

## Hunter 481

### Chapter 481 - Unrealistic Planetary Standards

Jake found himself teleported onto an identical metal disc within a small hall. Sultan, Miranda, Arnold, and Sylphie appeared together with him shortly after, and just as they stepped off the teleporter, it activated again.

A familiar figure appeared, and Jake turned and gave the Unique Lifeform a look.

[Fallen King – lvl 196]

The level of the King was approaching peak D-grade. Unique Lifeforms were truly cheats... then again, the King only had his race to progress while Jake had both profession and class. Furthermore, the Unique Lifeform had been busy as far as he knew, forming an entirely new faction on their planet as well as doing his fair share of hunting. Not everyone liked being ruled, after all.

“You have been busy,” Jake said.

“So have you, little hunter. I feel the remnants of a C-grade signature upon your soul. A very recent one. Perhaps the cause of your unsightly state?” the King answered, Jake once more being reminded he was wearing tattered clothes and still had quite a bit of blood on him. To be honest, that no one had commented on it yet was kind of crazy.

“Your assumptions would be correct,” Jake said with a confident smile. The King had sent out his telepathic communication wide and had regarded them all. Therefore Jake also responded openly. For the next thing, however, he said it to the King using telepathy.

“You are approaching peak D-grade,” Jake simply stated to the King covertly. “Won’t you be kind of fucked by me being behind?”

“You worry needlessly,” the King dismissed him. “I am in no rush for C-grade and see no purpose in sabotaging myself for temporary gain. I have been D-grade for over a century already, but most of that time was spent doing nothing worthwhile. This King also needs to fully comprehend his new reality. So no, I am not in a rush. Just don’t make me wait another century.”

Jake sent a mental nod in return as he ended their secret conversation. It was good to know even Unique Lifeforms had shortcomings they wanted to square up before evolution.

“I am wondering what kind of Path you are looking forward to seeing?” Jake asked the King. “Though I do have at least one guess..”

“A guess I would presume you correct about. In fact, I have two prominent possibilities in mind. One is if I never chose to participate in the Tutorial but stayed on my pathetic homeworld instead. The other – the one I presume you guessed – is if I had chosen to kill a certain little hunter and not died due to my own folly.”

That certain little hunter smiled and joked. “Live and learn. Or die and learn in this case.”

“A lesson I have taken to me and a reason why I am in no rush.”

A few more words were exchanged, but their conversation quickly drew attention. The tree-like willow form of the Unique Lifeform and the hunter wearing tattered armor and covered in blood did stand out a bit. Heck, Sylphie and the King stood about by themselves quite a lot, being the only two non-humans from Earth that had keys.

The unwanted attention made them move on, but not before Jake fixed up his state a bit. He went to a corner and summoned a stable arcane barrier and even used Arcane Stealth to stay undetected as he deposited all his armor in his inventory. He quickly stirred his energy to clean the blood off, releasing a wave of destructive mana that ran across his body. He was still not in top condition after the fight with the Panther and still felt pain from all over, but at least he was mobile and could function normally. Fighting was not the best idea, though.

Feeling adequately clean, Jake put on his non-combat party outfit from the Order. He had worn it at the World Congress too, and it was certainly better than his other things. Or being naked. In time all his equipment would be repaired within his inventory, and those that required some extra help, he helped.

Dispelling the barrier, he saw the others had waited. He hadn't even taken thirty seconds, so it wasn't like he had made them stand there for long. Jake did notice the King had left, not one to wait around for others.

"What are you guys planning on doing?" Jake asked the group once he went over. "I personally intend to go and do this event right away. Who knows how long it will take, and we only got seven days. Also.... I am curious."

"I do believe it is wisest to go now and do it," Miranda agreed. "If this is truly a possibility to meet those from other planets, I have no doubt some diplomacy will be carried out, but the event is a priority for sure."

Arnold just nodded but did not seem in a rush. In fact, he seemed more interested in their surroundings. Then again... it was Arnold, and it wouldn't be that surprising if he found the space station more interesting than a system event.

"Ree!" Sylphie also agreed. Jake looked at her and gave her a good head rub as he wondered what kind of event the hawk could even be offered. She wasn't even a handful of years old yet, so how many big choices did she have time to make? Maybe choosing to be blessed by Stormild or not was one? Or choosing to leave Jake and Haven altogether at some point? Who knows? He would have to ask her when both of them were done.

"Let's go then," Jake said with a smile.

While he did want to talk with his brother and the Sword Saint, it seemed like both had already left towards where the event would be held. At least they had exited the small entrance area belonging to Earth with the teleporter in it.

The party from Haven moved onwards and soon enough exited the room. They found themselves on a large platform, or perhaps balcony would be a more accurate word. Jake curiously went forward to the edge of the balcony and saw they were probably a few hundred meters up. More platforms were below them and above them.

The entire tower that was the Seat of the Exalted Prima was built like a circular atrium with several hundred floors. Looking straight ahead, he stared onto another balcony and saw several people stand there too. None of them were quite human either. They all had a greenish tint to their skin but otherwise looked mostly human. Well, okay, the four arms were a bit different than humans. Using Identify, he saw a race he had not seen or heard of before.

He checked out several of them and got the same race response. The man at level 131 stood in the front of all the others, and Jake saw his level was the highest of them all. This man also saw Jake and stared back with two odd eyes. One of them held two pupils and the other none at all.

Jake nodded, and the man did not seem to understand his gesture. Looking a bit around, Jake saw so many different races, most of which he had never heard of, but nearly all of them humanoid. There were also elves, dwarves, beastfolk, and all the usual suspects, along with two very interesting groups that only consisted of Risen and other undead creatures. Did they hail from undead planets, perhaps?

Miranda and the others – besides Arnold, who was busy checking out the metal on the railing – all looked around curiously. This was truly a clash of cultures as over a thousand different civilizations had their first meeting within an atrium in a space station.

However, Jake also noticed something else. Something odd.

Why are they all so weak?

He had only seen one or two above level 150. That was incredibly low, wasn't it? Jake knew he had been slacking off a bit too much with levels and had only begun to get back on track recently. That is why he was so confused... wouldn't people who rushed levels or had cities level faster? Jake wouldn't be surprised if someone like Jacob was already peak D-grade by now and close to C-grade.

Miranda noticed his frown, and Jake felt a mental probing as she tried to speak to him telepathically. Jake allowed it in as he heard her voice.

“You are surprised by their average level, right?” she asked.

Jake threw her a glance and nodded. “A bit. Did Earth have special opportunities or anything like that for us to grow? You know, something more than everyone else?”

She shook her head and smiled a little. “Answering that is a bit complicated, I think. I have been to the Verdant Lagoon many times with my dream skill and talked to many people, and I have come to realize Earth is truly a special place. Not because of what but who. Records have a way of congregating and building off each other. So I would say that in some ways, it had special opportunities by having the possibility of interacting with individuals on a level far above the norm.”

“Can it really be that simple?” Jake asked skeptically. He already knew there was some truth to it, but it was hard to believe the only reason so many strong people appeared on Earth was that other strong people appeared. It reminded him a bit of the old catch-22 where you can’t find a job without having experience and can’t get experience without finding a job. Just in this case, a lot of strong people would only appear if there were other strong people, yet you need strong people to get truly strong yourself. Okay, not exactly the same, but close enough.

“Probably not that simple, no, but at least it is a partial explanation. Jake, I want you to remember that you are used to interacting with figures far above the norm. To become a member of the Order of the Malefic Viper already makes someone a supreme genius in the eyes of the average resident of the multiverse, while I am sure you view the average members of the Order as not worth much.

“Heck, take me as an example. I was no one before you spontaneously wanted me to be City Lord for you. It is questionable if I would even have reached D-grade without that happening – assuming I even survived that long. Me being near you and working for you changed my Path entirely. I got a Blessing and was taught by gods. I got artifacts I could never dream of. All because of you making that one choice that day... and I am certain that is something I will be shown in the upcoming event: what would have happened if I had rejected to become City Lord back then.”

He listened without interrupting, not completely agreeing. Jake frowned as he didn't feel like it was entirely fair to give him all the credit.

"While I may have helped, that was only in the beginning. Since then, I have done close to nothing, and it feels like what I have done often just creates more problems for you. You have run Haven more or less alone, and those you found to help you were selected and trained by you. I know nothing of your magic and barely understand how your class or profession works. Don't sell yourself short; you are plenty talented in your own right," he sent to her encouragingly.

Miranda smiled at him but shook her head. "It is odd, isn't it? Why can I figure out this magic when who I was before the system should in no way allow me to? Why do I understand things I shouldn't? I have come to believe that it isn't always that those with talent get Records, but that Records can birth talent... you know, like how one says a child can inherit the talent of their parents, so can you benefit from the talents of others. Nurturing it of sorts. The Witches of the Verdant Lagoon have mentioned something like that but never truly confirmed it. Either way, this is all a sidetrack. Just know that Earth is special and that you cannot judge other planets using ours as the standard. But that doesn't mean we are at the peak... you never know which monsters may be out there."

"That we can agree on," Jake answered. Their conversation had been telepathic and taken far less time than using words, but a solid ten seconds had still passed. People were still curiously observing others, and he himself got quite a lot of attention... wait, no, it was Miranda who got it.

Her level was the highest of anyone around. This also made Jake realize why no fighting was allowed. Chances are the ones arriving from Earth could massacre most other "powerful talents" from other planets in their own galaxy, instantly wiping out much of their potential future competition.

Jake looked down towards the bottom of the atrium and saw hundreds of people gathering down there. From the looks of it, all of these balconies and floors of the Seat of the Exalted Prima were merely for those from different planets to enter, and the true Seat was at the bottom.

“I will head down,” Jake said.

Being not the most patient person, Jake merely stepped forward and teleported several hundred meters down and appeared on the ground floor. A few surprised and frightened gazes landed on him, but luckily the King was also there and took the attention away from him.

Not even when Sylphie swept down did they get attention. Then again, a Unique Lifeform above level 190 was bound to attract attention, especially as the King didn't even try to hide his level. Jake was damn sure he could, considering he was an expert in soul magic, which meant he chose not to. Probably to show off.

Oh well, that was all well and good for Jake. With Sylphie on his shoulder, he made his way past the crowd that tried to suck up to the King. In the center of the atrium was a pillar that Jake saw several people walk into like it wasn't there, and Jake saw several complicated scripts on it. As well as words.

Seat of the Exalted Prima Simulation Room

It was clear this was the entrance. With his sphere, Jake saw this metal pillar registered as just one huge mass of mana. Danger sense was also silent as he went over and, not wanting to make any queues, walked straight into the pillar like everyone else.



He phased through it without even feeling anything as only whiteness met his eyes. At the same time, he felt his connection to Sylphie disappear, with the bird now gone off his shoulder. Jake stood there for a moment before a menu popped up in front of him.

Welcome to the Seat of the Exalted Prima

Due to still being in the early stages of the ninety-third universe's integration, simulation options are limited.

Options available:

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System-tier events:

Path of Myriad Choices

It was the most barebones menu Jake had ever seen. Had they been offered an early alpha version of the Seat of the Exalted Prima or what?

Oh well. Not wanting to delve too much into the questionable actions of this Exalted Prima, Jake selected Path of Myriad Choices.

On one of the top floors of the atrium, another teleporter activated. A figure appeared, followed by over a hundred more. All of them stayed behind their leader, not a single daring to walk in front. These were clearly part of a singular force rather than a collective of individuals who participated in the event.

The leader was a man with deep orange skin with blue tattoo-like patterns running across it. He wore an intricate red robe and equipment that would put most others to shame. His face had near-perfect features that made him look androgynous yet also inhuman.

This figure, leading his entourage, exited their own hall as he looked down towards the bottom, ignoring all of those staring at him and his followers with wide eyes. He smiled upon seeing the Unique Lifeform he knew as the former King of the Forest.

He also spotted several other figures of interest as he failed to suppress a smile. How could he? There was so much to look forward to. So many things to do and such interesting stories to be told.

Soon... soon it would be time to meet his fellow Chosen and begin the first chapter of their legend.

Chapter 482 - Path Of Myriad Choices

Jake had selected the only thing possible, and a new menu popped up, finally giving him a better idea of what the event was all about and how it would work.

System-tier event: Path of Myriad Choices.

Simulation Description: The participant will be shown a minimum of two and a maximum of six choices made prior that significantly impacted their current Path. This simulation allows the participant to see a potential reality wherein that choice was not made. Dependent on the results of the simulation, the participant may be offered rewards related to the actions of the simulacrum of the participant during the simulation. The scope and length of all simulations vary but shall never simulate past current Realtime.

Note that no actions can be performed during the simulation outside of observing or ending the simulation. Only one choice can be selected.

Rewards may or may not be gained from this event. All participants are encouraged to take inspiration from the simulacrum and a potential other Path than that which they currently walk.

Initiate Path of Myriad Choices?

Y/N

Jake read the description carefully before entering. The Watcher had not given much information, but this sure shed some light on things. It truly was a simulation, and considering the system-tier event tag, Jake reckoned that the simulation would not be anything simple.

It seemed insane to think that the system would more or less create an entirely different world and show it to the participants. How much had to go into that? And how accurate could it be? Jake was sure as hell curious as he accepted the prompt.

Instantly, changes happened. Within the whiteness, four scenes appeared out of nothing, simply existing there in the space contained within rooms of sorts. One of the “rooms,” if it was even correct to call it that, was of himself walking through a dark tunnel. Jake instantly recognized it as the one he had found during the Tutorial after splitting up with his colleagues.

The one leading to the Challenge Dungeon.

The second scene was one that came quite a lot later. It showed Jake and the King of the Forest standing before one another. It was before the fight had begun.

But... from there, it got weird. The two other scenes were not at all what Jake expected. The first one was of him standing before his compound bow back in his parent’s old house. He was a teenager back then and had big dreams of going pro with his archery, and from the looks of it, this was before his accident. Back then, he ended up tearing several tendons, suffered severe damage to his shoulder, and was told by a doctor that he could no longer practice for over a year. That had made the dream impossible as it put him out of the competition for so long and had resulted in Jake studying more and ultimately going to university.

The fourth scene was something Jake did not get at all. He didn’t even remember it. It showed who he assumed to be himself standing in the entryway of a house Jake barely remembered as being the one his parents used to own. The one they moved out of when he was five years old to get closer to a better school and for his dad’s job.

Jake in the scene was nothing but a toddler - less than three years old for sure, as his mother was heavily pregnant with Caleb. Jake was clearly throwing a tantrum in the scene, and his father and mother were frantically trying to calm him down as his grandmother, who had probably come to babysit, stood confused in the doorway.

I don't get it, Jake thought as he looked at it. What choice did he make back then? Sure, he kind of understood the others, but what decisions could a damn toddler make? Luckily for him, the system of the Seat had more options available. He saw that four options had appeared before him, each with a small description attached. Treating it like a skill choice, he started from the top.

Choice 1: Turning back and never entering the Tutorial Challenge Dungeon, resulting in you never meeting your Patron god or obtaining your current profession.

See preview?

This one was straightforward, and Jake pressed the "see preview" button with interest.

The moment he did so, the entire world around him changed. Jake watched himself stand in the dark tunnel before cursing, shaking his head, and turning around.

It shifted again and showed Jake looking at Jacob and the others in Richard's camp. Jake kept an eye on them and noticed William and Richard meet.

Next, he saw himself shoot an arrow through the head of Richard, killing him. He saw himself surrounded by dark magic as he did so.

The next image was of Jake killing the Nest Watcher – the third of four dungeon bosses before the King – and barely coming out on top moments before the Tutorial ended. A brief flash was of him standing with more of his old colleagues, with Jacob still an Augur and most having still died.

