

## Hunter 801

### Chapter 801: Nevermore: The J\*\*\*s Incident

Oh, I recognize this one, Casper said with a smile as he quickly deciphered the Magiscript on the wall and found the solution as he wrote it down in mid-air before absorbing what was effectively magic code. A very novel application of the bound-zone script.

Glad that at least some people appreciate real art, Minaga answered. Speaking of art. Thoughts on the traps so far? Always open to feedback.

Casper, knowing where to go after analyzing the clues provided, began running down one of the hallways as he kept scanning his surroundings, also making full use of all his dungeon-related skills. They provided him far more hints than if he didnt have them, and he had almost a sixth sense as to the layout of the labyrinth as he ran through it. Hm, they are all very standard and understandable. There really isnt anything crazy or out of the ordinary, I mean. I assume this was a deliberate design choice?

Right on! Making the traps unnecessarily complicated will just lead to senseless deaths and lost attempts too fast, as people are taken by surprise. That isnt really the purpose of the labyrinth. Hence, its better to stick with the classics. But, if I did want to add some more interesting traps, you got any ideas?

While I cannot know what you already implement later on have you considered rolling boulders? Casper asked curiously. Who didnt like rolling boulders? They were as classic as could be.

Rolling boulders? Minaga asked, sounding genuinely confused. Boulders dropping down from the ceiling? I think that is just a less efficient way of collapsing the ceiling or-

No, no, not like that. I mean that right as you enter a hallway, a massive round boulder filling the entire hallway will drop down behind you and begin rolling toward you. This will force the challenger to rush far more than normal, and the boulder itself adds a great visual element and indicator of danger. Of course, some will be able to easily avoid the boulder with their skills maybe set the boulder on fire or something so those who can turn intangible cant just let it pass it? You may also need to make some more alterations so people cant just block the boulder or something, but I am sure you can find a solution, Casper theory-crafted. If he ever made his own trap-filled dungeon, he would surely have rolling boulders, even if he did admit they werent the most efficient.

That does sound interesting. Though it does seem to still serve a very similar purpose to collapsing ceilings, Minaga commented.

Lasers and spikes serve the same function, too, but you have both. Spike pits and acid pits are also very much the same. However, even if they serve the same function, both are still great as they add diversity and variance to the Challenge Dungeon, Casper kept insisting. Also, ultimately having a rolling boulder is just cool.

Despite spending his time trying to convince Minaga to implement rolling boulder traps, Casper had made quite a bit of progress already in his section as he reached a trap hallway. Even if he discussed them a lot with Minaga, Casper didn't really do the trap rooms himself. At least, he didn't do them as intended.

Instead, he knelt right in front of the long kilometer-long hallway and placed his hands on the floor. A wave of energy went through the floor as Casper's mana poured in, and in the very next moment, every single trap triggered at once as fire, ice, spikes, lasers, and whatnot fired, with pits and pistons slamming down activated throughout. After everything was done, Casper stood up, cracked his neck, and walked through casually.

As a dungeon architect and trap specialist, he did have certain advantages. Of course, he had a very strong feeling his advantage was far worse than someone like Jake, even if he could cheat a lot. In either case, Casper had confidence in reaching section one hundred at least.

Primarily because he was already on Labyrinth Section 96. It just saved a lot of time still being able to pass through the trap hallways safely. He did have a strong feeling his method of triggering the traps would stop working at some point, though. Or he would just no longer be fast enough. He wasn't really that fast, after all, and he still took some time to properly navigate, taking quite a few wrong turns throughout.

I will definitely take your feedback up for consideration, Minaga answered after thinking a bit and giving Casper time to focus on clearing the trap room. Maybe ask for some more opinions.

Casper smiled and nodded as he picked up speed and began running down the hallway to make sure he could pass it in time. Doing at least one hundred sections was his goal, and based on what he knew, that should put him as one of the absolute top performers for this Challenge Dungeon.

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Jake completely ignored the way-too-fucking-complicated huge magic script at the beginning of the section as he shot into a hallway at full speed, not stopping for a second. Arcane Awakening activated at 30%, giving him even more speed as he approached a hallway with a few traps in it. Right as the traps triggered, Jake jumped to the side as a spear shot by him, the air pressure alone leaving bloody cuts on Jakes torso and tearing flesh off his arm despite flying by him more than three meters to the side.

Continuing forward while ignoring his wounds, he soon triggered another trap. Dozens of lasers activated, filling the entire hallway and leaving no room for a human to get through, forcing Jake to block one of them. Eternal Hunger, with its form changed to resemble a shield with sharp edges to still be considered a weapon, appeared in Jakes hand as he blocked one of the lasers and kept running.

Even the mythical rarity weapon wasnt left unscathed, as a hole was slowly being burned into it. Gritting his teeth, Jake barely managed to reach the end of the hallway, where he had to jump up to another floor. Summoning his Eternal Shadow, Jake barely managed to delay the laser for a fraction of a second, proving just long enough for Jake to get through the ceiling and into the next hallway.

Eternal Hunger was still simmering with energy as a clear small hole had been burned into it, the weapon already mending itself. Considering not even the B-grade he fought could leave a single scratch on the weapon, he took that as proof Jake was somewhere he really shouldnt be.

Because he was pretty damn sure those lasers or that spear earlier could have killed even a True Dragon in one shot. A low-tier B-grade one, sure, but a True Dragon nevertheless. Then again, this probably shouldnt come as a surprise to Jake.

He was in Labyrinth Section 214, after all.

Jakes original goal of reaching two hundred sections had long been passed as Jake just kept going. He had briefly checked out one of the gatekeeper rooms as he passed by it on the previous floor, and while he couldnt tell the creatures exact level, Jake was pretty sure it was around mid-tier B-grade. That was a being above level 400 so, yeah, Jake didnt even have the instinct to give that fight a go. He was already pressured enough on time and attempts as things were.

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It was to the level where he had to use his boosting skill from the very beginning of a section to be fast enough. He had learned that when he didnt make it through in time in section one-hundred and ninety-eight, and with that loss and his other fuck-ups, he was down to his final attempt.

Attempts remaining: 1

His first life had naturally been lost against the B-grade. Another life had been lost when he learned he couldnt do the trap hallways at all anymore, a third life was lost when Jake thought that maybe he could still do a slightly smaller trap hallway, and a fourth one was, as mentioned, lost when Jake simply didnt run fast enough due to his lack of boosting skill.

By now, there wasnt really much to discuss regarding his approach to each Labyrinth Section. Jake didnt even have time to make a route properly anymore, but he just had to follow his intuition in the first part as he fired out Pulses of Perception and created a mental map to navigate through. Everything that wasnt the smallest of traps had to be entirely avoided, and he also tried to stay away from teleporters whenever possible. He had encountered one in Labyrinth Section 200 that he got very bad vibes from, giving him the feeling that should he take it, Jake would get teleported right in front of a gatekeeper. Or into a water level. Both would be equally horrible. Actually, scratch that. Hed rather die to a B-grade than be stuck in a water level as the timer slowly expired.

Anyway, all it came down to was pure speed and pacing. Jake had five whole days to complete the section, and he would need every moment simply due to how massive it was. It was a true marathon where pacing and conserving resources were as important as simply being fast.

Jake was lucky he was doing this Challenge Dungeon after the Colosseum of Mortals. During the Colosseum, Jake had improved small aspects of his boosting skill, especially the parts where he only amplified certain parts of the body, and this sure came in handy now. He didnt really need to boost his ability to punch stuff or create bigger magical explosions when he was just running, so he only focused on pouring his energy into his legs.

This increased his longevity and reduced the stress on his body quite significantly. When he did begin to run out of steam and had to relax his legs, Jake summoned his wings and began flapping while even using his hands to blast himself down hallways for more speed. It looked ridiculous, but it worked.

The only truly sad part about the increased difficulty was his inability to have fun with Minaga. He had to dedicate all his mental energy to making sure he was going the right way, and he didn't want to risk messing up by focusing on coming up with a good quip to throw back at Minaga. No, he had to wait till he was done with the section and could relax and fully regenerate inside every checkpoint hallway.

Because, yes, he sure as hell needed these brief respites now, or he would have been utterly fucked.

Days passed as Jake kept making his way through the section. Toward the end, his entire body was sore, his legs were slightly bloody from overextension, and his resource pools were borderline empty. However, he could see the end before him as he jumped up and down several floors before he finally reached the gate.

Placing his hand on it, a prompt popped up in front of him.

Labyrinth Section 214 clear time: 4 days, 22:41:55

Nice, Jake smiled to himself. He even had a bit over an hour to go, so it wasn't even that bad of a time. He was spent, though, and he really needed a break. A twenty-four-hour nap would also be nice.

Great, great Minaga muttered before he suddenly perked up. But, alas, this is where the journey ends!

You say that with such certainty it's kind of cute, Jake said with a smile as the gate in front of him opened, and he prepared to take a nice break in the checkpoint hall-

You have entered Labyrinth Section 215 of Minaga's Endless Labyrinth.

Time Remaining: 4 days, 23:59:59

Jake stared at the message and the Labyrinth Section that had appeared in front of him as he cursed out loud. What the fuck is this?

There was no checkpoint hallway. No break or slight reprieve. It was like on the early floors where you just went from one labyrinth into another something Jake hadn't seen for a hundred and fifty sections now.

Well, it's the next Labyrinth Section. Duh. Why complain? You feeling tired? Oh, poor you! Minaga said teasingly.

This is just cheap, man, Jake said with annoyance.

Oh, give me a break. You are already way, way past what you should be right now. So stop complaining and just take the damn win already, Minaga said.

Jake did know this was probably the end of the road for him, but he still tried to scan the section with Pulse as he relaxed a little, trying to find a suitable route. However, after about an hour, it became clear this section was about the same length as the last one. Considering his borderline non-existent resources and spent body yeah, there was no way.

Still feels cheap, Jake said after over an hour of silence.

Says the obvious cheater, Minaga shot back. Hopefully, the reward can make you stop complaining though I will warn you that you kind of run into diminishing returns when you do too well at a Challenge Dungeon. Built-in system anti-cheat, if you will. And while you may complain about that, you should be happy. There are others who have been able to cheat in other Challenge Dungeons far more than this and could have theoretically gained nearly infinite scores.

Jake was about to complain anyway until he remembered something. He remembered ElHakan in the Minaga City Floor and how he passed it instantly by entirely cheating the merchants there into thinking some random thing was worth a ridiculous amount. If he or someone else like him could do something akin to that elsewhere yeah, this kind of anti-cheat was probably for the best.

Glad you do see some sense, Minaga said after he saw Jake wasn't going to continue complaining.

I keep it internal, Jake commented as he had chosen to just stay there and relax. He had five days to do this section and decided he might as well just chill and heal up during this time. Sure, chances are the

dungeon would heal him when he exited, but he couldn't be sure. Also, he did kind of want to go and spend his last attempt by getting clapped by a mid-tier B-grade. That sounded like a fun way to go out.

Seeing as we have some time, how about I pick your brain about something?

Sure, Jake shrugged.

So, wild thought, what would you say if I added a trap that is a large flaming rolling boulder that drops down behind you in a trap hallway, blocking off your path of retreat and forcing you to pass it quickly? Totally original idea, by the way, totally not stolen from someone else.

Jake failed to hold back a smile as he chuckled and couldn't help himself. I was surprised you didn't have it already, if I am being honest. Back on Earth, it was a very common trap that many rich people had in their houses to protect from home invaders, with many large organizations also using them. With great success, too.

I see, I see Minaga muttered, seemingly very skeptical of Jake bullshitting him.

Ah, by the way, this kind of trap is called a Jones, Jake finally said with a big smile.

Hm Minaga answered tentatively, definitely seeming like he smelled something fishy.

Say, Casper, what is the name of this kind of boulder trap?

Casper considered for a second before he answered. I don't think the multiverse has a name for it.

But what about back on Earth?

Oh, Casper muttered. I would reckon most just call it a rolling boulder trap.

I knew it! Minaga exclaimed. Some asshole is trying to make me think it's called a Jones or somethi-

Yeah, thats the official name, Casper quickly interjected. Most dont know the official terminology, though. I just assumed you were asking about what the layman called it.

I see hm.

Great movies, too, Casper thought, as he already had a very good idea who had been filling Minaga with crap and he was more than happy to offer the assist.

Plus, it would be really fucking funny if Minaga actually ended up making that the official name.

#### Chapter 802: Nevermore: All Good Labyrinths Must Come To An End

Arnold stared at the wall for a good while before he returned his attention to his tablet. Taking out a pen, he began to write on it as he slowly nodded, taking down notes and trying to solve the puzzle in front of him. Hours passed as he never moved, and after nearly half a day, he finally reached a satisfactory solution.

Raising the tablet, he pointed its camera toward the wall, and the magical scripts were recorded and translated according to the algorithm he had written. There were still a few minor flaws in the solution, but with repeated scans and a bigger data sample, those would quickly be hammered out.

Reading the clue and seeing the unclear outline of a path displayed on the tablet, he began to make his way down one of the long hallways while scanning all the walls for more clues along the way. After another hour or so, his data sample was sufficient, and he no longer had a need to collect more.

Summoning a mode of transportation, he got into the ball-shaped orb of metal and soon after shot down one of the hallways. Whenever he spotted signs of traps, he sent in a number of disposable drones to scout it out or clear a path while he entirely avoided any of the gatekeepers.

Like Jake, Arnold was also currently doing the Endless Labyrinth. However, his approach to solving it was far different from Jakes. He actually did it the intended way.

At the beginning of every new Labyrinth Section, there would be a unique cipher to that specific section. Solving this cipher will allow you to decrypt and understand later clues that could be found on the walls throughout.



Arnold was quite good at this, and while each section did have a unique cipher, some elements did repeat, allowing him to slowly improve his methodology and speed. His void-related abilities had little value inside of this labyrinth, outside of some of the trap rooms. It had also been good when he could still fight the gatekeepers, but after reaching Labyrinth Section 95 or so, he had solidly reached his limit when it came to direct confrontations. Also, even if he could fight, they would take too long, making it more efficient to take another path altogether.

After passing section one hundred, the difficulty increased once more. Another layer was added, and the cipher jumped severalfold in difficulty. It took Arnold nearly a full week to solve it, but at least he managed to do so and complete the section in time.

He also did the next few, but he lost an attempt on section one-hundred and six and another on one-hundred and seven as he simply wasn't fast enough. In fact, he only did these sections because he could spend one attempt solving the cipher and another actually navigating his way through the labyrinth.

Arnold lost his next attempt on one-hundred and eight, which he barely completed in time, even with the cipher being done on the first attempt. One-hundred and nine was even closer, but he had learned a bit and placed drones at any triggers to move around doors. His problem was that the range at which he could activate them was severely limited within the labyrinth due to the special mist. However, he could still use them when relatively close due to his void affinity having some ability to pierce the mist.

