

## Hunter 791

Chapter 791: Nevermore: Test of Character Fully Tested

If you stood before a rail with a switch in front of you, that could change the path of an oncoming train onto another path, with five people tied to the trains original path and only one on the

Okay, everyone knows the trolley problem. Apparently, the Wyrmgod did, too, as Jake was presented with one that was pretty much a magical carbon copy where he could choose who to teleport away from an incoming monster horde. As for Jakes choice?

Why not just kill the monsters?

Which is what he did.

Jake didnt know if the system didnt like that or something, as, in the very next story, Jake was represented with a very similar scenario. However, this time, he was on a whole other planet operating a teleporter where he could either choose to let the story run its course or teleport a bigger group if he personally intervened.

As for Jakes choice? He did nothing.

See, he didnt really see this as a legitimate trolley problem, the same as back on Earth. He felt It was more like one of those modified ones, where you got told that the one person you killed to save five actually had the cure to cancer in their head, and you were now a monster who had doomed millions to die due to your decision. Of course, Jake didnt know this was the case, but he also didnt know it wasnt, so he just let the character who was in charge of teleporting do his thing, assuming he knew better.

Ultimately, Jake didn't really see why he should care much which group was saved either way. He didn't know who they were, and if he was to make a purely utilitarian judgment call, he lacked the information to do that. What if the smaller group he saved were all C-grades with good future prospects, while the larger group was filled with F and E-grades who had a better chance of randomly becoming Transcendents than reaching D-grade?

So, with all that in mind, Jake remained passive when he couldn't directly interfere to change the situation to something he thought was better. If he could reveal his true power to save people, he saw no reason not to, but if he had to make these weird moral choices, he chose not to engage. He was aware that in itself was a choice, but it was one he stuck to.

There was one of these trolley-problem stories where Jake did choose what to do. It was one where he was riding a space shuttle that was crashing toward a star, and he had to decide who could evacuate in escape pods. Jake himself was the captain in this one and the person who had been flying the spaceship when he had fucked up and hit an asteroid before Jake entered the story.

With only a total of fifteen escape pods but twenty-five people on board, ten people had to stay and die. During the story, he had gotten to know all the other crew members as they tried to repair the spaceship before it was too late, and when the final choice of who to escape appeared, Jake knew what to do as he took control.

Well, to say we're fucked is an understatement only fifteen of us are getting out of here, which means ten will have to stay. So, let me first ask first any volunteers for dying? Jake questioned before he did something none of the crew members had expected as he raised his hand.

Jake had learned something during this story he genuinely hadn't known. That entire thing where the captain goes down with his ship was not a thing in the multiverse. In fact, it tended to be the opposite. Seeing as the captain was often the person with the highest level, he would often be evacuated first as

he held more value. A high-level captain could have more value than the entire spaceship itself, so to lose both was just unnecessary in the eyes of most.

However, Jake didn't agree with this. In his eyes, the captain himself - in this case, had been the one who had fucked up. He had hit an asteroid due to his own incompetence and gotten at least nine others killed, so of course, he had to take responsibility or at least stay on the spaceship till the very end and try to fix the situation he had created.

Anyway, Jake volunteering to go down with the ship also made five others decide to stay behind. As they did this, Jake suddenly got an odd feeling as he stared at one of the crew members who had decided to leave. He got the feeling she needed to stay so he made that happen.

The remaining four who stay will be decided by chance to make it fair, Jake said, as he proceeded to use his Bloodline to entirely rig the game of chance to make that one specific woman stay with him and the other volunteers. She looked devastated when she realized she had lost, but still accepted the result as fifteen people took the escape pods, leaving ten of them in a spaceship that couldn't fly, barreling toward a star. They still had a bit less than two days till impact, but things were definitely less than stellar.

Jake learned a day later, when they were getting closer to the star, why his guts had told him to keep the female crew member who was one of the engineers. With excitement, she ran to him and said she had found a potential solution to allow them to survive. By blowing up one of the engines, they could take advantage of a storm of space mana that was approaching, pushing them just enough to enter orbit around the star, to then blow up a second engine to set free them from orbit again and send them flying home.

It was super risky and straight out of some very unrealistic space movie, but Jake was entirely on board. This was one of the stories where Jake's own power didn't do shit. Something he had noticed was a general theme. Either power didn't matter at all, as everything else was just too damn powerful compared to any C-grade, or everyone was E and D-grades. In fact, Jake hadn't seen a single C-grade even after doing more than fifty of the stories.

Anyway, in a twist that wasn't super surprising, the engineers plan turned out to work, and in the epilogue, Jake saw his captain character and the rest of the crew miraculously survive. It did also show his character getting scolded by his superiors for not escaping in a pod, but ultimately, he was still hailed as a hero along with the engineer for great decision making.

The lesson Jake learned from this test was to always trust his gut and that rigging a game of chance was acceptable as long as it was for the greater good. Ah, who was he kidding?

Jake hadn't learned shit during all these damn tests of his character or whatever. The novelty had long worn off, and while he did his best to get engaged in the stories, some of them proving genuinely interesting due to the setting, his attention span was waning. Most of them just weren't that engaging or interesting to him, and he felt like he was wasting time. Moreover, most stories took over a week, and at that point, he had already spent over a year inside the Challenge Dungeon with nothing to show for it.

Stories from there just felt slower and slower. Soon Jake had done sixty, then seventy, eighty, ninety. Jake had no idea when it would end until finally, he reached story number one hundred. This story in itself didn't have anything hugely enjoyable about it, but as he entered it, Jake felt like he was finally approaching the end of his suffering.

Once the story was done and the princess was not saved from a dragon that just turned out to have a massive crush on her, he finally went somewhere that wasn't just another random story.

Jake found himself within a white void. On a side note, the system really liked white voids for these kinds of situations where nothing happened for a few seconds. Finally, a system message appeared before him, making him sigh in relief.

Congratulations! You have completed the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon!

Evaluation performance

Thank fucking Villy, Jake thought to himself. For a second there, he was afraid the white void was just the setup for another story or something. Jake was sure happy to finally be out and was already looking forward to the next Challenge Dungeon, as it could only be better than this.

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But, before that, he still needed his final evaluation. One that he had to admit he was kind of nervous about. It had to be reiterated, but Jake had no idea how he had done or what he had even been tested on. So, with bated breath, he waited until suddenly, a Grand Achievement popped up in front of him.

Grand Achievement earned: Successfully completed the Test of Character with an excellent performance. You have shown a consistent sense of justice, character, and a high level of self-belief. However, you also displayed a lack of dedication to certain Paths and a lack of interest in understanding stories, even when doing so could prove beneficial to you personally. Throughout the test, you have shown no growth or regression in your character but remained wholly consistent. 49.108 Nevermore Points earned. Due to completing a Grand Achievement, you will receive a 10% multiplier of all Nevermore Points at the final calculation.

Reading it over carefully, Jake could honestly only shrug. It said he had an excellent performance, so that was good, right? Also, at least it called him consistent, even if it also recognized he was bored. But was it really that bad to not show dedication toward something that he really didn't like doing? Sure, it said he didn't display interest even when doing so could have benefitted him, but it wasn't like missing some

benefits here and there would ruin him. He could always just make up for any losses elsewhere while doing something he actually found engaging.

Jake knew one of the reasons he had kind of hated the Challenge Dungeon was simply due to how complicated it was. He liked to keep things simple, and some grand social experiment mixed with a personality test wasn't something he liked at all. If it had told him how to perform, he would have taken it as a challenge, but what even was the challenge in this Challenge Dungeon? He still didn't fucking know.

But oh well, he had at least gotten some more Nevermore Points and another multiplier, so that was nice to see. With this, he got his points above nine hundred thousand, rapidly closing in on a million.

Nevermore Points: 907.602

There was also no title this time around, and from the looks of it, there were no levels either. This did make him question if any of these Challenge Dungeons even gave experience, but surely, the Minaga one had to, right?

Anyway, Jake was complaining a lot internally, but it wasn't all bad. Especially not when he got the other reward from the Challenge Dungeon besides the points.

Right in front of him appeared what looked like a single blank page ripped from a book. At first, Jake was confused, but when he used Identify on it, a small smile snuck onto his lips.

[High-Quality Storybook Page (Unique)] The page of an unknown storybook containing empty Records of a tale yet untold. Allows you to infuse the Records of a skill into the storybook page. Ripping a page infused with the Records of a skill will grant you an opportunity to upgrade the skill. The effect is lower the higher the rarity of the skill, and the page will not accept Records of certain skills. It will have no effect if used on skills at or above legendary rarity. Skill upgrades are not guaranteed.

Requirements: C-grade. Soulbound

Now, this was something actually useful. Items like this were incredibly rare to find in the multiverse and would allow him to potentially even upgrade skills where Jake wasn't sure where to take it. Yep, definitely a good one.

Do you wish to exit the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon?

No further actions can be taken within this Challenge Dungeon.

Jake, standing in the void, sighed, happy he was finally done with the damn Test of Character Challenge Dungeon. Looking up, he stared straight at where he knew someone was observing him. Definitely the Wyrmgod recording.

I give that damn Challenge Dungeon a two out of ten. Its shit. The novelty quickly wears off, and then you are just doing chores. Definitely one to go back to the drawing board with. And if you say that my not liking it is proof I shouldn't have gotten a better evaluation, then I guess my character just sucks, and I'll happily accept that if it means not going to that shithole again, Jake said, giving a very fair and accurate review of the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon.

If they wanted to do a damn live documentary of his life, he should at least have the right to get a few jabs in, right?

Ultimately, he just decided to mentally write off the entire Challenge Dungeon. Yeah, it had just been a place for him to waste some time while recovering from the Colosseum of Mortals, nothing more, nothing less, and it wasn't like it hadn't still been efficient when it came to making Nevermore Points, and he even got that storybook page. Yep, it was definitely not a waste of time. Definitely not

Seriously, what kind of person would like that shitty place?

Jacob appeared in the white void, a pang of sadness hitting him as he realized the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon was over. He had genuinely enjoyed the entire experience, and despite it giving him no levels, he felt like he had progressed plenty. The Paths he had seen, the fates he had divined, and the worlds he had experienced were invaluable. To stand in the shoes of another person and truly experience life from their point of view was simply invaluable, and something he would gladly do again if given the chance.

He had barely considered what rewards the dungeon would offer, so he was taken aback when the system presented him with his final evaluation.

Grand Achievement earned: Successfully completed the Test of Character with a near-perfect performance. You have shown yourself to be a guide, a teacher, an observer, or whatever role you needed to adapt. You have proven you can understand every story and guide it toward an ideal future, your every decision guided by comprehension, empathy, and logic, your thought process adapting to each scenario. Throughout the Test of Character, you have grown and adapted to every challenge, never once faltering. 88.201 Nevermore Points earned. Due to completing a Grand Achievement, you will receive a 20% multiplier of all Nevermore Points at the final calculation.



Reward gained: Test of Character: Near-perfect Empath.

Test of Character: Near-Perfect Empath You have proven yourself a Near-perfect Empath during the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon, truly displaying compassion and understanding of every story, earning more than 80.000 Nevermore Points. Only one Nevermore Challenge Dungeon title can be held at a time. +175 to all stats.

Not to mention the odd page he got when everything else was said and done

[Exceptional Storybook Page (Unique)] The page of an unknown storybook containing empty Records of a tale yet untold. Allows you to infuse the Records of a skill into the storybook page. Ripping a page infused with the Records of a skill will grant you an opportunity to upgrade the skill. The effect is lower the higher the rarity of the skill, and the page will not accept Records of certain skills. It will have no effect if used on skills at or above mythical rarity. Skill upgrades are not guaranteed.

Requirements: C-grade. Soulbound

Despite his gratitude for these rewards, Jacob admittedly would have gladly traded them for another chance to do the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon. He was not a contender for the Leaderboards anyway, and getting more power through titles and such mattered little to him or his Path.

With gratitude for being allowed the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon, he left with a smile on his face, hoping others would find as much enjoyment in the experience as he had.

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Arnold appeared in the white void, having completed the Challenge Dungeon with an approach he deemed the best. Besides that, he didn't really have many thoughts of the roughly last two years of his life, as he hadn't really done anything he deemed especially noteworthy. This did make him display some surprise as he raised a single eyebrow when he got the final evaluation.

Grand Achievement earned: Successfully completed the Test of Character with an unquestionable performance. You have shown yourself to be an analyst of all stories. Every story was approached with logic, and every decision was made only according to the data provided to maximize benefits for your character. Your own personal beliefs or sentiments never once influenced your decision-making, allowing you to always remain impartial. Impartial to forever only make decisions that benefitted the character you inhabited, with no regard or care for any other living being. Throughout the Test of Character, you have been a beacon of consistency. 88.758 Nevermore Points earned. Due to completing a Grand Achievement, you will receive a 20% multiplier of all Nevermore Points at the final calculation.

Reward gained: Test of Character: Unquestionable Analyst.

Test of Character: Unquestionable Analyst You have proven yourself an unquestionable analyst during the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon by displaying an analytical and logical mind that defies comprehension, earning more than 80.000 Nevermore Points. Only one Nevermore Challenge Dungeon title can be held at a time. +175 to all stats.

What's more was the Exceptional Storybook Page he received, which would allow him to upgrade one of his research-related skills that usually had a too time-consuming progression path. This would save him a lot of time and allow him to proceed more quickly with some of the experiments he had hypothesized but lacked the means to adequately collect empirical data and form a proper theory. As for his thoughts on the Test of Character itself?

In truth, he didnt really have any. He didnt believe his own thoughts on the matter had any bearing on the actions he had taken, after all. However, he could admit he did find some level of happiness with his gains. Especially after the entirely lacking performance he displayed in the Colosseum of Mortals, which had proven to be an entirely unproductive endeavor.

Chapter 792: Nevermore: [Redacted]

The five Challenge Dungeons were something many parties attending Nevermore delayed doing for a variety of reasons. Partly because they were naturally easier once you got stronger. Even in the ones where your stats were normalized or reduced, your conceptual comprehension should increase over the decades of doing all the other floors. Another reason many waited was to do the entire Challenge Dungeon at once.

Once the seventieth floor was cleared by many groups, they decided, like Jakes, to tackle them. Some also did the dungeons before, as while the fourteenth city floor did mark when all the Challenge Dungeon would be fully unlocked, some of them were fully unlocked even beforehand. As an example, the Test of Character was fully unlocked after doing the floors that were meant to teach lessons to the Nevermore Attendees, such as the one about Plagues. The Test of Character was also one that would either be fully unlocked or entirely unavailable due to how it worked.

Before that, the Minaga Labyrinth one was fully unlocked after the Minaga floors were done, making it the first Challenge Dungeon to fully unlock. The final one that fully opened in this incarnation of Nevermore was the Colosseum of Mortals, where one had to clear floor seventy to become able to challenge the Grand Champion. If one did the Challenge Dungeon without having done floor seventy, the Battlemaster would have said that the Grand Champion wasnt available and to come back at a later date. Later, in this case, being after you had cleared floor seventy.

Many of the best parties had begun reaching this stage by now and were moving onto the Challenge Dungeons properly. As had been mentioned many times before, the Challenge Dungeons were where the true top of the Leaderboards would be found, and they were, by far, the most efficient way of getting points for those talented.

Each Challenge Dungeon could give a Grand Achievement upon completion, though it would only be a normal achievement without any percentage multiplier if the performance was too bad. The Grand Achievement usually ranged from 5-20%, with 20% being given if one fully completed the Challenge Dungeon with an outstanding performance. It was usually viewed as the maximum, though, of course, Jake knew there was one step higher. 25% was only given if one did the impossible within a certain Challenge Dungeon. If they achieved something that no one was meant to achieve.

With 20% usually considered the limit, the maximum amplification one could reach was thus 100% if one had a perfect performance in all five Challenge Dungeons. Needless to say, this never happened, as just getting a 20% multiplier in any of the Challenge Dungeons already put you in the top tier.