Then came what was almost a montage. It showed Jake making it to Skyggen, meeting his parents, and formally joining the Court of Shadows, also making it clear Jake had accepted the Blessing of Umbra. It showed him and his brother hunting through several flashes, them fighting beasts together, entering a different system event than the Treasure Hunt, and generally just Jake a lot closer to his family than before.

The preview ended there as the room turned white again, only showing the four scenes. The entire thing had taken only a minute or two and shown Jake snippets, but damn, was it interesting. So many things changed.

Not wanting to dwell on it too long, he saw the next.

Choice 2: Choosing to not fight the King of the Forest but bow out and leave the Tutorial there and then, thus not ending the reign of the King of the Forest and allowing him to return to Earth for a rematch one day.

See preview?

Jake selected it, and the simulation changed once more. This one proved a lot more boring than the old one. It was just Jake leaving the Tutorial and many of the same things happening as before, but everything was just... lesser?

He had killed a D-grade later, gotten fewer levels from the looks of it, and had just been far less impressive. Haven was also far more boring. Towards the end, Jake barely paid attention as he just shook his head. He knew why this one sucked.

Him backing down back then was backing down from everything he was. Surrendering like that was not in his nature and a rejection of his Bloodline. The only result of not fighting the King would be Jake not becoming a Progenitor and being far weaker. He would lose several titles, get worse skills from the Tutorial Store, and overall just seeing it made Jake annoyed at watching such a version of himself.

It was especially hammered home how much this version sucked when he saw the King and the Sword Saint fight to a standstill as he could only support from behind, not quite at their level.

Yeah, fuck that.

Next option.

Choice 3: Choosing to not practice archery that day but instead stay home, thus never suffering any injury allowing you to continue practicing.

See preview?

The third simulation... was weird. The preview was weird. It showed a few flashes of Jake doing archery, him standing with a trophy, him in an entirely different Tutorial – one with Caleb also in it. Jake saw a brief flash of himself standing before what he assumed to be Umbra, but her form was obscured. It showed him becoming the Judge and returning to Earth.

Jake was surprised at many things that happened, but one of them more than anything else. It showed Jake killing Bertram before forcing Jacob into a teleporter that took him off the planet.

It also showed him fighting the Sword Saint, but the moment the man realized his Transcendence, Jake was demolished and saw himself be saved as several members of the Court gave their lives to allow his escape.

It ended with Jake somehow teaming up with the Sword Saint and fighting the King of the Forest, who stood side by side with William of all people.

...

“What the fuck did I just watch?” Jake asked himself as he stood there and stared as the scenes still flashed before his eyes. The simulation room had returned to normal as it waited for his next input.

No, seriously, what the fuck did he actually just watch? There were so many things to take in. Him the Judge of the Court and, from the looks of it, an utter beast with the bow. Sadly Jake saw no details, just clips, the Seat not giving away any juicy stuff, just showing possibilities. Fighting Jacob and the Church... losing to the Sword Saint... so much to take in.

However, this weirdness did make it an attractive option. To see the possibilities of mixing dark magic and archery. There was the issue of Jake being pretty damn committed to his arcane affinity by now, but he could still learn a bit for sure.

Shaking his head, Jake decided to give the fourth preview a shot.



Choice 4: Obeying your parents and choosing to let them leave.

See preview?

This one was barebones. Jake frowned a bit as he began the preview. Jake instantly remembered that day as the first scene played out. It was odd he remembered with Jake still too young to truly form memories back then, but now he remembered it clear as day. He remembered the emotions, at least.

His parents were leaving to go to a hospital check-up for his mom. Jake had gotten a horrible gut feeling when they were about to leave and had stopped them by throwing such a large tantrum, so they had to stay and reschedule. It was something Jake did not even remember... but was that decision really that big?

As the simulation began, he realized it was.

He had chosen to ignore his gut and let his parents leave after only a bit of placating. The next scene was of Jake at a funeral - the next of him living with his grandparents, who soon passed away also. Then a foster home, another foster home... the scenes just kept changing rapidly as all that stayed constant was Jake getting older.

Then... everything became almost incomprehensible. A scene showed Jake in his early teenage years standing over a body. The next of him with a knife covered in blood and wearing a hoodie. Then him in a jungle-like environment, fighting other humans.

It kept repeatedly changing as nothing made sense until it reached a scene where he finally saw something familiar. The same Tutorial Caleb had gone to and one Jake had also been participating in during the third preview.

But things were very different this time around. The version of himself Jake saw was different to a level where Jake could not recognize him. Moreover, there was no bow to be seen anywhere. This version of himself was so different from who Jake was today; that much was obviously clear from just the preview.

The preview ended almost prematurely, shortly after Jake entered the Tutorial, showing him fighting several shadow beasts.

Being done with all the previews, Jake needed a moment to process everything. Because damn, was there a lot. Watching a movie of yourself doing things you have never done was just fucking weird, man.

Ultimately, these previews were lackluster and only allowed one to form an idea of what it was about. Jake considered all four of them and quickly filtered out the second version. That one was just a more cowardly version of himself who didn't become a Progenitor.

Next up, he filtered away the first choice. He wasn't a fan of it, and it included Jake doing much of the same but without poison and with more dark magic. It did have the bonus of Jake spending more time with family, but... that wasn't exactly something Jake could learn from. Okay, he probably could, as he really needed to go visit more and be a better son and brother.

That left the third and fourth, and of them, there was really only one option.

The fourth one was just too impactful and the one Jake understood the least. The Path was so different from who Jake was today. It was a Jake who fought entirely without a bow or poison. Moreover... the vision ended shortly after he entered the Tutorial. Did that mean he would die according to the simulation? Or was it something else? Curiosity alone made him feel forced to pick it.

However, before he did that, some considerations should be made.

One thing was clear from all these previews. Even without showing him anything substantial, Jake could infer some things, and the constant relation to the Court of Shadows couldn't be a coincidence. Even when his entire life was different from childhood, he ended up there. Yet now, Jake had no relations to it besides through his brother. He didn't even use his dark affinity for much.

That should maybe be the initial takeaway. My dark affinity is excellent, and I should be able to make some use of it, Jake noted mentally.

There was also one very notable absence of choices Jake would have expected – what would have happened if he had become a Malefic Dragonkin? It was such an obvious one Jake was surprised it wasn't there. Why had it chosen these four? It couldn't be due to how significant their impact would be, could it? All Paths ended up somewhat similar – either with the Court or Villy – and there was none where Jake even went with a third god as far as he could see.

So, why was it? Jake fought a version of himself back then. He knew he could have absorbed the power back then and changed significantly. Why was he not shown that? System limitations? No, that was out of the question. It could show even pre-initiation events, so thinking it couldn't figure out how to show him as a Dragonkin was moronic.

Wait... ah... yeah, that is possible.

Jake got on a potential explanation. These choices he had been offered had one thing in common: the lack of knowing their impact before making the choice. The only one that one could argue he did know was the one with the King and leaving the Tutorial, but did he really know? He had no frame of reference for what was good or the true reward for victory.

So maybe it just showed choices one could have made that would have had a significant impact without you realizing it. If not, wouldn't all the options offered be evolutions? It was a given that if Jake had chosen a different class or profession during evolution that it would change his Path.

It was just a theory, but it seemed kind of right. Either way, he had no way to confirm or deny this theory, not that it truly mattered. Jake had four choices and had already picked one mentally.

Without hesitating anymore, Jake chose the fourth option. The second he did so, a new message appeared.

Initiating simulation of Choice 4. All simulated content will be curated, and low-impact events and actions will automatically be filtered out or swiftly passed over.

With that message, the entire world changed. Jake found himself standing in the old entryway as if he was truly there, staring at a toddler version of himself throwing a tantrum.

"No!" little Jake yelled as he refused to let go of his dad's leg.

"Just stay with grandma, okay? We will be back soo-"

"NO!" Jake yelled again, tears in his eyes as he yanked the leg.

Jake remembered it now, clear as day. He had kept it up long enough for them to stay... but this time, it was different. He saw this version of himself relent, abandoning his trust in his instincts in favor of obeying his parents. He had let them go, despite feeling something bad would happen if he did.

Two hours later, a phone call came. A major car crash.

Less than a week later, the funerals - his parents both dead. His brother never born.

When Jake was five, his grandmother died, and he now no longer had any family he was still in contact with, meaning Jake became an orphan. Time quickly passed, but one thing was different from the start. He was no longer growing up in a loving family with parents and a little brother but in an underfunded and apathetic system where children were more often than not viewed as burdens.

Jake more than anyone. For there was one major difference between this child and Jake from back then. Something separate from the trauma and hurt. As he grew, it only became more apparent.

He had never suppressed his Bloodline... instead, he had embraced it.

Chapter 483 - A Very Different Life

Jake looked on as the life of the other Jake progressed at a steady pace, far more detailed than before, and it even included sound now. In fact, it was as if Jake himself was present and standing in the room and could even move around.

Many of the first memories after simulation-Jake - or sim-Jake for short – went into the foster system were of him being thrown into new environments surrounded by other children in equally unfortunate situations.

Such children tended to not be the best. They were emotionally underdeveloped and immature and often had no way of handling their situation besides acting out. So when a new kid entered a foster home of twelve kids – one younger than many of them – it was natural to make him a target.

A scene like this was one of the first major things that the simulation deemed an impactful event.

Sim-Jake, no more than seven years old, stood surrounded by children between the age of seven and ten. There were six of them in total. Jake was smaller than all but one of the other kids.

”Give!” one of the larger kids screamed as he reached towards sim-Jake’s toy. It was a foam dagger that Jake remembered his grandmother getting him before passing away. It appeared that it was a gift he would receive in both the simulation and real life.

Sim-Jake pulled away but didn’t say anything. But Jake saw the eyes of the other version of himself. He was ready. The larger kid moved in closer and pushed the far smaller child, sim-Jake stumbling backward. The other kids just laughed at the bullying as sim-Jake fell to the floor. Another kid came over to try and take the foam dagger while the large kid walked to Jake and prepared to kick him.

Now, even children have some kind of natural limiter on them. Greivous injuries when children were in scuffles rarely happened, as even when so young, they understood not to do it. Be it out of a fear of getting in trouble or inborn empathy, or perhaps a limiter imposed by society and early nurture.

Something sim-Jake clearly did not care about.

Out of nowhere, a dinner fork appeared. The kid trying to take the foam dagger didn't even have time to react as he was stabbed in the arm, making him scream out in pain. Rolling up, the far smaller child-version of Jake caught the leg of the bully and stood up, making him fall backward. Most would end there, but the small Jake ran over and stomped the larger kid in the head repeatedly as the ten-year-old started crying.

It only took a few seconds before a disheveled woman came yelling into the room and dragged Jake off the kid. Still holding the foam dagger tight as he stared daggers at the kid nearly twice his age on the ground.

As the scene was about to end, Jake noticed that the small version of himself seemed to almost look in his direction. Hm? Jake questioned, but the scene had already been completed.

A few more scenes appeared after that of Jake growing up. Each scene was of a different foster home, and all of them were of others trying to make trouble for Jake, and Jake using what could only be described as the use of excessive force in self-defense.

Where usually a kid would shove someone, Jake tackled them to the ground and began punching. Where one would punch someone, Jake broke an arm or a leg. His violence landed him in repeated trouble... but it was also effective. One instance was all it took, and no other child dared cause trouble for him.

Jake – the real one – had to admit he related to a few of these things. He didn't remember exactly when he began to truly suppress his Bloodline, but he still had it in some parts of his childhood. Even after it was suppressed, some of the effects were also still retained but far weaker. However, rather than slowly suppressing it more and more, this version of Jake embraced it. He grew into it.

Scenes continued, and the next most noticeable scene was of a fifteen-year-old sim-Jake. Rather than be in a foster home this time, he lived in an old abandoned warehouse. Homeless, most likely. Maybe the authorities had given up on him, or he had run off himself, but either way, he was clearly out of the system.

Jake first noticed the body of this version of himself wasn't what one would expect of a homeless fifteen-year-old. He had more muscles than kids of that age and looked more like an athlete in training. In the scene shown, he was also doing push-ups as two men walked over. Both looked to be in their thirties and were not happy.

"Hey kid, get the fuck up," one of the men sneered.

Sim-Jake barely reacted and kept training as he just turned his head. "What do you want?"

"I heard you made trouble for our boys," the other man said a bit more calmly.

"Funny, I remember it being the other way around. Them trying to rob me," sim-Jake said as he finally stopped training and stood up. He was smaller than the two men by quite a bit, but not a trace of fear was on his face.



A teenager before two large men would usually be viewed as a foregone conclusion. Facing little more than a child, the adults naturally didn't take sim-Jake very seriously as one of them reached towards him.

"Listen here ki-"

His wrist was grasped as sim-Jake looked him in the eye. "I am listening, am I not?"

The man did not take kindly to this. He wrested his arm free and took a swing. Sim-Jake effortlessly dodged it as he took a step back to avoid a follow-up. The man looked like he had some minor boxing experience, but it was far from good enough.

Sim-Jake caught his arm as the man made a wide swing and twisted it. The attacker yelled in pain as sim-Jake just pushed him away, making him fall to the ground.

"Just fuck off already, man," sim-Jake said, annoyed.

The other man who had yet to attack looked at his fallen comrade.

"Kid, you stole thousands from us. We aren't leaving," he said.

Sim-Jake raised an eyebrow and frowned as the other party pulled out a switchblade. The man raised it threateningly and spoke again. "Stop being an idiot."

The real Jake saw his simulated version take a clearly defensive stance. The man with the switchblade looked like he had hoped to just intimidate. No one wanted to kill someone and potentially land themselves in legal trouble over what could not be that much money. Yet when the man saw Jake clearly wanted to fight, he sneered and jumped. Sim-Jake dodged the blade, but one thing quickly became clear:

Sim-Jake was fighting someone with actual experience.

A cut landed on sim-Jake's arm, and he was forced to back away. He began retreating more and more as he took several wounds. When he made it behind a pillar, the man with the blade followed... only to have a rod of rebar smash towards him.

The man leaned back and dodged, once more showing he was no push-over. The first man had also gotten up again and pulled out a knife of his own.

"We really doing this?" sim-Jake asked as he stood there with his rebar rod.

None of the men answered but had clearly decided to kill him. It was answer enough. The simulated version of Jake dove forward, taking the men by surprise as he managed to hit the guy he had injured earlier on the arm.

He dropped his blade as sim-Jake tried to swing again but had to stop and jump back to avoid getting stabbed in the gut. The second man came at him again, and sim-Jake managed to keep him away with his metal rod.

Jake – the real one – who looked on noted how mundane the battle was. It was almost weird seeing three people who were just average humans go at each other. His simulated version was in many ways at a disadvantage but held his own, despite being younger and smaller.

The situation changed when sim-Jake managed to tackle the second man, and they rolled to the ground. Sim-Jake got up but was bleeding from his thigh, while the other man... didn't get up. He was lying there with the knife stuck in his own chest, straight in the heart, with a look of disbelief on his face.

This took both of the two remaining survivors by surprise. It was clear sim-Jake had not done it on purpose. The real Jake also saw how it was just "luck," if one can call it that. Sim-Jake had tried to block while the man tried to stab and had hit Jake on the thigh, but it didn't cut properly, and he ended up falling on his own knife.

"You! Fucking cunt!" the first man said but did not engage. Instead, he began retreating. The man was not the fastest, but neither was sim-Jake. He just stood there for a moment and stared at the corpse... before something clicked.

He looked at the fleeing man and picked up the metal rod from before. With an impressive toss, he hit the man on the knee as he tried to flee and stormed over, his bleeding thigh leaving a trail of blood after him. Sim-Jake picked up the fallen rebar rod again as he went to the fallen man.

The man stared back as sim-Jake lifted up the rebar rod, and the man yelled another curse as sim-Jake swung down, hitting him in the head. A few more blows sealed the deal as sim-Jake dropped the weapon and wheezed. He looked at his hands and started shaking a bit as he cursed.