Alas, section one hundred and ten proved to be too much. The addition of more floors to the labyrinth marked a ridiculous increase in difficulty. Even if Arnold completed the cipher, he would barely have enough time to navigate the labyrinth. If he even had enough time. The man had no way of knowing how close he got to the exit as his final attempt was spent, Arnold failing to pass Labyrinth Section 110.

He was a bit disappointed. Not just because he had failed but because he would no longer be able to be presented with interesting ciphers to solve. Appearing in the white void, he did wonder how he did, with the system quickly providing him an answer.

Grand Achievement earned: Successfully completed Minagas Endless Labyrinth while performing exceptionally and near-perfectly consistently. With your sharp mind and deep insight, you navigated the labyrinth as a true savant, making full use of the clues supplied as you solved every puzzle put before you. Your speed, tenacity, and deep analytical abilities allowed you to perform exceptionally well, passing Labyrinth Section 109 successfully. A feat to be proud of. 82.201 Nevermore Points earned. Due

to completing a Grand Achievement, you will receive a 20% multiplier of all Nevermore Points at the final calculation.

While he had performed worse as seen by fewer Nevermore Points earned Arnold had enjoyed the labyrinth far more than the Test of Character. Solving magical and mathematical puzzles was simply much more engaging than social problems that had too many annoying and illogical aspects to consider.

He had enjoyed the puzzles so much that he envied anyone yet to do the Challenge Dungeon and their ability to solve all those interesting ciphers for the first time while improving their analytical abilities. It was an invaluable experience he couldn't imagine anyone not enjoying immensely.

So people seriously just sit there and try to solve some damn math problem or whatever at the start of every Labyrinth Section? Jake asked Minaga as he stared at the magical script in Labyrinth Section 215. No matter how much he stared at the damn thing, he didn't get shit. He even wondered if it could even be solved or was just some stupid scribbles to fuck with people.

That is indeed how you are supposed to do things, Minaga answered. Well, one of the ways to do things. There are many solutions to the same problem, and ultimately, the challenge is to navigate through the labyrinth within the given time. Some have certain scouting methods that still work, others use summoned creatures to assist them even if that is limited severely while some bloody arseholes use their overpowered Bloodline to cheese the entire thing.

Why do I feel like that was directed towards me? Nah, it couldn't be. Anyway, I do wonder how someone like the Fallen King handles this place. He isn't exactly the fastest, and I don't think he has any scouting tools worth much, Jake shared thoughtfully.

I'm not going to randomly share stuff. It's not gonna happen. I will not tell you how badly or well your party members are doing, especially not if my fellow Unique Lifeform is doing badly.

So he is doing badly, huh, Jake nodded, not entirely surprised.

I didn't say he was.

You phrased it by putting emphasis on if he did badly. Not if he did well. I am guessing that means he is doing badly, Jake very correctly pointed out.

That is to the level of just being pure guesswork based on a very shaky foundation of nothing, Minaga said in a rather deadpan tone.

It doesnt matter if Im right. Which I am.

Minaga stopped engaging with that conversational track as he remained quiet, Jake also enjoying the momentary silence. He had already napped and felt pretty well-rested, with the period of weakness from his boosting skill also gone. This was an entire day already wasted, and Jake knew he didnt have any shot at beating the section.

But he still stayed to have one final moment of fun.

Standing up, Jake stretched as he looked upward. Ready to feel catharsis as you see me get my ass kicked by a far more powerful B-grade?

Yeah about that, one little piece of advice. Maybe you should reconsider doing that? While dying doesnt lead to any physical demerits, you are still dying. There is a reason people dont train too much in Challenge Dungeons with multiple lives. The mental toll dying has on the soul isnt non-insignificant, and you may end up suffering for it, Minaga said with what sounded like genuine concern.

Says the Unique Lifeform who has had uncountable versions of yourself die, Jake said with a smile as he got a bit more serious. While I appreciate the concern, I am good. If I felt like there would be any true consequences, I wouldnt go through with it, and no offense I trust my own gut more on this matter than anyone else. Be they god or not.

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Fair enough. Then go ahead and enjoy dying a horrible death! Minaga said with all his cheer back.

Jake didnt have to be told twice and went to do just that. He casually made his way down a few dozen hallways before he finally reached a barrier. Curiously, he looked to see what kind of being would kill him and frowned a bit when he saw a human-looking figure standing on the other side.

[Silver Knight Gatekeeper lvl ???]

It was a simple-looking knight, though Jake got the feeling there wasnt any kind of enlightened being within that helmet. Instead, It was more like a golem or maybe a living armor kind of deal. The knight stood in front of the barrier it guarded with both hands resting atop the crossguards of its sword, patiently waiting for anyone to enter.

Without Jakes instincts, he wouldnt really have taken the knight for anything powerful. It looked like the kind of foe you could find in any grade, but its aura was unmistakable.

Here goes nothing, Jake smiled to himself as he placed a hand on the shimmering wall to enter the room. As he did so, the space expanded once more as an arena was created with Jake on one side and the knight on the other.

Jake shook his head as a bow appeared in his hand. Right as it did, the silver knight that had been standing entirely still slowly raised its head as silvery light filled its eyes. Its aura expanded as it grasped the sword and raised it right as Jake shot an arrow toward the B-grade while his sense of danger exploded with warning.

In the very next second, time slowed down. Jake hadnt even been able to see the swing properly before Moment of the Primal Hunter triggered as a faint silvery line reminiscent of a thread floated in front of his head, slowly moving toward him.

Dodging to the side, Jake shot another arrow after his first one had already been annihilated by the first swing, having been cut in half mid-flight. Right as time returned to normal, Jake dove to the side as his danger sense warned him again. In a quite impressive display, Jake dodged five more attacks before the knights sword began to glow.

The B-grade held the sword with both hands and took a stance before it swung with its full might. Jake could only try and shake his head as he was very clear that there was no fucking way he was dodging

that. A net of silvery strings of magic cut through the entire hall as Jakes body was cut into hundreds of pieces instantaneously, marking his end of the road in Minagas Endless Labyrinth.

In the very next second, Jake opened his eyes again and found himself standing within a familiar white void. His heart was pounding, and sweat appeared on his brows, but he quickly calmed himself down as he muttered. What level was that thing even

Close to late-tier B-grade and not even considered a weak variant, Minaga answered. Was it really worth you spending another full day for just a few seconds in front of a B-grade?

It totally was. Also, should you really still be talking after the dungeon is completed?

Technically, you are still in my Challenge Dungeon, so I can. Besides, its not like you can do anything about it.

Jake knew it wasnt worth trying to discuss such a thing with Minaga as he simply turned his attention to what else would come in this white void. Something that popped up only a few seconds later.

Grand Achievement earned: Successfully completed Minagas Endless Labyrinth above any measurable expectations. With unquestionable speed and no hesitation, you have relied on your instincts and powerful natural talents to overcome Minagas Endless Labyrinth with ease, conquering every section effortlessly. You only met the end of your journey far after the impossible had already been achieved, passing a ridiculous 214 Labyrinth Sections, long past where there was much more to earn. A near-irreplicable feat. 148.205 Nevermore Points earned. Due to completing a Grand Achievement, you will receive a 25% multiplier of all Nevermore Points at the final calculation.

In all honesty, Jake didnt see anything that surprised him here. His ultimate goal had always been that 25% bonus, and he had earned that well, probably quite a while ago. Jake wasnt sure how many sections you had to pass to unlock it, but based on the amount of Nevermore Points he had earned, he had probably gone quite a bit beyond even the impossible. By at least fifty sections.

Jake had earned a lot more Nevermore Points than even when he had beaten Valdemar. In fact, looking at the number of points, Jake got a theory that the maximum one could ever get was 150.000, where getting that number was actually impossible unless you performed absolutely perfectly. Like you would

have to beat Valdemar without ever struggling while having all ten lives available, possibly even while never buying any equipment or recovery potions throughout.

Comparing his feat here to the Colosseum of Mortals didnt really feel fair. Jake would say the Colosseum had been way fucking harder, but he reckoned most others in the multiverse would view getting this far in the labyrinth as far, far more difficult. Jake had only gotten this far because he was a cheat, and he knew it.

Either way, another 25% amplifier was nice to get under his belt. That meant he would get a 60% bonus from the Challenge Dungeons alone so far, with two to go. Looking at those numbers, Jake couldnt help but have a thought

Could I get a 100% amplifier overall?

If 20% was considered the normal perfect score for each Challenge Dungeon, so if he got 20%, that would pretty much make it a clean sweep. It was a hard goal to reach, especially after that horrible Test of Character that only gave him 10%, but he wanted to give it a shot, if not for anything else but his own sense of vanity.

Shaking his head, Jake noted that he hadnt gotten any title despite being better here than the Colosseum. Probably because the title would have been of the same tier, so it just kept the old one. Considering that, Jake turned his attention to the final reward. After that Storybook Page from the Test of Character, Jake had high expectations which made him unsure what to think as he received what looked like a small statue of Minaga, giving him a double thumbs up.

Reserving judgment, he Identified it.

[My Own Very Own Top-tier Minagas Labyrinth (Unique)] Is that a dungeon in your pocket, or is it just me? Finally, a solution to missing the wondrous Minaga has been found, as you now have the opportunity to place your very own Minagas Labyrinth wherever your heart desires (conditions may apply). When placing the dungeon, you must choose a suitable location. The nature and design of the dungeon may be modified upon placement with advice from the Minaga clone within. This Minagas Labyrinth is of the top tier, allowing you to customize far more options while expanding the size of the dungeon significantly. As a top-tier Minagas Labyrinth, sections within the labyrinth can cross grades. Note that the dungeon must be maintained after placement, and should it run out of power, it will disappear forever. As a top-tier variant of Minagas Labyrinth, it does not have a built-in expiration date.

Requirements: Soulbound.

Jake, still standing within the white void and staring at the statue, couldn't help but get a thought as he spoke out loud.

Say Minaga this reward Jake muttered.

Yeah, isn't it great? It will allow you to-

Isn't this just a way for you to stash more clones of yourself spread across the multiverse to solidify your own immortality? And how many damn clones does it take to include a clone in every single one of these? Jake questioned. Actually, scratch both those questions will this even work in the ninety-third universe as you effectively bring a clone there using this?

Short answer? Yes, it does work. Long answer? I can't bring the clone out of the dungeon, or it will go poof. Also, it isn't the best way to hide clones. Artificial dungeons have a lifespan unless they are transformed into true worlds, which will naturally make it so they are no longer considered dungeons either. Of course, you can maintain a dungeon with skilled enough dungeon engineers. I doubt you have the staff required to fix this one unless I myself come and fix it, Minaga answered as he entirely needlessly lowered his voice as if whispering. That is a hint that I will use this dungeon as an excuse to come visit once the universe fully opens up.

I had kind of expected you to be a recurring character in my life but if I am being honest, I am not sure how to feel about this reward. It isn't really as much a reward for a person, but their faction, assuming they have one, Jake voiced his thoughts.

Kind of? But not really. Even if you don't have a faction, you could use this to get a Dungeon Pioneer title by being the first one to clear it or just design it to train yourself in some way. You could also just sell it to some major faction. Not gonna lie; most would pay top Credits for a Minaga's Labyrinth. Especially a top-tier one like this. Other variants will disappear no matter how well you maintain them, but the top-tier one can technically be around forever, making it far more valuable. Also, as a final note, don't you go around thinking these dungeons are given out easily. You need to have a damn-near-top performance to get one, as I can't exactly make an infinite number, Minaga said, really trying to talk up his reward.

You are fully aware I am just going to give this to my resident City Lord and manager back on Earth and have her figure out what to use it for, right? Jake said with a grin.

Well, hopefully, she can appreciate good craftsmanship

I could also just do as I usually do and forget it in my spatial storage forever and never let it see the light of day

Ha ha, funny joke, Minaga scoffed.

Jake just smiled as he prepared to leave the dungeon.

Wait, you are joking, right right? Why do I feel like you aren't joking? Yeah, you must be joking, who would-

Before the distressed Unique Lifeform could say more, Jake accepted the prompt to leave as he disappeared from the white void, a pocket dungeon that may or may not be forgotten forever richer.

#### Chapter 803: Nevermore (Not Really): A Sandy World

A hooded young man walked through the busy streets, sticking with all the civilians who made sure to stay out of the way of the patrolling soldiers who occupied the middle of the road. They all invited respect, yet fear from everyone. It was not necessarily due to their own power but what they represented. Who they represented.

The orange skin of these people made them easily discernable from humans, even if there were many similarities. Many had tattoos that marked their caste and origin, too, many of which were prominently displayed. It was a society where one was born into their station in life with little hope of ever changing. The newest leader of the planet had enacted some change, allowing people to ascend by joining the army, but it was an arduous process that had only truly picked up speed after the system arrived.

Integration. That is what the common term was across the multiverse, but here, it was called the Celestial Prophecy. An event that was foreseen by their glorious and unquestionable leader. A being born under the Twin Maidens and the Golden Patriarch. The names of the two moons and sun that shone brightly in the sky. Due to the nature of his birth, he was of the highest caste, selected by the heavens themselves, and given a title the moment his provenance was discovered.



The Celestial Child. EllHakan, the son of the twin moons and the sun itself. A living god in the eyes of many.

Born of the universe as a blessing to the Nahoom, their savior and leader by birthright. Legends flourished, how he was born on the day of the twin eclipse, having simply appeared atop the highest mountain on the planet. Another legend said he fell from the heavens, bringing with him rain and the best year of harvest in recorded history. There were too many legends to count, but they all had one thing in common.

They were all absolute bullshit.

Yet the natives believed every single one of them. How could they not? The Celestial Child had only brought miracle after miracle, and the entire planet had never been as united and happy as now. Well at least they thought they were happy. But to his eyes, he saw something else.

Everything was wrong. The threads hung in the air, invisible yet frayed. Broken, incomplete, tangled, miscolored nothing was as it should be. Their emotions toward one another were not as they should be. The karmic connections were not formed genuinely.

William continued to walk through the city, staying as inconspicuous as possible. His body was covered from head to toe, and despite his appearance so suspect, no one looked twice as if he blended into the environment.

If anyone with detection skills were around, they could surely find the karma mage, but there wasn't anyone of note around. Most of the powerful people on the planet had left for Nevermore already, leaving only the bare minimum. None of which were a threat to William and his purpose for visiting.

He had already been on the planet for a few months now, and he planned on staying a little longer. Looking at the karmic threads that spanned the planet, he had noticed a few that were very out of place - ones he had to research more than others to try and find the truth he had been searching for.

The rest of the day passed as William left the city and walked to the outskirts slums. Large orange mountains surrounded the city, having served as a natural barrier for millennia from both invaders and

the environment. Flying to the top of one of these mountains, he sat down and stared out at the vast nothingness beyond the mountains.