On that note, someone like the Fallen King was not expected to get a peak score. In fact, no one expected Unique Lifeforms to. Unique Lifeforms had very narrow Paths by definition, and while they could often do extremely well in some dungeons, they nearly always completely flunked in others if they didn't suit their particular talents. They could still go pretty high, though, just not the peak.

An overall amplification of 30% from all Challenge Dungeons was considered excellent, as just getting 10% was extremely hard, and this was around where many would expect a Unique Lifeform to land. 40% was at the level of true geniuses and were individuals many factions showed interest in. 50% was where one reached the territory of truly versatile monsters. For reference, getting to the Grand Champion in the Colosseum of Mortals while expending all lives - would give just 10%, so one had to be at that level in every single Challenge Dungeon. Most people would be over the moon for just beating the seven Champions, but one had to repeat similar feats five times over to reach 50%.

Above 50% was where one entered the realm of genuine monsters. Beings that already had high levels of divine attention on them who were already recognized by the gods. Some were expected to get at least 50%, such as Ghost King Azal, Davion of Valhal, and several other peak geniuses from major factions. Jake, Dina, and Ellhakan also fell within this group, which was expected to reach at least 50% overall.

However, even if they were expected to reach at least 50%, reaching 60% would be considered absolutely exemplary. Anything above 70% was practically unheard of, and the stuff of legends. Those who reached that level were considered the true contenders for the very apex of the Leaderboard. Going above even this, one reached the level of being an all-time record contender.

So, with Jake being at 35% after only two out of five, he was definitely on track to make his dear Patron a proud snake. Even if he did believe that bullshit Test of Character had been complete bullshit.

He understood Jakes frustration. The Viper truly did. It was an odd place, and in all honesty, one that he would argue didnt truly fit that well in Nevermore.

The Test of Character was an odd Challenge Dungeon by design. Jakes inability to understand why it worked as it worked was entirely purposeful, and while it did provide part of the challenge, it was far from the whole reason.

Vilastromoz knew that out of all the Challenge Dungeons, it was the one the Wyrmgod had exerted the most control on to turn it into exactly what he wanted. To fulfill the role he desired for it to fulfill. And that role wasnt necessarily to offer a challenge that was just a requirement by the system to turn it into a Challenge Dungeon that qualified to be part of Nevermore. It offered some diversity in what kind of dungeons there were, but it was also a Challenge Dungeon archetype that had been around for almost every single era.

In reality, it wasnt really made for the benefit of the ones actually doing the Challenge Dungeon. Not really. It wasnt even made for people like Jake or the other people who it was expected to get a high score. Instead, it was created solely for the Wyrmgods own goals.

The Test of Character did an acceptable job of assessing someones character and allowed the Wyrmgod to get certain data points. It allowed him to categorize people who even got low scores based on their

personalities and character. It allowed him to learn of their morals, quirks, mental thought processes, and sometimes even red flags that one had to be worried about. Not red flags, as in someone turning out to be a psycho killer, but red flags, as in potential weaknesses that would display down the line, such as an inability to show patience or deal with long periods of nothing. Something anyone who truly wanted to reach the peak had to be capable of to not go insane. And with the system actively not allowing someone without a mentality capable of evolving to evolve, it could potentially be the doom of a talented prospect.

This information would then be sold to whoever was interested. Some factions had an open subscription of sorts to get information on anyone from the faction it was worth getting information on. Especially places like the Holy Church used this data to weed out or address people who could turn into dissidents or problems for the faction in the future, but even places like the Order of the Malefic Viper also made use of it.

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Other factions had open calls on interesting new prospects. Someone getting a very high score in the Test of Character could indicate someone had a unique talent or was suited for specific Paths. The personality and character of some people even resonated with some extremely powerful Paths, to the level that such a personality and sense of character was the only requirement they had to fulfill.

Jakes former coworker, the Augur of Hope, was a brilliant example of this. His talent in magic was nowhere near good, he couldn't fight for shit, he wasn't adequately assertive at all but a total pushover, and he entirely lacked the ego someone like the Viper was looking for in those he believed could become truly strong.

Yet he had gained a Path many sought after. One recognized as a peak Path among mortals. Because what he did have was an uncanny ability to understand others, an unwavering will to guide them, and a selflessness that was almost nauseating. He would do what he believed was the best for others, even if it meant setting himself on fire. The Augur was simply born to be an Augur but he did need a little push

to get there. He needed the interference of the gods in the Tutorial to set up the scenario for him to realize his Path.

Many of those who did the Test of Character could be close to such a realization. They just needed a small push that some factions would gladly give them. The Primordial Church was a big recruiter of people who were just a single step away from being fanatics and recruited them almost en masse after they participated in Nevermore.

If Vilastromoz had to explain Nevermore and especially the Test of Character to Jake, he would very much compare it to those social media things his planet used to have. Nevermore was free to enter and participate in, but it still had to bring in resources for the Wyrmgod and others who were involved in developing and maintaining it, and one of the best ways to earn Credits was to sell information. As the saying goes, if something is free, you are the product. This was also why the Wyrmgod sent tokens to enter the World Wonder all throughout the multiverse. He wanted every C-grade in the entire multiverse to come to Nevermore if he could.

Of course, despite this data-gathering, some people still had special privileges to not get theirs sold. Usually, the Wyrmgod would refuse to sell any information on young prospects to rival factions, while he would never sell anything related to someone like Jake, considering he was a Chosen. He would keep all that under lock and key and only give it to the Malefic Viper. Save for a few scenarios like the Colosseum of Mortals, where others had made deals to still get notified when certain things happened, nothing would get out.

All of this is to say that a situation where several gods actively seemed to want information on someone they, under normal circumstances, wouldn't get was odd but what was even weirder was that they actually got what they wanted.

Oh, Jake is done with the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon now! Minaga said with a big smile, getting the attention of the others in the room. It took some of them a second to remember that Jake was the name of the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, but once they did, their curiosity peaked.

By now, it had been nearly two years since the Holy Mother and Blightfather had arrived, and things hadn't gotten calmer. Nobody had left, as frankly, two years was barely any period of time to them. As immortals, their sense of time was entirely warped, and even just sitting still and staring into nothingness for a century or two could go by entirely unnoticed. Especially when one had several avatars at the same time. The primary focus of the god could always just shift elsewhere as one waited for something to happen with one avatar.

With no one leaving, it had only made the room more packed, though naturally, the Wyrmgod could just spatially expand it if he saw fit. As the Viper had expected, the gathering of five Primordials and Natures Attendant in one place did not go unnoticed. In the first few weeks, factions were apprehensive about doing anything as some sent representatives to figure out what was happening, which was when the Wyrmgod just decided to effectively say fuck it and just allowed any god who wanted to enter to do so.

This had resulted in the room now having around fifty gods present, as they saw this as an invitation of sorts. Even the Dao Sect had sent one of their Wanderers, as they called them. People who actively trained out of the Dao Sects controlled territories and were more in tune with the rest of the multiverse.

No other Primordials had shown up, which honestly didn't surprise Vilastromoz at all. The Starseizing Titan, Rigoria, and Aeon never showed up unless expressly asked to, Stormild didn't show up even when asked to, and Eversmile and the Daofather were both too unpredictable. As for Yggdrasil well, she always just sent Natures Attendant as her mouthpiece whenever anything happened, and he was already there, making it as if there effectively were half of all the Primordials in the room.

The gods that had arrived were all unknowns that the Viper didn't care to know but were all representatives of major factions, including different internal tribes of the United Tribes, the Altmar Empire, and many smaller and larger Pantheons. These gods were naturally not at the level of someone like himself, and this had resulted in the room effectively being split into two parts. One where the Primordials, Natures Attendant, Artemis, and Minaga were, and one where everyone else gathered. As for their objective for coming?



It appeared not even they knew as the Viper came to learn that most were just there, so their faction felt they were present if anything important did happen. The chances of something noteworthy happening when half of the Primordials meeting had to be high, right?

That's why anything that was said or done caught their attention. Minaga calling out that Jake was done with the Test of Character were the first words said to everyone in over a month, as most gods only directed their conversations toward certain individuals.

Indeed he is, the Malefic Viper nodded at Minaga's statement. And his performance was pretty much as expected.

10% was really good for Jake in that one. Jake wasn't particularly suited for the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon, and in all honesty, the Viper didn't put much stock in the place at all. It was a useless trial for someone like Jake. It didn't align well with his Path, and it wasn't like the Test of Character was any indication if one had the mentality to become a god as long as the person got above a certain score. In fact, the Viper remembered that some currently living Godkings only got 5% or even no evaluation back when they did Nevermore.

His review was pretty harsh, though, Minaga said. Harsh, but fair.

The Wyrmgod grunted disapprovingly, but before he could say anything, Valdemar spoke up. If he is done, then what are you waiting for?

With confusion, the Wyrmgod looked at Valdemar. The Malefic Viper instantly understood as he brought his palm to his face. Yeah, there was no way the Wyrmgod would agree unless-

Very well, the Wyrmgod smiled in response.

unless the dragon god was being unbelievably petty because Jake didnt like his dungeon.

Jake stood in the white void and was just about to leave the Challenge Dungeon for good and get out of that horrible place when the notification in front of him suddenly began warping as another sentence was suddenly added on, and he was given a choice.

Do you wish to exit the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon?

No further actions can be taken within this Challenge Dungeon.

You can choose to either exit and appear at the Challenge Dungeon entrance or at [Redacted]

He looked at the changed message for a second, threw a glance at where he was being watched from, and shrugged as he accepted to go to the very exciting place known as [Redacted]. Eh, sure, whats the worst that can happen?

Chapter 793: Nevermore: Super Secret Meeting

Artemis could admit she had been too hasty in her actions when she decided to head toward Nevermore immediately. She at least had the clarity of mind to go and ask Natures Attendant to come along, knowing he had his C-grade granddaughter currently participating in the C-grade portion of the World Wonder. Yet, somehow, she had forgotten that the Chosen of the Malefic Viper and his granddaughter were in a party together in the brief timespan between watching the recording and approaching him.

Originally, she had only planned to go and stick close to Nevermore, so she was around once the Chosen of the Viper was done with the World Wonder, as she doubted she could enter and get any information. Trying to learn more about him would be difficult, considering he was the Chosen of a Primordial, but maybe she could get lucky there if she had Natures Attendant with her.

When she arrived and was told by Natures Attendant that the Wyrmgod himself had invited them to enter a special viewing area, she got excited only to find out it wasn't just the Wyrmgod there. Not only was the Malefic Viper present, but even the Wargod Valdemar was there for some reason. Three Primordials gathered in one place was an incredibly rare happening and only really ever took place around peak-level system events.

However, despite this, the meeting, if you could even call it that, seemed incredibly casual. Too casual. To the level where it was suspicious. The last time she heard, the Malefic Viper and Valdemar were in conflict due to the rising star Yip of Yore, a god who truly did have the right to claim himself to stand among the other beings at the pinnacle as far as she was concerned.

Yet Artemis saw Valdemar and the Viper interact casually, though there was some tension. No bloodlust, though, meaning they didn't give off the sense they wanted to kill one another. She didn't display her surprise, though, but just kept quiet and tried to not attract too much attention while internally cursing her decision to come. There was no doubt in her mind that if other gods saw this scene, it would cause quite an uproar, so she couldn't help but wonder if bigger plans were at play. Natures Attendant also gave her a subtle warning.

You may see some things that perplex you, but it would be best to keep it to yourself. In due time, all truths will be revealed, but till then, your thoughts are not to be shared, alright? he asked her in a friendly tone that Artemis knew was very much a warning. One she quite frankly didn't need.

Who the fuck was she to risk messing up some plans or plots that involved several Primordials? She didn't belong in the room at all, and she knew it. The only one with raw power roughly rivaling her own was Minaga, but comparing the two of them was a laughable endeavor. Minaga had hundreds of clones who were stronger than Artemis, and even if he wasn't at the level of Primordials, his unique ability made him someone who could stand tall by their side.

Artemis wasn't. She was weak in comparison. She felt small sitting in a room surrounded by titans of the multiverse, with her own strength still a step away from becoming a Godqueen. Meanwhile, all the other gods around had ascended beyond the circles of divinity.

She had honestly expected to be thrown out at some point but was allowed to stay. A decision she slowly began to regret the more time. Shortly after Nature's Attendant and she arrived, two more Primordials also joined them. What's more, they were two of the most famous and influential ones in all of the multiverse due to the utterly massive factions they controlled.

Both the Risen and the Holy Church were more powerful than the Pantheon of Life, and not by a little either. Their two leaders, the Blightfather and Holy Mother, were also absolutely unapproachable beings for someone like her.

It wasn't getting any better when the Blightfather directly questioned why Artemis was here.

Since we are talking about how great this reunion is why is she here? the Blightfather asked, staring directly at Artemis, making a shiver run down her spine, as she felt like the god could kill her with a mere thought. Even the life energy within her acted up, meeting a far more powerful polar opposite of itself.

Despite how precarious the situation was, she actually saw this as a chance. In all honesty, while she wanted to figure out more about the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, going to Nevermore was probably

overkill. She could always find him after he was done and approach him then; she had just been too hasty in her decision-making.

So, if she took this chance to excuse herself, using the justification that she was showing respect to the Primordial, she could-

Someone who was allowed to be here, same as you, Natures Attendant spoke up for her. While Artemis certainly appreciated it, she did scold herself for missing her chance to get the hell out of there.

At least Natures Attendant rebuttal did make them stop bothering her except for Minaga, who suddenly skirted over and was a lot more interested in talking to her than any of the Primordials.

You're here because of Jake, right? he asked with a sly smirk. You know while there were recordings in that information package of yours, I got several times more in my personal stash from when he did my labyrinth. Interested?

Artemis wanted to reject him and try to attract as little attention as possible but she was also curious, and it wasn't like she could just leave now, as that would make Natures Attendant look bad after standing up for her. Also, when a figure like Minaga was offering, you really shouldn't reject him. Nope, definitely not.

What do you have? she asked a bit tentatively as Minagas smirk turned into a grin.

Whatever your heart desires he said as he turned to telepathy. Or, well, the next best thing, as I can't bring Jake himself.

Artemis kept her cool and entirely ignored the last part as she gladly began browsing his lengthy catalog of recordings, though she did notice most of the recordings had some odd names. For some reason, they were filled with expletives complaining about Jakes Bloodline which only made her all the more interested in seeing them.

Things from there calmed down for a little while, even when a steady influx of other gods began arriving, having been attracted by the five Primordials who had gathered. She couldn't blame them, and it was nice that she wasn't the only god on the weaker side though she did remain sitting with the non-representative gods even after others arrived.

As weeks of waiting turned to months, Artemis began to focus most of her efforts on her main body, which was training in her divine realm. Everyone present was just waiting for something to happen as the room filled with gods was eerily silent, most of those who did communicate using telepathy. She also spoke to some people from the other factions, and unsurprisingly, this impromptu gathering turned into a diplomatic meeting of sorts between many large divine factions. Factions that usually wouldn't meet were suddenly gathered in an entirely neutral setting, with nothing better to do, so they made use of this time.

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Nearly two years after she arrived, the silence was broken by Minaga.

Oh, Jake is done with the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon now!

Instantly, everyone tuned into their avatars. Artemis found it a bit funny when she saw the momentary confusion on the faces of most gods until they realized who Jake was, and she also noticed how the confusion lingered for many, likely because Minaga used Jakes name and not just his title as the Vipers Chosen.

Indeed he is, the Malefic Viper responded, everyone now truly perking up.

His review was pretty harsh, though, Minaga continued. Harsh, but fair.

More confusion spread in the room, but Artemis instantly understood after having seen all of Minagas recordings. Recordings that had only made her more curious than ever about Jake. His entire demeanor was odd for a mortal, and he had zero change in behavior after realizing Minaga was a god - the same as with her own image in the Colosseum. For him to give reviews on a Challenge Dungeon was entirely in character, though she did wonder if it was smart to criticize the Wyrmgod. She knew he cared more about the Test of Character than any other Challenge Dungeon, after all.