"Fucking fuck. Shit... just... fuck..."

The real Jake noted how they both had the habit of cursing a lot. He also understood the frustration... this was his first time killing anyone. The simulacrum, that is. But... it was a necessary kill. If he hadn't done it, things would have no-doubt ended worse. They would have been back with reinforcements. Taken revenge.

Jake saw his simulation version limp away as he kept cursing and looked incredibly panicked. For some unknown reason, he also kept looking nervously around, primarily in the direction of where the real Jake was standing within the simulated space. The scene ended there as everything changed once more.

The next scene was of sim-Jake sitting in a room, clearly older now. An older-looking gentleman in a suit handed him a picture that the other Jake looked at, nodded, and handed back. He then got up and left.

It switched again, now showing Jake standing over a dead body with a knife in his hand. He cleaned the weapon a bit with a cloth before sheathing it beneath his clothes and prepared to walk out of the decrepit apartment building like nothing had happened.

At least he tried to, as there was movement in adjacent rooms.

The real Jake felt everything. Even in the simulation, his Sphere was fully functional and showed him the world as genuine. He could see an actual world for hundreds of meters in every direction, and from the looks of it, his simulacrum also had this ability.

He stopped at the door and waited, clearly sensing someone walking through the hallway. The person stopped at the door as he knocked. "Hey boss, one of the corner girls was caught trying to stiff us again. Want us to handle it as usual?"

Yep, this entire joint was clearly a hidden brothel of sorts, and it appeared like simulacrum-Jake had just killed the boss of the establishment. Real-Jake honestly felt a bit relieved that if sim-Jake was a killer, then at least he killed assholes.

The guy outside the door knocked again before finally opening the door a bit nervously. "Boss?"

He barely had time to step inside before sim-Jake snuck up from behind and slit his throat while he covered the guy's mouth. He fell limp to the floor as sim-Jake shook his head and went out the door casually, wearing a black hoodie.

This version of him was probably eighteen or nineteen tops.

Similar scenes repeated, and Jake quickly became clear what kind of person he was. He was not necessarily a contract killer but just a mercenary for hire. There was even a brief stint overseas where he worked for an arms dealer but left soon after.

Throughout these scenes, Jake came to realize there was a lack of guns. Not used by the other side, but by sim-Jake. He used it overseas but quickly discarded it. Instead, he tended to use knives, wires, improvised weapons found at the location, or just his body.

He would sneak past police with his supernatural Bloodline abilities every time. Like a ghost, he would enter, kill, and leave again. Gradually he moved up the food chain and went from killing low-life pimps to high-rollers in the criminal world. He even took out a corrupt judge at one point.

Real-Jake observed and went along for all these scenes. Weeks had passed for him, but time moved differently within the simulation room. Some of the scenes were incredibly impactful, while others were just more of the same. What they all had in common was an ever-growing Jake both in skill, physique, knowledge, and just overall ability. Compared to other humans, he seemed borderline unstoppable. He was the type of person to bring a knife to a gunfight and utterly annihilate the other side.

The most impressive scene was one of the times sim-Jake was in legitimate trouble. He had been in a motel room but was clearly restless. He was on the run from the goons of a recent target and had chosen to lay low. Yet he felt like they had found him.

It turned out that the one who hired him decided to try and get rid of sim-Jake and had informed the goons of his location. Knowing showing up in force would not work, they had simply placed two snipers focusing on the room's exits.

Sim-Jake exited one day to move to the next safe house. He looked semi-aware of what was happening.

For a bit of trivia... sniper bullets before the system traveled faster than the speed of sound. Many modern firearms did. This meant that one would not hear the gunshot before the bullet had already hit the target. Realistically there should be no way to react or know it was coming.

Which is why the sniper was sure bamboozled when sim-Jake swayed to the side and avoided the bullet before taking cover and eventually making another miraculous escape.

Jake had to admit... this version of himself was so different from who he had been. From a university-educated financial worker to a top-tier assassin and killer. Comparing the two was like night and day.

Yet it did not feel foreign. To the current Jake, this made sense. This version of himself just embraced what made him, well, him. He became a hunter, and Jake was certain sim-Jake did not only choose targets based on money or prestige... he did it for the challenge.

He was a Primal Hunter, after all.

It was odd, knowing this could have been a version of him. Assuming the simulation was truly as accurate as it seemed to claim – and it did seem like it was so far – wasn't this version of Jake just... superior?

There was a lot to think about. He would just have to see what happened as the simulation progressed.

A new scene soon appeared, one Jake could not see the significance of right away. It was just within a hotel room with his simulacrum, sitting on a chair in a bathrobe, drinking some water. He had a tablet at the side, and the entire place looked expensive as hell.

What skin was showing made the life of this version of Jake clear. Even with his abilities, injuries were unavoidable. Sometimes one had to take a hit to avoid a lethal blow, and this had resulted in dozens of scars covering his body - from knife wounds to bullet holes.

From the looks of it, this was happening not long before the initiation would begin. Real Jake peeked at the tablet and saw the date was displayed and nodded when he saw it was around two months off. It would be exciting to truly see how he would handle that.

But.... Then something weird happened.

Something very weird.

Sim-Jake looked deep in thought. He stared at the ceiling before finally sighing, steeling himself, and then looking straight at where Jake was.

"I do wonder who or what you are, oh silent observer."

Chapter 484 - Understanding Thyself

Odd. The world was odd. Jake hadn't noticed it much – at least not to begin with - but as he grew up, it became more and more apparent. It was as if someone was watching him. Not all the time, mind you, but this observer appeared at important events. That feeling of a gaze and a feeling of wrongness. It was also only in those moments he felt observed he truly felt this oddness of the world.

It was no security camera, no satellite locking in on his position... it was as if the observer didn't truly exist, yet could observe him. Jake chose to ignore it for the most part as his instincts told him he could do nothing about it, and so far, this observer had no impact on his life.

Perhaps it was a guardian angel given to him after his parents died? Or was it a god? Some extraterrestrial being? A creature existing in a world separate from his own? Many theories dominated his mind, especially as the gaze felt so familiar. Familiar, yet different.

As time passed and he grew older, this silent observer seemed more and more familiar. He even began wondering if it was his unborn brother's ghost. It would make sense if his brother would have been like Jake, right? That he would have the same abilities and be born with the same innate talents?



Sitting in a chair within the extravagant hotel room, he stared at where he faintly felt this apparition was. He shook his head and spoke out loud into the room, expecting nothing in response.

"I do wonder who or what you are, oh silent observer," Jake muttered randomly.

And surprisingly enough... it felt like this apparition had heard and understood him.

Jake stared at his simulacrum for a moment as he felt the other familiar yet foreign man stare back.

"Wait... did he just talk to me? Nah, it shouldn't work like that," Jake said as he shook his head.

"You understand me?" sim-Jake asked, equally confused.

Two Jakes stared at each other. Both were in utter disbelief. The real Jake because his simulacrum, an apparition of the system or the Seat or the Seat of the Exalted Prima, was suddenly aware of him. Sim-Jake for talking to what he probably assumed to be a mere delusion giving him the sense it understood his words.

"What or who are you?" sim-Jake asked as he stood up and went over to where Jake was standing. He moved his hand, and it passed straight through Jake. Yet when it was around his heart, his hand stopped for a second as he frowned.

Jake also felt it. A recognition or resonance of sorts. Sim-Jake removed his hand and backed away as his frown only grew deeper. "You're like me?" he asked almost with a look of realization. He then smiled before he started laughing.

"I fucking knew it. I now know why this all feels so damn wrong. I'm not meant to be here, right? What the hell happened? Did I get thrown into a separate dimension or universe or some shit? Am I even human? Are you?" sim-Jake asked, with a lot of excitement.

The real Jake stared as he considered the questions and decided to answer despite the other version not being able to hear him.

"Eh, I guess I am not meant to be you? But there was no accident, just a different choice. And yeah, you are human. We both are. Just more human than anyone else, perhaps," Jake said. Inside he was asking just as many questions as sim-Jake.

Firstly... how the fuck was this possible?

This was a simulation. The system was clear on that. Which just raised even more questions. This other version of himself had everything Jake had, including his Bloodline. He was Jake in every sense of the word, even to the level of being aware he was being observed by an outside force he should in no reasonable way be aware of.

Jake knew that the system itself made this simulation – it had to – and that it could be considered a real world for everyone in it. Maybe the system did just go above and beyond, and straight-up create a parallel universe to simulate what would have happened.

Then again, would that even be going above and beyond? For an omnipotent force, was there truly a difference between creating a speck of dust and a universe? Omnipotence was omnipotence, after all. A one or a trillion was equally insignificant before something infinite.

So... if it had just made a new world to simulate that one choice, why not do it perfectly? And a perfect Jake would know he was in a simulated world if he was. Well, he wouldn't know-know, but he would be aware something was off and that he was being observed.

Villy had mentioned before that the system did not create Bloodlines, but never that it couldn't. Just that it didn't. Actually, that wasn't even entirely true, as if the system controlled everything, wasn't it also the system "creating" new Bloodlines when two people with Bloodlines had a child and their Bloodlines fused, making a new one? Or at least it allowed it to happen.

Jake shook his head as he considered all these questions he would perhaps never get a straight answer to. Even Villy made it clear he didn't know. All he knew was that the system didn't create new Bloodlines outright but recycled old ones for some system events, so for it to copy a Bloodline temporarily for such an event was not overly surprising.

What was a bit surprising was that this Bloodline in question allowed the other copy to recognize the event itself.

Recognize the "real" version of itself speaking to it.

"I'm... wrong?" the copy asked after Jake answered that they were humans and that he was meant to be there. The ambiguousness of the answer still seemed to confuse the simulacrum. Especially considering he didn't actually hear any answer but had to go by pure intuition.

“No, not entirely,” sim-Jake concluded. “Alright, yes and no questions. Hm... how to confirm answers.”

The real Jake got an idea for this as he began moving back and forth while keeping an eye on sim-Jake. He, of course, noticed and picked up on it instantly. Jake knew he would. They were both Jake, were they not?

“I understand. To confirm, can you move to the left? My left.”

Jake did so.

“And right?”

Jake did so too.

“Alright, method of communication with a creature from a separate dimension established,” sim-Jake joked. Real Jake knew he would have made that exact same joke. Sim-Jake then followed up as the real “conversation” began.

“A step to my left is no; to the right is yes, alright?”

Jake stepped to the right to confirm.

“Okay. First of all, are you human?”

Once more, Jake confirmed that, yep, they were both humans.

“And so am I?”

Yep.

“Hm. But we are different, aren’t we?”

Confirmed.

“Odd. Very odd. Are there others with abilities like mine?” sim-Jake asked.

Jake thought for a second. Well, there were others with Bloodlines, but not others with his Bloodline. So... yes, but also not really? Not knowing what to say, Jake just stood unmoving as his simulation waited for him to decide.

After a good five seconds, the simulacrum frowned and asked. "You don't know?"

Jake chose to say yes to that one.

"So you do know?"

Yep once more.

"But yet you will not say there are others like me. Us. Hm..."

The next few minutes passed with sim-Jake asking questions and Jake trying to answer as best he could. It was damn weird having a conversation with himself, but it was also way smoother than it should be. Jake naturally understood his own logic, and even with how differently they had lived and grown up, he understood his simulacrum. Perhaps that was telling of how much the Bloodline truly had worked on forming him... or it was an argument that nature mattered more than nurture.

Either way, he ended up properly communicating that while there were others who were special, there were only those two who were Jake-special. It was also a bit awkward when sim-Jake asked if they were related somehow. Jake had chosen just to stand still and give a "maybe" to that one, as he wasn't sure people would consider what they were as related. He knew he would not, so of course, his simulacrum wouldn't either.

The questions eventually turned away from the question of "who" and moved on to the question of "why."

After a few preliminary questions where Jake confirmed he was unable to actually interact and influence the world outside of the communication they were currently having, his simulacrum began to understand.

“So you are here to observe me?”

Big yes to that one. It was all he could do.

“But you are only around at certain times... do you choose when?”

An equally big no there.

“Is someone else dictating what you are allowed to see?”

Eh, a no to that one. It wasn't someone, and his simulacrum quickly picked up on his answer.

“A set of rules then?”

Yes.

“Hm... okay, so you are here to observe me according to a set of rules. Which means you are here to see something specific about me. Considering that you mainly appear in or before combat situations or at other major events... is the reason related to our shared special ability?”

Maybe for that one. Yes and no. Jake was there to observe everything he was, and his Bloodline was certainly part of that.

“So partly, I guess. Is it related to combat?”

Also, a maybe, as that too was only partially right.

“Not combat either? At least not fully? Is it related to my targets somehow?”

Nah, it wasn't. Jake didn't really care who he killed, only how he did it.

“So it is only related to me?”

Big yeppers.

They went on a bit further as they narrowed it down. Dozens of questions later and a conclusion had been reached that Jake could confidently answer yes to.



“You are here to observe me passively to learn, not necessarily from me, but about me. Who I am, why I do as I do, and pretty much just see my life and how I develop and who I become?” he asked clarifyingly, to which Jake said yes.

“I think I kind of get it now. Okay, not really. But you do say this will be beneficial to me?”

Jake confirmed that. They were the same person, after all. Help me, help you, which is actually me. It made sense.

“I don’t get the feeling that is a lie either... alright. Let’s go from here, then. You want to learn about and from me about who I am? Well, let me teach you without holding anything back. You have seen everything anyway, so the more information, the better, right?”

Which was once more confirmed by Jake. His simulacrum was about to open his mouth and say more as the scene then skipped forward, much to the frustration of Jake. The next scene was of sim-Jake in a dark forest-like area with lights in the distance leading up to a remotely located mansion.

The moment he appeared, sim-Jake noticed and smiled.

“Been a week since last. I was beginning to wonder if you were done,” sim-Jake said. He was in a camouflage outfit, and his mouth was covered as he spoke incredibly softly. During their questionnaire, they had already confirmed that sim-Jake could speak in the lowest of whispers and real-Jake could still hear it. Not due to simulation stuff, but just because Perception was the best stat.

His simulacrum then began to speak. Almost rantingly.

“You know, I never really liked humans and found it a bit disappointing when you said I was one. I felt like I could never relate to other people. Not truly. They were all so different from me from the get-go. They were stupid, made moronic decisions, and their instincts were so pathetic it disgusted me on a fundamental level. I was superior to every one of them. Granted, I am not the smartest when it comes to books, but hey, you don’t judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, and you don’t judge an apex killer by his ability to discuss philosophy. Besides, all that shit is just needlessly complicated, you know? I always manage with the same plan:

“Make things simple... and take the complications as they come.”

Jake’s eyes opened a bit wide at that sentence. The sentiment. It was something he often thought to himself and was almost a motto of his, once more making it clear they were indeed the one and the same person.

“Anyway, this all makes me dislike other humans more. I hate working with them and being around them. They want plans or strategies, and if something – anything – goes wrong, they fucking panic and do nothing useful. Even if they are trained and don’t panic, they still don’t adapt. Not properly. Not like we do. I guess another way of looking at it is that I feel like I am a wolf living amongst sheep,” sim-Jake rambled on.

“None of them are aware of me or other dangerous entities around them. Perhaps I envy their ignorance as they can die with a simple shot to the head or a knife in the neck before they even notice. Perhaps I envy that they can belong somewhere and not always be the odd one out. It may sound narcissistic of me, but I do think I am better than everyone else. Not at everything, but at what I am and what I do. Overall, this does make me superior. Makes me more than human. Perhaps the next step in evolution or simply the apex of what humanity can reach. It isn’t even a guess anymore. I know I am

objectively superior from the core of my being. Even when I try not to feel superior, I feel disdain towards those weaker than myself... which is everyone. It is worse with those who don't even try."

