so... he forced them.”

Jake listened closely as nothing came as a surprise. He knew factions could be ruthless.

“Now, forcing them to join? Meh, that happens. Who cares. The problem was that he also forced them into propagating their Bloodline. He forced the women of the clan to be his own mistresses to sire powerful children and the men to copulate with his own daughters. This was caught within a week of it happening... and this moronic god learned the consequences of breaking the treaty.

“Jake, if there is one thing I want you to understand, it is that of all the treaties in existence, this may be the one no one ever dares break. Even I would not dare do it. Back then, seven Primordials descended. Umbra went, Snappy went in my place, more than ten thousand gods surrounded the planet the Pantheon called home. A slaughter began, the god in charge fled to his realm, where he was promptly followed and killed within. Even if he was stronger in there... even if he was a top talent, one not even another Primordial could kill in single combat, he was no match to the combined might of what may as well have been the entire multiverse. The entire Pantheon was killed and every single member of god’s faction. Trillions died that day, setting an example.”

“Have any Primordial broken it, or won’t they dare to either? I have a hard time seeing someone like Eversmile purposefully avoiding doing certain things just due to the opinions of others,” Jake asked skeptically.

“Eversmile may be able to hide it even if he does break the treaty, but he won’t. Eversmile is a bit of a bastard, but he is not a liar. His word means more than you can understand due to the Path he walks. A promise made by him is more binding and more meaningful than any contract,” Villy just shook his head.

Jake nodded along slowly, still believing Eversmile was an asshole. “Anyway, to conclude, this treaty means I am more or less a protected person due to my Bloodline when it comes to kidnappings and such?”

“Only if they kidnap you for your Bloodline, and only if the kidnapping is to research or forcefully spread the Bloodline. Not that there is much other reason to. As I am sure you can imagine, they would have loved to make Bloodline Holders into slaves, but you can’t enslave people with Bloodlines as we talked about before,” the scaled god explained again.

Jake was beginning to get a good understanding of the situation by now. “The method you talked about working back then still works, though. Integration.”

“Yep,” Villy said with a smile. “If a faction recruits someone with a Bloodline as a member or even just bribes them or pays them to join temporarily as mercenaries to have them spread their Bloodline, it is perfectly allowed.”

“Sounds like people with Bloodlines are still treated as commodities,” Jake frowned.

“Everyone is. If you are a powerful expert, you are an asset. Young talent is nurtured for the benefits they can bring... a god blesses someone for what they can get out of it. We are all selfish assholes in the multiverse. The Bloodline Treaty was not made purely out of altruistic reasons either. The ones who signed it tended to have large factions already and will thus have an easier time simply recruiting those with Bloodlines – something they would prefer to do either way.”

“To circle back... I am still kind of fucked, aren’t I? They just won’t kidnap me but try other “legal” methods...” Jake sighed.

“Yep, big time. Honeypots are aplenty ahead on your Path. Especially the more you progress. If you had a kid in your current grade, it would not be stronger than E-grade, while if you reach C-grade and above you, humans can have kids who are born at D-grade. That is the max, though... unless you go for some

high elf or maybe a dragon? In that case, you may be able to go for higher grade babies,” Villy smiled teasingly.

“You know what?” Jake said, returning the smile. “I don’t think I am having that conversation with you.”

“Fine, fine. But just one final piece of advice. Don’t have any offspring for now. In fact, wait as long as possible. Records are essential in anything, and the more children you have, the more spread out those Records will be. The chance of someone inheriting the Bloodline also goes down the more children you have, with the chance being higher for the first child and only falling from there. Of course, you could make up for it by quantity – a reason why male Bloodline Holders and especially Bloodline Patriarchs – are more popular than Bloodline Matriarchs,” Villy finally finished.

“I wasn’t planning on starting a family anyway, so it’s not like that is an issue,” Jake shrugged. He didn’t even have a girlfriend yet, and there was no way he would get bribed into it. He was also pretty confident in resisting honeypots.

“Ah, but do feel free to have some fun; the honeypots will gladly entertain you. I am sure there are many fine ladies interested in-“

“Villy,” Jake interrupted. “I am too sober for that conversation, and I got a lesson in like fifteen minutes, so now isn’t the time to get smashed.”