Valdemar then also spoke up, asking what they were waiting for only for the Wyrmgod to respond with very well.

Very well, what?

Artemis wondered what he was up to and what he meant as an odd thought struck her. No he cant be serious. That could kill him or cause some sort of permanent damage; surely he wouldnt-

A teleportation circle appeared off to the side of the large room, the heads of every god whipping over there as a recognizable form appeared a few seconds later. This newcomer stood entirely still as sharp

eyes reminiscent of a beast that hid behind a wood-like mask quickly scanned the room. Artemis felt his gaze pause on her for a brief moment before it continued to take in everyone present.

For a mortal to appear in a room filled with dozens of gods, including five Primordials and Natures Attendant one would expect him to fall to his knees instantly if he even managed to stay conscious. Even if he did have a Bloodline that made him capable of resisting auras, the sheer accumulated power present should be enough to suppress even that. Also, if he somehow was capable of remaining standing, he should at least kneel out of respect, right?

Perhaps the shock of seeing him just stand there for several seconds was why no one spoke up. After nearly five seconds, Jake raised a hand and scratched the back of his head as he looked perplexed.

Did I pick the wrong prompt? Wait, I'm not intruding on some super secret meeting or something, right?

Yeah Jake was genuinely unsure if he had picked the wrong prompt. Did the system bug out or something, allowing him to arrive in a room full of gods? Well, based on the slight smirk on the dragonkin god's face, who he recognized as the person who had been observing him all throughout his time in Nevermore meaning he was probably the Wyrmgod Jake chose to bet on this happening, being entirely purposeful.

As for what purpose? Hell if he knew, he just picked the [redacted] options as it seemed interesting, and he got the feeling that selecting it wouldn't be a bad thing. What his instincts hadn't warned him about was how awkward it would be to suddenly have so many people staring at him at once but hey, he saw some familiar faces in the crowd, too.

Villy, Natures Attendant, and Minaga were all people he had met before, while he had kind of met Valdemar and Artemis through his vision using Path of the Heretic-Chosen and, of course, during the Colosseum of Mortals. Artemis naturally being the one he had gotten to know the best during their time



in the Colosseum, and based on the odd look she gave him, Jake would put his money on her being fully aware of what her image had done and said.

Anyway, Jakes spontaneous question hung in the air for a few seconds as no one quite seemed to know what to answer. After a bit, the silence was finally broken as a huge laugh echoed through the room. A very familiar laugh Jake had heard within the arena many times both before, during, and after their fights.

Before Jake could react, a figure appeared beside him and threw his arm over Jakes shoulder, though it definitely looked awkward with Valdemar, who was way taller than Jake.

A secret meeting youre now invited to! Valdemar yelled as he threw intrigued looks at Jake, almost expecting some kind of response.

Okay? Jake just asked, looking at the bearded god as he felt the arm resting on his shoulders, entirely unsure what to do or say. It felt like a mountain was slightly touching him, and at any moment, it could fall down and flatten him into a pancake. But he didnt really feel any fear as he didnt feel any intent to kill from the Primordial.

Youre really okay, huh? Valdemar muttered, his voice a mix between surprised and happy. Good! Good! You really are an interesting one! I would have been very disappointed if the one who managed to beat my image turned into a babbling mess just by meeting the real thing!

Well, glad to not disappoint, I guess, Jake muttered, as his mind was preoccupied with considering a lot of other things. He felt the many gods within the room observing him carefully, trying to gauge different things. He felt the barrage of presences wash over him at all times, nobody intentionally trying to suppress him, but all of them nevertheless bearing down on him. It was the natural suppression of grades, and while Jake felt it, he didnt really feel it. He was just aware of it.

What he also felt from all their auras was the surprise when Valdemar said Jake had beaten his image. Nobody said anything, though. Many seemed to now also realize why Valdemar was there, including Jake himself, of course.

Oh, and thanks for the fight, though I guess it wasn't actually you, Jake continued with a heartfelt smile and nod. It was fun.

Valdemar's eyes opened wide for a second as he smiled even wider and began laughing out loud. He continued for a few seconds before he stopped and leaned down. You do know I want a rematch, right?

The words were clearly a joke, but Jake smiled and met Valdemar's eyes. Maybe later. I should at least become a god first, or it wouldn't really be any fun, now would it?

No, no, it wouldn't, Valdemar answered as he nodded, clearly happy with the response. He then turned his gaze toward the Malefic Viper as he raised his voice. Hey, Vilas. You found yourself quite a nice Chosen, eh?

I am not one to complain, though I do raise an issue with you being all buddy-buddy with him. How about you let off a bit and show some basic decorum? As you said, that's my Chosen, not yours, the Viper answered in a calm tone. Jake felt the slightly insidious undertone and couldn't help but notice how he sounded slightly different from usual. More malefic?

You're right; he is your Chosen, Valdemar said as he let go of Jake and took a step back before throwing the Viper a slightly taunting smile. A bit odd, isn't it? That you have a human as your Chosen?

I do not remember there being any rules about the races gods can have as Chosen, the Malefic Viper responded, his tone still calm but with that odd undertone more underlined than before.

Its still a bit of a shame, isnt it? Wouldnt it be better if we both stuck to the usual customs? Valdemar asked loudly.

The Vipers smile had disappeared by now, and Valdemar continued as he turned to Jake again. I know you became that damn snakes Chosen early on your Path, but wouldnt it be better to stick with a faction that better represents us as humans?

Jake was momentarily taken aback, as he assumed Valdemar was doing this invitation as part of some kind of scheme with the Viper and wasnt serious-

Im not really joking... while you are his Chosen, you would also find a home in Valhal if you so desired, Valdemar casually sent Jake telepathically, throwing him for a loop.

yeah, alright, Jake should probably just reject him publicly right away and-

Dont reject his proposal immediately, but leave your answer ambiguous. Make it look like you are really considering the offer, Villy sent telepathically.

Yeah, alright, things were really a mess already, and Jake was seriously reconsidering his decision to go to [Redacted] without properly considering what that could lead to. He felt the many gazes of the gods

upon him, many of them filled with interest as the two Primordials were openly arguing with so many gods as witnesses. Again, it was a bloody mess.

Whats more, Jake hadnt even gotten to Eversmile, who was hiding in the back, dressed up as some beastfolk god.

Chapter 794: Nevermore: Shameless Recruiting Tactics

Jake had lots of stuff to address for sure and started with the most urgent one. With so many eyes on him, he couldnt delay answering Valdemars bold proposal as he took a deep breath and jumped right into it.

I am not sure this is the time or place or place for such an important discussion, Jake said, trying to sound neutral to the question.

But it is a discussion, Valdemar grinned as he patted Jake on the shoulder. You heard that, Vilas? Do you think this the time and place for such a discussion?

His tone was very taunting as the Viper scoffed. Are you seriously blatantly trying to steal my Chosen right under my nose? Kind of pathetic coming for the so-called god of war to fight a battle he should know he cant win.

I never take fights that I dont have a chance of winning, Valdemar kept grinning as he stayed close to Jake. My promises wont be empty either. I think we all know your Chosen isnt just some common C-grade but someone valuable regardless of his own power due to his unique abilities and Bloodline, so I wont be cheap. And, honestly, do you think you can support someone like him better than Valhal can? Better than I can?

Jake was a bit surprised at how articulate Valdemar seemed. Then again Villy did say that Valdemar wasn't stupid, just very simple. He was a bit like Jake himself in that regard though the level of his own occasional stupidity was very much still up for discussion.

Well, isn't this something, the Malefic Viper said with a smile that wasn't really a smile. My Chosen is not just some mindless warrior swinging around an axe; he is also a skilled alchemist. It is through his alchemy his Path to manipulate Origins was revealed so let me counter. Do you think you can guide him to be a better alchemist than I can?

Odd, the version of your Chosen I saw defeat my image in the Challenge Dungeon didn't look like some weak alchemist. From my point of view, you are sabotaging his Path by making him follow your Legacy. He should walk a path more aligned with his own Origin. A Path Valhal will gladly show him, Valdemar said, crossing his arms. How about this someone like him is capable of choosing his own Path, right? Also, what was it you said before that big ceremony you did oh yeah, that he can make his own decisions with his unique powers and that they only belong to him. Then shouldn't we just let him choose, eh?

Jake was far from an expert in political stuff, and he had a strong feeling Valdemar wasn't either. With that in mind, he got the impression Valdemar had either been coached or at least given some tips. Maybe by Villy himself, but more likely by Gudrun. If she was talking to his real body while Valdemar focused on this avatar, he could easily relay everything happening within the room.

In fact, Jake was pretty damn certain everything happening in the room was being broadcast to many influential forces spread throughout the multiverse due to the representative gods. Which was part of the reason he had to be kinda careful. He couldn't mess up Villy's plan too much, right?

I am not some pick-me god, and I find the very notion of having to even try and sell the honor of being my Chosen ridiculous. Being my Chosen is a privilege, not something to be coaxed into. If he is truly so foolish as to reject me as his Patron and give up on my Legacy and the Path he is currently walking with such great success, then maybe he wasn't worthy of being my Chosen to begin with. Not with such utterly questionable judgment, the Malefic Viper said, refusing to engage in the discussion anymore.

Valdemar just shook his head while muttering something to himself before looking at Jake, who was just standing there without really saying or doing anything. He was pretty sure that was what he was supposed to do.

He must be exhausting to deal with, huh? Valdemar questioned Jake.

Jake was pretty damn sure the question wasn't actually rhetorical, and he had to stop himself from making some silly comment. Instead of saying anything genuine, he answered noncommittally again. I don't believe I should talk about my personal relationship with my Patron in a room filled with outsiders.

That had to also be considered neutral, right? Damn, where was Miranda when he needed her actually, it was probably best she wasn't there, as he doubted she would have managed well with a few dozen gods, including a handful of Primordials, staring her down.

That's fair, that's fair. But, you know, I am sure Carmen would be really happy if you joined us, too. She spoke very highly of you when she became a Runemaiden using my blood, and she even said her successful ritual was partly thanks to you! Valdemar said with a big smile. Ah, doesn't that sound nice? Two powerful fellow humans from the same planet under one banner? Could bring you two closer, too.

Valdemar saying this once more got the attention of the room. Jake also understood why after he discussed Runemaidens with Carmen. Based on what he knew, Valdemar had not openly announced a Runemaiden who used his blood and Records had been born before now, much less that she was from the same planet as Jake or that they knew each other.

This was pretty much revealing to the multiverse that Valhal already had existing connections to Jake as a person, ones even predating Jake joining the Order, which gave credence to his claim that Jake could potentially end up joining them and renouncing the Malefic Viper.

Gods werent the type to whisper among themselves, but Jake was confident many telepathic messages were being exchanged at that moment. The Viper also looked visibly annoyed, as Valdemar looked pleased with himself, awaiting Jakes response - a response he took quite a bit to think about as he was trying to remain as noncommittal as possible by just straight-up ignoring the proposal.

Right now, my sole focus is Nevermore and getting a good performance here, including the Challenge Dungeons I have yet to do. I believe it would be best for me to dedicate all my focus and attention to doing this World Wonder over anything else, Jake answered, not really answering.

Valdemar nodded as he shrugged. I guess thats fine. No need to commit to anything here and now that may distract from whats in front of you. Just know that Valhal still has its halls open for you.

Jake nodded, happy that one had worked. Valdemar did give up way too easily, making Jake more certain than ever this was all at least partly some kind of play he and Villy had planned. Jake said only partly because he had strong feelings that should he agree to the invitation, the Primordial would have gladly dragged Jake back to Valhal with him after Nevermore, even if the Viper complained.

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That went about as well as it could, Vilastromoz thought, as Jake and Valdemar did surprisingly well in playing their roles. Anything that had to do with scheming and Valdemar often didnt go according to plan, much less when it involved both Jake and Valdemar, two people who werent known as the most politically apt. Yet things had turned out extremely well, with lots of doubt sown in the minds of the gods present.

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It was a foregone conclusion that even if Yip of Yore himself hadn't shown up and definitely wouldn't some of the representatives present would be feeding him information on everything that was happening there. In fact, the Viper would bet he had a live view of everything going on.

Valdemar trying to recruit Jake wasn't overly surprising to many factions, as Jake was ultimately a human, especially not after it was disclosed he had beaten Valdemar's image in the Colosseum of Mortals, and to Yip, this would serve as further proof of the rift between the Order of the Malefic Viper and Valdemar.

It had to be noted that not much of this had been part of any of the original plans, but things had to be changed due to Jake.

Jake had proven himself both an annoyance and an asset to Yip of Yore's plans, but also the Vipers. Originally, Yip wanted his Chosen to defeat Jake in a proxy battle of sorts as part of his story, but that was no longer a feasible method, as the backlash would be bigger than the gains.

Killing Jake would mean removing his unique abilities to manipulate Origins, which would not be seen kindly by many major factions. It wouldn't necessarily create enemies, but it would weaken the narrative that Yip was fighting for what was right and that Jake was just some evil follower of the Malefic Viper. So Yip had changed his plans from trying to kill Jake to doing something that would prove even more beneficial to his story:



Turning Jake to the side of justice. Turning him to Yips side, or at least away from the Vipers. Having his Chosen renounce his Blessing would be a heavy blow to the Viper, especially in the context of the narrative that was being constructed. For the Viper to be so evil that even his own Chosen turned his back on him surely Yip of Yore was doing the multiverse a favor by putting him down?

However, Yip also knew that personally recruiting Jake directly was out of the question. EllHakan was an enemy of Jake, and their encounter in Nevermore City had only cemented this. That's why Valhal had stepped up to try and snatch Jake away. While it would be better for Yip to get Jake on his side by himself, having Valhal do it was also a good outcome.

Of course, Vilastromoz knew this would never happen.

The Viper would not describe himself as the most trusting person, so he could admit that Jake being locked in when it came to being his Chosen was more of a positive than a negative in his mind. If Valdemar's offer was truly genuine, Vilastromoz couldn't even blame Jake for considering it seriously, especially not if Valdemar went as far as offering Jake to become his Chosen.

While he did trust Jake as much as he could, he also knew that Valhal would suit Jake nicely. Jake loved challenges and fighting, and Valhal would offer that in spades. Far more so than the Order of the Malefic Viper ever could. What's more, Valdemar was a human, so if Jake had his True Blessing over the Viper's, there would be more synergy with their Records.

At least, he thought so but with Jake, it was genuinely hard to tell. Because there was a genuine chance that the Records of Jake's Bloodline would overpower any other related to his race, making it a moot point.

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Feeling like one thing had been dealt with, Jake turned to another. His gaze pierced through the room toward the very back end, where a Beastfolk man was standing inconspicuously among all the other representatives. It was naturally Eversmile whom Jake had picked out instantly upon entering the room. Jake considered if he should do or say anything, but before he could decide, a voice entered his mind.

I do find your ability to recognize me quite troublesome, if very intriguing. However, I would advise against revealing my presence here. Doing so shall bring you no benefits and only serve to hinder me needlessly. It may even impact the plots of your Patron, so reconsider before you make an unwise decision, Eversmile's voice echoed in Jake's head.

Oh? Why are you even hiding in the first place when there are already five other Primordials here? Jake asked, not really bothering with the fact he was showing zero levels of respect to a god. Are you doing some experiment or something?

None of that is of your concern, Eversmile answered, pretty much confirming to Jake he was definitely up to something. Nothing I am doing is detrimental to you or your Patron, so let be what should be left alone. That would be very appreciated.

Jake was curious but also feeling petty at the same time. He still remembered how much Eversmile had messed with him during the Tutorial, how he had used William to fuck things up and had even made him come after his family

Well, I appreciate that you wouldn't appreciate me revealing you. In fact, it makes it quite an appealing choice, Jake sent mentally. But I guess if you really want to stay hidden that badly I can do you this favor. Wait, doesn't that mean you owe me one now?