An endless desert of sand continued as far as he could see, with the occasional movement of monsters being the only disturbance to the tranquil world. Compared to Earth, the Nahoom homeworld was simply far less dangerous, having apparently never spawned any creatures stronger than low-tier C-grade. It was also far smaller, being only about a third the size of current Earth, with most of its dangerous monsters could be found inside of the planet. EllHakan had managed to conquer the world truly, having convinced every other nation to join him after the system arrived, with most having given in even before the initiation.

Before the system, things had been pretty bad, though. The environment was very dry, and the average temperature was quite a bit higher than on Earth. This meant something as basic as water was hard to come by, and large underground wells had to be dug for the people to survive. The entire planet was pretty much just a massive desert with only the occasional oasis here and there. It didnt have any true oceans, but just a few large rivers and lakes, with most of the ecosystem sustained due to many of the massive mountains spread across the planet getting covered in ice every year. Ah, and the poles also had ice, which was honestly a pretty common occurrence for habitable planets.

Turning away from the dunes and looking out over the city, William sighed as he saw the countless warped threads of karma once more. It was karmic power forged through false premises, lies, and delusion. All this falsehood was surrounded by golden buildings and grandeur as the massive capital city of the Nahoom homeworld stretched out before him. A city matching the largest Earth had ever seen, if not surpassing it, with tens of millions living there.

As he looked out over the city, he couldnt help but wonder how a place could even become like this. So whole, yet broken. There were so many things that were just wrong, and William wanted to get to the bottom of it. However, right as he thought this, he began to feel his body failing.

I guess it could only hold for that long, he thought as his arm began to crumble, and the very next second, his body fell apart into metal dust that was scattered by the wind.

Opening his eyes, William found himself back inside the cave, hidden away from the capital. His vessel had lasted quite a while this time around, William getting better at using the skill he had taken from his former dear Patron.

Being a Heretic had some benefits, the greatest of which was that William no longer found himself under the control of Eversmile. The bad part was that he couldn't get any teachings either, even if he could still get skills and the Primordials Records. Sadly, even if he had technically broken free now, damage had still been done.

Taking out the Nevermore token from his spatial storage, he rubbed it a bit as he considered going but ultimately decided to delay. He had no reason to rush it. His trip to Nevermore would be less fruitful than most others due to Eversmile convincing him he had to go in D-grade. He would still go, though, if not just to escape from the Nahoom planet.

William had arrived there with the help of the space jellyfish that had originally helped bring EllHakan to Earth and helped William get to Nevermore the first time around. It, too, had been blessed by Eversmile, but the Primordial had never communicated with it directly. Instead, William had relayed everything. After he turned his back on Eversmile, William still felt his connection to the jellyfish remain the same, making him believe it didn't know. This did indeed turn out to be the case, as it gladly helped him when he claimed it was on Eversmile's order. Of course, while the jellyfish was a damn good space mage, it could only teleport William to the Nahoom homeworld and not back again. Which is where the Nevermore teleportation token came in.

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Shaking his head, William put back the Nevermore token. It wasn't time yet. He still had an objective on the planet to complete, and he had to be done before anyone who knew who he was or could locate him returned from Nevermore.

Waving his hand, metal spurns appeared, which he quickly condensed into a humanoid form. Closing his eyes, he formed a connection as the empty husk came to life; William connected to it through karma. The construct was almost like a living karmic void, having no connection to even the world around it. This made it far harder to detect, and those who did notice it wouldn't pay any attention. Forming any karmic bond with it was incredibly difficult, after all.

The karmic vessel exited the cave soon after, headed for the capital once more as he had some things he still wanted to check out there. Evidence he needed to find to use against EllHakan when the time was right. After that, he had another major city to visit.

And this time, the mission was on his own terms even if he had effectively been hired for the job. But at least it was by a fellow Earthling and not some god, even if they did probably contact him at the behest of one.

But its, like, super hard the giant worm complained as they wiggled slightly after appearing in the middle of the vastness of space, another being teleporting in the very next second.

You already know how to open them. Now you just need better control of where you reappear when you use them, the god who, in Sandys eyes, was cruelty itself answered.

Opening one is easy! Its like digging in the sand. You just plop down, start wiggling, and you make a hole! But yeah, its a bit hard to know exactly where you end up making the exit hole again especially when you cant see where youre going and stuff so cant we just agree its impossible and go have dinner? Sandy tried very hard.

I was told expressly that there would be no food before you at least try to achieve minor success, the still-evil god insisted. Sandy knew the horrible man had been hired by the many-headed hydra to teach Sandy super complicated space stuff that Sandy really didnt feel like Sandy needed to learn.

As for what Sandy had to learn? Well, stuff about wormholes, duh.

Being a worm, Sandy naturally learned how to make wormholes. Wormholes were, in the simplest of terms according to the teacher, anyway two spots getting connected through a hole in space. In between these two spots, Sandy would have to swim through very dense cosmic dust, but after getting out on the other side, the former sandworm would find themselves somewhere entirely new, far away from the original spot.

Sandys problem was exactly with this last part where the wormhole would go. Trying to navigate while inside the dense cosmic dust was very hard, as it felt like really resistant sand. Also, the cosmic dust slowly damaged Sandy, even with all their resistance, so the worm had a limited duration inside of the hole in space.

This was also a bit of a problem, as the distance passed inside the cosmic dust correlated directly with how long Sandy would move in the outside world. Sandy did have the speed and resistance part pretty much figured out, though. Getting out was also technically pretty easy, as when Sandy had to go out

again, Sandy just had to imagine a hole opening and then swim through it. This hole would also appear in the true universe to serve as an exit.

But how was Sandy supposed to also know where this hole would bring Sandy when Sandy didnt know anything about where Sandy was in the real world? It wasnt like there was any real direction inside of the cosmic dust. Sandy could swim straight in one direction and somehow end up entirely opposite. It was very confusing.

Okay if I have to learn to get food, tell me the trick! Sandy insisted after getting over their frustration.

There are no tricks, only comprehension. Follow your instincts and your will, the god said. You are a natural-born talent at this. Its within you. You have already learned how to bend space far more efficiently, and your control of the space affinity is improving at an astonishing rate. However, only you can truly learn the secrets of the cosmic dust you see, so only you can find your own Path to comprehend it fully.

Sandy wiggled, annoyed at the damn teacher telling them that again. Why could a hydra with so many heads not figure out that Sandy needed a teacher who could also feel and see the same cosmic dust? Cosmic dust was everywhere, like sand in a desert, so it shouldnt be that hard.

Yet, for some reason, apparently only Sandy could see it. Sandys teacher claimed it was because the cosmic sand didnt necessarily exist but was just Sandys conceptual comprehension of the concept of space materialized through will... or some other dumb stuff like that Sandy was pretty sure was just an excuse for being blind. And that came from Sandy, who didnt even have any eyes!

Can we just go back to normal space magic stuff? Sandy asked after a bit more of trying to do wormholes properly but failing repeatedly.

If that is what the Chosen desires, it can be arranged. However, we shall still do so with the intent of improving your understanding of this cosmic dust, the god said as he waved his hand.

Sandy found themselves surrounded by a cube-like barrier the very next moment, getting entirely trapped. A second later, a second layer appeared, then a third and a fourth popped into existence. Each of them sealed off space in different ways to stop Sandy from wriggling through.

This kind of training Sandy could understand. The flow of cosmic dust was disrupted by the sealed space, but it wasn't perfect. The god purposefully left the kind of vulnerabilities C-grades and early B-grades would also fail to fully address, allowing Sandy to find more loopholes to wiggle through. Sometimes, Sandy could also just eat their way through a barrier altogether, but that tended to be pretty hard and a waste of energy compared to just finding a weakness and exploiting that.

The training continued for a few more days as Sandy made good progress as usual. It was not surprising, considering Sandy was a super genius. After that, it was time to do stomach training again, where the cosmic worm worked on their internal world. Both with the intent of expanding it and designing it to be more useful, but also just to learn more about how it all worked. Sandy also had to check in on all the people Sandy had eaten recently. There were lots of bad people in there who had tried to say Sandy couldn't take food that clearly belonged to Sandy by virtue of existing. They would be let out again once they had learned their lesson. Definitely.

Speaking of stomachs

Starvation is a form of torture; did you know that? Sandy asked as they had just finished another training session.

I believe you have mentioned it a number of times, yes, with me always answering that as a C-grade, you cannot starve, not truly. Alas, your Path is related to consumption, so go ahead. We shall meet up again in a month's time, the god answered.

Yay! Sandy wriggled in excitement. The worm considered for a moment before deciding to head back to the Order branch located not that far away to get some food there before hunting down stashes of good stuff in the wild.

Deciding it was the fastest way, Sandy opened a wormhole back to the Order of the Malefic Viper branch as the worm just followed the tasty food. Wriggling through the dense cosmic dust within the wormhole, Sandy soon felt like food was close and dug their way out, appearing in the sky just outside of the branch.

However, before Sandy even had time to wriggle inside the large compound, their teacher popped up again, despite them just having agreed to meet up again in a month.

What did you just do? the god asked.

I went to get food? Sandy asked, confused. How could a god be that forgetful?

Yes, through a wormhole. I planned on teleporting you with me, but you went by yourself and successfully appeared right outside of the branch so how did you do it? How did you designate where you would appear outside of the condensed hyperspace of the wormhole? the god asked. Sandy felt like the question was more there to make Sandy understand something than the god actually wanting to know. Which was a bit silly when the answer was so obvious.

I just told you I went to where the food was, Sandy wriggled in disbelief.

But how did you know where the food was?

Pfft, any good worm worth their tail can find food!

So, did you smell the food somehow while within hyperspace? Some other form of detection? I want you to try and recall exactly what you felt when you knew when to exit the wormhole.

Sandy tried to do just that and remember what they felt with the answer being so obvious.

I felt hungry.

You always feel hungry.

Exactly! Great talk, food time!

With that, Sandy quickly escaped the clutches of the evil god that tried to stop them from eating tasty food. Sandy would definitely be putting in a complaint with the many-headed hydra for having a god teach them who didn't even have the common courtesy to offer snacks during work hours.

## Chapter 804: Nevermore: Wise Ideas

While we cannot tell you what to do, sister, we can at the very least advise you and I cannot help but question your decision, the Dragonfly True Royal said as she looked at Vesperia. You still have time to reconsider.

Vesperia looked at her sister and sighed. I feel like this would be best for me.

Odonestra also sighed as she shook her head. It is a risk you do not need to take. The Endless Empire can provide you all the protection you need. Our resources surpass what any other factions would possibly be able or willing to provide. Our unique treasures can only be found here are you truly willing to forsake all that, even if it is only temporary?

I appreciate your concern; I truly do. And as you said, sister, I will stay here for at least a little longer, Vesperia answered as she smiled. But I cant remain forever.

This was far from the first time they had this discussion, as Vesperia had dropped a bombshell shortly after she had fully absorbed all the energies of the old artifacts of the former Vespernat True Royal. She declared that within five years, she would leave the heartlands of the Endless Empire once more and go somewhere the other True Royals truly didnt want her to go. Somewhere, they couldnt go.

The ninety-third universe.

Some had questioned if Vesperia could even go, but she knew instinctively she could. Despite being a True Royal, born in the first universe in a ritual deep within the Order of the Malefic Vipers headquarters, she was a native of the new universe. At least, she kind of was.

She knew the egg she had hatched from was originally from a system event her Sire called a Treasure Hunt. Anything taken from there was naturally considered native to the new universe, even if the world of Yalsten in which it took place was technically from a far earlier universe.

Vesperia also had to admit that she liked the implications of her origin. That she was a treasure her Sire had brought back. It was an odd thought she didnt share openly but one she very much cherished.



Alas, I still do not understand why you find it so imperative to leave, Odonestra said. Especially to somewhere we cannot help protect you.

You not being able to go also means many other threats cant. And I will be at the side of the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, as well as many other powerful figures of this new universe. I will be far from defenseless, and besides I believe I can take care of myself against most threats I will face in a nascent universe. As long as I dont decide to venture somewhere unwise, Vesperia answered, trying to put her fellow True Royals mind at ease.

It didnt work as well as she had hoped.

The risk is still far too high Vesperia sister you are the only True Royal of your Lineage. Even if there is only a minuscule chance you could die, it isnt worth the risk. You represent all of the Vespernat. Their entire future. Even if you wish to go, cant it be after you have matured into your powers more? Until you can leave some insurance behind? There are many potential partners out there who are already interested, too, so maybe go after you have left a possible successor? I know it may be a few more decades, but-

But nothing, Vesperia cut her off as she got a bit more serious. While I perfectly understand your concern, I also know that staying here is not my Path. While this is my Hive its only one of them, and I have to return to the other. I have to get some level of independence. Even as I am saying it, I know how odd of a notion this is for a True Royal, but perhaps it is one of the things I inherited from my Sire.

Odonestra looked like she wanted to argue more as a figure popped into existence in the middle of the conversation. Instinctively, the other True Royal placed a barrier around Vesperia as this new figure attacked with a barrel filled with confetti.

Celebration time! the Unique Lifeform turned divine menace said with a big grin. Here with your unscheduled and unrequested update on Jake in Nevermore.

We are having an important discussion, Odonestra said, looking at the All-God Legion without even trying to hide her annoyance.

I know, I know. I was trying to listen in. Its pretty rude to make isolation barriers like that, but seeing as I am in a good mood, Ill let bygones be bygones. Say, does the Endless Empire have anyone at Nevermore right now? I am sure you know whats happening.

We have allies from the United Tribes who are relaying information to us, and they have sent a representative that is on their way there right now, Odonestra answered. And, yes, we are aware that there have recently been movements that include several Primordials.

Do you know the cause of these movements? Minaga asked hintingly.

I would assume it is my Sire due to your excitement, Vesperia chimed in.

Ding ding ding! We have a winner! Yep, Jake is once more the catalyst of chaos as he has initiated an impromptu Primordial reunion by being himself. As for how he did it

Minaga purposefully had a long dramatic pause as he stared at the two of them, Odonestra far less interested than Vesperia.

No drumroll? Disappointing, should have brought my own. Anywho, Jake did a Challenge Dungeon and ended up beating up a low-level image of Valdemar within, making Valdemar curious and head over. Then Jake also had some interactions with another gods image from the Pantheon of Life, making Natures Attendant and this god he interacted with also headed over. Considering the Viper was already there, others also decided that maybe something cool was going on and went to attend what is effectively just a watch party for Vilastromoz Chosen, Minaga shared with a big grin on his face.

Odonestra frowned at the explanation as Vesperia just smiled. It seems like my Sire is having an enjoyable time in Nevermore.

Oh, no, not at all. He just entered another Challenge Dungeon he really hates and is having a miserable experience, as far as I can tell. Like, hes doing okay but definitely not having a good time.