Jake listened on. His simulacrum whispered beneath his breath as he snuck forward and passed over a fence. Security cameras were covering most spots, but sim-Jake picked up a small stone and, with a piece of cloth, launched it towards the one covering his entrance point, breaking it instantly. He then quickly ran over and tossed a dead bird at the base of the mansion as he ran across the side of the large building.

"Don't get me wrong, I also like to laze around once in a while and do nothing, but how can you live a life doing that? How can you not improve yourself? More than anything, how can you live with yourself standing in a crowd, knowing the majority there could end your life if they so desired? Would that realization not make you strive for power more? I know, I know, this doesn't apply to them. They don't feel the inherent danger others can pose. They just embrace their feeble safety given by others. Maybe that is why I like what I do."

Guards reacted to the broken camera as they made their way to investigate. Sim-Jake easily took advantage of this and scaled the building on another side as he reached an already open window. Clearly, the one living there feared little. It was located in a remote forest with Jake counting more than forty guards total and a top-of-the-line security system. Not expecting someone to climb four stories in less than half a minute with absolute ease was also reasonable.

"A lot of the "powerful" in this world is just the opposite. They are weak. Feeble old men are elected leaders of countries, institutions, and large, influential companies. Even leaders of cartels and criminal enterprises tend to be on the older side. They are viewed as the brains of the operation, or maybe they are just leveraging who they used to be and their reputation. Logically I understand. You want the one in charge to know what he is doing... but does he really need to be at the top? Why is he at the top when a simple reality is clear."

Sim-Jake had small breaks in between whispering as he hid from guards who patrolled. They found the broken security camera and noticed the dead bird, perhaps concluding that it had flown into the camera

and destroyed it. In the midst of night with low visibility and with nothing else going on, this was an easy and frankly lazy conclusion.

Jake's alternate version finally made it to a door guarded by two men. Thinking quickly, sim-Jake retreated a bit and quickly dispatched one of the patrolling guards. Once the man was silently eliminated, sim-Jake took on his clothes, which included a nice pair of night-vision goggles perfect for hiding your face.

"They like to hide away. Use others as shields. They live in a reality that simply isn't true, and they hold a worldview I love to shatter. They think they are the superior ones. I feel it. They genuinely believe they are better than everyone else. That they are apex humans, who are untouchable."

Sim-Jake walked casually towards the two guards who lazily stood there, not really commenting on the approaching disguised figure. It was only when sim-Jake was within striking distance one of them noticed something was off, and by then, it was too late. A knife was thrown, and another man was stabbed in the neck as they both fell to the ground, unable to even resist.

Inside the room was only a single man sitting at a desk with a computer. He looked up as the door opened and saw the bloody sim-Jake who had already taken the mask and night goggles off as he smiled, his clothes splattered with blood.

He spoke the last part out loud to both Jake and the man who stared at the approaching sim-Jake.

"Even with all their wealth. All their influence and their grand reputation... they are still weak, feeble humans."

The man behind the desk finally reacted as he pulled out a gun and aimed. Sim-Jake just smiled as the man shot, but he had already dodged the bullet before it was even released from the chamber.

“Weak, feeble humans that, despite everything they have-” sim-Jake said as he dodged the final bullet of the chamber and now stood before the scared shitless old man. He tried to speak, but a single fist hit the side of his head as he fell, his eyes glazed over.

“-still die by my hand. Because that is true power.”

#### Chapter 485 - A Lonely Existence

Jake watched on as his simulacrum made yet another miraculous escape by leaping out a window and rappelling down four stories before swiftly making it over the fence to the forest. The guards were a bit distracted by the gunshots from their boss earlier and had, of course, gone to investigate only to find the man dead.

Back in the forest, sim-Jake kept running as he spoke once more, a smile on his lips.

“I wasn’t even paid for this one, you know? I just didn’t like the guy. He tried to hire me a year or so ago, and when I refused the job as the target wasn’t my kind of thing, he threw a hissy fit and tried to have me killed. Naturally, he failed, and I killed the people he sent, and the idiot probably thought that was the end of it. Or not, based on the guards, but hey, I enjoy the added challenge. Sometimes you got to sneak a bit as not even I can survive the barrage of an entire squad of gunmen. Too many bullets. Even if I can feel the trajectory of every one of them, it would be like trying to dodge the rain itself.”

He talked about himself more and explained things that Jake, of course, understood. Ah, but the rain was dodgeable; he just had to get strong enough. If it wasn’t, Jake would have been torn apart by the Sword Saint.

As for the philosophy of his simulacrum... Jake also understood. Understanding and agreeing were not the same, though. He himself had felt and still at times felt similarly. His Bloodline was, in the end, partly about being at the peak of the food chain, and looking down on others was just inherent to him. Be it an unwanted side effect or a necessary part of his ability to ignore presences, it was there.

Jake could only imagine how it must have been to grow up with his Bloodline on full display. The real Jake could at least meet actually powerful individuals after he fully awakened his Bloodline to get some perspective. People so strong he would not be able to land a single injury on them no matter what methods he deployed. Those so powerful they could wipe him from existence with a mere thought. Looking down on those individuals was something not even Jake could do. However, that was still different from recognizing them as superior. To Jake, someone being stronger than him was just a temporary state of things. One day, he would stand at the top, or he would die trying with a smile on his face.

Sim-Jake did not have that kind of perspective at all. It was entirely possible he was the strongest individual on the planet. That there truly was nobody, he couldn't kill, and Jake could understand why that could be... boring. But, something else was also readily apparent:

This Jake had way less empathy than the non-simulation Jake, and damn, Jake was not the most empathetic person to begin with. Never had been. But his family had ensured he had some "humanity" in him. He could confidently say that he truly loved and cared for his brother and parents. His simulacrum never had anyone that he judged worthy of recognizing as worth caring for. Especially not if he disconnected himself from humanity early on. Jake had seen no signs of lovers or even friends in any of the visions he had seen. Sim-Jake was always alone. In some ways, it was a bit sad.

"I sense a trace of disapproval. Why? I know you understand. Don't get me wrong, it isn't that I like to kill humans for sport. There is no sport in committing a senseless murder. It would be like a pathetic loser sitting back with his rifle to shoot a rhino. There is no danger, no challenge... no meaning in such an action. I also do have some rules. I will not kill people I believe genuinely contribute to making the world a better place or if I believe their deaths will cause too many issues for too many innocent people. The last rule is the reason why I haven't killed nine out of ten politicians," sim-Jake said. The last part was only half a joke.

His simulacrum ran through the forest a bit more before making it to a boat at the edge of a river. He jumped on and started the surprisingly silent motor as he sailed the thirty-odd meters to the other side.

“You may ask if I couldn’t look for my challenges elsewhere... and I did. Underground fighting rings, hunting in the wild, or even fighting animals. None of it was able to truly scratch that itch. Sadly I could never do anything official or even try to perhaps compete with the peak of humanity in sports as I have not been viewed favorably by the law since I was a teenager. I don’t even think I am officially alive anymore. And even if I competed in sports, it would all just be too fake. A challenge without consequences is just not as good, and fencing competitors don’t want to use real swords during combat. What true combat I could find, such as in the underground fighting ring, was not interesting either. They were too weak, and even their rules ruined the fun. Ah, but I did have a handful of life and death fights, but after four opponents, no one wanted to fight anymore. Understandable, I guess,” sim-Jake further explained in a defensive tone.

Getting off the boat, sim-Jake went up a hill and into a camouflaged getaway vehicle.

“I would never claim to be a good person, but I would not call myself a bad one either. I am just me. I don’t kill without reason, but I also don’t spare those I find undeserving. I have rules I abide by, even if they conflict with what society believes I should do. I fight, I kill, and I try to challenge myself. I do what I want, eat the best food I can get my hands on, and go wherever and do whatever I want. So let me ask you...” the simulacrum said as he turned to Jake, who sat beside him on the passenger seat, flying along as he couldn’t actually sit on the seat.

“Why do I feel so fucking miserable? Why does this world feel so utterly meaningless? Why do I feel like I am just waiting for something to happen? For true meaning to appear? Tell me, oh silent observer... will things ever change, or am I doomed to live in this meaningless reality surrounded by weaklings till I die of boredom? I do not expect an answer, I ju-“

The real Jake had already floated in front of sim-Jake by this point. As the simulacrum drove the vehicle, Jake appeared in front of the window. Jake then moved to the right to answer a confident yes. Jake saw his simulacrum smile through the windshield with relief as the scene changed abruptly once more.

Jake saw himself standing within an entirely white room that he instantly recognized. A humanoid figure that wasn't quite human sat in a chair with sim-Jake right in front of him.

It was the Introduction. This was the very moment the integration began, and the Tutorial was about to begin. Sim-Jake seemed to instantly notice and turned around. He looked at Jake, but Jake was more focused on the apparition of the system that ignored him entirely and directed sim-Jake to select a class or profession like Jake had – minus the possibility of a profession - but his simulacrum instead asked the system:

“Are you aware of someone else than us in the room?”

The system-construct answered instantly. “Yes. Now please select a class or profession.”

“Was this the change you spoke about?” sim-Jake instead asked Jake. Jake moved to confirm, and the man smiled. “You are telling me life gets better from here?”

Once more, a solid yes.

Sim-Jake turned to the system construct again. “I choose light warrior.”



With that, two daggers and a set of basic armor appeared on the table just as the scene ended.

As the transition to the next scene began, Jake noted how the first major difference in the Tutorial was already made. Firstly, he could pick either class or profession, something the real Jake could not do in his. Additionally, his simulacrum had chosen light warrior, which made sense based on his prior fighting style.

The new scene appeared soon after. A huge hall, filled with individuals wearing their starting gear, with dark elves and other high-level individuals scattered around. Jake instantly realized this was the Tutorial he had seen in the preview and the one Caleb was meant to be in. This was further hammered home when he saw the two people Caleb had entered the Seat of the Exalted Prima with, called Matteo and Nadia, if he remembered correctly. What he did not expect was the next scene.

A circle was formed. A circle around a certain individual. Jake had been told this Tutorial included a lot of former assassins and contract killers. Criminals. It also seemed like people quickly realized who he was and backed away as the Organizer of the Tutorial stepped up on a platform overseeing them all. Jake was amazed at feeling the presence of an S-grade there, and when the aura of this entity bathed the area, all of the assassins were affected by it.

This was clearly a moment to establish dominance. No mere newly initiated G-grade could stand against a mere fraction of an S-grade's presence, as everyone was forced to their knees.

Everyone except for one.

Sim-Jake stood tall, surrounded by over a thousand kneeling or squatting individuals. Even all the dark elves were pressured, leaving only two entities in the entire Tutorial standing at that moment.

The S-grade stared at sim-Jake as sim-Jake just looked back and made a toothy grin. Jake felt the excitement. One he had felt himself. However, his moment was when he saw the Malefic Viper during his vision from the mural back in the dungeon.

It was an emotion born from standing before something so much more powerful than yourself you couldn't truly comprehend it. It should lead to a feeling of powerlessness or inadequacy, perhaps humility, but to both Jake and sim-Jake, it meant only one thing: a new goal. A new mountain to climb and a peak to shatter. Jake could imagine his simulacrum thinking: "I want to beat that person one day."

"What are you?" the S-grade asked as it looked at sim-Jake, all attention gathered on them.

Sim-Jake just kept his smile as he answered. "A hunter."

The scene ended a mere moment later, sim-Jake not even acknowledging Jake in this particular scene. Then again, it was a relatively short, if impactful, one.

A brief flash showed the next scene: sim-Jake standing before who he assumed to be Umbra. No words were spoken that Jake could hear, but he saw sim-Jake extend his hand as the being of pure shadows humored him and shook it. The scene ended just as sim-Jake turned around to look at Jake.

As the scene changed again, the environment was very different. Sim-Jake stood in a dark cave, with the dark mana almost palpable in the air. Monkey-like creatures hid in the crevices as sim-Jake turned his head towards where Jake had just appeared.

"It's been a while," he smiled. Jake could already see the changes. His smile was far more genuine, and looked far happier than before. "In case you are wondering, this is about a month into this Tutorial. You truly did not lie. Tell me, is your presence here related to this system and the multiverse?"

Jake smiled a bit himself as he did his old dance routine of stepping to the right to confirm.

"I see," sim-Jake nodded. "Are you a god?"

That one Jake had to deny. He wasn't a god. Not yet, at least.

"I kind of figured you weren't based on not even that god Umbra being able to detect you despite being quite impressive according to, well, everyone. Which must mean the system is directly involved, am I right?" he asked. "Ah, by the way, no one is watching or listening in right now, but I reckon you already knew that. I made it clear to Umbra I knew and shut that shit down instantly."

Another change. Jake felt the level of distrust from his simulacrum was as intense as ever, and from the looks of it, he was hunting alone. Nothing wrong with that, but Jake had a feeling this Jake was always alone. Again, solitude was nice, and Jake liked his alone time, but that didn't mean he never wanted to interact with others.

Sim-Jake was the opposite. He distrusted everyone else heavily, which was a bit odd if you thought about it. His Bloodline offered him an intuition that allowed him to quickly get a gut feeling about others, so shouldn't that help him trust people a little more? Sure, Jake had been wrong about people, but he had also been right often. Miranda had given him a good feeling, and he felt like he had hit the jackpot there.

Meanwhile, he did not see his simulacrum ever forming a city. At least not without being the City Leader himself and ruling it with an iron fist. He would also no doubt be shit at running the city as he didn't trust anyone, so he wouldn't delegate and, of course, wouldn't do stuff himself as he was too busy hunting.

Such an existence had to be lonely, as Jake noted before. Lonely but also limiting. Jake had gained a lot from talking with Villy, sparring with others, and fighting people like the Sword Saint. Would sim-Jake also learn a lot through fighting? Yes... but he would not have an enlightening conversation afterward with his opponent.

Sim-Jake would also be far less receptive to feedback and would have probably just ignored all he had been told during the D-grade test dungeon in the Order of the Malefic Viper. A lot of issues could crop up from that... but it would also lead to something unique. Sim-Jake would perhaps forge a far more unique Path, and at least it did seem like he took pointers of some kind or at least embraced the skills of Umbra based on his aura.

Anyway, Jake confirmed the question of the system's involvement, making his simulacrum nod in understanding as he followed up.

"Is this part of some test or something?" he asked.

Hm... Jake thought. It wasn't really, but then again, it kind of was? Maybe? The system event description wasn't very clear on that, and Jake was unsure if he could describe what happened as a test. So he stood still.

"Partly, huh? Odd. But the objective stays the same, right? Observe and learn about and from me?"

Jake confirmed that one.

“Well then. Let me teach you,” sim-Jake said. Dark mana began revolving around him as Jake saw dark veins appear on his skin.

“No, let me show you my Path.”

Chapter 486 - Profession??

From all the things Jake had seen so far, his simulacrum wasn't that much better at fighting in melee than him. He was better for sure, but it was more from experience than pure fighting technique. One could say that to beat other humans, sim-Jake didn't need to learn anything advanced. He just needed to attack with one quick blow and end their lives.

With the system, enemies did not go down as easily. Especially not foes above himself in level. Even a blow to the brain didn't necessarily mean instant death, so Jake finally got to see his simulacrum in extended combat against several foes. From this, Jake truly understood: this version of himself was far superior to the current Jake in melee combat. Far, far superior.

Jake followed sim-Jake for days as his other version went through the dark caverns, ascended a set of stairs and entered a grand hall, fought there, and then ended up within a decrepit old village after going up another set of stairs. Jake was a bit confused as sim-Jake explained the Tutorial a bit.