He was fully aware he was just messing with Eversmile now, knowing how the Primordials Path worked. Also, if he could somehow make Eversmile owe him a favor, that would totally be worth it. Based on what Villy said, he was very serious about owing favors.

You should be aware that is not how karmic debt is formed. There has to be a sufficient balance between the two parties for any debt to form, and you are not powerful enough to enter any kind of agreement with me, Eversmile responded calmly.

Yet. Not powerful enough yet, Jake corrected him.

Even if we say that is so, I would suggest not getting too much ahead of yourself. Remember you are only here due to the curiosity of others and who your Patron is, not truly by your own merit. If you wish to speak of karmic debt, then you are far from in a position to make any demand through threats, much less speak of favors. One could also say I am doing you a favor right now by even conversing with you. Or that I allow you to keep living despite the disrespect. I have plenty of cause to take action already, so how about you let off your petty threats? In return, I shall do you the favor of letting you off, Eversmile said, his voice still calm but full of warning.

Jake felt an odd pressure and a slight sense of danger that was not at all unambiguous in its message: back off.

anyway, I hope all goes well on your end; I shall be minding my own business, Jake responded.

He had fucked around and would very much like to skip the found out part.

Their conversation had been relatively long but had, in reality, only taken a few seconds as everything had been said telepathically. There had always been a natural silence after Valdemar had spoken, and only another full second or so after Jake finished talking with Eversmile did someone else speak up.

Speaking of doing Nevermore, how is little Dina doing? I know my granddaughter isn't the most experienced quite yet, but I still hope she has proven a valuable party member so far, Natures Attendant asked Jake, changing the topic quite nicely while also advertising he had a close relationship with Jake.

She is doing great; no complaints from here, Jake answered with a smile, happy no longer having to consider his words super carefully. He also made sure to not even glance Eversmiles way anymore. I hope she is also doing well in her Challenge Dungeons.

I am sure she is, Natures Attendant nodded. Now, while I have you here how about you come over here and tell me a bit about how she is doing? The stingy Wyrmgod refuses to share anything.

Jake doubted Natures Attendant really just wanted to hear about his granddaughter, but he had no reason to reject a conversation. Especially not considering this was an excuse to talk to Artemis, who was sitting with him.

That would be my pleasure, Jake answered as he looked at Valdemar. Unless..?

You go on ahead, Valdemar waved him off.

Jake nodded as he walked over to Artemis and Natures Attendant, the attention of the many gods still on him. As he got over, he saw Natures Attendant casually set up a sound isolation barrier for them to

talk in peace, something that seemed to annoy quite a few people present, including the Holy Mother, Blightfather, and even Valdemar.

Their dissatisfaction manifested through their presences that weighed down on Jake, Natures Attendant, and Artemis. Jake and Natures Attendant were fine, but Jake saw Artemis clench her fists, and without even thinking, Jake flared his own presence to cover her.

The pressure on her instantly lessened significantly as Jakes aura clashed with that of three Primordials... slightly pushing them back to give Artemis breathing room. All of this was done under the gaze of dozens of gods as Jake felt the entire atmosphere in the room change after seeing what he had done.

I shouldnt have done that yep, I definitely should not have done that.

Chapter 795: Nevermore: Aura-Measuring Contest

Sometimes, you just knew you fucked up, and in that moment, Jake knew he had fucked up. Trying to get some petty levels of revenge on Eversmile by getting one over him had already been pushing it, and now Jake had effectively just rebuffed three presences of Primordials, as well as those of dozens of other gods, entirely on accident.

Instantly, Natures Attendant read the mood of the room and dispelled his soundproofing barrier, giving Jake the chance to apologize as he scratched the back of his head. Ah, sorry about that; I reacted without really thinking.

Yeah, that also wasnt the best thing to say, as he had just told everyone he had effortlessly rebuffed them entirely accidentally. Jake was entirely expecting some kind of negative response, but then he saw that Villy was just smiling as he shook his head, seemingly not bothered at all. So, it probably wasnt that bad, right?

The Holy Mother just retracted her own presence without saying anything besides giving Jake an inquisitive look, Valdemar temporarily doing the same as the Blightfather chose to speak up.

I am beginning to get a better understanding of that power of yours after feeling it myself, especially after meeting and Blessing your friend from before the integration of the ninety-third universe. I was intrigued by how he, a mere E-grade at the time, managed to hold up so well before me, but if he was baptized by constant exposure to your presence, that would certainly be an explanation, the Blightfather nodded with comprehension. Quite a multi-faceted Bloodline you got there. If you ever feel like visiting the Ghostlands, you would certainly be more than welcome. You could maybe even go with that friend of yours?

His words were both praise and sharing the fact the Risen also had some level of personal connection to Jake while also deciding to once more reiterate all Jake could do was rooted in his Bloodline. Along with that, he also publicly shared an aspect of Jakes Bloodline he didnt really think was that much of a secret, that being his ability to also increase others resistances through sheer exposure. Valdemar had kind of hinted at it, but the Blightfather pretty much stated it outright.

The final part the invitation was the only thing Jake would answer directly to. I thank the Blightfather for his words, and I am certain I will visit the heartlands of the Risen one day.

It wasnt a lie, either. Jake would probably end up visiting most of the places of note throughout his hopefully eternal life, and the Ghostlands was definitely one such place. He just didnt give any timeline as to when he would visit. It could be in a few decades or a few million years.

Seemingly thinking this answer was good enough, the Blightfather also retracted his aura, having said his piece. Jake thought his mess-up was finally over, only for him to realize it had only truly begun.

You know, ever since seeing that battle in the Challenge Dungeon, ya got me curious about something, Valdemar said in a loud tone as he stepped slightly toward Jake with a massive grin. Prepare yourself!

Jake barely had any time to react as Valdemars presence came back with full force. Instinctively, he once more reacted as his own flared to meet the challenge, the two auras clashing in an invisible battle. Instantly, Valdemars was getting pushed back again until he opened his arm wide, and the Primordials fighting spirit was triggered.

His eyes began to glow golden as a slightly golden luster appeared around his body. He was not using any energy, but the concepts of his Transcendence still bled into his presence as it pushed back at Jakes with indomitable strength.

It was like an unstoppable force, capable of crushing anything in its path, and for the first time ever Jake felt his presence getting pushed back as pressure descended upon him. He felt like a mountain was crushing down on him as his own presence shrank, Jake gritting his teeth as this reminded him of what had happened inside of the Colosseum.

And like the Colosseum, Jake did not back down as he retaliated in force.

The two auras clashed as an invisible battle took place. Valdemar was slightly pushed back by Jakes release but stabilized just as fast, stopping Jakes advance. Their two auras kept battling as an equilibrium was soon established, neither side capable of gaining any ground as each of their auras extended halfway to the other party.

Jake was both astonished and excited. He was equally matching Valdemar in a pure battle of presences, though if Valdemar decided to pour in just a smidgen of energy, Jake would instantly be crushed. However, the mere fact their two auras were equal was more than enough to prove one thing to everyone in the room:

His Bloodline matched the quality of Valdemars Transcendence. A Transcendence many recognized as potentially the most powerful one in the entire multiverse. Some of the gods present even failed to hold their poker faces as they displayed genuine surprise at the impromptu duel of auras.

However, things weren't over yet.

Hah! Valdemar laughed loudly as he took another step forward, his body exploding in golden light, enveloping the entire room. His aura spiked several degrees as it washed over everyone, Jake included. With a grin, Jake took a step toward Valdemar as he met the challenge, his heart beating with excitement.

Thump!

A shockwave erupted from his own body as their two auras clashed one final time before both faded. The only two people standing in the room were Jake and Valdemar, as everyone else was either sitting down or looked to be in quite a bad situation.

This was when he also understood why the poker faces of some gods had dropped their clash in auras had put them quite on edge, many of them unable to take it. Even Eversmile was acting like he had been hit by a bus as he was kneeling while breathing heavily.

Needless to say, none of the Primordials, Minaga, or Natures Attendant had been affected. This didnt surprise anyone but Artemis was also fine, most assuming she had been protected by Natures Attendant somehow.

Good! Good! Valdemar said, looking extremely satisfied. I like you more and more!

Likewise, Jake smiled, having enjoyed the clash of auras more than he thought he would. It wasnt like an actual fight, but it was a challenge nevertheless. A kind he had never had before, considering there was no one else who could match his presence in pure quality.

The atmosphere in the room calmed down as Valdemar looked approvingly at Jake for a few seconds before speaking.

Eh, you should go talk to that old druid and your fellow hunter; I think you kept them waiting long enough, Valdemar waved him off as he walked back to the Primordials, yelling behind him. Oh, and do come visit Valhal at some time! Our beer is better than the Orders, too!

Jake smiled but neglected to answer. He didnt have to be told twice to go and talk to the two from the Pantheon of Life as he returned to sit down with the Natures Attendant and Artemis on a sofa set. The old druid gave Jake a very interested look and an approving smile as he sat down. The isolation barrier was quickly summoned again, making Jake feel like he could talk without as much of a filter or having to consider that everything was being recorded and openly broadcasted.

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This sure is quite the gathering of gods, huh, Jake muttered as something had been bothering him for a while. Why exactly are there even so many here? Valdemar, I could understand, but whats up with the dozens of gods who are seemingly just here as observers?



Its because of you, Natures Attendant answered. At least partly. You made Valdemar come here, getting the attention of other Primordials, who then followed suit. With five gathered in one place, it is only natural it will attract the attention of most forces. And I am certain many are happy they came, as the show you put on just now with the Viper and the Wargod will have made the trip more than worth it.

Jake nodded, considering his words for a bit. Yeah, that probably made sense. If a large group of the top world leaders on Earth before the system decided to have a meeting, you could bet your ass journalists and other interested parties would also show up to see what was up. Even their casual interactions would be gossip at worst and groundbreaking news at best. Plus, something did happen here. At least, it looked like it had. Two top world leaders had just gotten into a scuffle, after all, and were battling over a resource. The resource in question being Jake in this case.

Show? Artemis asked, looking confused, before she quickly gathered herself, seeming a bit out of it in general. She looked at Jake and lowered her head a bit. No, wait. Before anything else, I should thank you for just now. I apologize if defending me leads to any trouble down the line.

No worries, no worries, Jake waved off her concern. I should be the one thanking you for what happened in the Colosseum of Mortals. Well, thanking your image, I guess, though based on Valdemar just now, there shouldnt be that massive of a difference. Either way, I enjoyed the time together in there immensely.

Artemis was taken aback at his answer as the tip of her elven ears turned slightly red. I I dont believe there is anything you need to be thanking me for.

Oh, but there definitely is, Jake said with a big nod as he smiled at her. Im talking about the archery training, of course. Wait, what were you thinking about?

It took her a few seconds before her eyes narrowed. You no, never mind. Disregarding that, my image sure must have looked like an idiot with her whole speech about how you wouldnt even be able to stand tall in front of the real me.

Eh, I found it more cute than dumb, Jake shrugged. Its not like that wouldnt be the case if I was pretty much anyone else. I just happen to deal with presences quite well compared to most everyone else.

Thats an understatement, Artemis scoffed. Also, what was that thing about a show you talked about earlier?

Jake had purposefully avoided answering this one as he genuinely wasnt sure if he should or could give a response without jeopardizing anything. Unsure, he looked at Natures Attendant, who seemed to be in on what was happening, as the old druid responded promptly.

I will make sure she cant leak anything even if she wants to. I set up this barrier with the expectation we would be talking about things best left unshared to the masses, so no worries, Natures Attendant sent telepathically, sounding only slightly scary as he did so.

Artemis noticed Jake and Natures Attendant exchanged glances as she looked confused about what was happening. Jake finally sighed as he leaned back on the couch and looked at Artemis.

This is quite a big secret that has multiversal implications, so keep it under wraps, okay? he asked in a serious tone.

Not sure I want to know now if it can get me in trouble Artemis muttered.

Too late! Jake grinned. Anyway, the gist of it is that the entire conflict between the Order of the Malefic Viper and Valhal is mostly fabricated. That entire thing just now was also apparently just part of this bigger plot that I think is ultimately pointed at Yip of Yore. As for what it hopes to accomplish and the entire scope of the thing I have no bloody idea. Natures Attendant probably knows more there.

And I have been very expressly told to not inform you of more, Natures Attendant continued. As your lack of knowledge makes you a better catalyst of chaos to introduce more uncertainty into this entire matter.

So there you have it, Jake said, giving Artemis a beaming smile. Just a plot involving a bunch of Primordials and a good segment of the peak existence of the multiverse. Kind of exciting, isnt it?

Artemis stared at Jake and Natures Attendant for a while as she sighed. And I guess if I share anything with anyone, I will be killed?

No, of course not, what a silly notion, Natures Attendant said, shaking his head before smiling teasingly. You will be killed before you are able to share anything.

The wood elf formerly known as the Lord of the Hunt just held her head and leaned forward. Ill just act like I never heard anything. Yeah, thats probably best.

If its any comfort, I try to do the same, but I keep getting dragged back into things, Jake shrugged. This entire scheming thing is definitely way above my pay grade.

It sure would be easier if they could just fight it out and not make things so complicated, Artemis sighed. Thats why the natures way is so much better. Predators hunt prey, and prey sometimes kills the predator in return.

Nature also has natural schemers, Natures Attendant said. Plants or fungi who lay hidden for long, slowly growing in power. Predators stalk their prey for long periods to discover where the rest of their packs are. Beasts who take the shape of others mix into groups, only to eat them from within. But yes, I do agree that schemes like this are not aligned with the Paths of hunters like you two. You should still be able to take part in schemes when it benefit you, though. It doesnt mean you have to initiate them; just be capable of performing as part of one.

Is this you low-key calling me out for being bad at playing my role? Jake asked.

No, I believe you played it extremely well. No one understands you, so you cannot truly act out of character as you have no established character. Plus, there is a high chance people assume any mistakes you make to be entirely deliberate, considering you are the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, Natures Attendant shook his head.

I definitely didnt make any mistakes, Jake nodded.

Bullshit, Artemis scoffed. You constantly act without thinking and make needlessly rash decisions too quickly. Just from the recording I saw from the Colosseum, your reliance on instincts in battle bleeds into your way of acting outside of fighting constantly.

Youre saying that as if its a bad thing, Jake smiled.

I didnt say it necessarily was. Not most of the time, Artemis shrugged. Theres nothing wrong with living according to your instincts.

Glad we agree on that, Jake said, throwing her a look.

Artemis sighed as Natures Attendant chuckled slightly.

However, before any of them could say anything more, the soundproofing barrier around them cracked, and a second later, disappeared entirely, Jake feeling the energy of the Wyrmgod no, the energy of Nevermore itself tearing it away.

Considering you are a Nevermore Attendee, I will not bend the rules further. I also believe it would be unwise of you to waste more time here than necessary if you wish to continue competing on the Leaderboards, the Wyrmgod spoke, nicely telling Jake to leave.

Jake took the hint as he nodded. Good point. Let me get out of here; I do have a few more Challenge Dungeons waiting, after all.

The Wyrmgod nodded as a teleportation circle appeared under Jake. However, just before he got whisked away, he heard several voices echo out in his head.

See you when you do my super exciting labyrinth that you surely wont ruin all the fun of! Minaga said.

Acceptable performance here, but now that youve shown yourself off so much in front of your little girlfriend, you better do well, or I am sure she and everyone else will be very disappointed, Villy said teasingly.

And finally, the voice of the little girlfriend in question, Artemis.

I will be waiting for when you come out of Nevermore to discuss more private matters further. Good luck!

After Jake had left, Valdemar was back sitting with the other Primordials and Minaga, a big smile still on his lips. The Viper had already set up a sound isolation barrier, making sure none but they could hear the conversation to come.

What brings such a big smile to your face? the Holy Mother asked after a bit, seeing as Valdemar hadn't stopped grinning even after Jake was gone.

He is just happy another strong human has emerged, the Blightfather waved her off. Not that I would blame him. He is quite an interesting specimen.

Heh you really didn't notice? Valdemar asked with a raised eyebrow.