Vesperia was a bit worried hearing that but just nodded. She hoped he would find enjoyment somehow anyway, as she knew her Sire did better at things he enjoyed.

Anyway! Thats what I came to share with the group! Oh, and also, I can kind of guess what you were arguing about, and I would advise you to just allow your little sister to follow her instincts or at least Jakes instincts. Things somehow tend to work out well when that happens, Minaga said as he looked at Odonestra before he did an exaggerated wave. Toodaloo!

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With that, he disappeared again, leaving Vesperia with her sister. They looked at each other for a moment before Odonestra sighed. Let us talk about this another time, alright? I never questioned the capabilities of your Sire but he is ultimately still just a C-grade, no matter how much potential he shows.

Vesperia nodded, unable to argue against that point. She continued her practice and nurturing of her nascent hive for several weeks until Minaga popped back in, having dragged Odonestra along again. At least Vesperia thought so for a moment, but it quickly became clear they had just arrived at the same time due to recent happenings.

Update time! Jake finished the Challenge Dungeon he really didnt like, and guess what happened next? Minaga said with excitement.

The sheer audacity of a mortal to do something like that, its- Odonestra muttered.

Shh, let her guess, Minaga interrupted the True Royal as he looked expectantly at Vesperia.

I would guess he did something unexpected again? Seeing as he didnt enjoy the Challenge Dungeon, I doubt it is due to his performance in there, and my sisters comment makes me believe it involves gods so did he say something to the observing gods or otherwise end up interacting directly with them? Wait, was he perhaps summoned into the same place as several gods and acted as he usually acts? Vesperia answered, having put together the limited clues provided and her knowledge of Jake and how she had seen him interact with the Malefic Viper.

Thats incredibly accurate. Huh, Minaga muttered. Well, glad to hear you skipped out on inheriting any of his intelligence! But yeah, that is exactly accurate. Not just that, he

Minaga continued to explain everything that had happened, Odonestra even engaging a bit in the conversation as she had been relayed what had happened from the United Tribes and even given a recording.

After she and Minaga left, Odonestra seemed a bit more positive and said she would have a meeting with the other True Royals to discuss things.

More time passed, and once more, the two gods decided to visit. Minaga was in a mixed mood this time around, and Odonestra looked a bit happier than usual.

So, he did another Challenge Dungeon, Minaga muttered. My Challenge Dungeon and, well, he did as expected, I guess. Man, I doubt anyone is going to beat his record in my dungeon in this era unless some other monstrous bastard appears. Or he has any kids who get even more annoying variants of his Bloodline no, I don't even want to think about it.

He shuddered a bit at the end, clearly not keen on the thought.

Also, your wait, what is that Sylphian Hawk even to you? I know she refers to Jake as her uncle, and since he is your Sire I guess half-sister, maybe? Maybe cousin? No idea. Anyway, it's not like she is much better, but at least she doesn't have a damn broken Bloodline and is a little disrupted still, Minaga continued talking, sounding a bit miffed.

Vesperia smiled, happy to hear that her Sire continued to do well. It was also fortunate that the Sylphian Hawk was doing well. She knew that the hawk called Sylphie was Jake's first creation using his unique abilities, and it was not at all surprising she also excelled. Based on what Vesperia had heard here and there, his second creation, Sandy, was also doing well as the Chosen of the Boundless Hydra.

Vesperia, I also had a meeting with the other True Royals, Odonestra said. And we agree that it would be beneficial for you and the Endless Empire to continue strengthening the bond with your Sire, so perhaps going to the new universe is a wise idea. We also have to factor in the fact that many special events and titles are available to those from the newly initiated universe, and it would truly be a waste for you not to also take part in these and reap the benefits.

She had done a complete one-eighty, making Vesperia look at her surprised as Minaga teleported over and leaned in.

Psst. I think they got a recording of when Jake beat Valdemar. I cant really blame them for getting a bit excited at that, the Unique Lifeform said.

Vesperia shook her head, not sure what to say. It wasnt as if the approval of her fellow True Royals was a requirement for her to go to the ninety-third universe, but their approval did take a weight off her shoulders.

Also when you go, would it be possible to bring along some items for us? Odonestra asked. We can discuss details at a later date, but we thought that-

Still smiling, Vesperia just nodded along, not at all surprised and having entirely expected this. While the chances were low, why wouldnt they give her Sire a bunch of eggs he could potentially end up turning into True Royals if he one day got the inspiration to play around with his special abilities?

Picking dungeons wasnt an easy endeavor. Especially as Jake didnt know which one to go with. He only had two dungeons to go and, quite frankly, way more time than he needed. Minagas Labyrinth had only taken a bit over a year despite Jake passing so many damn sections.

The primary reason for this was his speed simply being too high. Many of the earlier floors had far more time than Jake needed, and even when he had two weeks, he didnt even take more than a day. When he did begin to have a hard time, the amount of time he had to do the section was also lowered, as if Minaga just wanted him out of there. Which, in fairness, he probably did.

Now, with Minagas Labyrinth completed, Jake no longer had an easy option. He didnt know anything about the two other Challenge Dungeons, and while he had some guesses, it was ultimately still just guesswork. Yet, despite not knowing what he was walking into, Jake was confident in gaining a high evaluation and going for that overall +100% boost from all the Challenge Dungeons combined. Where did his confidence come from?

Well, primarily an overly inflated ego and pure arrogance.

Anyway, as Jake didnt know if he wanted to do the Endless Journey or the House of the Architect Challenge Dungeon, he decided to leave it up to chance. Standing back at the place where everyone

entered the Challenge Dungeons, Jake counted how many entered which dungeon for the next ten minutes flat and would go with the one most people picked.

And that's how Jake ended up going to the House of the Architect as his second-to-last Challenge Dungeon. As usual, he went up to the door and placed his hand on it before accepting the prompt and getting whisked away.

In the very next second, he opened his eyes again and found himself standing in the middle of a large area. His sphere instantly spread out, and Jake instinctively released a Pulse of Perception as the inside of the Challenge Dungeon was laid bare.

Jake found himself inside a massive building, currently in the central hall. The entire thing was built like an atrium, and looking up, Jake could see the ceiling several kilometers above. As he was still standing there looking, a system message popped up.

Nevermore Challenge Dungeon Entered!

You have entered the House of the Architect. A place for creators, inventors, researchers, artists, and all those who progress both their own Path and the Paths of others. It is somewhere you can let your creative spirit loose and design whatever your heart desires.

Your task is to create something that will impress the Architect. What you create is entirely up to you, and all materials required in your process and can be purchased using Merit Points. Merit Points can be earned by performing tasks within the House of the Architect or turning in creations you do not deem good enough to submit to the Architect herself.

Creations can include anything. Be they a crafted product, displaying an upgraded or newly created skill, a student you help improve, or even a simple book written with your thoughts. Anything can be submitted, and anything can be evaluated. As long as it is of your design. Should you find yourself doubting, simply ask one of the many attendants if your idea is acceptable.

Due to the nature of the House of the Architect, unique creations are evaluated incredibly highly. Submitting several Creations too similar to one another will result in a worse evaluation and leave the Architect unimpressed. Diversity is thus key if you wish to stand out and earn the highest overall evaluation possible. During this Challenge Dungeon, some items will be limited. **WARNING:** entire living

beings with Truesouls cannot be submitted as Creations. Other restrictions may also apply. Ask an attendant if you are unsure if your creations can be submitted.

Good luck, and may your Creations inspire awe.

Objective: Submit 10 Creations and submit them to the Architect for evaluation.

Current objective: Make a Creation and present it to the Architect.

Creation-submissions remaining: 10

Jake stared at the message for a while as a thought popped into his head.

I really bloody hope you can gain levels in this Challenge Dungeon

Chapter 805: Nevermore: House of the Architect

Jake closely read the system message regarding the Challenge Dungeon, and outside of the thought that he really hoped he could level up in there, he had a few more opinions. However, overall, it wasn't that bad.

Firstly, it was actually pretty straightforward, if still incredibly broad. Sure, there was some confusion about how exactly these evaluations would work, but compared to that horrible hellhole of confusion known as the Test of Character Challenge Dungeon, you had something truly unique in this one:

People you could actually ask about stuff. From the vibe Jake got, it was even possible these attendants would be helpful and not just be like Minaga, who commented on stuff happening while providing nothing of substance more often than not.

Anyway, even without Jake asking anyone, it was obvious you were meant to make stuff in this dungeon. He would have to ask about more details, but he got the gist of it.

In some ways, the Challenge Dungeon reminded him a bit of Minagas City Floor. There, one also had to do things to earn points, though here, you would use these Merit Points to buy stuff you needed in your creative endeavors.

Jake also knew that the system had limited his access to his inventory, but when he tried to open the spatial storage, he was fully able to. What's more, he would even take out things like his weapons and other tools, such as his cauldrons. However, when he tried to take out some of the stored ingredients, he found himself unable to do so.

Alright, so you have to buy the raw materials, Jake quickly understood. It was probably for the best, though. It was the same thought as Minagas City Floor again, where if rules were not in place, someone could just bring in expensive shit from the outside and breeze through.

However, like Minagas City Floor, Jake also instantly got worried about one thing.

EllHakan is going to get a free ride in this dungeon, Jake quickly concluded. Of course, he couldn't be entirely certain yet, as he had literally just arrived and was still unclear about many things, but he could totally see this being the case.

Not that Jake would let that bring him down. He was pretty skilled at creating stuff himself. Especially unique stuff, which the Architect valued higher than regular goods.

Concluding his initial thoughts, Jake turned his attention toward the actual building he found himself in. As mentioned before, it was a huge atrium-like construction with a sunroof far above. Hundreds of stories ascended upwards from the floor, with the middle of the hall filled with different exhibits. Glass boxes with odd items inside, entire skeletons of weird creatures, and even a few things straight out of some sci-fi could be found if one looked around. Floating up throughout the atrium were also several skeletons of flying creatures and even a spaceship-looking thing.

Through his sphere, he also saw how paintings hung on most walls, and looking to the side, he saw one of them depicting a landscape that seemed to be in constant flux. The painting itself warped with every second, going from filled with light to entirely dark in the very next moment. He also saw that the first to the seventh floor of the atrium was a large circular library that went the entire way around the round building.



Below him was a cellar that also seemed to extend downward for many kilometers. Down there, Jake wasn't quite sure what he saw. Several rooms were filled with what looked like prisoners of all kinds of races, cages with beasts, and even areas filled with water or elements that housed creatures or just plants and other odd baubles. Jake was a bit confused, considering that beings with True Souls could not be submitted as Creations, but it was entirely possible that not all these things were collectibles. It was also entirely possible some of them were for the creators to make use of when they worked on their Creations.

All in all, it looked like the home of some mad collector who just liked shiny, weird, and sometimes highly disturbing things. The building was also utterly massive, and that was without taking into account the fact that many of the rooms and floors were spatially expanded based on how things warped when Jake observed with his sphere.

When it came to other living beings who weren't trapped in cages, Jake saw quite a few mull around. However, they all stayed off to the sides, all wearing the same white robes with an insignia on the chest. It wasn't hard to figure out these were the attendants mentioned in the system message.

Jake decided that he would go ask one of the attendants first thing to clarify some things so as to not waste too much time which was also when he noticed something else about this Challenge Dungeon.

No time limit.

He didn't have any deadlines to submit anything. At least nothing of the sort was mentioned yet. Nevertheless, Jake saw no reason to dally as he walked toward one of the many attendants who stood off to the side of the atrium, currently working on polishing a statue depicting some kind of scaled beast.

Excuse me, Jake asked as he went over. Are you available right now?

Without really thinking about it, he treated the attendant as if they were the average store worker before the system.

The attendant, who was some kind of dragonkin, quickly turned toward him and smiled. Of course. What can I help you with, Creator?

I was wondering if you could answer some clarifying questions regarding this place. Mostly on how the Architect will evaluate my creations, Jake asked politely.

Most certainly, she nodded. What do you wish to know?

Jake decided to start with the first question on his mind. Am I able to submit items I created outside of here for evaluation? Say, if I had made some kind of weapon in the past I believe the Architect will find impressive?

Unfortunately, the Architect only cares about what is created within their house, the attendant said as she shook her head. As the Architect often says, what truly matters isn't only the final Creation but the method by which it was created. Every Creation is a journey that is documented by the building, and the creation process will also serve as part of the evaluation.

I see, Jake nodded. What if I make alterations to a current Creation and submit that? Would that be a possibility?

Yes, but only the alterations will be evaluated, not the full Creation, the attendant clarified. The Architect cares much for the journey, and having missed part of it will inevitably lead to a worsened evaluation, so unless the Creation and the alterations are truly impressive, getting a high evaluation will be difficult.

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That was a bit of a bummer if Jake had to be honest. He would have loved to show off Eternal Hunger and even Eternal Shadow of the Primal Hunter, as you could submit even skills as creations. Oh, and also Moment of the Primal Hunter but maybe that was too similar to Eternal Shadow, as they both had the Primal Hunter tag? Actually, he should ask about that.

When it is said that similar creations are penalized, what exactly does it mean? Jake questioned. Let's say I submit two bottles, where one is a mana potion, and the other is a poison that destroys mana. Will they be viewed as similar?

Uniqueness comes in two forms. One is the Creation itself, and the other is the method by which it was created. To truly achieve great diversity in Creations provided, there should be a difference in both of these aspects, but either will count and be looked favorably upon. In your example, both the poison and potion have many similarities in their crafting process, but the Creations themselves do vary somewhat. Overall, I believe the Architect would view there to be acceptable, if still a bit low, diversity between such two Creations. I also have to point out that the Architect appreciates improvements as part of the journey, so simply making Creations you are fully familiar with will not gain bonus points for improvement to your crafting process during the final evaluation, but do not let it push you too far away from making what you are comfortable with. The quality of the final Creation and the complexity and skill required for the crafting process is still imperative to the evaluation, the attendant gave a pretty in-depth answer. Way more so than Jake had expected.

Jake thought for a bit, and while making entirely new stuff he wasn't familiar with would give him some bonus points for improving, he ultimately decided it was best to at least stick with things he was familiar with for the most part. Deciding that now was a great time to become a super plant cultivator was definitely not the plan. But he still had some questions about the diversity part.

What about if I create a weapon using transmutation and a powerful poison? Both use alchemy, but different schools of alchemy? Jake tried to probe more.

I cannot comment on specific examples, but I would guess that transmutation and concocting poisons have more differences than concocting poisons and brewing potions. However, I cannot comment on a specific case without knowing all the details. Also, I would warn that the nature of what is transmuted shall matter much. If you transmute something crafted by others, their Records will also be part of the final Creation, worsening your evaluation. Of course, this can be made up for with a wonderfully executed transmutation, and considering a better-crafted product by another will lead to a better final Creation and a higher skill requirement to successfully transmute, you may still consider doing it.