The Viper just snickered for a moment before he quickly acted all solemn. “I can’t believe how fast they grow up... just a year or so ago, my little Chosen was running around shirtless in a forest fighting local overgrown wildlife, while now he is all grown up and going to school. He is even being responsible with his lessons!”

Jake was about to shoot back with a snarky comment as he felt a presence enter his sphere. It was Meira who was heading over. She was clearly unable to sense Villy, who was currently feeling no different from a normal mortal, and when Jake looked at the snake god, he just shrugged.

“What? If you plan to have her stick around, she may as well get used to it because I may or may not teleport by once in a while when I feel like it.”

“Can’t just make yourself invisible?” Jake asked with a raised eyebrow.

“The question isn’t if I can, but if I will. A question to which the answer is no.”

Jake just sighed as he stared into the ceiling, hoping whatever progress he had made with Meira wouldn’t be shattered the moment she walked in on him and the Viper sitting in the living room chilling with a beer each.

Chapter 430 - Relationships Are Hard. Oh, And Neurotoxins

Meira was briskly walking towards the living room as it was on the way to the mansion’s bedroom where her Master usually resided. If he wasn’t there, he should be in the laboratory. She had gone looking for him already once an hour or so ago, where he should have returned from his lesson, but it appeared he had other engagements. That made sense; he was an important figure after all.

She herself had also gone to a single lesson so far. Meira had felt incredibly out of place, but no one had really commented on her presence or spoken to her. They had just left her alone as she had listened to the teacher about finding her own Path... something Meira had never even considered doing before. Something she still had to admit she found unrealistic.



Making her way forward, she believed she heard voices from the living room. It was difficult to tell as the materials the mansion was made of had phenomenal sound isolation tens if not hundreds of times more effective than what buildings back at her clan had been built with.

A bit nervous, she considered if her Master had visitors and if there were, then why she hadn't been called to attend to them. Then again, perhaps it was something private, so she reconsidered if she should just wait outside until the visitor left.

Ultimately, she decided to show herself. Something she actually felt a bit proud of, as it was one of the most important things from the lesson she had taken: to be assertive and take control of your own destiny. That included not hesitating as much in your daily life but moving forward even if there may be some difficulties.

Besides, she didn't believe her Master would get disappointed or angry even if she entered. At worst, she would be made to leave, right?

With that in mind, she opened the door into the mansion's living room as she bowed and said. "Excuse me, I-"

She instantly stopped as she saw the two people sitting there. Her Master on one side holding a bottle in his hand and a scaled being she would be unable to ever forget. She instantly fell to her knees and placed her head against the floor as she deeply regretted just walking in.

"This one greets the Malefic One!"

“Meira, just get up. There is no reason for that,” her Master said. Meira was a bit confused at the command and was conflicted if she should follow it or not. On the one hand, the orders of her Master were above anything else, but on the other hand, it was the Malefic One...

“This is my mansion, right?” she heard her Master say, directed not at her but the Malefic One.

“Yep. Even if we can argue if you own it or not, you are most definitely a legal tenant.”

“In that case, I repeat, please get up, Meira. You also live here, and you most certainly don’t have to bow to someone within your own home,” her Master said again. It was the kind of thing he had said so many times before like it was natural...

“Breaking through a lifetime of conditioning is not done with a few words Jake,” she heard the Malefic One say in a weird voice that sounded odd to her... it was almost friendly?

Meira was still not daring to look up, but she heard footsteps as someone approached her. Based on the sound, it was her Master, and she felt him place a hand on her shoulder. “Come on, just get up... he won’t do anything, and nothing will happen if you do. I promise.”

“Big promises from a D-grade with a literal Primordial in the room,” the Malefic One said, making Meira shiver again.

“Villy, how about I reveal myself as your Chosen and begin spreading the word that you have decided to declare war on all mushrooms and initiate a righteous crusade?”

“You wouldn’t dare!”

“Try me!”