Notice what? the Viper asked, frowning.

That I lost, Valdemar said, clenching his fists as the other Primordials looked confused at him, making the god of war elaborate.

Our auras may have seemed equal but he was protecting that gal all throughout, not allowing a single bit of my aura to reach her, no matter how hard I tried.

## Chapter 796: Nevermore: Planning a New Approach

Jake was teleported out of the godly meeting and appeared in front of the Challenge Dungeons like nothing had happened. He couldn't help but smile a bit to himself after what had just transpired, finding the entire ordeal quite amusing. It was also really nice to see Artemis again.

He couldn't lie there was something about her divine aura that was just fundamentally appealing. Jake hadn't been able to hold himself back from teasing her a little, and based on her responses, he hadn't offended her too much. In fact, he was pretty sure he had quite an interesting meet-up planned for after Nevermore.

Shaking his head, Jake tried to refocus on the task in front of him. He still had to finish Nevermore before anything else could happen, and he got the feeling that while he found Artemis divine aura

appealing, she would very much like it if he performed extraordinarily well in the World Wonder. At least he was telling himself this because who didn't want a bit of external motivation along with the internal one? Either way, Jake stopped dallying as he thought about the next dungeon to enter as a notification popped up in front of him.

\*You have successfully taken part in a meeting between gods standing at the apex of the multiverse without compromising on your Path as a Heretic-Chosen. Instead, you have further proven yourself capable of standing tall even when confronted by the most powerful gods, acting far above your station. All while performing your duties as a Chosen and acting according to your Patrons will A new feat has been accomplished. Bonus experience earned\*

Jake stared at the notification for a while, quite frankly having forgotten he could even get these. Sure, he had gotten one when he made William turn away from Eversmile and even when doing other heretic and Chosen stuff, but he pretty much only leveled his profession using alchemy normally, making it easy to forget this was a thing.

He hadn't really expected anything out of doing this secret god meeting outside of meeting some gods and looking at the following notifications, he definitely hadn't expected the level of rewards to be so high.

\*DING! Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 252 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points\*

\*DING! Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 259 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points\*

\*DING! Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 254 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points\*

\*DING! Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 257 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points\*

8 fucking levels from just meeting a bunch of gods in some casual get-together? Wasn't that wholly too much for something so completely non-extraordinary? Jake hadn't done anything super special in his own mind and had acted just like he had when interacting with others which was maybe the reason he had gotten this feat.

This was Jake's first time doing it in a public setting and the first time for the system to truly recognize it. For anyone that wasn't Jake, just being able to exist in that meeting would have been an extraordinary feat in itself, while Jake had even talked to them and gotten into a metaphorical dick-measuring contest with a Primordial. All in all, he had entered the meeting, acting not just as one of the random gods there but as a being standing on par with the Primordials.

As Jake considered the matter more, he also quickly concluded this wasn't replicable and some secret super-fast leveling exploit. He could go back to the meeting again, and it wouldn't really reward him as he wouldn't accomplish anything in the eyes of the system. These feats would only give massive rewards the first time he did something. Jake did believe that if he continued to attend meetings and continued to show off, he would be able to get more levels out of it. He would also make a lot of enemies and feel wholly uncomfortable doing it, so it wasn't going to happen, but as a Heretic-Chosen, this was a legitimate way to level.

He also guessed that one reason why the experience gained was so high was due to how little he did as a Heretic-Chosen and how much he did as a pure alchemist. Jake, doing something he rarely did, was probably rewarded extra by the system, a bit like how he got more experience from working on transmutations after making potions for a long time. At least, that is what he guessed as he shook his head and decided to move on with what truly mattered.

Getting 8 random levels was definitely nice, but it didn't really change anything, and he still had to focus on the Challenge Dungeons to come. The Test of Character Challenge Dungeon had been chosen purely as a way to recover from the Colosseum of Mortals, and it honestly had been the one he wanted to do the least and the one he guessed he would do worst at.

This left three others that he all thought were a lot more interesting. This was despite Jake not truly knowing what they were about, just him relying on his own guesses and assumptions.

House of the Architect made Jake guess it had something to do with energy control or something like that. Maybe something with imagination and your ability to make up and design new things, or if he got really lucky, a Challenge Dungeon that was similar to his Puzzle Box from the Seeker, where he had to fix and work on mana constructs? Or maybe it was about creating physical structures where he could maybe cheat with his arcane affinity? Doubtful, but hey, maybe. No matter the case, Jake felt pretty good about this one.

Endless Journey was a bit of a weird one, but he took a shot in the dark that it wasn't about riding some weirdly scary dog-looking dragon through the sky as if he was taking part in some never-ending story that wasn't truly endless. There was a good chance it had to do with traveling, though. Maybe some sort of

endurance run? A set of traps for one to overcome? Maybe a story where you got chased by something or someone? There were many possibilities, but assuming it had to do with journeying around, Jake felt confident.

Finally, there was Minagas Endless Labyrinth. Jake didnt believe many comments had to be made about this one. Minagas Labyrinth on the prior floors had been a piece of cake for Jake, and he looked forward to utterly breaking the poor Unique Lifeforms dungeon while listening to his ever-increasing complaints about how much of a cheat Jake was. Needless to say, Jake definitely felt the most confident about getting a good score in this one.

All of them were valid options, and Jake could do them in any order. All would be a pick-me-up after the horrible Test of Character, too.

Now the question just was which one should he do first?

While flying to Firebound Peak, the red dragon Albaromoz couldnt help but sigh at how his life had changed. How he had gone from being a diplomat and teacher at the Order of the Malefic Viper to this.

Stolen novel; please report.

Albaromoz felt like the latest period of his life had only really revolved around one thing. Or, more accurately, one person. How could he have known that the fateful day he talked to a C-grade who participated in his lesson on Soulflames and made Albaromoz suspect he had a Bloodline would lead to all this?

At first, it had just been a simple mission to try to recruit him into the Emberflight clan. Nothing complicated that he, as an A-grade, hadnt done many times before. It turned out to be a bit more complicated due to some unknown backer, but it wasnt any big issue, right? Wrong.

They couldnt find out who the backer was, and it quickly became clear why as the young Bloodline Patriarch was revealed to the Chosen of the Malefic Viper. A figure even he, as an A-grade, couldnt casually approach.



And whats more, he was far from a passive Chosen who just trained and did alchemy. Instead, he seemed to create chaos and happenings wherever he got involved. Ones involving the Dragonflights, too.

A great example of this chaos he could create was the entire ordeal with the Azure Dragonflight also known as the Azureflight. Albaromoz wasnt sure about the details; he just knew that an Azure Dragonkin blessed by the Venerated Azure Dragon had attempted to get close to a comrade of the Malefic Vipers Chosen and somehow ended up offending the Malefic Viper himself, making the Primordial personally remove his arm.

This hadnt led to anything back then, as no one knew the Bloodline Patriarch was the Chosen until after the Chosen ceremony was over. However, after, every faction dug up what they could on the Chosen, and through that, the Emberflights name was mentioned. Albaromoz was mentioned. Something that caught the interest of all the other Dragonflights.

Albaromoz had after the ceremony swiftly been called into a meeting with the Patriarch of the Azureflight himself present. As the person from the Dragonflights who had made contact with and talked with the Malefic Vipers Chosen first, Albaromoz had become the go-to person if anyone had questions. As he had interacted with the Chosen before he revealed his identity, many believed that Albaromoz had known him better than pretty much any other person among the nine Dragonflights. Helen had also been called in for many things but had quickly been dismissed as all her meetings had been under the oversight of Albaromoz, making him the go-to. She also still had to focus on her personal growth and had many other jobs, while Albaromoz had far more time as an A-grade.

This pestering to know more hadnt stopped. In fact, it had only gotten worse as other Dragonflights also wanted to know more about him. The Azureflight was just the beginning as more and more got involved. Especially his ability to manipulate Origins caught the attention of many high-ranking beings, as plans were slowly being formulated behind the scenes to try and get their hands on this ability one way or another. This had made him a busy dragon until, luckily, the Chosen went to Nevermore.

Albaromoz believed this would give him a reprieve, at least for a while. Sure, he would likely perform incredibly well in the World Wonder and gain much renown, but nothing chaotic would happen that required Albaromoz to be called to a meeting, right?

right?

Patron Fireplume, Albaromoz kneeled deeply as he arrived at Firebound Peak and entered the Dragon Cave of the Grand Elder of the Emberflight who resided there. While kneeling, he also regarded the other figures who had appeared as projections in the cave. Grand Elders.

Albaromoz, Grand Elder Fireplume spoke. Have you been following recent happenings in Nevermore?

He got a bad feeling before he answered honestly. No, I do not believe I have heard anything out of the ordinary.

Hm, so it hasnt spread amongst the mortals yet, another Grand Elder spoke.

Perhaps best it is kept that way, a third voiced their opinion.

I concur, a fourth chimed in.

Albaromoz was confused as he quickly pieced together that they discussed something only gods knew about. So why was he there? There were a few options, but considering the mention of Nevermore, there really only be one explanation.

Child, the second Grand Elder spoke up again. You were the first to identify the Chosen of the Malefic Viper and his Bloodline, correct?

Yes, he answered, getting confirmed what he already knew. Who else could it be but the Chosen.

Before he was revealed as a Chosen, how receptive would you estimate he was to the contact we made? a fifth Grand Elder asked. I am referring specifically to his interactions with Helenstromoz.

Albaromoz was a bit confused, as he felt like he had answered this before, and he quickly shook his head. He seemed neither positive nor negative, just as if he preferred as little interference with his life and Path as possible. His level of interest in Helenstromoz was also low. Moreover, recently, she has begun to get closer to the Malefic Dragonkin called Draskil, who carries a Divine Blessing of the Malefic One. This Malefic Dragonkin is also on friendly terms with the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, to the level where they may even be considered friends.

I see, the Grand Elder responded disappointedly. Do you deem it plausible he will show interest in any other attempts to form a closer relationship with him?

Are you asking about deploying honeypots? Albaromoz asked.

Potentially, yes, he continued. Would it be worth it to try and appeal to him through talented women and men?

I do not believe so, no, Albaromoz shook his head. In fact, I fear it may have the opposite effect of what we intend.

A shame, the Grand Elder sighed.

If I may, could I know what this is all about? The last time, we agreed upon holding back from trying to reel him in and keeping a respectful distance? To try and assure that even if we do not better our relationship with him, we at least keep it neutral until he matures more?

This was far from his first meeting, which other Grand Elders than his Patron attended, though this one was where most were present. When it came to the question about waiting for him to mature, it was something they had discussed many times prior.

As a C-grade, the Chosen had a long way to go on his Path, and many things could go wrong along the way. He could die to any number of incidents, somehow get stuck in his Path, begin to fall behind his peers, and lose the interest and Blessing of the Malefic One, or a myriad of other things. All of this is to say he was still very young, and his situation was volatile.

This was the primary reason the Dragonflights had all agreed to their neutral and passive approach. It had become clear that obtaining the Bloodline in early grades wasn't going to happen, and investing heavily in making friends with a C-grade was rarely worth it.

If the Chosen ended up dying, the Dragonflights would lose nothing but an opportunity, while should he manage to step into the realm of the truly powerful, it wouldn't be too late to approach him then. The Emberflight firmly believed they had a good shot at forming a friendly relationship with him if they

worked on their albeit feeble connection through Helenstromoz and Albaromoz, even if they waited a few grades. At least they did before.

Things have changed due to recent happenings in Nevermore, the Fireplume Grand Elder said with a sigh. A gathering of powerful beings is currently taking place in Nevermore right at this moment. It includes five Primordials, Natures Attendant, and dozens of representatives from factions, including the Draconic Accords.

Albaromoz nodded, this being the first time he heard of something this monumental taking place. He just had a hard time seeing how that related to the Chosen of the-

And less than an hour ago, the Chosen of the Malefic Viper was also part of this meeting.

What? Albaromoz exclaimed before quickly gathering himself and bowing his head even deeper. I apologize; I was simply taken aback.

None of the Grand Elders seemed to care as the Fireplume Grand Elder continued to explain what had happened. Albaromoz's eyes only got bigger and bigger as everything was disclosed to him, including the fact he had directly clashed his aura with that of the God of War.

Albaromoz soon understood sentiment had changed. Remaining entirely passive was no longer an option, as many other factions would likely try to get in his good graces now.

When the Chosen of the Malefic Viper had the incident with the Azureflight prodigy, he was with some people, correct? the Fireplume Grand Elder asked.

Instantly, he understood. Yes, he was. From our investigations, he appeared closest to his fellow humans and was originally invited there by a snakekin named Scarlett, who also carries a Blessing from the Malefic Viper.

If they couldn't form a connection directly with the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, they would do the next best thing. They would get close to someone who already had a connection to the Chosen, and Albaromoz already knew who they should approach.

The Alabaster Crimsoneye Snake named Scarlett was a perfect target because few knew she had such a deep relation to the Chosen. At least they hoped it was deep hoped enough for them to gamble on it as the seventeen Grand Elders present began discussing their approach.

#### Chapter 797: Nevermore: Minaga's Nightmare Begins

Jake considered what Challenge Dungeon he would do for all of five minutes until he decided to just go with the one he felt the most confident about. It was also the one he thought would be the most fun and familiar.

Ultimately, he had to do all of them, and as he still felt a bit groggy after having his character tested, he wanted to do one he believed would be interesting. Maybe it would not be super challenging, but he firmly believed there would be some level of challenge, especially the further he moved in.

During the first part, most of the entertainment definitely would have to come from Minaga. Jake genuinely hoped the Unique Lifeform would be commenting again and complaining about Jake. If not, it probably would get a bit dull during the early parts of his labyrinth.

Having only arrived outside of the Challenge Dungeon entrances for five minutes, Jake walked straight to the entrance of Minagas Endless Labyrinth and placed his hand on the massive gateway. Without further ado, he accepted the prompt to enter as his vision went dark, Jake ready to conquer and utterly demolish Minagas grand creation.

In a certain meeting room filled with gods, Minaga let out a massive groan as he saw Jake enter his dungeon.

Bloody hell, he just had to go for mine right now, didnt he? Minaga grumbled. This is on purpose, right? He is trying to bully me after showing off here, isnt he? Yep, everything he has done was definitely a personal attack on me to throw me off my mental game.

I am impressed you think Jake would ever plan that far ahead, the Viper commented.

The Wyrmgod had already isolated the area with the Primordials, Minaga, Natures Attendant, and Artemis, making them the only ones capable of hearing the conversation, likely in preparation for what was to come next.

Well, if he can attack me like that, I should definitely strike back in kind! Minaga huffed while ignoring the Vipers comment as he waved his hand. A screen appeared before all of them, not just the Viper and the Wyrmgod, as the Unique Lifeform grinned and threw Artemis a look.

Lets have this entire Challenge Dungeon be a live performance so you can all see how unfair he is! he said, hiding a smile as he saw the cute god from the Pantheon of Life lean a bit forward while trying to remain dignified and hide her interest.

You just want to have an audience to vent to during this, dont you? the Wyrmgod questioned in a deadpan tone.

Well, duh? Minaga said. If I have to suffer, it should at least be entertaining to the rest of you and give me more people to complain to. Now sit back and see injustice and unfairness personified.

Jake opened his eyes in a very familiar hall. It was a perfect replica of the one he and his party had entered the first time they arrived at Minagas Labyrinth in the regular part of Nevermore. And just like that time, a familiar figure also teleported into the room, appearing on a central platform.

Light filled the room as music began playing, but Minaga quickly clapped his hands once, making it all stop. The room darkened as Minaga just sighed. Oh boy, here we go again

Right as he said that, a system message was triggered and popped up in front of Jake.

Nevermore Challenge Dungeon Entered!

You have entered Minagas Endless Labyrinth. An endless maze that extends forever until you can no longer keep going lies before you, ready for you to explore, the entire labyrinth split into Labyrinth Sections to conquer one by one.