Okay, that made sense, and once more, the answer was quite informative. It was definitely a breath of fresh air to have a Challenge Dungeon that didn't purposefully try to obscure information. Jake did have some more questions, but for now, he decided to ask just one.

Final question. Will I get to keep any Creations I make when I leave here again? Jake asked.

Sadly, that is not for me to answer. Only the Architect can decide such things, the attendant shook her head. But the intangible Creations can never be taken away from you. No skill can be taken, no enlightenment can be taken back, and no improvements gained will be lost.

He pretty much got a non-answer. Jake was already pretty damn sure the system would not outright take a skill from him, much less wipe his memory of the Challenge Dungeon and what he had achieved. That would make the entire place meaningless.

Now, if only he could also get experience in the Challenge Dungeon, he would be golden. He just had to figure out if he could so

Actually, final, final question. Can I get experience points here? Jake asked as he grabbed back the attention of the attendant, who was turning away to continue wiping down the already pristine statue.

You can most certainly gain experience, the attendant answered. Jake got the feeling she didnt really answer, though.

So I can level up?

You can level up your creative process and abilities as a creator for sure.

So... thats a no, Jake muttered to himself. Why in the living hell did these Challenge Dungeons not give any experience? He also hadnt gained a single level in Minagas Labyrinth, even if he did kill a few gatekeepers. Not that many, mind you, but it never said he got any experience when they died. Sure, that could have been because they were just summons bound to the barriers and that this one would give some, but alas, it wasnt gonna be that way.

Having gotten all the answers he needed for now, Jake decided to do something he rarely did as he sat down and began to formulate a plan for the Challenge Dungeon. He couldnt just rush through this and do everything purely based on his instincts this time around, but he had to actually use some brain power.

From what Jake had gathered, three things were important when it came to Jakes Creations. The first of which was naturally the requirement for there to be diversity. The second one was the complexity and difficulty of the crafting process. Finally was the quality likely expressed through rarity of the final Creation.

Thinking about it, 10 Creations was kind of a lot, especially if you shouldn't submit similar things. Unsure exactly what he planned to do, Jake sat down and decided to write out a list of ten things he could make. However, he quickly ran into some problems as he tried to keep things relatively diverse, ending up with a list that, while it was useful, couldn't exactly be called a plan of action.

Looking down at the paper, he sighed as he read over the options he had impromptu come up with.

1. A poison, using either hemotoxins, neurotoxins, or necrotic poison, mixed with soul-based poison and plenty of Blood of the Malefic Viper. Potentially try a mix of all the different toxins for maximum effect.

2. Something transmutation-based.

3. Maybe elixir?

4. Grimoire

5. Use Teachings of the Heretic-Chosen for something?

6. Skill-related thing. Based on magic and mana.

7. Skill-related thing. Based on archery or melee combat and stamina.

8. Origin-related Creation. This may be done during one of the prior Creations.

9. Something weird Bloodline-related?

10. Ritual stuff.

So yeah, things could be a bit more concrete, and Jake was sure he had missed something obvious. Jake wouldn't call himself super creative, as most of the unique Creations he made were something he kind of

stumbled into. He hoped that could happen again inside this Challenge Dungeon, but if not, he would just have to make do with what he was confident in already making.

One very notable option Jake had put on there was the Grimoire one. When Jake had evolved to C-grade, he had also gained the ability to create Grimoires related to his path as a Heretic-Chosen Alchemist, and quite frankly, Jake had no idea what to use that skill for. At least not before now.

A damn Grimoire granting a profession or class related to a Path that the system called unique quite a few times had to give a lot of bonus points for diversity and uniqueness both, right? Jake had also never made one before, so he would get bonus points for learning something new. Finally, Jake also believed the final product would be of high quality, making the Grimoire one of his trump cards for this dungeon. He also considered if maybe he should use a bit of Jake Juice to spice it up but ultimately decided to put that plan on hold.

First of all, he was pretty much still out after his fight with Valdemar. He could feel a bit of it had recovered, but a few years just wasn't enough for him to get much back. Even if Jake had felt that after his visit to the divine streaming party, he had gained quite a bit from the level-ups, he was still pretty darn low.

Secondly, Jake believed he could make a pretty good Grimoire without using any of his unique energy. It also wasn't even certain it would improve the Grimoire much in the first place. If his Origin Energy made something return to Origin, what effect would it have on something where Jake was already the Origin? That was an answer Jake didn't feel like wasting his limited energy on finding out.

Jake would still use his Origin Energy, mind you. Just somewhere else or maybe through some wholly unique creations. Who knows, maybe just a bit of the energy itself could be submitted as a Creation?

However, before he began to do any of that, one thing still bothered him. The attendant had not said Jake would necessarily get back all his Creations and be allowed to leave with them, which begged the question: where would they go?

Who would see them?

Because Jake wasn't sure if it was a good idea to hand over or even show things that included many of his deep-rooted secrets to the Wyrmgod. Especially not ones related to being a Heretic and whatnot.

So that was definitely something he had to ask this Architect about though, of course, that was also another question in of itself.

Who exactly was this Architect?

## Chapter 806: Nevermore: Nevermore

Throughout Nevermore, Jake had encountered quite a few gods. He had been recorded both visually and in far other ways by the dungeon and system as he made his way through the floors and Challenge Dungeons. However, despite this, he still felt like much about him still wasn't shared. As if the system put up certain barriers of information not even the Wyrmgod could see.

Others had suspicions and theories, but they didn't know. Minag's lack of fully knowing how Jake overcame his labyrinth was prime proof of this. The Wyrmgod asking Jake about Bloodline-related stuff when he was summoned to the streaming room also served as further proof that while Jake was analyzed from head to toe, some things weren't revealed.

But what if Jake handed a sample filled with his Records? Especially if he made an item related to his Origin energy or his Path as a Heretic-Chosen? Surely, that could cause some problems, right? Even if the system had some rules within Nevermore, they could just take these items or samples outside and figure Jake out there.

Also, on a side note, Jake didn't understand how no one had called him out for being a Heretic yet. Jake had done all his usual Heretic stuff while in front of other gods and the Viper, but everyone just seemed fine and chill with it. Alright, sure, he could get no one calling him out publicly with his Patron right there, but they at least had to be thinking in their minds Jake was a damn Heretic, right?

Probably. Or maybe they thought Jake was just putting on an act or following the will of the Viper. In either case, confirming to them he was indeed a Heretic, even if he was also a Chosen, seemed like a stupid idea.

This begged the question of whether Jake had to hold back in his Challenge Dungeon out of fear that he would reveal something he really shouldn't. Of course, he would only need to do that if the items and information scanned during the crafting process were given to the Wyrmgod or others.

Right now, Jake felt the usual observation of the Wyrmgod, who was likely streaming all Jake was doing to the other gods present. With this, it could be confirmed that everything happening in this dungeon wasn't confidential.

Alas, Jake could not make a decision before he knew for sure what would happen with the items or the information he handed in for evaluation. So he did the only thing that made sense and went straight to the owner of the house to ask about just that.

At the very top of the atrium, on the highest floor, was a section Jake could not see at all due to it being cut off by spatial distortion. His guts told him that was where the Architect resided, and after confirming with an attendant, Jake flew straight up.

Up there, the entire pathway was empty. There weren't any attendants anywhere, and even the walls were bare of decor. The only thing was a single wooden door that Jake couldn't at all tell what was behind. However, the nametag saying Architect was a subtle clue as to what may be behind it.

Flying over, he landed in front of it, and as he did, something odd happened. The door began to open by itself, and right as it did, the gaze of the Wyrmgod he felt on him disappeared, having seemingly been cut off. Jake was surprised as he looked through the newly opened door and saw a smallish hall where the only thing of note was someone sitting in the center.

Jake observed what looked vaguely like a human woman but clearly wasn't, staring right back at him. Her skin was an odd ashen gray, making her eyes stand out even more. One was golden like the sun, while the other remained black as the void itself. Her head was entirely bald, her bare head covered with an elaborate tattoo of some kind. She wore a tight-fitting suit, and in all honesty, Jake wouldn't have been able to pin her as a woman if not for the system message and attendants mentioning she was one due to her androgynous looks. In some ways, her looks reminded Jake a bit about the system entity he had seen, but that was probably because of what he felt from her gaze.

It put him on edge. He felt like she saw everything. Far more than she should be able to. Villy had the same look at times, but this woman her gaze was something else. Like he could not keep a single secret in front of her.

Welcome, Jake Thayne, she greeted him with a small bow of her head. You have caused quite the stir, and seeing you now, I am beginning to understand why.



Thank you for having me, Jake said while bowing slightly and walking into the room properly as the womans eyes continued to pierce straight through him. Are are you the Architect?

That is the role I am playing right now, yes, she nodded. A temporary title, if you will. Now, come, you are here to ask me questions, are you not?

Jake slowly nodded as he tried really hard to get a read on the entity in front of him. Tried and failed. She felt wrong to his senses, and no matter how much he tried, he couldnt truly detect how strong she was. Whats more his Sphere of Perception didnt pick her up properly, and that had only happened with one other thing before, although it was to a lesser degree with this woman. Figuring out the Architect wasnt why he was there, though.

I was wondering what happens to the Creations I submit? Who will see the full analysis related to them? Jake asked.

Only I will. But, that is not truly what you want to ask, now is it? You are worried that secrets you wish to keep hidden will be revealed, the Architect said with a reassuring smile. There is no need for such worry. Not even the Wyrmgod will truly be able to know or see what happens here. I have enhanced his limitations beyond the usual for this Challenge Dungeon precisely due to your concerns.

You enhanced them? Jake asked as he suddenly had a realization. Wait are you

The Architect just smiled as she stood. Usually, a conversation like this would never take place, but you are already a being who has had many secrets divulged to you. Minaga and the Wyrmgod have both been generous with what they divulged and keeping secrets from the Malefic Viper has never been an easy task. Seeing as you are his Chosen and one he gladly shares things with that mortals shouldnt know, why cant I be the same?

Youre a Bound God, Jake said with certainty.

Bound Gods. Unnatural gods who appeared and were linked to something, the most known example being Bound Gods bound to World Wonders. However, Jake didnt think Nevermore had one with the Wyrmgod being around. For this place to have a Bound God, too

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Insightful observation, she said, looking at him. A correct one, too. Allow me to properly introduce myself: I am Nevermore, though I reckon you already knew that. I also hope that answers many of your questions when it comes to my capabilities.

Jake slowly nodded once more, having most of his doubts dispelled regarding that. Bound Gods had their power directly linked to whatever they were bound to, so it wasn't even necessary to speculate how powerful Nevermore was. As a living dungeon, she was also linked directly to the system itself, which explained why Jake's Sphere of Perception and senses acted a bit off around her. Being a Bound God indeed explained all that, but Jake still had some questions.

I am a bit confused I thought the Wyrmgod made Nevermore you actually, can I just call you the Architect? Jake asked. How exactly does that make sense with there also being a Bound God tied to this place?

Curious to a fault, Nevermore shook her head. Also, yes, feel free to refer to me as my current role. As for the answer to your question well, things are complicated, and there are many things I will not share. All I will say is that my original form was that of a dungeon core and that without me, Nevermore wouldn't be able to exist as it does.

So the Wyrmgod somehow obtained you in dungeon core form, made Nevermore, which makes him the dungeon master, while you are the dungeon itself Jake muttered as his eyes opened wide and pointed at her. You're the living personification of dungeon-fuckery!

The Architect just stared at him for a few moments before she laughed. What a crude term. Yet, I cannot entirely argue its inaccuracy. I also believe that realization should answer any questions you have regarding confidentiality?

For the most part, Jake said, a little embarrassed at his outburst. My only real question left is if I can keep the things I make? Also, I reckoned I may as well ask this, but do I get experience in this Challenge Dungeon? And if not, why don't I? Not just in regards to this Challenge Dungeon, but all of them.

If you keep what you created or not is a question I shall refrain from answering, the Architect said. And you do not earn any experience in here, no. What you earn instead is plenty of Records to facilitate your

later progress through C-grade. It is a way to build up your Records and exit each dungeon effectively with more potential than when you entered. To most, not getting experience here is purely positive, as getting levels isn't the hard part; it's raising their maximum potential and overcoming barriers. I do understand that for your situation, where Records are not a challenge, at least not yet, it is a negative. However, I guess that is just one of the drawbacks of being in an extraordinary position.

I see, Jake muttered, understanding the logic even if he didn't like it. Ah, speaking of Records, is there some cool meta-achievement for doing well in all five Challenge Dungeons?

I recall you saying those questions before were the last? the Architect said, clearly not wanting to answer. Not that she had to, as Jake smiled, her silence and his guts giving him the answer.

There is a good chance there is one, got it. Oh well, now I have to perform great, or I will feel like I missed out, Jake thought as he prepared to excuse himself.

I believe you got your answer, didn't you? the Architect said, shaking her head. Alas, it was probably a scenario I should have expected. The intuition and senses you possess are outside of anything Nevermore has experienced before. I fear this will have to be our only meeting outside of formal evaluations, as even with my link to the system, I am not considered outside of the scope of the Primal Hunters instincts.

Jake's smile faded at her final sentence as he furrowed his brows and looked at her closely.

Didn't I already tell you? Your secrets lay bare before me, she said with her usual smile.

Frowning, Jake spoke calmly. Some of them, at least. I get the feeling you can see my status and have some read on my abilities, but you are still limited, aren't you?

What makes you think that? The system is omniscient, and as its representative and a World Wonder, is it that surprising I may be too?

You feel different from the system itself, Jake said, shrugging as he remembered that faceless being he had seen during the integration as well as the auction event. You're somewhere in between.

Words spoken with confidence that can only come from genuine belief in your words, she said, sighing. I am beginning to understand why Minaga finds you intriguing, yet frustrating, to deal with. You see and know things that are not there yet are nevertheless true. Truly perplexing.

I like to be perplexing, Jake shrugged. Keeps my enemies on their toes.

And your allies in a perpetual state of confusion.

I am doing my best indeed; thank you for noticing, Jake grinned, joking around with the half-system World Wonder entity known as Nevermore. Yes, he was fully aware of the absurdity of this situation but also its uniqueness.

Truly a peculiar person, the Architect said. I have had countless mortals through here. Endless questions and inquiries, but your genuine casualness is a first. Many try to be casual, hiding their true thoughts and merely putting on a faade, but you truly are merely a human who lives according to his own instincts. The data and the Records your very existence provides, not to mention your journey through Nevermore, will prove incredibly valuable.

Glad to be of assistance, I guess, Jake said politely, not sure how to feel about helping out Big Data over here.

Sadly, I will have to cut our meeting here before it goes too long and you begin to prematurely uncover forbidden secrets of the multiverse, the Architect joked a bit back.

All good things must come to an end, Jake nodded as he smiled. Pleasure meeting you, and Ill look forward to exploring all your house has to offer.