Meira just knelt there, shaking and a bit confused. She truly couldn’t comprehend what was happening as the two seemed to do what she could only describe as banter? It just didn’t make any sense or conform to her worldview. A Chosen was an instrument of a god... their mortal representation, prophets, and sometimes even avatars. But... her Master and the Malefic One wasn’t like that, or was this just how it was supposed to work? Wait... were they trying to fool her? Was this some kind of elaborate experiment she was just too dumb to understand? Send her to a lesson about finding her own Path, just to-“

“Fine,” the Malefic One said as she felt another presence approach. She couldn’t resist as she felt her own body moving, and she was lifted to stand upright as she stared right at the Malefic One. She couldn’t even blink as she felt like passing out upon looking into the eyes of the Primordial.

“Girl. Jake and I are friends, and I do agree that with your presence being a continued element, this entire thing would get boring soon. I have absolutely no interest in you, and Jake is a simple-minded fellow who genuinely has no interest in treating you as a slave. You aren’t worth an experiment. You aren’t interesting enough for me to care about outside of your connection to my buddy. You are just a slave who got extremely lucky to find yourself where you are right now, so thank your luck and be grateful. And for the sake of everyone’s sanity, just relax. I won’t do anything to you as long as Jake has any interest in you.”

Meira wanted to open her mouth as the words echoed in her head, but the situation became too much for her as she felt her brain slowly shut down, and she passed out. Her last thought was her wondering if she would ever wake up again after treating not only her Master but the Malefic One with such disrespect and ignoring the order she had just been given.

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“Well, that went exactly as expected,” Villy said as he shrugged. Jake caught Meira with a few strings of mana and lifted her over to a couch, where he laid her down.

“While I don’t think you were the nicest, I don’t think you said anything to pass out over,” Jake said, wondering out loud.

“Jake, you repeatedly misunderstand some very basic things of the multiverse. While I can hide my presence and appearance and everything else, that entire subterfuge becomes meaningless if they actually know who I am. The instinctive suppression remains, and they will still feel like they are in the presence of a Primordial the second they become aware of me,” Villy shook his head. “It makes it impossible to have any meaningful and genuine interactions with those of lower grades. Even if they act normal, that is little more than having a constant fight to resist and not at all enjoyable for either party.”

Jake frowned a bit at this. He knew it was a thing – kind of – but he couldn’t really relate for obvious reasons. He couldn’t imagine the feeling they had, as he, quite frankly, was incapable of feeling it. It was like asking a blind person to think about colors.

But... he also understood him being him was the only reason he and a Primordial could get along as they did.

“I guess that means having house parties with you attending wouldn’t work,” Jake sighed.

“Sadly not, at least not if people know who I am, and if they don’t, then what is even the point?” the snake god also sighed.

“True. I guess it will take Meira a while to just at least get partly used to it, at least enough to deal. From what I know, being near me helps build up resistance,” Jake answered.

“It does, but it does not mean they will suddenly be okay. They still know logically they are in my presence, and they will still be on edge more than when they are around you. They just won’t be suppressed in the same fashion, even if they will be suppressed,” the Viper explained.

“Hm,” Jake frowned. “I guess the only option is for you to invite some of your friends then. You do have other god friends, right?”

“More like subordinates, and they can be even worse than mortals in some circumstances. Anyone besides Duskleaf, you, and a few other gods I would consider myself friends; there really isn’t anyone. And getting such a crowd together would be a momentous occasion and no-doubt lead to much interest and scrutiny,” Villy said, shaking his head at the notion.

Jake just shrugged as he swept the beer bottle off the table. “Guess it is just the two of us and the occasional Duskleaf then.”

“Better that way,” Villy agreed. “And it isn’t like mortals can’t get more used to me. I have had mortal servants in the past, and I have met plenty of mortals. I will forever have to deal with either reverence, fear, or both, but that I am used to.”

“Life is truly lonely at the top,” Jake chuckled.

“A little less than it used to be, though,” the god said as he also took a drink of his own beer.

The two of them chatted a bit more about unimportant matters before Jake had to leave for his next lesson. He did feel a bit bad about just leaving Meira passed out on the couch, so he left a note before he left through the gateway. This lesson was in neurotoxicology, so that should be fun.

Vilastromoz appeared in his divine realm as he left Jake’s little mansion. He smirked a bit to himself as he looked at the bottle in his hand. He let it go, seeing it slowly be disintegrated by the passive mist dominating his realm as he closed his eyes, deep in thought.