These Labyrinth Sections will each serve as separate challenges, and passing each will trigger a checkpoint. Some checkpoints will allow you to rest and recover for a while before continuing on your journey.

Each Labyrinth Section has a time limit that will begin upon entering a section. Your goal is to navigate your way through each section as quickly and safely as possible while overcoming foes, traps, and other challenges along the way. The further you progress in the Endless Labyrinth, the more challenging it shall become.

During the Endless Labyrinth, the magnanimous Minaga has taken pity and granted you five attempts in case you should fail any Labyrinth Sections, allowing you to retry them should you run out of time or meet an unfortunate - yet expected - early end. The Labyrinth Sections layout will not change even after an attempt has been expended, but all traps, creatures, and other such challenges will be reset.

Minaga wishes you luck. For if you wish to challenge his Endless Labyrinth, you will sorely need it.

Objective: Complete as many Labyrinth Sections as possible.

Current objective: Complete Labyrinth Section 1.

Attempts remaining: 5

Jake read the lengthy description as he quickly got the gist of it. It was pretty much exactly as he had expected it to be. It was just an endless string of floors that Jake had to complete as quickly as possible, hopefully doing as many as humanly possible.

No, better than humanly possible. Jakely possible!

You done reading it all? Minaga asked before Jake even had time to consider the whole message.

I get it. Not like this is that complicated or different from the prior floors, Jake shrugged as he threw the Unique Lifeform a teasing smile. Also, I must thank thee, oh-so magnanimous Minaga. To bless the lowly me with five attempts, your kindness is truly unrivaled.

Minaga looked at him for a bit before crossing his arms. I am going to broadcast this to everyone live, so you better not be a bully, or everyone will come to learn how rude you are.

Eh, theres not that many watching, Jake said, shaking his head. I guess youre only showing it to a select few and not all the representatives present.

Maybe Im recording it and will show them later, Minaga pointed out.

I guess you could do that, Jake nodded as he smiled. I must admit, I hadnt taken you to be that kind of guy. You sure are full of surprises.

Im not going to take that bait, so you may as we-

Who would have thought Minaga had a humiliation fetish? Truly an astonishing discovery.

I am beginning to question my decision to broadcast this live, Minaga muttered to himself as he got a bit more serious. Anyway, lets just get this started, alright? While I am not going to disagree that you have a huge advantage in my Challenge Dungeon, you shouldnt think it will be a complete cakewalk. The difficulty scales infinitely, and you will reach your limit at some point.

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I shall keep that in mind, Jake nodded, pretty much getting told what he already assumed. I am looking forward to seeing what interesting things you cooked up in your Challenge Dungeon.

Then lets get started. I am obligated to say this, so good luck! And more importantly, try and have fun!

With those words, Minaga teleported away as the massive door behind him began opening. Out came the special fog Jake had seen so many times before. The one that limited Perception and how fast you could move within it while also fucking up divination magic and many other schools and affinities. Of course, what it didnt fuck up was Jakes sphere.

Right as the system message telling him the Challenge Dungeon had truly begun appeared, Jake closed his eyes and released a Pulse of Perception.



You have entered Labyrinth Section 1 of Minagas Endless Labyrinth.

Time Remaining: 9 days, 23:59:59

Jake opened his eyes again with a mental map before him. The first Labyrinth Section was pretty large, extending nearly one hundred kilometers into the distance, with a classic maze-like design. A super classic design, in fact, as one could technically beat it by just continuously following the left or right wall until one reached the end.

Heck, based on what Jake saw, the first section could easily be beaten by doing just that and walking at a brisk pace. Of course, Jake wasn't going to do that as he bent his knees and smiled a bit to himself as he shot forward into the first Labyrinth Section.

There weren't even any enemies or traps in this first section. It was just a pure maze and, quite frankly, kind of boring. Luckily, there was one thing present to not make it entirely mind-numbing.

Oh great, he just charges right in as if he already knows where to go oh wait, he probably does yay

Jake smiled to himself as he navigated through the shortest path toward the end, not slowing down for a single second or even taking his time to respond to Minaga's very exciting commentary throughout. Though, to be fair, rather than commentary, it was more just Minaga venting in a passive-aggressive tone.

How exciting, will he go down the wrong path!? No, of course, he's not, how silly of me. Is it left or right at the next right, it was right, yeah yeah, good job. Halfway already, huh? Nearly there and congratulations for finishing the first section!

Reaching a giant double-sided door, Jake quickly touched it as a notification popped up in front of him, and the door began to open. Through his sphere, he also saw that the next part of the Endless Labyrinth simply manifested behind the door, popping into existence all at once.

Labyrinth Section 1 clear time: 1:17:42

Damn, it still took me over an hour, huh? Jake said. Longer than expected for sure then again, the maze was just long, not hard.

screw you and keep moving. The timer for section two already started.

Grinning, Jake shrugged as he saw that was indeed the case. He had just been too focused on the clear time to really notice it.

You have entered Labyrinth Section 2 of Minagas Endless Labyrinth.

Time Remaining: 9 days, 8:59:52

Time allocated is going down fast, Jake commented, and he released another Pulse of Perception. But the size of the section is about the same. Say, can you give a scoop on the average number of sections cleared?

Four million, four-hundred-twenty thousand and sixty-nine, so if you dont at least do that many, you suck, Minaga said, clearly being entirely truthful and not at all salty over Jake casually using Pulse to cheese his Challenge Dungeon.

Damn, thats sure a lot. Better get going, then, Jake smiled in response as he released another pulse and headed into the second section. This one had a few traps added into the mix, but it was still pretty straightforward. So, the result also didnt come as a surprise.

Labyrinth Section 2 clear time: 1:12:30

Better than last time, Jake said as he touched the second door.

It will get harder, okay? I promise. Just it may take a bit, alright? Minaga said with exasperation. So keep keeping on and stuff

Jake didnt need to be told twice as he proceeded to have some more fun in a Challenge Dungeon that felt the exact opposite of the Test of Character one. In the Test of Character, Jake had no idea what to do or where to go at any point. It was just an exercise in confusion and frustration as you figured out what the hell the damn dungeon wanted you to do.

Meanwhile, Minagas Labyrinth was as straightforward as it could be. Disregarding the fact it was infinitely more straightforward for Jake as he knew the straight path to the end, even for those without a cheat-like Bloodline, Minagas Labyrinth was still simple. You just had to make your way through a Labyrinth within a set timer and then keep doing that over and over again until you couldnt reach the end in time anymore.

Soon, Jake completed sections three, four, five, six ten twenty Jake just kept going as Minaga kept commentating. Most of it was just him talking and Jake returning the banter, but there were some things of substance said, too.

Did you notice the wall there? You have seen those before, right? Minaga asked at one point. I am giving you an actual hint here.

Jake had noticed the odd markings covering many of the walls, and he even felt the magical energy infused into them. It was some complicated magic, and while Jake couldnt immediately figure out what they were about, he had an idea.

These are hints for solving the labyrinth in time, right? Jake asked as he rushed through section twenty-seven, jumping over and sliding under traps on the way.

Exactly! See, I know you could figure it out! How about trying, just once, to do one of the sections without relying on your cheats but doing it properly? Just for the experience, Minaga semi-pleaded.

Hm, I could, Jake muttered.

Really? Minaga exclaimed with surprise.

Yeah, I definitely could. I wont, but I could.

... bullying behavior is not going to get you far in life, you know that, right?

Didn't you tell me a bunch of stories about you bullying and annoying larger factions or stronger gods into submissions, making use of the fact that you are a cheat-like existence? Jake countered.

Well, stories are always exaggerated, and I wouldn't say I bullied them. I just made very appealing arguments with adequate levels of insistence until I got my will, Minaga said in a holier-than-thou tone.

Right, right, and I am carefully evaluating your proposition for me to handicap myself for no damn reason and finding your arguments for doing so wholly inadequate.

It was just a suggestion Minaga muttered. And I put so much effort into those hints, too

On the topic of the hints to solve the Labyrinth, Jake got the feeling they were borderline mandatory if one wanted to do the latter sections. Stumbling in the dark or keeping a hand on one wall as you sprinted through could only take you so far, and already by section twenty, that tactic no longer appeared viable as the difficulty began to step up. Not just with the labyrinth getting longer and having more dead-ends but also with the addition of stuff like traps.

Anyway, Minagas Labyrinth also included some level of puzzle or maybe even riddle-solving, which was kind of fun. Jake wasn't entirely sure how it worked as he never bothered to study the hints given at the start of every section fully, nor did he take his time with the markings covering the walls at other places. But it was probably fun for others, right?

In the labyrinth in section twenty-seven, he took a sharp turn, avoiding the mech-like beast that barred the way down one of the hallways that wasn't the fastest path. Jake threw the beast a look as he remembered a prior talk with Minaga about these creatures inhabiting and barring his progress in the labyrinth.

Jake had sadly confirmed one didn't earn any experience inside of the Challenge Dungeon, even if you did kill some of the monsters barring the way. Jake naturally had to question the Unique Lifeform about this, and he actually got a straight answer when he did.

Eh, they aren't real monsters but just summons tied to the energy barrier. Killing them just cuts off power to the barrier and allows you through, nothing more, nothing less. As for why it isn't designed so you get experience? Well, there is a good reason. I won't tell you the reason, but there totally is one, trust me on that. Definitely not just some random decision the Wyrmgod and I made when designing these Challenge Dungeons. Definitely not.

Alright, Jake called it a straight answer, but at least it was an answer. Only the first part really mattered, explaining they were just summons that powered the barriers.

But, it probably did make some sense? If the creatures gave experience, it would be an incentive to take the paths where they were and not the fastest route. Of course, Jake wouldn't bother to hunt the monsters in these earlier labyrinths as they were far too weak and often died in a single arrow, but maybe he would have later if they gave him experience.

After Jake passed section twenty-nine, he entered number thirty, and finally, something changed. With a Pulse of Perception, Jake saw that this labyrinth had introduced a new element: teleportation circles. Were they shortcuts? Ways to set your progress back? A mix of the two?

Jake didn't know if each teleportation circle was good or bad, and while he could try and decipher the hints on the walls around the teleportation circles he could also just do none of that and leave the decision entirely to his intuition.

#### Chapter 798: Nevermore: Three Limiters

The further into the Challenge Dungeon Jake got, the more twists and turns Minaga began to throw at him. Quite literally, at times, as some of the sections outright twisted and turned, the labyrinth itself subtly changing as he moved through it. Walls would pop up, and others would disappear, shuffling themselves about in a set pattern that Jake could quickly figure out when he could take snapshots of everything with his Pulse.

Then there were the sections Jake dubbed the Labyrinth Archipelago, a name that Minaga liked so much he considered making it official for the next iteration of his labyrinth in the next era. Jake gracefully handed him the trademark to the name and didn't even need to be credited if the Unique Lifeform did decide to use it down the line. Not that he would have said no to royalties.

Anyway, the reason Jake called it the Labyrinth Archipelago was because it wasn't just one maze but several that were spread out throughout an area, all connected with teleporters. Each maze was a lot

smaller than the others, but when you had to do several, sometimes even having to backtrack, one definitely got pressured on time.

Not to mention that many of these islands were fake, only having one teleporter on them, with the entire place just being a waste of time. Of course, you had no way to confirm this before fully exploring it or solving some more odd magical riddles and stuff.

Jake could definitely see why these were supposed to be a lot harder. Of course, for him, it was just an extra Pulse of Perception or two to check out everything. Sadly, he couldn't see all the islands at once as they seemed to exist in separate spaces or were at least very far apart if they were floating in the same void. This meant Jake had to actually take a few wrong turns before finding the right path. Sometimes, anyway. More often than not, he intuitively just went the right way on his first attempt, which definitely got a few comments out of Minaga.

Oh, and then there were the labyrinths Minaga began to throw in around section forty, where illusionary arrays were spread throughout, creating illusions such as fake doors, fake barriers with gatekeeper creatures, and even fake traps that looked impossible to beat. Jake ignored all of these.

Aside from different layouts, the non-illusion enemies and traps also changed significantly. The traps had become deadly even to Jake assuming he ever let one hit him and were no longer made just to slow people down. Lasers that could cut Jake's limbs off like butter began appearing around section sixty, and in section sixty-five, he encountered the good old lowering ceiling trap. Except it was entire sections of the maze that would begin to lower at once to crush him, forcing you to quickly find a way out as a mini-maze was created. What's more, with the ceiling lowered, one of the paths you could potentially take got blocked off, forcing you to take detours around the newly blocked-off area.

There were many interesting traps for sure, but what was more were the creatures. At section one, Jake saw only foes around level 210, while at section seventy, they were between 280 and 290. Based on some quick math, the levels of foes scaled up by one every time he progressed a section, making the difficulty rapidly ascend.

When Jake reached section seventy-five, he did something he hadn't done before. He took a breather in the checkpoint hallway, as he had dubbed it. For a good reason, too, as the last section had been quite arduous and annoying to get through after he decided to fight a level 293 turtle gatekeeper creature that had put up a good fight simply due to how durable it was. This section had definitely taken him far longer than he would have liked.

Labyrinth Section 74 clear time: 16:54:39

Damn, nearly seventeen hours for one section, Jake sighed as he took a breather in the hallway between two Labyrinth Sections. I really need to step up my pace if I want to do just a thousand, much less several million sections.

While it was true the Challenge Dungeon had given him 20 days to complete that section, he still felt like it was a little slow on his part to take the better parts of a day.

you're killing me over here. Killing me, I tell you!

What's one clone more or less to someone as esteemed as you? Jake smiled as he closed his eyes to rest and fully restore his resource pools before it was time to move on.

These checkpoint corridors, or whatever he decided to eventually dub them, were pretty rare in the beginning, but by now, they pretty much appeared after every section. They were nothing more than hallways between two doors, but they did represent a place where no timer was constantly going down, putting pressure on you.

Even if you think my clones have little value, are you truly willing to have the death of one on your conscience?

Minaga asked. To live with the fact that you have killed me for the rest of your life that you have killed such an inspiring figure?

Jake put on a serious face as he spoke in a calm tone. I have resolved myself to the fact that my Path to godhood will be one littered with corpses. I can no, I must be able to face myself, even if such a thing happens. Your sacrifice would definitely be remembered eternally.

You know what? Now I nearly want to die just to keep this hanging over your head.

That doesn't sound like something an esteemed figure would do, Jake said with a smirk. And why would I bother remembering someone like that?

Rude.

I never said anything rude. I just spoke my truth and was brutally honest.

People who say they are just speaking the truth or being brutally honest are often just saying that as an excuse to be horrible assholes to others without having to face the repercussions of their own actions, Minaga chimed in.

Wow, thats a brutally honest take for sure, Jake nodded along. And are we back to you being a massive bully again?

I always face the consequences. Well, the version of me that did something does. It wouldnt be fair to get all of me involved just because one of me fucks up.

A great way to truly avoid responsibility indeed, Jake shrugged as he kept relaxing a bit. Now, back to this labyrinth in question you said it would be getting hard, but when exactly does that happen? Still waiting over here.

Some would argue it has already gotten hard. The traps can now prove lethal even to you, the teleporters arent as easily exploited, more features to slow you down has appeared, and the gatekeeper creatures can put up a decent fight so isnt it at least harder now than in the beginning? Minaga tried to argue very flimsily.

Sure, it has gotten more difficult, but something going from easy to slightly less easy still makes it easy. I think the main thing right now is the length of the timers being more than ten times above how long it actually takes. Removes a lot of the pressure of the situation and makes it all feel a bit too relaxed and casual, Jake argued.

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You do remember this is a maze, right? A labyrinth? You are just running straight for the end every time, already knowing the way. If I had to balance the timer around everyone already knowing the way, I would have put a damn map at the start of every section and not a magical problem to solve, now



wouldnt I? Or maybe I should just make my next labyrinth a straight path for people to sprint down. Would that be better, huh?

Minaga said, sure winding himself up.

I never said you had to change anything, just that from my very overpowered point of view, it has yet to be hard, Jake muttered.