And I shall look forward to seeing all you create and submit to me, she said, finishing the conversation off as Jake walked toward the door. After a few steps, Jake stopped right before he exited.

Ah, one last thing, Jake said as he stood at the door and turned to look at her. Id like to make my first submission for evaluation.

Oh? the Architect said with what seemed like genuine surprise. I do not believe you have created anything, though?

I did make something, and I just gave it to you. Unknowingly, you have just experienced my first submission. You and the system recorded it, true, but I was the primary creator, Jake said with a grin. I would officially like to submit our entire encounter as my first Creation.

The Architect looked at him perplexed for a while as Jake looked straight back at her, holding her gaze.

What? Didn't the rules say anything can be a Creation?

You're correct; there is nothing making it unsuitable, and part of the evaluation is already what the system gathers. It's just that this is genuinely a first, the Architect answered.

So it's extra-unique? Wait, can something even be extra-unique? Unique already means something is actually, never mind, the point is, yes, I am sure of my first submission. Why, do you think it's a bad idea? Pretty sure I can't take it back, Jake said, rambling a bit and semi-questioning if his spontaneous decision had been a really dumb one.

It certainly is unique, the Architect said as her golden eye began glowing brighter than before. Very well, your first submission has been accepted and evaluated.

So, how do you rate my first Creation? Jake asked curiously. Do I get any immediate feedback?

No, you get an overall evaluation at the very end, she shook her head. And I cannot give you any answers regarding how well something is evaluated.

I got a feeling I wasn't being entirely moronic, though, Jake muttered, going with his gut as usual.

And perhaps that is the only answer you need, she said with a smile. Now, you do need to do one final thing: name your Creation. What do you wish to call your first Creation? Be aware even the name will be considered entirely confidential.

Jake considered only for a moment before he shrugged.

Lets just call it the Primal Hunter Experience.

With those words, he left the office as the door shut behind him, Jake getting the rightful feeling that he couldn't simply enter it again before he had another Creation to officially submit. As he exited, he also briefly saw that his system menu had updated, his first submission, even if it had been a weird one, indeed having gone through.

Current objective: Make a second Creation and present it to the Architect.

Creation-submissions remaining: 9

Chapter 807: Nevermore: Merit Points

Jake felt pretty good about having one submission down, with only nine more to go. His written plans were already entirely off just from him deciding to submit a damn conversation as a Creation, but Jake didn't regret it at all. In fact, he believed it was a great move.

He wasn't blind to his own uniqueness, and he got the feeling being unique counted even more than the attendant let on, but this wasn't the only reason he submitted the encounter. While Jake had gone over the things that mattered for Creations, it could all be boiled down to one thing: Records.

The Records infused into an object were the only true determiner. More quality Records would mean higher quality and rarity, with the Architect giving an even higher evaluation if it was solely your Records. However, the final product its overall Records still mattered. And where could Jake get more Records than from a Bound God with power that surpassed even Primordials? From a being that was the living personification of the most known World Wonder in the entire multiverse? Not that his own Records were anything to look down on either.

So, yeah. Jake was wholly satisfied with his first submission. Also, it was entirely different from anything else Jake could possibly submit, meaning that even if it ended up being a bit of a dud, it wouldn't drag down the overall evaluation much compared to if Jake had just submitted another kind of poison or some inferior product.

Having exited the room with the Architect, Jake also felt that the livestream was back on. He briefly looked up and waved as he went to check out some of the other interesting places in the House of the Architect. Being on the top floor, he decided to just go down and check what was on every floor. Or, at the very least, check what the signs there said.

Flying down one floor, Jake saw only a single door once more. Curious, Jake went close as he entered it, and the moment he did, he felt the livestream getting cut off again. Frowning, Jake felt space around him expand as he found himself standing in a nearly entirely white room with a single attendant right by the door and a number of portals floating all around him. In total, he counted nine portals.

Welcome to the portal room, Creator. Is there anything I can help you with? the male attendant, who looked like a butler with his slightly altered uniform, asked.

Could you tell me a bit about this room?

Most certainly. The portal room allows you to travel to several worlds to acquire certain types of materials you may require. This includes people you may need for your creative processes or certain limited ingredients for your more regular crafts. Do be aware that these worlds are uniquely created by the Architect herself and will not have many of the usual ingredients you may experience from a natural world. Instead, they will only serve as catalysts or objectives for certain merit missions, the attendant politely explained.

When you say people, do you also mean people to potentially teach if I want to submit an improved student as a Creation? Jake asked, also biting onto the last part about merit missions but putting off that topic for now. He would go visit the merit place later to figure out how all of that worked.

Most certainly, the attendant answered with a smile. Do you want me to explain the properties of each world?

Jake didn't hesitate as he agreed, allowing the attendant to do his thing. It wasn't a waste of time either. Jake learned that each world was widely different, with varying properties, cultures, and whatnot. One of the worlds he instantly wrote off as it was an entirely underwater world, making Jake question if the Architect knew how to design dungeons properly. It was a bit embarrassing, really, considering she literally was a dungeon. Then again, it wasn't like he had to go there, so maybe he could consider it barely forgivable to have an optional water level.

As for the other eight worlds, Jake quickly narrowed it down to three he definitely had to visit. One was a vast planet that was pure wilderness, the other was a highly established metropolis, while the third was your regular medieval setting with different factions and whatnot. His plan for these worlds was to primarily look for people he could potentially teach.

Jake had never seen himself as much of a teacher, but considering the nature of this Challenge Dungeon and that he had not just a legendary teaching skill but was a human with his teaching-related race skills, Jake decided he should at least give it a shot. If not, he would learn not to waste time doing something like that later in his life.

Leaving the portal room, Jake checked out more floors and quickly got an understanding of the place. All the different floors had varying crafting rooms and themes. Entire floors were dedicated to alchemy, others to smithing, tailoring, engineering, and woodworking the number of rooms was almost endless. Plus, Jake had a strong feeling that should someone with a really unique profession come along, the Architect would accommodate them and make a suitable room.

He also learned that whenever Jake entered one of these many rooms, the livestream would be cut off. Jake reckoned this was to stop even the Wyrmgod from gathering too much information, or maybe it was just the Architect being petty and wanting to show off that this was her Challenge Dungeon and for others to stop snooping. In either case, Jake liked knowing he could do whatever he wanted without worrying. He wasn't afraid of the Architect leaking anything, as she already knew far more than she should and hadn't shared it yet.

After checking out all the rooms, he went to the final thing he wanted to check out: the Merit Points Exchange. It was on the ground floor and prominently displayed. The exchange itself was a huge building, and walking inside, Jake saw hundreds of attendants who all looked busy at work. Jake felt pretty weird about it, considering he was the only one who would ever visit the place, and most of the work they did just seemed like they were trying to look busy.

Trying to ignore it, Jake went to the main counter within the exchange to talk to one of five attendants who manned the counter again, why the hell were there five when this was a damn Challenge Dungeon only one person could enter at a time?

Welcome to the Merit Points Exchange; how may I help you? the attendant asked, mirroring the speech pattern of the one in the portal room.

Could you give me some general information on



To skip over all the boring parts, the Merit Points Exchange was exactly as Jake predicted. You could get missions or turn in stuff to get Merit Points and then spend these Merit Points on ingredients for crafting. Jake also quickly realized the easiest way to game the exchange, though he was pretty damn sure his genius plan was just the way it was supposed to be used.

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If Jake bought, lets say, materials for ten concoctions, he would be able to sell back the products from these ten concoctions for more than he used the materials on. A lot more. In fact, they would even buy back failed products, which could lead to quite a nice feedback loop.

Jake could experiment and try to make a Creation using materials from the exchange, and then he could sell back his failed products for more Merit Points to purchase even more materials. So, while it seemed like Jake had to grind out Merit Points to be able to craft anything, it wasnt that bad.

Alas, he still has to get that initial batch of Merit Points to get the entire loop started. Looking through the different missions, he quickly found a few he could do within some of the portal rooms. Though they did all look very boring.

Merit Point Mission: Collect 500 Remonotous Fruits

Current Progress: Remonotous Fruits collected (0/500)

Reward: 750 Merit Points

This first one was just to go collect a bunch of fruits in that jungle world he had seen before in the portal room. The second mission he also prepared to pick up was one that took place in the medieval world, where he had to deliver a bunch of letters, with the third one in the metropolis perhaps the most uninspired of them all.

Merit Point Mission: Deliver 12 letters to their destination.

Current Progress: Letters delivered (0/12)

Reward: 500 Merit Points

And the third one where he had to quite literally return lost pets. But at least this one rewarded more than the others.

Merit Point Mission: Return 5 lost pets to their respective owners.

Current Progress: Pets returned (0/5)

Reward: 1000 Merit Points

While they didnt give a lot of points, Jake wanted them to check out these two worlds anyway. He also ultimately needed some Merit Points. Also, on a side note, one could only select one mission for each world at a time, so that did suck a bit. Jake always liked it in games when he could pick up several quests in the same area and do them all at once. Made him feel like he was being clever and more efficient than the game expected, despite knowing deep down the developers designed it to be done that way.

I want these three for now, Jake said to the attendant and handed him the three papers. Because, yes, despite there being a system menu, they also used paper.

Very well, the attendant said with his perfect customer service smile. Are there any other missions you would like to accept, or would you like to spend your Merit Points?

Maybe I would if I had any, Jake joked back, the friendly yet deadpan of the attendant not changing.

The Creator currently possesses 5000 Merit Points, the attendant just said instead, Jake needing a second to double-take he had heard right.

Oh damn, Jake said. So you start with 5000 or something?

Each submission rewards Merit Points to allow the Creator to keep up their creative endeavors, the attendant explained.

Well, wouldn't you know Jake smiled to himself, feeling like he had gamed the system even more than he first thought with that first submission.

I would know indeed, the attendant answered his rhetorical question, making Jake quickly decide to get away from the creepy, perfect-acting attendants. Despite not necessarily having to do the missions as he did have some points, Jake still decided to give them a go, as he wanted to explore those three worlds no matter what, and doing the missions anyway while in there just seemed like the efficient thing to do.

Starting with the jungle world, Jake went straight to the portal room and into this world. The moment he stepped through, he appeared standing atop a large cliff, staring down as an endless jungle appeared before him.

A system prompt popped up in front of him a second or so later, displaying his current mission for the world, which included a picture of the fruit he had to go collect a whole bunch of. Playing a bit with the system, Jake was surprised to see he had no way to bring up how many Merit Points he currently had, so that was a bit weird and annoying.

Jake also considered for a moment if these Merit Points would be transferred to Nevermore Points in the same way the Colosseum Points had. Yeah, that was definitely a question to ask one of those attendants once he got back, assuming they would even give him an answer.

Focusing on the world in front of him, Jake summoned his wings. Stretching them a bit, it felt good to fully spread them out and be able to do some long-distance flying. Jumping off the cliff, Jake took flight as he soared over the tall trees while observing the life beneath them.

He saw many different sorts of beasts everywhere, with plenty of plant lifeforms also sitting here and there. Looking at one of the many beasts, Jake identified it.

[Crystalheart Lynx lvl 200]

It was barely C-grade, and as Jake Identified a few more, he realized all of them were level 200 with not a single exception. It was definitely like this by design, making the danger level practically non-existent. Jake had no plans on hunting these beasts down, as he simply had no reason to.

As he continued to scan the world around him, he noticed one thing that was very off. Sense of the Malefic Viper usually picked up a lot of things when Jake traveled in wilderness areas, but here it stayed entirely silent. This indicated there were no alchemical ingredients anywhere within his detection range, and as a Perception enthusiast, Jake had quite a high detection range.

Alright, so the attendant was right. No materials to collect here, Jake thought. Flying down, Jake landed on the ground so his boots could touch the undergrowth. Their passive ability to detect natural treasures activated as always but remained just as quiet as his Sense.

It was a bit of a bummer, as Jake had hoped there were some secret hidden items or something the attendant had purposefully not talked about. Alas, this did not appear to be the case.

Continuing to fly around, Jake soon picked up a familiar fruit with a Pulse of Perception. Once he got over there, Jake saw several familiar trees that all had these fruits growing on them. Monkey-like monsters guarded the fruits, and when Jake Identified them, he was a bit surprised.

[Fruit-gulping Primate lvl 242]

Level 242 was quite a bit higher than the usual level 200s wandering around. Not that it was any problem for Jake. Not wanting to bother with them, he flew down to collect the fruits. He flew straight up to one to pull it off its stem, but right as he did, the entire fruit exploded, covering him in juices.

Fucking hell, Jake cursed to himself as he saw through his sphere a monkey on the other of the tree successfully took a fruit off a tree, pissing Jake off even more.

Gritting his teeth, Jake got close to another fruit as a monkey not sitting far away spotted him and jumped to a branch nearby as it screeched at him.

Jake turned his head and looked it in the eye. You sure you wanna do this?

The monkey looked at him for a second before taking a step back as Jake stopped it. Oh no, you started this.

Seemingly realizing it was in trouble, the monkey began hollering loudly, and within a dozen seconds, Jake found himself surrounded by nearly a hundred angry-looking monkeys. Yet none of them ever got within ten meters. Honestly, it was a pretty good situation for Jake.

Five hundred fruits, Jake said. Give me five hundred, and I leave.

Uh? Uh uh! the largest monkey said. Jake instantly got the gist of what it wanted to communicate. He also quickly confirmed this was the leader, making things a lot easier.

[Fruit-gulping Primate Alpha lvl 250]

This is not a negotiation, Jake said as he looked at the monkey, faintly activating Gaze and Pride. This is a business proposal where you have no leverage whatsoever.

Uh! the monkey leader yelled loudly, and just as Jake thought it was about to attack, it reached over to a fruit next to it and plucked it off the tree in a weird fashion that made it not explode before holding it out in front of it toward Jake. Uh?

Jake summoned a string of mana to quickly snatch the fruit before putting it in his spatial storage as the quest progressed. See? Isn't this easier?

The big monkey yelled, and about five minutes later, Jake flew off again, having done some great business. He had received five hundred fruits, and the monkeys had avoided dying premature deaths while receiving a free bonus of generational trauma toward winged humans.

## Chapter 808: Nevermore: How To Not Find a Pet

Jake had been to enough medieval worlds already, so he found the second mission quite boring. The letter delivery did allow him to explore quite a few places, but nothing really caught his eye. Level-wise, there was a good spread, ranging all the way from F-grade to around level 240 in C-grade.

Race-wise, the diversity was even better, as Jake saw pretty much everything one could imagine. All the way from goblins to high elves lived in the medieval world, with many races having their own small kingdoms. Oh, and when Jake meant small, he meant small. Each kingdom was a highly condensed area, with the open area between each only like a hundred meters, meaning Jake could easily jump from one village to another if he wanted to. All this, despite the lore of the world dictating they were actually in conflict.