“I am in what is called the Shadow Trials, which is the combat grounds. It is split into several floors, and I am currently on the twenty-fifth floor. I have killed two bosses of sorts so far, but neither have been that hard. As you know, I was blessed by the god known as Umbra and offered the Legacy of some god known as Tenlucis who died or something like that. Quite potent if I say so myself, even if I do find it questionable to accept the Legacy of a god weak enough to have died, but oh well. I will take what I can get, and I do get the feeling Umbra is worth working with. For now,” sim-Jake explained rather casually.

These were words that most other mortals would scoff at, if not scream at him for blasphemy. Not only did he offend a dead god, but he also put himself on the same level as Umbra by insinuating they worked together and that he was no follower. Naturally, Jake expected nothing else, and from the looks of it, Umbra was also fine with it. Jake was not told what level of Blessing his simulacrum had gotten, but he knew he was not a Chosen. Potentially a Divine Blessing.

Dark lightning began revolving around sim-Jake as he recognized some of the abilities Caleb had. It was a bit odd seeing a version of himself be surrounded by that same black lightning. Sim-Jake dove forward toward a zombie-like creature. It lunged towards sim-Jake, but he hit it through the head with a dagger before it had time to do anything. It struggled and tried to strike sim-Jake, but every attempt was foiled as it soon died.

He then stepped back and seemed to sink into the shadows. Jake still saw him with his sphere, but it was like sim-Jake melted into the shadows to anyone else. He ran over to the next zombie that didn't notice him before getting stabbed through the head. Flailing around, the zombie used its claws to tear at the ground and collapse the building it had been hiding in, but sim-Jake was already out of it and proceeded to throw a bolt of black lightning at the collapsing house, making it explode.

Everything shown so far had been simple and easy like this. Sim-Jake dominated everything he came against so far. This made Jake initially think these foes were just low-level monsters... but no, they were all several levels above sim-Jake himself. In fact, sim-Jake was many levels ahead of where Jake had been about a month into the Tutorial. In Jake's defense, he had focused on Alchemy for nearly all that time, but Jake also soon noticed something else.

Through the days Jake observed his simulacrum, he didn't see him do anything that was not fighting or meditating to prepare for another fight. Jake frowned at him and began moving a bit and forth to get his simulacrum's attention.

“Hm? What?” sim-Jake asked. “I must say, this the longest you have been around so far, so I guess this entire combat thing is quite important. Is that why you are moving around? Do you want me to explain more of why I fight like I do and such? Sure I guess.”

“Well, no, that wasn’t what I meant,” Jake said out loud but still stood still. What? He still wanted him to explain more. Sometimes telling was just better at delivering information than showing, especially if one wanted to learn the intent behind something.

“Not right, huh? Or only partly?” sim-Jake asked as he proceeded to take out a potion. Jake saw it and rapidly moved back and forth, making sim-Jake stop just before drinking it.

“What?”

Jake tried to move a bit more as he wanted his simulacrum to just give him some damn information on his profession. He was really curious by now what this version of himself would do. Jake himself had no idea, honestly. He had ended up becoming an alchemist to not die and had come to like it only after getting the profession. What would this version have chosen? Any kind of social profession was out of the question, so it had to be crafting-related, right? What interests did sim-Jake even have besides fighting and killing? Maybe something to make things that made that easier?

“I am blanking here. Something to do with the potion?”

Stopping his movement, Jake stood still to confirm that was partly it.

“Is anything wrong with drinking them?” sim-Jake asked. “Hm, I have theorized that they are too good to be true and may have some long-term demerits that I have yet to notice, so-”

Jake quickly denied it. Potions were awesome, and he was almost offended at his super-distrusting simulacrum talking shit about them.

“Good to drink? Then does it have something to do with this particular potion?”

Jake stood still.

“Is it the effects?”

Nope.

“Where it comes from?”

Yep!

“I traded it with an alchemist fo-“

Jake began moving quickly again the moment he said the word alchemist.



“What? You want to know about this alchemist?” sim-Jake asked, looking genuinely confused.

They went through a few more questions before sim-Jake finally asked a question Jake could work with.

“Are you asking if I am an alchemist?”

It wasn’t actually what he wanted to ask, but that question would lead to a natural follow-up, so Jake answered yes.

“No, I am not. Oh... yeah, I should have understood this way earlier. Of course. You are here to learn about me and my Path, so it is relevant. You want to know what my profession is, right?”

Yes! Finally!

Sim-Jake just smiled and shook his head. “Why the hell would I have one? Sure, the stats would be nice, but that just isn’t me.”

Jake froze at that. What?

“I know, I know. I have been told plenty of times I need to get one, but I ask again, why the hell should I? They want me to sit on my ass making swords, or what, pick up painting? Make magic formation and

spend hours on making something that is still fucking useless to me as I am currently? Become an alchemist and sit with a stupid pot like some second-rate cook who only knows how to make fucking soup? No, fuck all that. I am a god damn hunter, not a good little craftsman making my masters happy. I am the damn master. They can spend their time learning how to make things, and I can spend mine using their creations to get stronger and do what I was born to,” sim-Jake explained passionately.

Now, more than ever, Jake saw the difference between them grow. The thing is, Jake did not disagree with much of what he said, besides his words on alchemy, which he forgave sim-Jake for, as he knew it came from ignorance. He had a hard time imagining himself doing any profession either when he first entered the Tutorial. He just wanted to hunt. If he had not found the dungeon, he would have waited a long time before getting one, and if he did get one early, he would have half-arsed it.

The only reason Jake appreciated alchemy in the beginning – after using it to not die, that is - was because he saw its usefulness. He saw how it made him stronger. The skills related to the Malefic Viper were skills that did have alchemical effects but were also combat skills. Sure, Scales of the Malefic Viper could be used to touch toxic substances and resist fumes and such, but its true value was in combat. Villy knew it, Jake knew it, and the system also knew but allowed it.

Not having a profession this early also wasn’t an end-all, be-all. Sim-Jake was only a month into the system. Sure, it would make him lack some easy race levels early on, but he could always get a profession that would fit him later. There were near endless possibilities, so-

“Just to reiterate, I don’t plan on ever getting a profession. The lack of instant gratification through easy levels is a sacrifice I am willing to make to follow the Path I have chosen for myself. It may sound stupid, if not outright moronic, but I believe this is truly the best decision. Even if I can somehow get a profession that fits me well and doesn’t feel like a waste of time, I wouldn’t do it. But I have a plan. One I even discussed with Umbra, and while there was some disagreement, you, of all people, should know that those like us can be stubborn. What I plan to do is evolve. To evolve out of this pathetic human form and become more than I am now. I need the class still, but there are enlightened races that only have either-or of class and profession. I want one such race. Till then, I shall walk a Path of purity. One of pure combat and dominance. Also... while I said I may sacrifice instant power, it isn’t like I have encountered anyone worth fighting amongst humanity quite yet, and the multiverse runs on a timescale far different than our pathetic old world,” sim-Jake explained further.

Jake stood with his mouth open for a while. When he heard the first part about never wanting a profession, Jake thought his other self was indeed a moron, but... could Jake really say sim-Jake that wrong? At least he had a plan, and what he planned was entirely possible. So far, Jake had already had the possibility of evolving into a vampire or a Malefic Dragonkin, which would allow him to only have a class or profession, so who was he to say sim-Jake would not get similar options down the line? Even if he did not get any of these extraordinary evolution chances, there was a good chance he would get one for his D-grade evolution.

Now, to make one thing clear, Jake still thought his simulacrum was being stupid. Clearly, he had some inborn hatred of being human, one Jake did not have at all. In fact, he thought being human was pretty darn awesome. Also, after seeing Valdemar tear Villy a new one, how could he ever proclaim that humans weren't great?

"I still sense disapproval, but my mind is set. I may crash and burn and ultimately adapt my Path, but I doubt it. Now come, the boss is ahead," sim-Jake said.

Yet just after he said that the scene ended. Clearly, the upcoming fight was not viewed as at all impactful by the system. He then saw a few brief scenes. Sim-Jake was fighting in nearly all of them, where he faced different progressively stronger monsters and eventually had duels with humans. Jake saw him easily beat both Matteo and Nadia in duels, making it clear he was the strongest in the Tutorial. Even without his profession to gain race levels, he stayed ahead of the curve, and what levels he did have were probably more valuable due to a powerful class.

Jake watched on as soon it settled on a scene once more. Sim-Jake noticed him the moment he appeared and smiled at him.

“Not just popping in briefly this time, eh?” he asked with a light smile. His equipment had entirely changed since the last time Jake saw his simulacrum. He wore dark leather armor now of high quality and even had a spatial item from the looks of it.

“I guess it makes sense... we are at the end of this Tutorial, after all. With a day left, we stand before the final fight,” he laughed a bit as he looked at what was in the horizon.

Jake followed his gaze and saw a spider-like creature sitting on a massive web. He instantly knew it was a D-grade. Looking at sim-Jake, he wondered if he was up to the task... but quickly realized that it wasn't even a question.

He was level 66. If he still had no profession, it meant he had pushed his class all the way to the cap at 99 and then kept getting experience to level his race about a dozen more times. In a bit over two months. It was a speed that completely put Jake to shame in every way.

Moreover, this Jake was not facing a King of the Forest but a regular D-grade. He also didn't seem to have any special items; even if he did, Jake knew sim-Jake would not use it. He simply didn't have to. One had to remember that Jake had been around level 80 when he had killed his first D-grade back on Earth, but that fight had been rather easy. And while this version of Jake was not as strong as Jake was then, he could surely put up a big fight.

But before he engaged in the fight, sim-Jake turned to Jake with an odd gaze.

“You know... I always felt something was off about this world. I believed for a long time it was simply due to my uniqueness. Then I thought it was due to your presence. Finally, I believed it was due to the initiation not having happened. But even now, things just feel slightly off,” sim-Jake suddenly said as he smiled at Jake.

"Yet I choose to ignore it. I chose to suppress that emotion even now... so please observe as always. From the very first time I laid my eyes on this creature, I wanted to fight it, and now that I stand before my goal, I will reach it. I will prove my Path to you, and after I win, we can discuss... everything. If I survive, that is," sim-Jake added, his smile oddly melancholic.

Dark magic began revolving around him as weapons appeared in both hands. At first, Jake thought they were daggers, but at a closer look, they were more... fist-blades?

The weapon had an H-shaped horizontal hand grip that rested against one's knuckles. Each weapon had one blade, and the blades themselves were wide triangular blades. The blades themselves were straight and roughly 40 cm long, making them rather long.

"These are called katars. Classified as push daggers, they are highly efficient stabbing weapons. However, they are also rather impractical in battles usually and inferior to a dagger or a sword, much less a spear. However, they do also have advantages. First of all, using them is very natural and similar to punching. Secondly, you can put your whole weight behind every hit. They can also be used for slashing, but it is a bit less practical, while the handle itself can help block, albeit not that well. Defensively, it is a weapon inferior to most others you will see. I shall show you why these weaknesses truly don't matter."

With those words, shadows surrounded sim-Jake as he prepared to face a D-grade in the Tutorial. No gimmicks. No special quest items. Just a natural predator that had grown through hunting to reach that stage in two months.

And what followed was indeed a display of what that natural predator was truly capable of.

Chapter 487 - A Path To Survival

"As we both know, the Bloodline offers abilities that are on a qualitative level at the peak of the multiverse. Merely doing by instinct, dodging anything and everything is simplicity itself, but that does

leave one obvious flaw: attacking. Don't get me wrong, the instinct to attack weak points is still there, but such a simple instinct may do more harm than good. When attacking, you are forcing a reaction, not being the one to react, meaning our predictive instincts are far less useful," sim-Jake explained as he flew towards his foe, Jake easily keeping up.

"So let me show you how I truly fight. Ultimately, that is what you are here for, isn't it?"

Jake didn't confirm as they both knew the answer. He stopped a bit away from the spider-like creature that had already noticed the approaching human. It was sitting on a massive web with hundreds if not thousands of eggs beneath it. Its many eyes were shining purple as it looked at sim-Jake and didn't do anything until sim-Jake stepped his foot onto the web. It was likely due to a system restriction of some sort, or maybe it was just a territorial creature.

"One word," sim-Jake added under his breath as his body exploded with power as the sky above darkened and thunder rumbled.

"Counter."

A spider several times faster than sim-Jake descended upon him. A leg bathed in deep shadows shot forward, but rather than block, Jake dodged under it and stabbed the side of the leg, using the creature's momentum to make his katar sink in deeper.

The spider made a screaming sound as it attacked again, but the same pattern repeated as several blows were exchanged. Sim-Jake was clearly using a very intense boosting skill at this moment, and Jake saw him begin to take damage as the intensity of the dark sky above increased. When the web below began shining silver, sim-Jake did not hesitate to jump into the air away from it and floated backward. The spider followed him into mid-air, where he finally blocked a blow, but as he was in the air and already going backward, all that truly happened was that he was sent flying.

“Two objects colliding will result in damage from the sum of their speeds upon collision. Two objects hitting each other, each going forty kilometers an hour, is the same as a single object smashing into a solid object at eighty. Simple physics, really, and even if this law doesn’t truly apply anymore in its elegant simplicity, it is still a thing. It is hard to stop an attack mid-swing no matter what, and the blow will deal more damage if you hit it mid-swing as not only will you hit it – your foe will hit itself upon your weapon,” sim-Jake communicated as he landed on the ground below. He clearly knew the spider did not want to follow, as he sat down and stared at it, drinking a potion. His boosting skill was also deactivated, but the dark clouds above persisted.

“Winning in a single engagement is naturally out of the question. This beast is far too durable and even has energy stored inside the web. However, it is also territorial to the level of making it a fatal weakness. It will not leave its net and the eggs it protects unless absolutely necessary. The unique dark lightning I use is a perfect weapon for a situation like this. The dark mana hampers regeneration and lowers its perception while the lightning burns its mana. An additional effect gained from merging these two concepts also means it burns stamina,” sim-Jake explained as he regenerated.

Jake looked at the spider and did detect the dark lightning still lingering. The dark clouds above seemed to also pressure the entire area, something that only affected the spider.

Ten minutes later, sim-Jake rose once more. “Second round.”

He stormed forward as he engaged the beast in yet another bout of melee with his boosting skills fully active. His fighting style was like before. A mix of dodging and then the occasional stab whenever an opening presented itself. It all looked incredibly simple, but the more Jake watched on, the more confused he became.

Wait, that was such a good opening? Why stab there? Wait, did he delay the strike? Why? Now! No? What?

Jake was very engaged in the fight, but he didn't get it. It seemed, well, not random, but arbitrary when sim-Jake chose to strike. He let obvious openings pass and instead went for tiny, tight openings to land a hit.

Yet the result was clear as the spider slowly got whittled down. Sim-Jake retreated several times until, finally, the spider seemed to realize this could not go on. The entire web began glowing and moving as the energy stored within was fully absorbed, making it fall apart.

The spider, with renewed vigor, attacked sim-Jake and left the web. Its eight legs carried it forward at a swift speed as it followed Jake when he tried to disengage. This forced their brawl onto the ground, where Jake saw how the dynamic instantly changed.

This time, sim-Jake went on the offensive. Power revolved around his weapons as lightning roared forward. It covered the spider, but as a D-grade, it was far too durable to take any noticeable damage. Sim-Jake nevertheless went close to attack with his weapons. The spider retaliated as suddenly sim-Jake pulled back. He delayed his attack by a mere moment, making the spider miss with a dark lance of magic, allowing sim-Jake to land a blow uncontested.

Once more, the spider tried to attack its attacker, and it missed by a narrow margin yet again. Jake observed and stood there dumbstruck. The spider was missing, despite its far higher speed and power. No, sim-Jake did not dodge... it was the spider missing. In every exchange, its timing was off. Like they were dancing, following set steps in the choreography, but sim-Jake was almost half a second behind, making the spider off-tune.