Fair, I guess. But there are more things to come, so maybe you will face something that is actually difficult at some point? Heck if I know, though. Your overpowered Bloodline probably has some other secret aspect to overcome anything I throw at you

You could always throw in a water level. That would sure slow me down, Jake said semi-jokingly.

I find the very notion you believe I could ever do that insulting. I have integrity! Integrity, I tell you! Minaga said, getting himself even more worked up.

He remembered Minaga had already shown disdain for water levels prior and definitely believed he wouldnt do that in his labyrinth. Also, even if there was a water level, Jake would still be beating it, though it would be a lot more difficult and time-consuming.

Then I guess all there is to do is watch me continue to demolish your labyrinth. Hey, maybe you can use the data for an improved version in the next era? Find countermeasures to someone like me? Jake said, trying to be a little encouraging.

I think that if I implement countermeasures to actually hinder you, an unfortunate side effect would be to make it utterly unbeatable for nearly everyone else Minaga said with a sigh. Procedurally generating it wont work as that messes up many other legitimate scouting methods, and even if I did that, who is to say you wont just know where to go anyway due to some stupid gut feeling or anything? Yeah, trying to make countermeasures is a waste of time. I would rather just hope there arent more people like you out there

Jake just smiled and shook his head as their conversation slowly died down. He knew Minaga had a hard time implementing any features to hinder Jake, and in all honestly, he saw himself as only having three true limiters in Minagas Endless Labyrinth - three things that could lead to him not completing a section in time.

The first one was his movement speed. Jake was fast, but he could be faster, especially with the mist slowing him down. That is why he worked on trying to speed up slightly by covering his body in a faint layer of destructive arcane affinity that seemed to help a little bit. Outside of that, it was just to keep good form and keep sprinting while conserving stamina and drinking potions whenever necessary.

Secondly was his fighting power. Jake had noticed that, at least so far, Minaga would never force him into a fight, but there were cases where not fighting a gatekeeper would require him to take a long detour. So when he began to meet foes he simply couldn't beat, it would all be down to if he was fast enough to do the detour in time. Jake was still not at this stage, but he knew it would come at some point.

The third and last limiter Jake saw was Minaga introducing a new element he had no way of cheating. The Labyrinth Archipelago was already pretty good at delaying him. Still, it didn't impact him more than anyone else, but if Minaga added elements Jake couldn't do anything about, he could also see himself being fucked. He wasn't sure what Minaga could add, but it was definitely possible.

However if number three didn't come into play, Jake felt extremely confident he wouldn't just be going for a high score but perhaps the highest score anyone on the Leaderboards could get. He did believe there were level 349s out there who didn't compete on the Leaderboards and could do better, but those didn't matter. As long as he could beat all his peers, Jake would be more than happy.

His confidence was far from unfounded. One would have to be a complete cheat with a Transcendence or a Bloodline to even stand a chance against him, and even if they had one, Jake believed his Bloodline was better. Jake was also a speed-focused built, having even put all the Free Points gained from the levels to his profession after he visited the gods into Agility to move just a little faster through the labyrinth.

He had everything going for him in this Challenge Dungeon, almost as if he was born to utterly dominate it. He truly had no excuse if he ended up with a poor performance. If he couldn't get the top score, then what the hell kind of living cheat did you have to be in order to do so?

Alright, there was one more potential kind of person who could overtake him. While talking with Casper when they met up in Minaga City, the Risen talked about how he had certain advantages as a Dungeon Architect. That he could also cheat in the dungeon and find the way easily.

Casper himself wasn't a threat when it came to being number one, as the Risen, quite frankly, didn't have the speed required to be at the top. Even if he knew the way, Jake could see him get stuck on levels with limited time quite easily, a sentiment he shared with many others with dungeon-making focused Paths. Such Paths tended to focus on mental stats over the physical ones, after all. Plus, while someone like Casper could cheat as a Dungeon Architect, Jake's level of cheating was still far superior.

So to summarize, Jake was going for the top spot. He wanted the best Grand Achievement he could get and he couldn't lie; Minaga's constant complaints only served as further motivation.

After his rest, Jake stood back up and stretched as he looked at the next gate. Let's see if I can do this faster than the last one.

How long has it been since he entered? Vilastromoz asked with a big smile. He naturally already knew, but he wanted to ask just to make Minaga vocalize it.

Twenty-five days or so, Minaga said, not elaborating further.

And, color me curious, how long does it usually take for the average person? the Viper asked.

more than that the Unique Lifeform said in a small voice.

How much more, I wonder? A week more? Oh, maybe an entire month! Pray tell, pray tell! Vilastromoz said, completely unable to hold himself back from teasing the Unique Lifeform.

Minaga just stared at him for a bit before crossing his arms. Not saying. Figure it out yourself. And Wyrmgod, you better not say a word either.

How petty, the Viper shook his head as he turned to his secret weapon. How about you two? Aren't you curious?

He naturally spoke to Nature's Attendant, but more importantly, Artemis. The old druid just smiled, while Artemis didn't even try to hide her interest as she nodded enthusiastically.

As expected, Minaga couldn't resist as he sighed. First of all, the Vipers question is flawed. The usual person never even gets this far. And for those who do, the average time for doing so is just around thirteen months, give or take.

So, Jake is just fifteen times or so faster than the average person? the Viper asked with a smile. Not too bad, I guess.

Faster than the people who make it this far, Minaga corrected him. Considering it's only the above-average Nevermore Attendees that get above section sixty, with many entirely flunking out within just a few, I guess some would argue his performance is even better than expected.

If I may, how does he compare to the other top contenders? How close is he to being the fastest to get to section seventy-five? Artemis asked, a bit nervously.

Minaga just threw her a deadpan look. How close? Come on, are you also teasing me now?

Artemis looked genuinely confused as the Wyrmgod spoke up.

He is the top contender.

Oh, Artemis muttered with a nod.

Man, he sure is a cheat. That Bloodline of his is totally broken, Minaga sighed loudly. Hey, Artemis, can you do me a favor?

Hm? she responded. If it's within my capabilities, I will do my best.

Great, Minaga said as he put on a massive teasing smile. If you two ever have kids that inherit his Bloodline, can you give me details on it or at least some tips for countermeasures?

I what? Artemis exclaimed as the tips of her ears turned red before she gathered herself. Please stop joking around like that; I find it highly inappropriate. Also, you know as well as I that sharing the secrets of others, including the details of their Bloodlines, is not something one should do.

Right, right, how rude of me. Minaga put up his hands defensively as no one continued the subject. Jake standing up in the recording to continue the labyrinth served as a nice distraction.

Vilastromoz just shook his head at the interaction between the two gods as he smiled to himself unable to avoid noticing how she hadn't denied or shot down the notion of potentially carrying forward Jake's Bloodline.

#### Chapter 799: Nevermore: An Unmissable Opportunity

Jake narrowly ducked under the flying glaive before jumping right as the floor collapsed under him. Kicking off the wall, Jake managed to launch himself away from the pit that had opened up beneath him right as a piston-like block of labyrinth shot down, nearly pushing Jake into the hole.

Landing on solid ground, Jake quickly knelt down and braced himself as he crossed his arms and summoned a stable barrier of arcane energy to defend himself. A barrage of small mana spikes hit him right as the barrier was done manifesting fully, blasting Jake further down the labyrinth hallway but failing to penetrate the barrier.

He knew he couldn't land on the ground as spikes would just pop up, so Jake ran on the wall for a bit as he made his way down the long trap-filled labyrinth hallway while avoiding all the remaining traps. At least he tried to. A net of lasers shot after him not soon after, followed by an incredibly fast-moving spike that came out of seemingly nowhere, but before Jake could even address these two, he had to consider something else.

Runic circles began glowing on the ceiling and walls as energy intensified. Jake instantly understood what was about to happen as he gritted his teeth and blasted arcane mana to launch himself down the hallways as quickly as he could while also dealing with the damn everpresent mist.

This decision did mean a sacrifice had to be made as one of the lasers hit him, taking his left arm clean off. It hurt like hell, but it had to be done. Flying down the hallway quickly, Jake hit the back wall and kicked off it as he got around the corner.

Right as he did so, an explosion sounded out as the entire hallway erupted with intense mana, the ceiling even collapsing in a scripted event, blocking off the path. Jake didnt doubt for a second he would have died if he had stayed there or been just half a second slower.

Maybe I should have taken the non-shortcut route, Jake muttered to himself as he regarded his missing arm. Taking out a health potion, he quickly chugged it and focused on his Blood of the Malefic Viper skill as the arm began to regrow at a visible pace.

Wow, really? But that would have wasted an entire hour or something horrendous like that! Minaga chimed in, always ready to add his two cents.

Oh, good point. Yeah, definitely picked the right hallway, Jake said with a smile.

These trap hallways had begun to get quite dangerous. By now, everything could kill him, and the attacks moved so fast that Jake could only react due to his near pre-cognitive instincts. He had noticed that some attacks could still be blocked even if Jake should logically not be strong enough to. The barrage of small mana spikes being one such example. If it was dungeon-fuckery or some unique properties of these attacks, he didnt know, but his stable arcane mana did wonders.

For most attacks, blocking was entirely out of the question, though. The lasers would burn through anything Jake could summon, with him only feeling confident in blocking with Eternal Hunger if he absolutely had to. However, even then, the remnant energy that hit him scorched his flesh. Any physical attack was also not gonna happen as the sheer impact would rip both his arms off.

So, is it hard enough for you yet? Minaga asked.

Considering I managed to do the hallway while only losing an arm, I am sure I can handle it getting a bit harder. But yeah, things are definitely improving with every section, Jake said with a smile as he continued onward. Walking a bit forward, he saw a hole in the ceiling, and without further ado, he jumped as he went up a floor.

A new kind of Labyrinth Section appeared at number one hundred. One that Jake hadnt even considered before, but honestly, it shouldnt have come as a surprise. It was a multi-layered labyrinth with two floors. It was as if the labyrinth had gotten a basement that one had to use to pass certain sections by either passing through on the first or second floor.

This in itself wouldnt be that difficult except the walls could move up and down, with some of them being triggered by the person doing the labyrinth. However, you could only trigger a gate on the opposite floor of the one where you needed to move the wall, making it all quite a complicated puzzle. Well, it was complicated for regular people. Jake, on the other hand, could easily piece together which walls he had to move and see all the trigger mechanisms right as he entered the Labyrinth Section.

So section one hundred hadnt added the feared third limiter obstacle Jake hoped wouldnt come. When he reached section one-hundred and three, the labyrinth was expanded once more as a third floor was added. At one-hundred and seven, a fourth one came, and at one-hundred and ten, the fifth one arrived.

Jake realized that Minaga had decided to increase the difficulty of the labyrinth, not simply by making it longer but by adding an entirely new dimension. A usual labyrinth was very much a two-dimensional puzzle, but the further he got after section one hundred, the more it became a cube as it turned into a three-dimensional labyrinth.

It only got more and more complicated the more sections he passed until soon, even Jake had to admit he began to struggle and get challenged. It had to be mentioned that even if Jake had an overpowered Pulse of Perception, the labyrinth could still get so damn complicated Jake still had to take his time and think about how to solve it.

He had to consider which walls to raise and lower, which teleporters could potentially be used, which paths he had to avoid entirely, and finally, to create an entire route that he could complete in time. Okay, the time limitation still wasnt a real problem quite yet, but he had a feeling it would be soon.

Because right now, Jake was in Labyrinth Section 151, and by now, it was pretty much just a giant cube. He had to climb up and down all the time to get to the exit that was often incredibly far away, with a shitload of near-impassible obstacles in between. These trap hallways were something Jake could still do, but he had reached his limit somewhere.

Jake, having run for a few hours and with a newly fully regenerated arm, snuck around a corner and took a quick glance in to confirm something. What he saw was a creature that stood in front of a large barrier, with a shimmering wall nearly right in front of him. He knew that if he passed this wall, he would be trapped in there with the gatekeeper until one of them died, so he couldnt just escape even if he wanted to. The shimmering wall also marked when space would be expanded, as each gatekeeper pretty much had an entire arena to itself. Fighting in a hallway wasnt going to happen, after all.

Especially not when it came to the kind of gatekeepers Jake now found himself facing if he wanted to pass these barriers.

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What stood in there was a large mammal-like beast with massive arms, each with long blades growing out of it. Its body looked more metal than flesh. It was about five meters tall, very bulky and bear-like, and looked to be a slower tanky variant. As it stood on two legs reminiscent of a werewolf, and even with the shimmering wall, he could feel its presence subtly come through.

[Scytcheborn Gatekeeper lvl ???]

He had been right after facing peak C-grades from around section one-forty, he had now truly graduated beyond the grade and found himself before a true-blue B-grade. And, based on what he guessed, it wasn't necessarily a horrible variant either.

Hey Minaga Jake muttered.

You're thinking about doing it, aren't you?

I was just wondering are there any rewards from getting to a certain section without dying? Jake asked. Like, if I somehow died now, would it screw me over in any way?

I can't answer that. Oh, by the way, on an entirely unrelated note, did you know that B-grades aren't really meant to ever appear in this C-grade version of the Challenge Dungeon? So, if you do ever happen to encounter one, surely it is indicative of you having gone far beyond the norm. Just food for thought, Minaga super subtly hinted.

Jake smiled at the response as he kept observing the B-grade for a little while, trying to get a feel for it.

He still had five lives or attempts remaining. Five resets, so to say. While it probably wasn't necessarily the smartest, Jake believed he couldn't let go of a chance like this. To face a B-grade in an actual battle



without any genuine risk of death was a rare opportunity and would give him invaluable experience for when he would truly hunt one down.

Yeah, it definitely wasn't just Jake really wanting to fight it. It was definitely a decision rooted in logic and reason.

Wish me luck, Jake smiled as he walked toward the shimmering wall, not bothering to make any real preparations. He was just testing the waters, after all.

I hope you die a horrible death that demotivates you so much you become unable to do any more sections. Oh, or maybe the experience makes you dead-set on revenge, making you spend all your other attempts going back here over and over again to exact vengeance upon the gatekeeper, Minaga said with a hint of hope in his voice.

Both very realistic scenarios for sure, Jake shook his head as he reached out his hand and touched the shimmering barrier. Now let's see what a B-grade can truly do.

Minaga stayed silent as Jake focused. Passing through the wall, the entire world warped as the wall expanded rapidly. Jake soon found himself standing inside a massive chamber with the B-grade gatekeeper at the far end. He thought for a moment it didn't know he was there until its attention firmly landed on him, making Jake temporarily freeze.

From several kilometers away, it just stared at him with two large beady eyes. Jake resolved himself as he pulled out his bow, ready to attack. Pulling out his bow apparently registered as an act of aggression, making the B-grade react instantly, making Jake's danger sense immediately respond, Arcane Awakening even getting triggered at the stable 30% right off the bat.

Jumping to the side, Jake barely avoided two crescent metal blades stabbing out of two small slits in space, the B-grade at the far end having raised an arm. Surprised at Jake dodging, it let out a low growl that sent a shockwave of sound through the chamber. Jake felt Pride of the Malefic Viper get impacted as the mental attack hit, but he managed to stay unaffected and even dodge the follow-up as space once more warped around him as scythe-like blades pierced out.

Pulling out an arrow, Jake released a potshot toward the B-grade. It didn't even move to dodge but simply motioned as a blade appeared to block it. Jake smirked a bit to himself as the arrow flicked itself

to the side, dodging the blade and continuing its way toward the B-grade that seemed genuinely surprised.

In the end, it chose to take the blow directly as it swatted at the arrow. Jake wanted to manipulate the arrow to dodge the blow, but he wasn't fast enough. The metal-covered claw made the arrow explode, dealing no damage at all. All he accomplished instead was to annoy the B-grade as it became even more offensive than before.

Using the same arm that it blocked the arrow with, it swung widely, releasing an odd wave of energy. Mana gathered around the energy of the wave as soon as spinning metal scythes manifested in mid-air, with hundreds flying toward Jake less than a second later.