His primary objective for being there was to try and find someone he thought it could be interesting to teach, but he ended up leaving disappointed. While it was true Jake genuinely had no idea what he was looking for when looking for a potential student, he still felt like he would know it when he saw someone.

After getting done delivering all the letters and leaving the world, he went to the final world he wanted to explore. This one truly was the most unique of them all, as it was a kind of world he had never experienced before. Going through the portal, Jake found himself standing on a terrace of sorts, overlooking a vast megacity.

Skyscrapers of metal, glass, and what looked like some kind of ceramic material towered into the sky, many of them several kilometers tall. Lights were everywhere, from billboards and whatnot, as flying vehicles traveled between these many large skyscrapers, all of them having docks for these ships to land in.

On other lanes, Jake saw people flying inside tunnels of light formed to dictate traffic. Closing his eyes for a moment, Jake sent out a Pulse of Perception and nearly felt overwhelmed by the result. For hundreds of kilometers in all directions, the city continued endlessly, with the number of living beings in the billions just within the area he could see. If this was an entire planet filled with such population density trillions, no, tens of trillions, could be living there.

As he stood there and looked around, he thought it all looked impressive as hell, but after a closer inspection, he finally saw it.

Ah, there are the dystopian elements one would expect of a futuristic megacity, he thought as he saw the ground deep below all the massive skyscrapers. It was naturally the slums, a place for all the undesirables and poor people to be allocated. Down there, he also saw many factory-like constructions and deep holes in the ground that led into vast underground mines or other production-related facilities.

Looking upwards, he also saw what flew above even the skyscrapers. Large discs floated up there, some of which had only single massive mansions on them. These mansions made any personal residents Earth ever had look like a joke, as these compounds easily had buildings more than a kilometer wide, with so much luxury it had long surpassed the level of being moronic.

This entire world was truly unlike anything Jake had ever seen before, and while he was curious about the place, he also got some very bad vibes. Alas, he was there to do a mission. He had to find five lost pets and return them, which shouldnt take that long. The mission window even told him where he could find the first pet owner to talk to, which was naturally inside one of the big mansions floating above.

Flying up there, he wondered why this mission gave the most Merit Points out of all of them. It had to have something to do with the difficulty, right? Maybe the pets were actually semi-powerful C-grades or something. That, or creatures who were really good at hiding. Either way, he would find out soon. Jake was quite good at finding stuff, after all.

Getting close to the first floating island, a magic barrier sprung up around it right as Jake approached. It was a pretty weak one, but Jake still stopped as he saw a figure flying up toward him. Based on a cursory scan, this was the strongest person in the mansion not that it was saying much.

[Mansion Security Captain lvl 212]

Halt! What is the purpose of your unannounced visit? If you do not have any valid reason for-

Something about missing pets, Jake cut off the captain.

Ah, youre here for that, the guard said, sounding a bit relieved. Let me bring you to the lady of the house.

Being a really shitty security guard, the guy just believed Jake right off the bat and took out a token. Activating it, the guard made a hole in the barrier and invited Jake inside. Following the guard, Jake quickly made his way to the main building, where he saw hundreds of servants milling about doing stuff. They all bowed when they saw the security captain but mostly ignored Jake as if he didnt exist, while those who did look his way did so with disgust in their eyes. Jake quickly had a guess as to why.

They all wore pristine clothes, while Jake walked in wearing his usual armor, a mask, and his good old boots. In their eyes, he probably looked poor, and based on how damn materialistic everyone seemed around here, Jake wasn't surprised. He did kind of want to point out how Eternal Hunger was probably worth more than the entire world they were living in, but he restrained himself with the hope of just getting things over with.

Walking up the way-too-long staircase, Jake entered a large living room where a single woman was lounging on a couch as she watched a large screen that was playing some soap opera or something based on how damn dramatic it was.

The woman was a human, similar to most of the beings on this planet. Jake had also seen other enlightened races, but most were humans, especially those of the richer echelon. She was level 201 and looked to be in her early forties, which indicated she had evolved very late in life or was at the later stages of her natural lifespan.

I heard you're the one who will bring me back my dearest, the woman said as she saw Jake and quickly sat up.

That's me, Jake said, rather deadpan, wondering what he had to retrieve. If he had to guess, it was probably gonna be some large fat cat named Mr. Snuggles or something else dumb and stereotypical like that.

Good! Good! I have been waiting anxiously, and these useless security guards haven't been any help! He's been gone for nearly a week now, and I am simply beside myself with worry, she said in an overly dramatic voice. I have barely been able to rest at night when he isn't there. I fear he may have fallen into the slums or something! Imagine what they might be doing to him down there, those savages.

Jake thought she was a bit over the top, and he sure as hell didn't like her, but he just sighed and wanted to get this over with so he could get his Merit Points. Just give me a description of your pet.

Oh, of course! she said with a smile as she took out what looked a lot like the type of tablets Arnold used. Though her was definitely much worse.

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Here is a picture, she said, having the security captain take the tablet from her and give it to Jake. Jake took it and looked at the picture on the tablet as his facial expression changed dramatically.

What the fuck?

Running down the narrow alleyway, the young man kept looking behind him as he knew he was being chased. He looked baffled as to how he had gotten found that fast but refused to give up. Continuing to run a bit longer, he soon found himself cornered, and the moment he turned around, he saw the masked figure already standing there.

I know who you are and why youre here, and Im not going back! the young man yelled as he backed up against the wall but still raised his gaze and met Jakes eyes in defiance. I would rather die than go back to that that

Bitch? Horrible piece of shit? Waste of human life? Jake came with helpful suggestions as he observed the young man. Come on, I am sure we can make up more.

Jake looked at the young man, whose expression quickly changed from defiant to confused at what Jake was saying. At the same time, Jake also inspected the young man or should he say the lost pet.

[Half-Elf lvl 188]

What what are you trying to do!? the half-elf questioned, as Jake saw he had taken out a hidden dagger behind his back. I already told you I know who you are, and-

I know one of the servants sent down a message, Jake interrupted as he began to walk closer. Not the most subtle form of communication. Pretty sure nobody else could pick up on it, but you really need some better magical encryption if you wanna communicate long-distance like that.

The young man made a decisive choice when Jake got within only a single step. He lowered his head as if he was giving up, only to quickly stab forward with the knife. An odd yet recognizable black energy revolved around the dagger as Jake caught the blade directly, the young mans eyes opening wide.

You really do despise her, huh? Jake said with a smile as he looked at the dagger and felt its energies try to invade his body. No you despise not just her but the entire system that allows someone like her to exist.

The energy Jake recognized from the dagger was one he had also used quite a bit himself. It was pure and dense curse energy, born from within the young man himself. Only a high level of natural talent in curse energy and a deep-seated negative emotion could give rise to something like that, not much differently from how Casper had originally realized he could also wield the power of curses.

In this half-elf's case, Jake felt the pure hatred within the curse energy being the source of his power.

You you the young man stammered. Why would someone like you serve that disgusting molefucker.

Disgusting molefucker? Never heard that one before, Jake muttered. As for your question? I am not serving her. No, I believe I am about to do just the opposite.

The young man was thoroughly confused by now, as Jake had already made his decision. Say, kid, you ever heard of alchemy?

Ye yes? he stammered out as his eyes darted to the knife Jake was still holding by the blade in his hand.

Ever done any?

No

Well, better late than ever, Jake grinned as he leaned forward. You want revenge, right? On her and this world?

Seemingly having had some time to steel himself and gather his thoughts, the young man didn't hesitate. Of course!

Great! Jake said as he tossed the dagger back to the half-elf. Revenge is a great motivator, and I believe I can help you get it.

To try to sound more convincing, Jake let his aura leak as he mixed in Pride of the Malefic Viper and a bit of his Bloodline to really seal the deal. He looked down at the young man as he grinned beneath his mask. So, what do you say?

It took the half-elf a moment before he clenched his fists. Dark smoke began to be emitted as his nails dug into his flesh, and he gritted his teeth. If I can get revenge, Ill do anything you can do anything to me, even if you-

Wow, wow, wow, calm your horses, Jake stopped him. Im talking about teaching you alchemy and controlling that special energy of yours.

The poor guy looked confused again as Jake just sighed. So, want to make me your teacher? Ill help you get stronger and have your revenge, and in return, youll help me. How exactly this will help me you dont need to know, but just think about it as me investing in you for future personal gain, yeah? Honestly, its a win-win situation. For anyone that isnt your target of revenge, that is.

Slowly, the young man nodded, and just like that, Jake had gotten his very first student.

Now, to backtrack a bit, Jake had been very close to just blowing up that entire sky mansion the second he saw the picture of a twenty-year-old-looking young man on the tablet as he quickly realized exactly what was going on with this entire lost pet situation.

However, he stopped himself and instead decided to figure out if there was more to the story. Which there was. The young man who had run away turned out to be involved with some rebel group or something down in the slums, but they were far too weak to do anything as things were now. Still, they tried, and one of their hopefuls was this young man as he was slowly getting close to C-grade.

The fact he could still level and potentially reach C-grade was proof he had some innate talent. When Jake detected the curse energy within him, he got intrigued, with the determination in his eyes and his ability to stay upright under Jakes gaze sealing the deal. To summarize, the young man had determination, a decent level of talent, and he was even pretty close to C-grade. This meant that Jake had an idea already for a Creation to submit:

A student who evolved to a new, intriguing Path. Whats more, Jake could allow the young man to take revenge on a shitty pet owner along with the rest of the society that had led to the dystopian megacity. As he said to the young man, a win-win.

The only sad thing was that he had to give up on the Merit Point mission, but that wasnt too bad. He could always pick up another, and finding a potential student was definitely worth it. Finally, the earlier he got a student, the better it would also be, so Jake would have more time to make his Creation and didnt have to spend several years in the Challenge Dungeon.

Acting like a mysterious master, Jake brought the young man back to the same portal he had entered the world through. These worlds each had several portals spread throughout, with a system compass in a window provided to find them. When he reached the portal, the young man still looked confused as he couldnt see it at all. Jake was pretty damn sure he could still bring him through it, though, which was proven true a few seconds later.

Where where is this? he asked when he appeared on the other side of the portal, standing in the large white room.

Your home for the foreseeable future, Jake answered. Not this room in specific, but this place.

Turning around, the young man looked straight at the portal they had entered the room from. I is that the gateway to my planet?

Right on, Jake smiled. Can you see any other portals anywhere?

The young man frowned. No?

Hm, alright, Jake muttered. Maybe he had to take him through a portal at least once for him to be able to see it, or perhaps he could only see and interact with the portal, leading to his own world. Either way, follow me. Also, whats your name?

Temlat, he answered.

Alright, Temlat, Jake said. How much do you know about the multiverse, if anything?

I know the basics? Temlat said, clearly unsure as to what Jake was getting at.

You ever heard of the Primordials?

Temlat looked at Jake as if he was an idiot. Of course? They're the twelve leaders of the multiverse and are all gods. I heard that other gods have begun to appear, too, but I am not sure if that's true. Even if it is, they wouldn't be Primordials.

Hm. And what era do you think we are in? Jake asked as he found the answer weird.

I don't know? the young man asked, confused.

How many universes are there? Heard of a new one getting integrated?

Well, we live in the second universe, so there are two, I guess? Temlat answered, looking progressively more confused with each of Jake's questions.

Jake could also understand why as something quickly became clear this young man was from the second era. Or at least he thought he was. It was entirely possible the Architect had taken a snapshot of a certain planet in the second universe to make the world, and in some ways, it even made sense. His Records would be vastly different from Jake's own, making influencing him easier.

Plus, it being the second era, Jake saw a great opportunity.

Then do you not know who I am? Jake asked in a haughty voice.

Temlat looked Jake up and down as he shook his head. No, sir teacher. Am I supposed to?

Jake took off his mask, covering his face in dark green scales as two black wings sprung from his back. At the same time, he didn't hide his True Blessing as he stared down at the young man. You stand before the Chosen of the Malefic Viper.

He had done all these theatrics to try and get the young man to be receptive to his teachings but maybe Jake had taken things a bit too far considering the poor young man's reaction.

#### Chapter 809: Nevermore: A Cursed Student-Teacher Relationship

So, Jake was used to quite a few reactions when he revealed he was the Chosen of the Malefic Viper. Most reacted with fear, confusion, and then some level of reverence and respect. The majority of the time, it was not toward Jake but toward what he represented.

However, when it came to poor Temlat, he never got further than the fear stage. He froze entirely as his face went white, and he stared at Jake with wide-open eyes. His mouth opened and closed a few times as if he tried to say some words but failed at every turn. The reaction was way over the top compared to what Jake had expected, as he felt such intense fear from the young man. As if he expected Jake to do something far worse than just killing him at any moment.

That is when Jake realized a little something in the ninety-third era, Villy was still a Primordial, sure, but he was also just one of many gods. Not to mention all the other pinnacle factions people knew of. Throughout the years, the number of gods multiplied and, due to this, got more and more involved with mortals as their factions spread and consumed more territory.

In the second era, it wasn't like this. Back then, there were only twelve true gods. The twelve Primordials. Jake had read a few old history tomes Villy had left in Jake's library back in the Order for fun, a few of which were written all the way back in the second era. The way they described the Primordials was far different, including the way they described the Malefic Viper himself.

You see Villy was not exactly known to be a good guy back then. Not that he was now, but back in the day, it was far worse. It was during the days when the Viper was still doing everything to continue growing in power, destroying anything and anyone that got in his way. He was truly a villain of the multiverse, so for Jake to come and advertise himself as his Chosen was the same as saying he was some harbinger of doom and destruction.

Jake was a bit perplexed as to how he should approach this but decided to lean into Temlat's understanding of Jake. If he thought his teacher was some semi-divine being, that would just mean that

when Jake convinced him to not be a doormat and make his own decisions and improvements, Jake would have accomplished a more impressive feat.

Is that truly the limit of your desire for revenge? That the mere identity of someone can make you give up? Jake said. In that case, you truly aren't worthy of another moment of my time. You can go back where you came from and live your pitiful life and wallow in despair until your owner gets tired of you.

Temlat's eyes seemed to come to life a little bit as Jake continued.

Or do you want me to kill you right here and now? Are you satisfied with this being the end of your path? An opportunity squandered due to your own pathetic fear?

He finally said. I want to get stronger, but-

No, that sentence was already over. You want to get stronger. Then do that. Grasp every opportunity given and take all you can until one day, the targets of your revenge lay slain before you, Jake said in a loud voice. So what do you want? To die a mere pet or to become someone no one will ever dare look down upon?

I am not a fucking pet, Temlat said in an almost growling voice.

I take that as a yes? Jake asked.

Without any hesitation, Temlat knelt down and went as far as to press his forehead to the ground. Master, please-

Ah, don't call me that; it still gives me the creeps, Jake said, remembering Meira. Just call me teacher, Mr. Thayne, Lord Thayne, or something like that. Or you can just call me Jake, but I have a feeling you aren't going to do that.