The spider was, purely stat-wise, probably three or four times stronger than sim-Jake. It was a wider gap than any opponent Jake had faced during his Tutorial besides the King of the Forest. In all of Jake's fights, he had been struggling, he had overcome his limits, and he had come out victorious. Sim-Jake did



not need to overcome any limits. He had spent his entire life pushing himself towards perfection, and the system had only allowed him to flourish more.

This did not mean he wasn't struggling. Jake saw how his simulacrum was running out of energy and had taken many minor wounds - sacrifices made to avoid more dangerous blows or land a counterattack. Of course, these would build up and, with time, become an issue.

If the spider had simply fought from the beginning and not allowed sim-Jake to constantly reset and consume potions, it would have no doubt won. But... it hadn't. It had allowed itself to be slowly whittled down. Sim-Jake had targeted one leg many times and finally managed to sever it. This led to a chain reaction as it stumbled, only to get another near-fatal stab with the katar into one of its eyes. It retaliated, but sim-Jake turned to lightning, dodged behind it, and stabbed again.

He moved from blindspot to blindspot and landed puncture-wound after puncture-wound. It couldn't heal due to all the dark lightning, and finally, sim-Jake landed the final blow. He stabbed the katar through the weakened skull of the spider and pushed down, the creature finally breathing its last breath.

Less than a second later, the dark clouds above dispersed like they had never been there. Sim-Jake himself shook for a moment as he spat out blood and fell backward onto his back. His eyes were now bleeding, and Jake saw his arms and legs begin to turn purple, along with several dark spots appearing on his body.

"Another tip," sim-Jake whispered in a coarse voice. "Never show weakness and give your prey hope."

He then turned his face and looked towards Jake, who stood near the corpse of the slain D-grade. "Thank you for observing what may be my final fight."

With those words, the scene ended. Jake frowned deeply. What? Final fight? Why wou-

Jake then felt something odd. Like a pull was on him or something. A summoning. He tried to figure out what it was, and his eyes opened wide as he accepted.

“Granted.”

Jake found himself standing inside the same old white familiar room. The Guide had been the one to just speak, sitting in a chair across from sim-Jake. Confused, Jake looked at what the hell was going on. Him appearing there was not a usual scene transition at all... it was instead as if he had been asked to be there.

“For my third tutorial purchase... I want to reveal and become able to interact with him within the confines of this room until the Tutorial Store expires,” sim-Jake said as he turned and looked at Jake. The system acknowledged, and Jake knew his simulacrum got some system prompt that he accepted.

Once more, Jake felt himself be “asked” to approve of this. With a thought, he could reject it, but he chose to accept it once more.

He felt solid ground beneath his feet for the first time in a long time as Jake knew...

For the first time, he truly met the eyes of himself – of sim-Jake. No longer a mere observer but a physical entity now within the room. They stared at each other for a moment as sim-Jake smiled.

“Hey me,” he said in a melancholic voice. “Good to finally meet you... me. Us.”

Jake looked at his simulacrum and nodded in recognition. “When did it click?”

“I guess I always had my suspicions, but it was when I met Umbra I truly understood. We have the same Bloodline. I am a Bloodline Patriarch, which means I am the only one with it... except you. Which means you are either some descendant from the future, or you are me. I still had that tiny sliver of doubt, but just a few minutes ago, I confirmed it using my first of five purchases from the Tutorial Store,” sim-Jake answered.

He was calm. Awfully calm, if not too calm. Jake would have been at least a little distressed or, at a minimum, weirded the hell out. Then again, perhaps his simulacrum had already gone through all that before during a scene Jake did not see. Or, he was just that much calmer than Jake.

Jake had also not seen the usage of the Tutorial Store coming in. Jake remembered the custom option back then could offer anything. Even information, it seemed. There did appear to be some limitations as it had to ask Jake for permission before bringing him there and making him visible, but that could also potentially just be due to the way sim-Jake made the purchases. Had to be cheaper if Jake went along with it.

“I will be honest; I am unsure how to handle this situation,” Jake said. “But I guess an explanation would be a start?”

“Before that, let me ask you a question,” sim-Jake said. “Are you stronger than me?”

“Yes,” Jake just answered.

“But you are also older, aren’t you?” he followed up.

“Yeah.”

“So... if I had the same time as you, who would be stronger?” he asked with a raised eyebrow.

Jake smiled. It was exactly the kind of question he would ask if he stood before another version of himself. He also knew the answer.

“I would. But if we switched situations, I am sure the answer would be the same. You are stronger than me in certain areas while I have you beat in others. You have abilities and skills from growing up I do not, but my upbringing also means I have some things you don’t,” Jake said with a smile.

“And what would that be?”

“Friends,” Jake just said as he stared his other version in the eyes.

His simulacrum, surprisingly enough, didn’t protest that answer but instead asked: “Do you trust them?”

"I do."

"Well, I guess that is a stark contrast to who I became. I haven't trusted anyone besides myself since I was a child. Besides you... which should maybe have been a clue too. Trusting you is just trusting myself, after all. Now, if you will enlighten me what exactly is going on," sim-Jake asked.

Jake decided to just be completely honest. "You are in a simulated world of sorts created by the system as part of a system event showing what would have happened if I made a different impactful choice at some point in my life. In your case, it was not stopping mom and dad from leaving the house the day they died. I did that in my world, and it resulted in me growing up with a family, a brother, and overall it completely changed my trajectory of life."

"For the better or worse?"

"Better, I would say. Granted, I did end up suppressing my Bloodline to fit in and more or less made myself depressed since I was a child, viewing the whole world with apathy and boredom, so that part did suck, and I never really did form any meaningful relationships with anyone outside of my family either, but it was sure as hell better than you," Jake said with a laugh.

"I guess we are dysfunctional no matter which choices we make," sim-Jake said with a wry smile before turning a bit serious. "But this does mean I never truly existed, doesn't it?"

Jake shook his head. "I don't know how this entire thing works, to be honest."

Sim-Jake turned to the figure of the Guide, who was still just sitting there, unbothered. "Which one of us is real?"

The system entity looked at them. "Both are parallels of the other and hence both real."

"So, what would happen if I just leave this store like this and go on back to Earth and act like nothing happened? Will I cease to exist one day randomly? Will I just have never been?" sim-Jake pressed.

"Negative. Simulacrum will persist in the simulated world until destruction, at which point the simulation will be closed."

"I guess that answers it," sim-Jake sighed. "Kind of pointless, isn't it? Man, living in the simulation, knowing you live in a simulation, does suck. Tell me, is it possible for me to be transferred into the real ninety-third universe right now?"

"Negative. Parallels possess identical Truesoul signatures, and multiple separate copies are unable to exist in the same universe."

Jake heard this and remembered something from quite a while ago. Back when he wanted Rick, the gardening troll, out of the dungeon. It was about how multiple versions of the same creature could not exist in the same universe. Remembering this, Jake also knew the answer to the follow-up question.

"Can I then just fuse with my other version?" sim-Jake asked before throwing Jake a look. "I gotta ask. If I can "survive" I sure as hell want to."

"Fair enough."

“Negative,” the system once more said. “Secondary Truesoul signature shall be automatically delegated and potentially assimilated into the original with no impact on Records.”

“Bummer,” sim-Jake said as he looked onto the ceiling. “Hey, original, what did you even hope to gain from this kind of event? Was it really as we discussed?”

“I wasn’t sure in the beginning, but it was truly just learning from you. Especially your melee fighting skills, which are quite a bit better than mine,” Jake answered.

“Huh. While I would love to give you a crash course, I am pretty much dead, and it seems pretty pointless. Besides, this tutorial store business will end semi-soon,” sim-Jake shrugged.

“Sorry,” Jake muttered.

“Eh, not your fault. Shit happens, I guess, and as fucked up as it seems, you were the only friend I had throughout my life, even if you turned out to be me,” he shook his head. “Besides, I have one more gamble.”

“System, I would like for my fourth purchase to be a method on how to exit this simulation and enter the true ninety-third universe while remaining who I am and staying a unique and separate entity,” sim-Jake asked.

“Unable to provide an acceptable result with current funds,” the system responded, surprising Jake and sim-Jake a bit.

“What?” sim-Jake asked, confused. “Fuck. I hoped there was a way...”

Jake stood there and stared a bit as he felt kind of shit about this entire thing. However, as he stared, he got an idea.

“Guide is the reason transference cannot happen due to the requirements of unique Truesoul signatures?”

“Correct.”

“In that case, is it potentially possible for the Records of this other version to enter the ninety-third universe through some other medium? In other words, making his existence tied and dependent on our shared Truesoul while still allowing him to remain unique and separate?” Jake asked.

The system paused for a while. Sim-Jake also looked at him oddly before the system finally answered.

“Positive. Transference of Records into a non-living Soulbound entity that is tied to the primary being is possible through storage within a suitable vessel. Additional limitations may apply.”



Sim-Jake looked at Jake for a moment as he also understood. One would think another person would be angry or offended at what Jake insinuated, but instead, sim-Jake just shook his head and sighed.

“I guess this is a start?”

#### Chapter 488 - The Faint Line Between The Virtual & Reality

There was potential. Jake nodded at the system’s answer as he asked to clarify: “What kind of limitations may apply? And what do we need to do to make it happen?”

The system entity answered as monotone as ever: “Limitations include absolute separation from the material realm and interacting with other entities, limiting the transferred simulacrum to the Truesoul. All expression must be made through an inanimate Soulbound object. Requirements to facilitate this process include a vessel able to house the transferred simulacrum as well as expenditure of all other material Path of Myriad Choices event rewards.”

“That is the name of the event?” sim-Jake asked. “A bit on the nose.”

“Oh, it totally is,” Jake agreed as he regarded the system entity again. “Do I have a vessel able to house the simulacrum?”

“Negative.”

“Not even this?” Jake asked as he pulled out Eternal Hunger. That had to be good enough, right?

“Negative.”

“Okay, then this!” Jake tried as he spat out the Root of Eternal Resentment from his internal storage using Palate of the Malefic Viper, getting a weird look. He had confidence this item could be used, it had housed a curse and was meant to house energy, so surely-

“Negative. An incompatible vessel will result in destruction, alteration, or complete erasure of the simulacrum as well as the vessel. A unique vessel created to facilitate the process is required,” the system answered.

“Do I possess enough Tutorial Points to create such a vessel?” sim-Jake asked. “Also, is it possible to elaborate on these limitations? What does it mean that I will be limited to the Truesoul?”

“All rewards given by Tutorial Points within the simulation are limited to the simulation, and no reward given can be transferred or persist within the true world. Limitations result in absolute non-interactability with the world, with the simulacrum permanently confined to the Soulspace. The simulacrum’s existence shall remain permanently tied to the simulation to ensure continued autonomous existence. As such, the simulacrum will continue to exist as a simulacrum only viewable and detectable by Origin.”

Sim-Jake looked in thought a bit. “Okay, I am just confused now.”

“Wait,” the real Jake said. “Will it mean he more or less is just what I am now, but in the real world? As in, he will be a silent and undetectable observer to everyone that isn’t me? Like, we turn the situation one-eighty?”

“Interpretation acceptable. Limited manifestation outside of Soulspace potentially possible but will remain detectable only to the Origin and remain non-interactive with the world,” the system answered.

“Huh,” sim-Jake said with a frown. “So I will just be... what? Unable to do anything?”

“Simulacrum will have free movement and interactability within the Soulspace,” the system answered.

“Guess it is about time I ask... what is this Soulspace?” sim-Jake asked, clearly not happy to admit he didn’t know.

“Like, a world inside the soul? I am not entirely sure how it works, but I can meditate and enter there and have trapped energies within, including an ancient curse that could probably destroy the planet. Definitely could destroy the planet,” Jake explained nonchalantly.

“Sounds like you have had quite the fun so far, huh?” sim-Jake smiled. “But I guess any option is better than just dying. Because the alternative is dying. I can’t see myself living within a virtual world I know only exists because I do... it would make it all feel so utterly pointless knowing nothing I do is real. No, rather have a small impact on reality than dominate a fantasy.”

Jake just nodded in understanding. While experiencing a simulation temporarily would be fine, knowing that nothing you ever did would carry over had to be hell. It was a perfect case of “ignorance is bliss,” and once the veil had been lifted, there was no going back.

“Besides,” sim-Jake added. “We are the same person. So me helping you is helping myself in every sense of the word, isn’t it? Also... if I do get transferred into an item of some sort, it won’t be permanent, will it?”

The last part was addressed to the system, which confirmed his question. "Resonance and equilibrium may eventually be reached, making the simulacrum and Origin one."

"Hear that?" sim-Jake smiled. "Who knows, I may even be able to take over your mind and become the real version?"

"Isn't it more like we will eventually just be so similar in every way a natural fusion kind of just happens?" Jake asked, looking at the system.

"Correct."

Jake and the simulacrum nodded in sync. Neither truly understood but were still guessing. All Jake knew was that sim-Jake was looking for some sort of Path to survive, and Jake wanted to help himself – his other self - and potentially even benefit from it.

"Alright. What kind of vessel is required to store the simulacrum?"

"Vessel must originate from the original universe yet contain innate ties to specific virtual universe. The vessel must meet parameters, including, but not limited to, durability, storage ability, non-attuned, energy signature resonance, Record-compatibility, and Origin-compatibility," the system entity answered.

“Wait, will I be able to transform any of my items into a compatible one?” Jake just asked with a bit of hope.

“Negative.”

Jake and sim-Jake threw each other a look as his simulacrum groaned. “So we just had this entire shitty conversation to say that I am fucked either way?”

Frowning too, Jake considered a bit more as he got an idea.

“You got two purchases left, right?” Jake asked.

“Yeah?”

“Hm. Hey Guide, when will the Path of Myriad Choices end for me?” he asked the system.

“Due to developments within the simulation, the final scene is currently being displayed,” it answered.

“And if I leave here, will I ever be able to go back so-to-say? As in, could I go back and get my simulacrum out later.”

“Improbably.”

“But not impossible,” Jake murmured. “If my simulacrum does leave with me to the original universe, what will happen to the simulation?”

“Simulation shall persist as long as simulacrum remains.”

“Huh,” Jake considered again.

“What are you fishing for?” sim-Jake asked.

“I am getting here,” Jake said dismissively. “I happen to be buddies with a god who loves semi-breaking or at least bending the rules of the system a bit, and I guess it rubbed off. Guide, the rewards of the system event are based on the performance of the simulacrum during the simulation, correct?”

The system confirmed.

“Alright then. Do these rewards include physical items?”

“Potentially,” it just answered.

“Okay... considering this is the final scene, are the rewards already calculated, and how will they be given?”

“All rewards will be given and calculated only at the conclusion of the event,” the system confirmed once more.

Jake just smiled.

“Hey... for the fourth purchase, how about you buy that your performance will award me a compatible vessel?” he asked him simulacrum.

“No fucking way that works,” he shook his head and turned to the system entity. “Does it work?”

The system paused for a moment. “Partial consumption of Path of Myriad Choices event reward required.”

Sim-Jake froze for a moment as he looked at Jake.

Jake just nodded. “Can the fifth purchase then be for the Records of the simulacrum to temporarily be safely stored within my Soulspace to then be transferred to the vessel upon exit? Without causing any harm to him, that is?”

Once more, it paused for a moment. "Partial consumption of Path of Myriad Choices event reward required. Requires total temporal suspension to facilitate effect. Acceptable."

"Do I have enough Tutorial Points for these two?" sim-Jake asked with concern.

"Vessel can be adjusted to minimum requirements, allowing the process."

Sim-Jake just stared for a moment. "I truly have no idea what the hell we are doing here or why this is even allowed. It feels like we are somehow cheating the system and using an exploit or something, which makes no fucking sense if the system is supposed to be omnipotent."