Jake reacted by flying into them, dodging every single one as he even got off another potshot that was once more easily blocked. His ability to dodge and even launch annoying small attacks only seemed to trigger the gatekeeper as it released another annoyed growl.

A silver-like aura appeared around the beast as it bent its legs. Jake instantly dismissed his bow and pulled out his katars just in time as his opponent shot toward him. Air and space were cut in its wake as it soon reached Jake, swinging down its massive glowing claw.

Minor cuts began appearing all over Jake just for being in the beast's presence and looking at the descending blow, he knew he had no leeway to hold back. Arcane Awakening activated at full power as the claw reached him, smashing into his body.

At least a body.

Curse energy dispersed as his Eternal Shadow took the hit, Jake having launched himself forward straight for the beast. Stabbing forward with Eternal Hunger, Jake got in a surprise hit as Penetrating Fang struck the beast in its stomach. The metal-like skin and fur offered incredible resistance, but Jake's stab was designed to penetrate armor, allowing him to get through.

A loud roar resounded as the beast clearly hadn't ever expected to get injured. Jake, with his hand still firmly stabbed into the beast, opened his eyes widely as he let go of his katars and jumped back as fast as he could. The entire body of the gatekeeper began to shimmer as every single one of its hairs seemed to turn into metal scythes, its aura and the white energy surrounding it rapidly growing in power.

However, even as he dodged back, his sense of danger still went strong. The beast let out a long, drawn-out growl as its body began to glow more and more, Jake making as much distance as he could. The sound of the growl slowly started to sound more metallic and high-pitched as the gatekeepers aura stopped spiking, and the silver light reached a crescendo.

In the very next second, its body exploded. Every single hair-scythe shot out and began to revolve around the B-grade in a tempest of silvery spinning blades. In the center, the light subsided as the B-grade slowly stood up, having entirely changed. Its formerly bulky body had grown from around five meters to more than ten and turned lithe and lanky, with all its limbs now just thin scythes. It looked more like a silver statue or mannequin than a beast at this point, with even its face entirely gone, making Jake doubt if it had ever been a beast, to begin with.

Jake took a defensive stance as a loud, high-pitched sound echoed in the room. His vision temporarily swayed, and he barely managed to dodge a scythe-like appendage that struck down where he had just been standing. The floor of the labyrinth exploded from the impact, sending stones flying everywhere as Jake scrambled.

Before he had the slightest chance to do anything, the monster was upon him again. The spinning scythes came in from all sides as the faceless and emotionless gatekeeper descended with speed far above what Jake could handle, and as the many attacks closed in, Jake felt pretty confident.

Not about winning, mind you.

Yeah maybe I shouldn't be facing B-grades quite yet.

## Chapter 800: Nevermore: Birds of a Feather

Jake returned to consciousness, standing within the checkpoint hallway before Labyrinth Section 151. He felt like he had only blacked out for a moment, but the phantom pain of having his head chopped cleanly into four pieces could still be felt.

He had known from the beginning it wouldnt be a fight he could win, and true to his prediction, it wasnt. The B-grade was far more powerful than Jake in every way, making it utterly impossible for him to keep up and land any meaningful blows. Especially after its transformation, Jake didnt stand a chance at all.

He managed to stay alive for quite a long time, but whatever weak attacks he did land didn't even leave a scratch. The metal monstrosity was simply too durable for him to do anything.

The only time he managed to damage it was during Moment of the Primal Hunter, where he managed to disable one of its scythe-arms temporarily. It was a minor victory but a meaningful one. Jake had barely entered mid-tier C-grade, and he had already managed to injure a B-grade and it wasn't even that weak of a B-grade variant. In fact, he would rate it solidly as a slightly above-average creature.

Of course, if it had been something like a True Dragon B-grade, Jake would have been annihilated near-instantly. The prefix near only being there because he still had Moment to keep him alive for an extra second or two.

Sighing, he did still find his loss a bit sad. Oh well, I guess I still have a ways to go before I can fight B-grades.

You're, what, level 257? If you could fight B-grades straight on, I would have put in a complaint with the system itself to have you banned for being too overpowered. The fact you managed to even put up a bit of a fight and last that long is already plenty impressive. Also, what kind of overpowered skill do you have to help you close the gap? My dungeon tools to measure your power and stats read quite the spike the moment you decided to fight that B-grade actually, don't answer that; the Viper is currently giving me very unpleasant looks.

It's from my secret skill called The Power of Friendship. It gave me stats because I knew you believed in me and that I could win, Jake joked with a completely serious look on his face. Through the power of friendship, any obstacle can be overcome.

I know that's a joke, but those kinds of skills totally exist, Minaga pointed out.

Jake smiled, knowing that very well. Yip of Yore and, to some extent, EllHakan were perfect examples of this. Their ability to get power from stories and the beliefs of others was ridiculous in Jake's mind, but did he really have much to say?

Big Game Hunter did something very similar, except it only worked when he faced foes of a higher level. He also knew it was this skill Minaga detected. It wasn't his highest rarity skill, but it was the signature

skill of his class. No, his entire Path as a hunter. It had upgraded every single time he evolved it, and he was certain it would continue to do so.

Even now, it provided Jake with a lot of stats. It was like an extra free boosting skill, except it didn't have any of the drawbacks, actually made boosting skills even better as it increased stats, and all it required was for him to fight higher-leveled foes. And that was the C-grade ancient rarity version of it.

What would a divine-rarity version of the skill look like? One wielded by a god? Could Jake truly say it would be any less ridiculous than whatever Yip of Yore was doing? Well, yeah, he could because his skill actually made sense to Jake, while Yip did some weird, complicated, and manipulative shit to get his power up, while Jake just had to be the underdog rising to the occasion.

Shaking his head to himself, Jake decided to stop dallying and get a move on and complete the section. He just had to redo what he had done before, with the only change being one number that had changed.

Attempts remaining: 4

Sure, one could argue Jake had wasted a life by fighting the B-grade, but Jake believed the experience was worth it. If he hadn't done it, he would have wondered what it would have been like to fight it, so now he could just skip any B-grade gatekeepers without any regrets. His remaining four lives would be used as intended and give Jake a bit of leeway if he did fuck up and die to a trap or messed up his routing in a particular section. Something that was getting increasingly likely as he felt like he was trying to do some unsolved math mystery in every damn section.

Alas, it had to be done. And at least Jake didn't have to do it for this section as he had already done it once. With swift steps, Jake moved to the gate leading onto the section as he looked up and smiled.

Hey, Minaga, can you keep giving me your power of friendship so I can overcome this Labyrinth Section that I already failed once? Jake asked teasingly.

I think you should go fight that B-grade again. You nearly had it. I am sure you can win the second time around, Minaga tried to bait Jake into making a horrible decision.

Jake entered the gate as the timer started, and the section began. Shooting down one of the hallways, he answered. Alas, your words earlier convinced me of my inadequacy. I shall henceforth avoid all foes.

No, no, you misunderstood me. I just meant that with more practice, you got this. It was totally weakened toward the end and nearly out of resources and stuff. Come on, give it a go, Minaga said, trying to sound as convincing as possible.

Even if I tried again, I would only find death, Jake answered as he kept moving quickly, weaving around corners and jumping up and down floors as he proceeded through the cube labyrinth.

Alright, I digress. Maybe you won't win on your second attempt but surely, all good times three? You got five attempts. With that many, surely you can beat it! Heck, with nine lives, you managed to best a Primordial in battle. What is a mere B-grade gatekeeper to one such as you! Come on, do it for friendship! You just have to believe in me, who believes in you! Be confident! Believe in the power of friendship and go face that B-grade with every single attempt until you either win or leave with your dignity intact!

Damn, that's a long speech to convince me to go suicide four times to a B-grade, so I don't clear any more of your labyrinth, Jake said, soon closing in on the trap-filled hallway he did the first time he attempted this section.

What? Why would I ever do such a thing? These are groundless accusations. I'm innocent until proven guilty, and you have no evidence of such preposterous claims, Minaga responded in a huffed-up voice.

Wait oh, I know why you're trying to stop me now. I get it, I get it Jake muttered as he would soon reach the hallway with the many traps. Another reason he had faced the B-grade in this section was due to how close it was to the entrance.

Alright, you got me. What kind of dumb theory have you conjured up now?

Jake purposefully avoided answering until he was in front of the trap hallway again. Oh, I just figured that ah, damn, I am here already, huh. I just gotta focus on this, so I will answer after, alright?

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You waited on purpose, Minaga said in a bitter voice.

Cant talk right now, busy, Jake grinned as he jumped into the trap hallway. Having already done it once more, Jake quickly made his way through, dodging everything way more smoothly the second time around. He didnt even lose an arm.

Alright, lets hear it. Come on, Minaga said. Jake, deciding to be generous and not make him wait any longer, deigned him an answer.

Well, I just guessed you were trying to avoid a lawsuit for false advertisement because your Minagas Endless Labyrinth isnt truly endless. You want to stop me from discovering this by making me quit now so I dont discover your dirty secret, Jake said with faux confidence.

Are we just doing conspiracy theories now?

No, no, hear me out. It makes sense. Let me first clarify: all of these Labyrinth Sections are designed personally by you, right?

Yes?

So, with that being the case, youre telling me you created infinite sections? No, of course not. That would quite literally be impossible to have done. Assuming you designed all of them, there must be a limited number, thus making it not endless, and your claim saying it is a dirty, dirty lie, Jake argued flawlessly.

Ah, but there is a flaw in your theory. Even if there werent endless sections, it could still be considered relatively endless. If there are so many sections that its impossible to clear all of them in fifty years or if there are ones that just become straight-up impossible later on, it would effectively be considered endless, as no one can reach the end, Minaga countered.

But then it wouldnt be truly endless, now would it? What if someone with my Bloodline and a Transcendent skill that allowed them to effortlessly phase through walls appeared? They would be able to pass every section within minutes, Jake kept up the argument, happy to waste some time.

Considering he wasn't going to fight the B-grade again, he had to take a big detour of just running through hallways, moving walls, and dodging the occasional trap. Nothing super exciting, which made talking with Minaga and teasing him during this run a solid form of entertainment.

Funny you should mention it there was actually someone like that in the eighty-fifth era. It was someone with a Bloodline, though, that could phase through things. She did pretty well in my labyrinth, but considering she didn't know the way like you, she did struggle quite a bit. Ah, by the way, the only reason I am even sharing this is that she ended up dying quite a dumb death in S-grade when she tried to use her ability to break into somewhere she shouldn't have and got a hit put out on her, the Court of Shadows promptly carrying it out. Did I mention she was a professional thief? Yeah, not a well-liked gal, that one, Minaga changed the topic away from false advertisement.

Huh, Jake muttered, accepting Minaga's avoidance of consumer rights. Say, got any more interesting stories about intriguing characters? Both good and bad.

Okay, a funny one, then. There was once a monk from the Dao Sect who entered and somehow convinced himself this entire dungeon was just an illusion. A prison of the mind. He was certain that he needed to achieve enlightenment and elevate his third eye to see through my tomfoolery. Yeah, anyway, he ended up wasting all five attempts in the very first section, still convinced even as he left that he was just a simple step away from success.

Doesn't sound like the smartest cookie in the jar, Jake chuckled.

Yo, don't go around insulting gods from the Dao Sect like that, Minaga said in a joking tone, Much less one of the Daolords. Ah, but not the Soulfist one. Another monk. Can't say which one, that would be breaking privacy rules.

I am pretty sure you already broke those by sharing he was one of the Daolords. Kinda narrows it down to a handful, especially when you even exclude one. If I then also exclude the ones who became Daolords before you were around, it should be pretty easy to-

Oh! I just remembered this weird rodent C-grade who managed to do the entire labyrinth by using a form of divination I had never encountered before. It worked off throwing random acorns on the walls and going by the sound, deciding where to go. I thought she was fucking with me for the longest time until it was confirmed this was an actual form of divination magic. I fixed it with my next mist



upgrade, Minaga seamlessly changed the topic away from his own privacy violations. His second slight to consumer rights that day.

Jake and Minaga continued their banter as Jake ran through the labyrinth, now having to avoid quite a few things. Fighting gatekeepers was confirmed out of the question, and even the trap corridors were something he had to reconsider doing. He believed he could still do them for a few sections more, but soon he would reach his limits.

From there, Jake just had to hope he wouldn't meet a section where doing a gatekeeper or a trap corridor was mandatory. That, or one where avoiding these two, resulted in Jake simply not having enough time to make the run, even at full speed. He did hope to do at least a few more sections, though. Wouldn't completing two hundred in total be a nice round number to end on? Yeah, Jake was sure Minaga would appreciate him doing at least that many.

You know what the worst part is right now? Minaga said after a few minutes of silence. At this very moment, you aren't the only one barreling through my labyrinth near-effortlessly, making me question my current employment. It's someone you know, too, but I am not saying who. Again, privacy rules and all that.

Oh? Jake asked, genuinely curious. Who else could it be that managed to break the labyrinth? Was it maybe Jacob? Nah, his divination was like the definition of standard, even if it was very powerful. Casper? No, it couldn't be Casper. If it was him or any other dungeon-focused person, Minaga would be fine with it. Arnold? No if it was Arnold, it was because he would solve those riddles instantly, something Minaga also wouldn't complain about, as that would still be him completing the labyrinth in its intended fashion.

If it was someone he knew, it also included someone like EllHakan, but he didn't think that guy had anything wait could she maybe?

It's Sylphie, isn't it? Jake asked with a smile as he got an idea.

I should really stop giving too many hints

In another version of Minagas Endless Labyrinth, a bird was flying through the mist, flapping her wings pretty casually as she bee-lined for the exit of the section. At the same time, she also had a very engaging conversation with Minaga.

Again, can you properly explain what it means when you say you can still hear the wind?

Ree.

There literally is no wind. Its entirely calm, zero meters a second.

Ree.

Alright, yeah, sure, there still is a smidgen of air-affinity mana in the air, but that is a requirement for the mist to have a medium to exist in. You need to fill the air with something, and whats better to fill the air with than air.

Ree.

That doesnt really answer anything, now does it? Is it some kind of intuition? Instinct of some kind? An odd form of divination? Also, if you could do this, why didnt you just show the way when you did my labyrinth floors?

Ree.

What do you mean you wanted your uncle to also have fun? What even is that ability of yours? Wait I got an idea you are related to Sylphs, elementals that do not appear at C-grade. I do not have safeguards against their unique magic, even if most of it will be blocked by nullifying many general divination concepts, but if you rely on that, then maybe say, for pure research purposes, can you tell me if the skill of yours is related to Sylphs?

Ree.

I didnt ask if it was related to Sylphie, but the wind elementals known as Sylphs. You do know what Sylphs are, right? You definitely should. I literally gave you that Dreamy Embrace of the Benevolent Sylph mythical item.

Ree?

Well, yes, I do believe that can be described as a tasty item, but that doesnt answer anything

Ree.

I am not giving you another damn mythical item for answering a question couldnt you just tell me? For the sake of scientific progress?

Ree?

no, I dont really know this guy called Arnold

Ree?

Science isnt the name of some club you join, but actually, forget it. I am not going to get a straight answer no matter what I say. Jeez, youre worse than that uncle of yours as what you have isnt even a Bloodline

Ree! Sylphie screeched cheerfully.

Oh oh, so you say that what the wind says is related to your uncle? Wait, if your skill is a merging of the Sylph one and Records from his Bloodline that would explain why it works so well, as it is a wholly unique skill never seen before, containing new and unexplored concepts if I could figure out how it works, I could block it with my mist going forward. Alright, I may be ready to strike a deal.

Ree. Ree, ree, ree? Sylphie entered negotiation mode.

You drive a hard bargain, but compensation in the form of tasty things can be arranged.

Ree, Sylphie responded cheerfully.

mythic rarity natural treasures are not just tasty things, but-

Ree?

Well, yes, I did agree they could be described as tasty, however-

Ree!

What do you mean I am arguing in bad faith!? How do you even know what that means!?