A moment later, he opened them again as he teleported once more, appearing in a small oasis of his realm. The only place where life existed in what was otherwise a land of desolation.

The Viper looked at the two obelisks in the center, the perfect black obsidian stone unblemished and the runes upon them forever humming with power. The talk today had brought back memories that he was incapable of forgetting... quite literally. He went over and put his hand on the smaller of the two obelisks as he once more closed his eyes, just allowing himself to be stuck in the past for a second before letting go again.

He looked at the far larger obelisk as Vilastromoz smiled faintly. “Yeah yeah, I know; I’m doing fine...”

Talking to himself was not healthy... but he knew exactly what she would have said and done.

“Even if I do now have a friend to hang out with, I am not forgetting you two,” he smiled. “In fact... I believe this time outside of my realm has led me closer than ever.”

Jake returned from his lesson far more tired than when he left. He walked a bit wobbly as his one leg wasn't quite able to move yet, and for some reason, he couldn't open the one eyelid. Well, okay, he knew why. The lesson included some practical portions. In other words, he got infused by the teacher, who used some kind of poison magic on him that numbed his entire damn body.

This did allow Palate to do work, but even with it in legendary rarity, he wasn't a match for the C-grade teacher's poison magic. The woman was a real hard-ass and just applied some extra on those who managed to resist, and with her peak C-grade power, no one present could resist, not even the one other C-grade Jake detected.

As he wobbled into his residence, he was met by Meira, who sat kneeling in the entrance chamber, having clearly waited for him. When she saw him walk weirdly, she hurriedly asked. “Ma... what is wrong?”

Jake didn't feel like correcting her as he waved it off. “Neurotoxins, part of a lesson. More importantly, how are you feeling?”

He hadn't expected what she did next – even if he probably should have – as she practically threw herself to the floor as she pressed her head against the tiled floor. “I apologize for disappointing the Malefic One and the Chosen like such! I swear I wi-“

“Meira... this is what we talked about not being necessary,” Jake just smiled as he shook his head. “And don't you have a lesson starting in a bit?”

She looked almost surprised at Jake mentioning it. Jake wasn't sure if she was surprised he knew she had a lesson or when it was, or that he still wanted her to go to lessons. Nevertheless, she nodded in confirmation.

"Well, then you better get going."

"Is it certain I should not offer any assistance?" Meira asked unsurely.

"No need. This is part of the experience. I am learning what the poison does to my body to better understand the effects of neurotoxins. And, Meira, what the Viper said is the truth. I don't wish you any harm; he doesn't care enough about you to cause you harm, so you are good. Just focus on your lessons and figure out what you want your future to be like," Jake said, as he shoed her away to get to her own lesson, even if she would be a bit early.

He just wanted her out of the mansion for now as he wanted to hurry over to the lab. He hobbled over as he became able to blink properly again on the way. The neurotoxins had odd effects, and Jake felt like he had a good idea about how it worked even after just one lesson.

Needless to say, the nature of neurotoxins had changed with the system. neurotoxins before the system were toxins that destroyed nerve tissue or were otherwise able to damage them, effectively immobilizing foes. Due to how it worked, high enough doses could easily cause permanent mental damage. He definitely wasn't sure about the detailed way of how neurotoxin worked, but he was sure it had been very sciency.

After the system, some parts of neurotoxins were no longer factors or properties. Mental damage was not a thing anymore. In fact, it wasn't a thing, period. Memories and such ultimately belonged to the



soul, same as personality and everything that before resided in the brain, and nothing could directly damage that as it was rooted in the Truesoul.

Nerves were not really a factor either. Jake could have tendons cut, and nerves severed all day, every day, and still be able to move just fine due to his magic body powered by stamina. This meant neurotoxins didn't actually target the body most often, but the metaphysical framework of the body that stamina ran through. This did not cause damage long-term but just temporarily hampered movement. In other words, neurotoxins were simply a restrictive poison.

There were also types that hit the physical body and made them almost in "stasis," but that was a bit more complicated.

All in all, he was glad he had begun making neurotoxins because he was sure they would be useful in the future. In fact, he was sure all of his lessons would lead to great gains as he felt like he was finally getting into the groove of the entire school thing and was looking forward to all the things it offered.