Jake shrugged. "Eh... listen. Think about it like this, why are we allowed to do this? Talk like this? This is all due to how you performed during the simulation. Your actions led to this possible outcome. If you hadn't dominated the tutorial and hadn't become aware of me and done as you did now, it wouldn't have happened. Remember, we are still in the simulation right now, and even this conversation is part of the event. So... in some ways, isn't it pretty normal to reward a simulacrum, becoming aware it is in a simulation, with a way to somehow find a way to break out of the simulation? For the system to not at least leave a Path? So... yeah. It is allowing this to happen and is within expectations."

Sim-Jake tossed the system entity a look. "I guess that makes sense... would also explain why the hell nothing has happened despite the time for this Tutorial Store thing having elapsed."

"Yep," Jake agreed despite not actually knowing. He did recognize the absurdity of the situation that sim-Jake pointed out, but he also vehemently believed in what he had said. The system clearly facilitated these sorts of things to happen. It allowed sim-Jake to be an autonomous person, and thus Jake also believed it would allow him a Path as a reward for his performance. A true Path that he so desired.



“So, to summarize, I will be transformed into a form suitable to be transplanted into an item and deposited into your – our – Truesoul, suspended in time to not disperse and forcefully remerge with the Truesoul and stay me. Then this event will end, you will be rewarded an item I can merge into, and you will do that fast as fuck before I cease to exist. I got that right?” sim-Jake asked clarifyingly.

“I think that about sums it up,” Jake confirmed.

“And, just to be clear, you have never done anything like this before, right? Has anyone?” Jake asked. The last part was addressed to the system entity.

“Yes,” it answered. “Prior divergent simulacriums have appeared and through contact with their Origin merged into the true multiverse.”

“Alright, so only semi-uncharted territory. You confident?” sim-Jake asked Jake.

“Believe it or not, yeah, I am. I have to be,” Jake answered.

Sim-Jake finally sighed. “Aight... let’s get this show on the road. If I don’t make it... never mind. You already know.”

Jake smiled. “Let’s go.”

“For my fourth purchase...

The last two purchases were made. One to make sim-Jake into something capable of surviving the transfer and one to make sure Jake got something to transfer him into. With that, the scene finally ended, and Jake got a few notifications as he appeared in the white room, but he didn't pay them any mind.

As he appeared, so did a new item appear in his inventory. It was a black bone-like item, and Jake instantly took it out and did a quick Identify.

[Bone of the Virtual Gap (Unique)] – A bone created from a human rib belonging to a world that exists yet does not. Specifically made to house the simulacrum of Jake Thayne. Requirements: Soulbound.

Having confirmed, Jake entered Serene Soul Meditation as he appeared in his Soulspace. The moment he did, he saw the distorted human form of pure energy. It looked halfway broken. Jake knew this was because it wasn't meant to exist and was only held together due to the direct interference of the system.

Jake got to work as he controlled his Soulspace. In the outside world, he sat in meditation with the bone in his hands while he in the Soulspace forcefully collected every single fragment of the Records that had been sim-Jake.

Gritting his teeth, he focused as he knew sim-Jake would only stay together for that long. At the same time, he felt the energy itself almost move to help him. It wanted to be gathered and become one again. The energy that was the simulacrum resonated with the Soulspace itself as he felt everything pulse. With focus, he began collecting faster than before. Soon enough, a foot appeared, then a leg, two legs, a torso, arms, and finally a head. This version of sim-Jake was slightly different than the simulacrum from

before but also wasn't a copy of Jake himself. It was instead more like sim-Jake having undergone his D-grade evolution.

When the full form was collected, Jake moved on to the next stage. A black bone appeared in his hand, and Jake did not hesitate to stab the human form in front of him right in the heart, letting the bone sink in deep and take the place of one of the ribs. At the same time, he began infusing the bone in the outside world. He had done something similar with Eternal Hunger, and frankly, this was far easier. Sim-Jake was primed already, and rather than fighting him like the curse energy had when he made Eternal Hunger, this energy actively wanted to work with him. Almost as if it had an instinct of its own.

Throughout this process, he poured energy into the bone and established a connection between the two. The bone would serve as an anchor to the world as it still existed partially in the virtual simulation. Some parts of sim-Jake had to always exist there, or he would cease to be a simulacrum and thus his own person.

This entire merging process was complicated, but out of everyone in D-grade, Jake was probably one of the best. Not only had he made Eternal Hunger, but he had consumed and slowly absorbed knowledge from the Root of Eternal Resentment for a long-ass time and had learned close to everything he could about it. The Root was a marvel when it came to all kinds of energy, and Jake was certain that if it wasn't because of the peculiarity of the simulation, it would have worked. In every sense of the world, it was a top-class natural treasure when it came to energy transference and storage.

As he pressed on, Jake felt the temporal suspension applied to sim-Jake about to wear out. It was clear that while the system had allowed this entire ridiculous situation to happen, it would not do it for them. If he fucked up, sim-Jake would simply disperse and become one with Jake. All this would do was probably just add some Records with unknown effects later down the line... perhaps just adding a skill option or two, something he obviously didn't want.

Stabilize, Jake thought as sim-Jake's body was fully assembled. It looked complete, and the bone had completely merged with his body. Jake gritted his teeth as suddenly the temporal suspension

completely expired and something went wrong. The arm of sim-Jake suddenly disappeared, and his entire body turned transparent and began leaking.

“Fuck,” Jake muttered as he pushed his Willpower to the extreme. A barrier of pure arcane mana covered a huge portion of his Soulspace as he compressed it together to keep the energy in. To his relief, the dispersing energy that was about to be reabsorbed by the Soulspace was slowed down, and he managed to force back most of it.

His entire Soulspace began shaking as he expanded the barrier even more to try and put back all he could. Every piece of Records had to be there, or sim-Jake would not be sim-Jake. In the outside world, blood began dripping out of his nose as he strained every fiber of his being.

Finally, something fell into place. The energy that had begun dispersing collected once more and formed around sim-Jake, but... some had been lost. His body was slightly transparent compared to before, and Jake cursed himself inwardly. There was no more energy to collect as the entire Soulspace fell still. Nothing happened as Jake stared at the figure that still had his eyes closed, yet to wake up. It was stable... but what the hell did that help if what he had made was just an empty husk of a simulacrum?

“Come on, man... don’t let this all be a waste.”

Jake stood nervously as suddenly the figure in front of him opened his eyes. Yet what Jake saw was not the gaze of sim-Jake but something far more... primal. The figure moved before Jake could react, and the next thing he knew, his arm was gone. Yet he did not react as his danger sense had yet to make even a single peep.

The arm reappeared instantly as he was within the Soulspace. The arm taken by the simulacrum was absorbed into the figure as his body rapidly turned far more corporal. Jake stared as he understood.

“It replaced the Records with mine...”

One had to remember that Jake and sim-Jake shared a huge percentage of their Records. All that was innate to them was shared... and it appeared that when some were lost earlier, it was parts that could be replaced.

Jake smiled as the simulacrum blinked, and he finally saw familiar eyes.

“Welcome to our Soulspace.”

Sim-Jake stared a bit at his hands as he clenched his fist. He looked up at Jake as he smiled. “Is this where I declare my intent to take over your mind and become the true owner of our body?”

“Sure, just after I throw you into a trashcan,” Jake joked back as he was inwardly incredibly relieved. He felt the same relief from his simulacrum but did notice something else.

A bit of knowledge had appeared in his head... and a few memories he did not quite recognize as his own, even if they did feel like his own. His simulacrum also seemed to have noticed.

They both looked at each other with understanding.

This entire thing was temporary... they were one, after all. As time passed, they would slowly meld into one another until one day, there would only be one Jake left in the Soulspace. A bit had already leaked during the formation, and chances are it would continue to, had there been issues with the process or not. Of course, this led to the question: who would he become? The original? Sim-Jake, if he managed to somehow exert influence?

Or was it a question that didn't even matter, as there was no him or me? Perhaps they were naught but two parallel Paths that had briefly split up after making a choice and would always one day rejoin to form their true Path.

The Path of the Primal Hunter.

Chapter 489 - Internal Developments

However... even if the two Jakes would someday become one again, that day was not today or any day in the near future. For now, they were quite different. One thing they did agree on was a bit of quick experimenting, though. The first item on the list was the bone in the real world. Jake had already confirmed that sim-Jake could see everything Jake could and shared all senses, but it appeared that sim-Jake couldn't talk to him in the outside world, so all communication had to go through the Soulspace.

All detailed communication had to, at least. Jake still kind of knew what sim-Jake was thinking, and it was honestly a bit weird as most of his thoughts were the exact same as Jake's. However, one thing they did not agree on right away quickly appeared as the bone began ever-so-slowly warping and growing. Minutes passed as Jake decided to let sim-Jake do with his new "body" as he wanted and for them to talk about it later.

Instead, he would get a look at the system notifications he had delayed checking. The first of which was the good old flavor text.

Congratulations on fully experiencing the simulation of Choice 4!

Due to the exceptional performance of your simulacrum, you have earned the highest-level award. Not only did your simulacrum excel before the initiation, but it also managed to become Progenitor in the Tutorial, similar to Origin, despite different prior choices that resulted in significant divergence. Finally, the simulacrum managed to realize its existence within a simulation and successfully partially remerged with Origin. Each Path you walk is truly unique and powerful, making you a true Progenitor of Myriad Paths.

Rewards Gained: 1x [Bone of the Virtual Gap Unique]]. Title Earned: Progenitor of Myriad Paths.

Jake read it all over carefully and nodded. The system recognized everything that had happened and seemed totally fine with it. No, more than fine; it rewarded him for doing what he had done. Though, to be fair, Jake should not really be surprised. The system had also rewarded him back when it helped make Moment of the Primal Hunter and by giving him the title for making a legendary skill even if he had cheated it. It was a bit of the same when he made Eternal Hunger which was only possible because Jake's Soulspace was ridiculously powerful, something also primarily caused by his Bloodline.

He saw that he had received just two things from the event. The system had told him material rewards would not be given due to making the bone, but it appeared that he still got a title. With quite a bit of excitement, Jake checked it out.

[Progenitor of Myriad Paths] – A Progenitor through and through, you are born to walk unique and powerful Paths. You have earned the recognition of the Watcher attached to Earth and thus the Seat of the Exalted Prima. All bonuses gained are dependent on the simulacrum during the Path of Myriad Paths. +100 Agility, +100 Strength. +5% Agility, +5% Strength. Recognized as a potential Administrator Candidate for the Milky Way Seat of the Exalted Prima.

Jake had added yet another Progenitor title to his portfolio. It was beginning to compete with the prodigious tag and seemed to be of a generally high-to-peak tier when it came to titles. The details of

the title were also a happy surprise. Jake didn't have many speculations on potential rewards, but a title was certainly one of the best. Moreover, it gave percentage increases along with just a pile of pure stats. The only thing a bit different from what he usually got was that everything was added to Strength and Agility.

It didn't take a genius to figure out why they gave these stats. This reward was based on sim-Jake, and sim-Jake had been a melee fighter focusing on Strength and Agility. In all honesty, it was pretty good for him to get some points for both, and considering the bonuses he already had, the 100 in each stat actually added 150 to Strength and 160 to Agility. That wasn't even counting the new percentage increases. Even with just 5% more in a stat, with more than 6000 Agility, it translated to more than 300 free stat points, equivalent to several levels.

Then there was the second part of the title: "Recognized as a potential Administrator Candidate for the Milky Way Seat of the Exalted Prima."

Now, Jake naturally had no clue what this was actually about, but he could infer some things and quickly formed a theory. This Seat of the Exalted Prima was not just some system event location or something spawned and created just for the new initiates. It was something far more... and something one could come to influence.

Additionally, it was not limited to Earth but their entire galaxy. Candidates would come from all sorts of races, and Jake would compete with not just a few billion other Earthlings but potentially hundreds of billions, if not trillions of sapient creatures spread across the Milky Way Galaxy. Also... one more thing. The existence of a Milky Way Seat of the Exalted Prima indicated that other galaxies with life also had Seats. If that was the case, was there somewhere or something that controlled it all?

Perhaps this Exalted Prima itself. Perhaps some headquarter that commanded millions of Seats of the Exalted Prima spread across an entire universe. If it truly was like that, Jake knew what to talk to Villy about when he exited. Well, that, and to talk about his new best friend in sim-Jake. Jake was truly a Prodigious Progenitor in everything, even being his own friend.



Jake smiled a bit goofily to himself and closed his notifications, satisfied with what he had gained. The bone he was holding was still slowly molding itself, and it looked like changing the shape would take a while. Popping into his Soulspace, he saw sim-Jake in deep meditation as he had immersed his consciousness in his new “body.”

Guess I will just wait here to make sure, Jake thought. The space he was in was clearly the meat of the Seat of the Exalted Prima. Looking around, he wondered how one was supposed to exi-

Do you wish to leave the simulation room? Possible destinations:

Simulation room entrance cube.

Administrator’s Terrace.

Alright, never mind. Also, Administrator’s Terrace? Looks new. It must be due to the title, Jake thought, already knowing where he would go. After sim-Jake was done, of course. For now, Jake would meditate a bit and actually fill up his resources. He was surprised at seeing they were still low after his fight with the Phantomshade Panther – a fight that seemed like it was ages ago.

It appeared Jake had only been in the simulation for half a day or so, even if it had been way, way longer on the inside. Just counting the elapsed time of the actual scenes, Jake had to have seen at least a few months’ worth, most of it spent watching Jake fight both pre-and post-system.

Jake meditated for a bit, deciding to do so using Serene Soul Meditation to enter his Soulspace to also see when sim-Jake was done. About half an hour later, sim-Jake opened his eyes and smiled.

“All done.”

Real-Jake also opened his eyes and finally got a good look at the bone that was now no longer a simple rib. Instead, it had changed into an H-shaped handle with a blade attached.

“This is a katar?” Jake asked inside his Soulspace as sim-Jake summoned an identical copy to the weapon in the real world.

“Yep.”

“You do know I use swords and daggers, right?” Jake asked.

“I know you did. This whole partially shared memory is far from one way... in fact, I would say I got a lot more of you than you got of me. From this, it is clear you have yet to make proper use of our abilities and, most importantly, have yet to actually develop a proper melee fighting style for yourself,” sim-Jake explained.

“Well, you suck with a bow,” Jake countered.

“Oh wow, great burn, very clever of you. I am not even fucking criticizing you; I am saying it in a positive way. It is good you never had anyone else teach you how to fight in melee because, quite frankly, they all suck compared to what I will teach you. Don’t get me wrong, that old swordsman you fought in vampire land is an absolute fucking monster with his sword, to a level you can’t even begin to appreciate, but we also both realize we will never reach his skill level. Not that it would be worth trying. I spent years training with people, fighting experts, and it quickly became clear that nothing suited me. Not because they were weak, but because fighting my instincts constantly while fighting would be a fucking pain. No... the style I began developing is not about fighting my instincts but making full use of them,” sim-Jake explained.

“Developing?” Jake asked. “From the fight with that D-grade, it seemed pretty damn effective already?”

“Yeah, no. Dude, stop making us look stupid by thinking that was in any way good enough. That stuff was developed in a few months and is just the basics that were built off my experience before the system, and I had only just begun integrating these concepts into a more magical framework. I guess one can say that all the time you spent training magic, I spent training melee combat, but I had a massive headstart due to the lives we lived before the initiation,” sim-Jake answered.

Jake nodded as he asked further: “Am I right to assume the core concept is about controlling the flow of the fight?”

Sim-Jake smiled. “Right on. We are not experts who have trained for a hundred years. We are ultimately little more than beasts in human skin that rely on our instincts above anything else. However, the problem is that while we can use these instincts to survive due to us responding to complex attacks, we cannot form our own complex attacks, which is why I began to question if I even have to? Why not just tap into those god-like instincts and use them to counterattack and control the momentum of the battle from start to end. Anyway, my point is that the katar is the best weapon I found, though I guess if you had become a Malefic Dragonkin, that would have been just as good. Though I get why you didn’t get it... would have been weird with the Viper.”

“Hm, any reason why claw weapons aren’t good?” Jake asked.

“What kind? The kind where a few come out of your wrist and get stuck in things while cutting or your flesh ripped apart by something getting wedged in between them or someone simply slashing down the length of the extended claw, or the type that is basically a glove?”

Jake scratched his hair. “The glove?”

“Also a great idea. Here, let me just tank the impacts with my hands while believing my weak-ass human finger won’t snap like a broken twig if the attack hits slightly wrong. If I used glove claws, I would be a grappler, but that would just be a damn waste. Both types of claws commonly used just don’t fit as well and sorely lack the penetrative effect of the katar. Also, they are fundamentally slashing weapons and not stabbing weapons. Stabbing is best in my opinion, and with your poison, I reckon it will be even better,” sim-Jake explained while shaking his head.

“You know what? I will leave this up to the expert. When does the training session begin?” Jake asked.

“Not now. I still need to figure stuff out and get a feel for this place. Rather than asking, I would prefer to just absorb the knowledge directly. Also, more than anything, I need to do one absolutely critical thing,” sim-Jake said in a serious tone.

“Take a nap?”

“Right the fuck on once again,” sim-Jake grinned. “Molding that bone I am in was tiring as hell. I will also take this time to observe you a bit to really get a feel for where to start, though I already have a good idea. Also, this just feels fair. You have been staring at me like a creepy stalker for my entire life. Now it is my turn.”

“Blame the system, not me. And have a good nap!” Jake snickered as sim-Jake waved him off as he waved his hand and summoned a bed and a blanket out of nothingness. He got cozy under it as Jake disappeared from the Soulspace and returned his full attention to the outside world.

The first he did when outside was to Identify the black bone once more... and to be honest, Jake was not sure if he should be disappointed or not. Okay, he was a little disappointed.

[Bone-weapon of the Hunter (Epic)] – A weapon containing the simulacrum of Jake Thayne. Can be molded by the simulacrum. Extremely tough and near-unbreakable as long as the simulacrum persists. Highly upgradeable. Requirement: Soulbound

It was... kind of bad? The system had done as it said and made the item only meet the bare minimum requirements. In every way, it was just a really tough bone that had now taken the shape of a katar, through a process that was both slow and tiring.

However, that was only now. According to the description, the weapon was highly upgradeable, and it was even possible he could combine it with something else in the future. Naturally, it couldn't even begin to hold a candle to Eternal Hunger, but it was a start.

Putting it in his inventory, Jake thought about leaving as the option popped up again. He picked the one for the special kids who had done well.

Administrator's Terrace.

He was swept away a moment later and, to his surprise, appeared standing on grass. He felt the soft soil under his feet and looked around as he saw a beautiful garden surrounding him. However, rather than a cloudless sky and a sun, he saw cloudless space and a lot of stars.

He was clearly within a hemisphere, but one different from any of the others. Seeing nothing above them but stars, Jake guessed they were perhaps at the very top of the Seat of the Exalted Prima. The air in the garden felt incredibly refreshing, and the mana density was insanely high and extremely pure. He nearly wanted to sit down and do alchemy there and then but decided against it. One, because it would be a bit weird and there were still more pressing things to do, and two, because he wasn't alone.

Standing on the grass towards the edge of the hemisphere stood a single figure, gazing out into the vast cosmos, clearly admiring the stars. The figure looked over when he saw Jake and smiled.

"Ah, welcome. You are the first person besides me to arrive," he said courteously. Jake gazed at him with a bit of suspicion. He was not human but had orange skin with blue tattoo-like markings all over it and had quite an otherworldly look. Jake met the man's eyes and saw they had no pupils but instead reminded Jake of the stars beyond the faint barrier sealing them in. They did have a faint red tint to them, though, making them only stand out even more.

Jake naturally used Identify as he knew the man also used it on him.

[Nahoom – lvl ???]

He failed to pierce the man's protection from Identify, and Jake knew the other party also failed to Identify him. It was honestly to be expected. Jake felt the man in front of him was strong... real strong. But he also didn't feel threatening in the least. In fact, he gave off incredibly good vibes to Jake and did not at all register as an enemy. He seemed like an even more approachable guy than even Jacob.

Oh, and there was one more important thing about the guy.

He had a Bloodline.

#### Chapter 490 - Beneath The Stars

The Path of Myriad Choices was an event quite a bit different than any prior. It was not one that was decided by simply being strong or one that could be teamed up for a strategized to beat. All you had was who you were fundamentally and simulations showing you what your choices could have changed.

To some, no simulation shown made them more than what they were. One such person was Miranda. She saw five previews. One where she died because she led them in another direction than where Haven would eventually be founded, resulting in Jake never saving her, Hank, and the kids. Three more were about choices in the Tutorial, only one of which ended at least a little happily as she saved Hank's wife and left the Tutorial with them to settle down in a small settlement ruled by the Holy Church. That was the one she had selected, as the fifth choice was her trying to take over Haven from Jake and getting herself killed. With all these choices being, well, bad, Miranda did not get any particularly valuable reward. Except for one thing that was perhaps better than any minor item or title.

Confidence. Confidence in her Path and the choices she had made to get where she was. Many had this happen to them as all they saw were worse or maybe equal outcomes from making different choices. They experienced newfound belief in their own decision-making and Paths, which would no doubt help move them forward. To some extent, Jake was also in this camp.

Then there were the ones who saw only utterly negative options. One such person was the former King of the Forest. All of his choices included him not becoming the Fallen King. He had three options. One where he stayed on his old planet and nothing of particular interest happened for the entire period until Realtime, one where he killed Jake during the Tutorial and returned to Earth only to overconfidently try and take over the planet, resulting in death by humanity. Finally, a third choice of fleeing the fight with Jake during the Tutorial, resulting in him still getting hunted down just a year or so later back on Earth.

All choices meant a far worse outcome, and the Fallen King despaired at seeing how fortunate it was for him to get killed.

A whole other segment saw Paths that were just... meaningless. Ones where no choice was made truly had any major impact at all. All the examples were of faintly similar scenes with only slight variation unless some just led to early unfortunate deaths.

And then... then there was one person who got three options of so little consequence the system should have been embarrassed for even offering them. Sylphie had been given these minimum three, and none of them had any impact whatsoever. Even the one where she rejected getting Stormild's Blessing ended up with Sylphie accepting it the next day after getting a minor bribe from Jake to at least consider it.

Second-to-last, there was one more person with just outstanding choices. One person who was offered six choices, but all had only minor variations of their Path. It was the Sword Saint who, no matter what choices he made, would end up with a sword in hand and one of the strongest on Earth.

Finally... there was an anomaly. A person that stood out from the get-go. The thing is, the Path of Myriad Choices event was based on, well, choices. Singular events with huge impact. So, what happens if said person had never made a choice without considering everything about it first and rapidly evaluating the outcome and course-correcting? You would get a person who kept re-aligning his Path again and again.

You would get Arnold.

He and others also appeared within the Administrator's Garden. Soon enough, he was joined by the Sword Saint and a lot of individuals from other worlds. All-in-all, around two hundred people ended up in the Administrator's Garden, making them Candidates.



“Hm?” the Sword saint suddenly said as he looked towards the far end of the hemisphere garden and saw two people already there. Talking as they gazed out into the vastness of space, both of them were clearly in an excellent and friendly mood as they chatted away heartily.

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Before anyone else made it to the garden, Jake and the man sized each other up after the other party greeted him, as Jake finally replied. “It does indeed appear I am the second to arrive. I assume you also did the system event?”

“I did. Quite an interesting experience, wouldn’t you agree? Did you find it enlightening? I personally found much inspiration from seeing how much impact a simple choice can have on one’s entire Path,” the alien man answered in a friendly tone.

“Definitely an experience,” Jake agreed as he began walking over. The other party gladly took a step to the side and invited Jake to join him at the edge of the hemisphere.

“I have to ask, is nahoom the name of your race or something else?” Jake asked. It was probably a bit rude of a question, but Jake had never encountered the race mentioned anywhere before.

“We are a rare breed, it seems. I have not found any mention of my race in any records either, so perhaps we are native to the ninety-third universe. From what I have gathered, we seem to share most of our traits with elves and the starborne. Naturally, we are not born as powerful entities like the starborne, but we seem to share some affinities with them,” he explained. Jake was amazed at the man’s willingness to share information and found it only proper to respond in kind.

"I assume you already guessed I am human?" Jake asked.

"That one isn't hard. You humans are quite widespread across the multiverse, so not knowing about you would be a challenge," the man smiled and chuckled. "But rather than races, how about names? Ah, I mean no offense if your culture does not use such things."

Jake shook his head at the overly polite nahoom and answered. "Jake Thayne, a pleasure to meet you."

"Ell'Hakan. And the honor is all mine," he bowed, and Jake returned the bow politely. "Now, do tell, what kind of world do you hail from? What exists in the cosmos has already interested me greatly."

"I come from somewhere named Earth," Jake answered. "A quaint little place that got quite a bit larger after the initiation."

"Sounds pleasant. Is it a blue or a red planet? What I mean is if it is a world of greenery and vast oceans or one of dust and rock," Ell'Hakan asked further.

"Definitely on the blue side, even after the changes," Jake answered. "Plenty of greenery too. Heck, I live within a city placed in a forest called Haven. Well, I live there sometimes. I am more the traveling kind and don't really have a set home, I guess?"

"Having a home is important," Ell'Hakan disagreed slightly. "I hail from a planet that is more on the red side. Most of our water is found underground, but we made it work, and I live in a beautiful city myself."

One that I also rule, just as you do. Of course, without my companions and friends, I would not be able to handle such responsibility, and it pains me to stand here without them by my side.”

“Definitely essential to have good help. I have a friend called Miranda who handles most, if not all, city-related things for me and have several good friends that I made mainly through fighting. At least I consider them friends. Shit, I even killed one, and we are now kind of on friendly terms?” Jake explained with a bit of a chuckle.

“Having friends, especially those that one can trust, is more important than anything. I myself try to be as trustworthy and genuine as possible. Though I do have to admit that when I look back, most of my greatest allies right now are there due to our shared Patron. Do tell, are you also blessed?” Ell’Hakan asked in his continued friendly tone. Jake definitely got the feeling that the guy was trustworthy just from their brief conversation. He was like a capybara: friend-shaped.

“I do happen to have a Blessing,” Jake answered. He considered if he should share more, but it wasn’t like he usually bothered hiding it, and Ell’Hakan seemed like a good dude, so why not? “I am blessed by the Malefic Viper. Ah, but don’t misunderstand, while he does have quite a bad reputation, we get along very well.”

“Judging others solely based on the accounts of their detractors is never wise. Better to meet them and reach your own conclusions. My Patron also has unsightly rumors, but I shall not base my own judgment on that but rather how the relationship we formed ourselves shape up,” Ell’Hakan said understandingly.

He truly didn’t seem to care about Jake’s identity at all and didn’t view him badly due to it. Yet he also clearly knew of the Viper, which would only make sense if he was blessed by another god. The twelve Primordials were pretty hot topics as far as Jake knew.

The entire conversation was interesting, and Ell'Hakan was undoubtedly a character worth knowing. Jake definitely got a good feeling from him all-around, like he was making an ally for life. He didn't even bother when other individuals appeared on the other end of the Administrator's Garden, and the man in front of him set up a quick isolation barrier. It was a nice gesture.

"Sometimes I wonder why our Patrons chose us," Ell'Hakan muttered out loud after the barrier was formed to give them some more privacy. "Is it our power or our persons? Tell me, how powerful are you? Truly?"

Jake shrugged as he felt like bragging a bit, especially as the barrier was now there and no one untrustworthy could listen in. "Eh, I am actually 169 in both race, class, and profession level, so that is pretty damn nice. I also got my own fair share of titles adding up further."

"Impressive!" the man complimented Jake. "Now... this may be presumptuous of me, and please do forgive me if I am wrong, but you are the Chosen of the Malefic One, are you not? I heard from my Patron he chose a mortal from this new universe, and with how impressive you are, I cannot help but wonder if it isn't you?"

Grinning, Jake confirmed. "I am his Chosen, yeah."

Ell'Hakan smiled in return. "Another thing we have in common, it seems. My Patron also chose me to make his Chosen. He has helped me a lot, but I also know it is because of one of our other... commonalities. I have never met anyone else with one, so I may be wrong, but you have a Bloodline, right?"

There was really no reason to hide it. They could both detect it due to how Bloodlines worked, so Jake naturally confirmed. "Sure do."

“As one would expect of the Chosen of a Primordial. I cannot say my own Bloodline is one that offers a lot of power, but I do wonder if yours does. Tell me, what does this Bloodline of yours do?”

“Oh, it is called Bloodline of-“

\*THUMP!\*

A pulse went through Jake as he felt his own heartbeat. It stopped him before he could answer further, and with the heartbeat came another feeling. Clarity.

El'Hakan looked at Jake expectedly, and his smile only deepened when Jake stopped himself. “Impressive indeed, Malefic's Chosen. Few, if any, manage to regain themselves.”

Jake stared at the guy as all of his previous feelings began dispersing. Feelings that now seemed odd and ungentle to him.

“What the fuck was that?” Jake asked as he clenched his fists. His danger sense flared as he was about to charge forward to attack, not necessarily due to El'Hakan but the rules of the Seat. He stopped, but he still stared as his fingers dug into his palms.

“A greeting, Jake Thayne. Our first exchange. One made under the stars as we both get to know the other and begin our shared story. It was truly an enlightening encounter, and I must say I look forward to meeting you again under less... let us say regulated circumstances,” El'Hakan said, his smile never changing.

Jake was more focused on analyzing what had happened internally. The question of “what the fuck was that?” was as much to Jake himself as the man before him. A conclusion was swiftly reached: Bloodline. The guy had some weird Bloodline that had affected Jake.

Addressing the words of Ell’Hakan, Jake grit his teeth. “Sure you want that?”

“I am most certain I do,” he confirmed. “Our next meeting shall be far more enlightening and eventful than this one, that I promise. And do not worry... it will come earlier than you think.”

“If you ever-“

“Jake, do not misunderstand,” Ell’Hakan interrupted him. “You are not the one who decides anything here. I do. Your role is already written, and so far, I must say you are a brilliant actor. And with that, my part here is done. Goodbye. For now.”

Before Jake could say anything else, the figure of Ell’Hakan disappeared like it had never been there. Jake clenched his fists even harder and punched the ground where the alien fuck had just disappeared from. His level of anger was intense as he just stared at the now broken ground ignoring the gazes of others directed at him.

What the fuck is that Bloodline? Jake asked himself as he considered what had just happened. His emotions had been affected somehow? Was it mind magic? A mind magic Bloodline? Was it something else? Emotion-control of some sort, which would probably also be considered mind magic?

Jake was only happy that he had caught himself in the very last moment before he revealed his Bloodline or any details. However, before that, he had already overshared way too much. He had no idea what he had thought when he just blurted out his damn levels and information on Earth like it was nothing. Okay, he kind of knew... he did it because he truly felt in that moment that there was nothing wrong with it and that he was talking to someone genuinely trustworthy.

Well, that was a fucking lie. Jake cursed inwardly as he kept considering the nature of the other person's Bloodline. The only truly good thing was that at least Ell'Hakan didn't know Jake's either. One thing was also for sure: he would have his revenge the next time they met.

Jake shook his head and looked upwards with frustration. He just stood there for a while staring into the cosmos within a massive space station among the stars - the stars themselves, uncaringly staring back at him.