Then, Lord Thayne please help me become stronger! Help me get my revenge! If you do so, I'll do anything to pay you back! Temlat said with proper determination in his voice.

See, that wasn't so hard, Jake smiled satisfied. I don't want something from you right quite yet, and right now, all you need to focus on is becoming someone who can actually be of help to anyone, including yourself. Now, come on, follow me.

Finally getting out of the portal room, Jake let Temlat take in the environment of the House of the Architect as he walked slowly. Say what you will, but the extravagant place filled with servants and expensive-looking decor did look like somewhere the Chosen of a Primordial could reside, especially to someone like Temlat, who seemed to have the understanding that someone like Jake, who was only mid-tier C-grade, was a borderline godlike existence.

So, you said you didn't know much about alchemy, right? Jake asked as he decided to just walk all the way to the floor with alchemy stuff on it. Mainly to give Temlat some time to adapt and to give Jake some time to ask his questions.

I know about alchemy but Temlat said as he sounded a bit anxious.

But you know fuck-all? Got it, Jake nodded. It was pretty much as expected. It was easy to see how nervous the young man was, as Jake reassured him. That's good. It means you're a clean slate without any bad habits.

Yes, Lord Thayne! he quickly said, perking up.

Next question. How much do you know about curse energy? Jake asked.

Not much, he confessed as he held out a hand, the darkish energy gathering. It's like my feelings somehow made it happen, and the system gave me a skill, and it helped me level up fast it all just happened one day. That bitch was satisfied with me getting stronger, and I managed to convince her I was doing it because of her, which gave me more freedom. Enough freedom to try and run away once my collar was off.

Wait, she actually made you wear a collar? Jake asked. What's worse, Jake had a bad feeling it wasn't even meant to be in the consensual, kinky way.



Yes Temlat, the curse energy began to materialize around him as Jake saw his apparent anger. If I tried to run away, the pain was too much. I still tried once, but if I had not returned, I know it would have taken my life.

Jake slowly nodded at the explanation. Well, whoever the fuck made those collars also sounds like someone you ought to pay a visit in the future, eh?

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Continuing their way down, Jake began to discuss some basic things and even got Temlat to feel comfortable enough to ask questions. Having a casual demeanor seemed to work well, and with every passing moment, Temlat's nervousness lessened.

Soon enough, they reached the alchemy room of the House of the Architect. Alright, calling it a room really didn't do it justice. It was more like a massive complex of halls, each with different functions, and every single one of them filled with tools of different kinds. There were even several rooms clearly designed for people to work with ritual circles.

The place also had living quarters and space for Jake to leave some books, so he quickly got Temlat settled. Spending a few hours, Jake sorted through some books and had Temlat go through them. Jake had considered for a while what exactly to teach Temlat and quickly concluded that normal alchemy wasn't going to cut it. No, he would throw him into the deep end instantly. He would try to let Temlat harness his innate ability to create and use curse energy rather than learn how to make potions or anything like that.

A few books with more general alchemy theory and history were still left there, along with a large number of miscellaneous stuff Jake decided on in case the young man found it interesting. If Temlat found something he really liked, it would be way easier to teach him.

Also, during their conversations, Jake learned Temlat was nearly three hundred years old. This was not going to stop Jake from mentally referring to him as a young man. As a mid-tier C-grade, Jake was definitely more mature because he had a higher level; that's just how the multiverse works. At least, that's how he decided things were in this particular instance. It also wouldn't be a good look if Jake admitted to being younger than his student.

After Temlat had gotten a bit more comfortable in his new living quarters, Jake headed back toward the Merit Exchange as he felt quite good about things so far. Having a student this early was definitely going to be a great boon, even if Jake still felt a bit unsure about how he was supposed to go about this entire teaching business.

Jakes plans for Temlat were pretty straightforward. He would teach the young man alchemy and give him access to many of the books Jake had brought with him from the library back in the Order of the Malefic Viper to make him mainly self-study.

If he got lucky, the young man should quickly be able to progress and learn this new craft. Considering Jakes influence, the plan was then for Temlat to evolve to a C-grade with a new class and profession, both partly related to Jake. If all went well, the power Temlat got would even allow him to take revenge on the woman who made him a pet.

It was definitely a bit of a gamble, and much could go wrong, but Jake felt like Temlat was his best bet.

With the young half-elf occupied, Jake quickly went and turned in his two completed Merit Point missions while abandoning the one he had failed.

Using some of his points, Jake picked up some ingredients he was familiar with. The way the store worked was a bit unique in that there was no browsing of goods or anything like that. Instead, the Creator had to request certain materials, with the exchange then acquiring them and giving a price.

This made it easy to get what you wanted but also added a requirement for the Creators to know their stuff when it came to ingredients. Jake was even happier than before that he had brought half a library's worth of books so he could look up material names if he ever got in trouble and needed something.

Ah, Jake did try to trick one of the attendants into selling him things based on properties, but Jake sadly had to know the name of the ingredient. Even if Jake described something to perfection, the attendant would say that they lacked information on the goods Jake wanted them to acquire. It was a bit frustrating, but Jake did at least know quite a few good ingredients from all his time spent at the Order.

With a good stack of ingredients in hand, Jake finally got to crafting, having decided to start out with concocting some poisons. First of all, because he wanted to submit a good poison for evaluation, and secondly, to get more Merit Points from selling back what he made.

He had a few plans in mind for the poison in question, and he would definitely need some ingredients he didn't already know the name of, but that was where the books came in.

Jake had also decided that one of the things he would make was a ritual circle. He would make one similar to what he used when he gave birth to Vesperia, though naturally without any Jake Juice in the mix. In fact, Jake wanted to make an improved and even more efficient version. Perhaps one suited for another kind of creature than an ectognamorph. Maybe he could even do something curse-related.

Both of these objectives would take a lot of time and resources, but Jake made them a priority. One reason why he wanted to do two semi-familiar things was also due to his new little student nearby, who he had a feeling would need a lot of guidance in the early days as he learned basic alchemical theory. Again, Jake would not turn him into a real alchemist, but just a highly specialized one who worked with curses and maybe a bit of poison to mix his curse energy into.

It was totally not because Jake also wanted to research infusing curse energy into poisons himself. Nope, that was definitely not something he would ever do.

This is how Jake's initial time in the House of the Architect slowly began passing. Jake quickly realized he was horrible at teaching anything, primarily on the grounds that he also didn't know exactly how things worked himself due to his instinctual approach to everything. However, this is where Temlat specializing in curses was advantageous.

Controlling curse energy was all about emotions. It was instinct and not knowledge that had to guide you. Even someone like Casper couldn't logic his way to curse energy. He still had to nurture negative emotions in spades to keep himself powerful. However, as a trapper, he didn't have to be emotional during fights. He just had to have been during his preparation phase. Ah, and then he had Lyra, his ghost girlfriend, who also helped him quite a bit and gave him access to blight energy.

Temlat had none of that. He was just an angry young man who hated the world, and Jake chose to nurture that. Very directly, too. Curse energy had the ability to affect other sources of curse energy, and Jake had a great source in Eternal Hunger. It was actually pretty normal for curses in the wild to fuse into amalgamations if more formed in the same area. The curse energy from Yalsten that Jake had absorbed was a great example of this.

That curse had come from countless beings and their resentment. This didn't mean that they all agreed on who or even always what they resented, just that they all held a grudge. Over time, a common hatred would then be formed, with it eventually turning into simple resentment one of the most common forms of curses.

Resentment was not a Sin Curse, though. Sin Curses were the highest level of curses by default and couldn't be easily formed in the wild. They were pure in concept and had singular goals that didn't lend well to curses born of people dying. Hunger, which Jake wielded, was a Sin curse that was actually considered pretty rare despite being such a common emotion. It encapsulated a singular desire to simply devour everything insatiably.

Temlat wielded a curse of hatred. Hatred was closely related to the Sin Curse of wrath but was still a bit off. Hatred had the problem that it needed something to hate. It could be resolved once everything you hated was exterminated. No, for something to be a Sin Curse, it had to be something far more basic, far more unfocused on a goal, but just the emotion itself. Wrath was just anger and hatred toward everything. Just an emotion of wanting to destroy and make others suffer until there was nothing left. And endless Path of destruction.

Considering Jake had a higher-ranked curse than Temlat, he decided to feed Temlat's curse. He worked in a ritual that could contain some of his own curse energy for Temlat to experience it and be empowered by it. To have his curse of hatred be strengthened by his hunger for revenge.

This is how a few months passed as Jake trained and made Temlat stronger as Jake also progressed slowly. He had studied a lot related to the kind of poison he wanted to make, and all of the recent focus on curse energy had inspired him.

In fact, he believed he had gotten quite an interesting and novel idea for a new kind of poison he had never even seen mentioned in any of the books related to both curses and poisons.

## Chapter 810: Nevermore: To Study the Curse

Curse energy was a great tool for combat. However, when it came to using it to craft while doing alchemy, things were very different.

The energy was actually pretty damn hard to store outside of your body, something Jake already knew and now had to find a way to work around. Jake had a talk with Casper back during Minagas City Floor, where the Risen shared that he primarily used wooden stakes due to innate concepts within the

element. Wood was great at storing energy of different kinds, as trees in the multiverse tended to be very diverse. You could find trees capable of housing anything dependent on their environment. This included curse energy.

To be fair, most plants were very adaptable, but wood was one of the only things that retained most of these properties even after the tree itself had been cut down. It was also part of the reason why Yalsten had even fallen. If it hadn't been a giant tree that granted that world its unique properties but had instead been some special kind of star or big rock, the chances of the curse taking hold would have been far lower. The fact it was a tree also helped it survive for as long as it did, even if the curse was eventually reduced to a single root.

Curse energy also didn't mix well with anything; something had run into this many times with his own magic. Jake's Sin Curse especially did not do well with any other form of energy. One could even say that Jake's destructive arcane energy and his curse energy were exact opposites.

One wanted to simply destroy everything, while the other wanted to devour it. When these two met, the result would be mutual destruction until there was nothing left of either. However, the story was different with his stable arcane energy. As long as Jake kept the hungry curse energy and destructive arcane energy apart by just a small sealed barrier of stable arcane energy, they would ignore each other.

It was a bit odd that the curse energy didn't even try to eat his stable arcane energy, but he just chalked that up to another special trait of his arcane affinity. Maybe the energy just wasn't tasty or something, or maybe it was because the barrier registered as something physical and not energy. Honestly, who knows? Probably Villy, but Jake digressed.

Due to the difficulty of using it, he only actually had a single skill that actively used curse energy. Piercing Cursed Arcane Fang made use of Jake's ability to seal in the curse energy with a coating of arcane mana that he would then stab into stuff. It was as simple as could be, really.

Either way, Jake's problem with curse energy was that it inherently wanted to eat everything, so if he tried to mix it into a concoction, surprise, surprise, it would try to eat the concoction. This is what was called a bad thing in the alchemical world. Even if the curse energy was far from powerful enough to consume the rest of the concoction, all Jake would have accomplished was to destroy a part of what he was trying to make.

In all honesty, Jake had no way around this. The only place where Jake could mix poison and curse energy was during combat. Eternal Hunger didn't passively give off the curse energy when not in use it

was simply too greedy to do something like that which meant Jake could coat it with poison with no problem. The curse energy would then activate to attack foes he stabbed or cut, ignoring the poison it was with to feast on something far tastier.

Jakes idea for a unique poison came from a simple question: what if Eternal Hunger didnt ignore the poison? More specifically, what if he wanted the curse energy to eat it? What if he made a type of poison specifically made to be eaten by his curse energy to empower it?

Mind you, methods to empower curses werent new, far from it. There were many catalysts or liquids Jake could make to empower curse energy; Jake had even been offered a skill to create cursed items that he could then later use to empower his curse energy.

But this wasnt what Jake was thinking about. No, he wanted it still to be a poison. To accomplish this, Jake looked into another branch of alchemy that he didnt study much but was considered a side-branch of ethtoxins soul poison. Some poisons existed out there that didnt deal any damage or even registered as harmful at any point, some of which even made the person you infected more powerful but at the cost of grave consequences once the poison ran out.

One could almost compare it to doping someone forcefully. Whats more, this always came with effects that infected the mental state of the target. Something that made them more bold, reckless, and overconfident. The effects wouldnt be overly powerful, and the poison was considered very hard to make, but he had found it intriguing, even if something was a bit weird.

Jake wondered why he had never really run into this type of poison before until he read a book that explained its fatal flaw: it only worked against idiots. Not just idiots when talking about intelligence, but beings that didnt even have any instinctive wisdom either. Even elementals who were just beings of pure mana would notice something was wrong.

Considering the poison didnt register as a poison and had subtle effects by design, anyone who didnt suck could quickly purge it when they noticed it and rely on their Willpower to get rid of any mental manipulation in the meantime. This made the poison hard to craft and hard to use, making it subpar due to this alone. When you did use it, it very rarely worked, and even when it did work, it made your target a bit stronger for a period of time before it would then be weakened, making it an overall shitty poison.

All in all, it was one of those types of poison many had researched but never really used. It was more a branch that some alchemists recommended looking into to make better flasks using some of the

concepts to also benefit from some Malefic Viper poison-related skills. Because, yes, poison flasks were also a thing but that was a topic for a whole other time.

Anyway, this type of poison that sucked to use against people gave Jake an idea. What if he made a poison that effectively boosted the curse energy? Curse energy was odd in that it kind of lived, if that made sense, so Jake was pretty confident he could affect it. He also didn't care about any of the subtlety or the potential consequences of using too much of a steroid. The curse energy just had to go wild and eat whatever it struck anyway, and if it did so more ravenously and uncontrolled than before, all the better.

However there was one huge problem with crafting this kind of poison. It included a lot of ingredients classified as psychedelics which could also be used to make flasks or potions to help one hallucinate and gain enlightenment and these kinds of ingredients tended to have one thing in common. One terrible thing.

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Violet Cap Sporeduster of at least rare rarity, Mindcap of epic rarity, Rainbow-Spotted Satyr Mushroom of rare rarity, Illusory Puffball of rare rarity, and finally a bag of mosscap and moss mix. Rare-rarity, please, Jake asked the Merit Exchange worker, holding back any vomit.

That's right pretty much every single ingredient was mushrooms. Even the goddamn moss was mixed with small mushrooms that grew on and inside of it. To make matters even worse, Jake would have to eat many of those disgusting shrooms for Palate of the Malefic Viper.

Oh, and also, all of these were psilocybin mushrooms, or what Jake before the system would have called magic mushrooms. They didn't really affect Jake much in their raw form due to his Palate, but some of their effects did leak through as they didn't register as necessarily being detrimental. Jake wondered why the hell an effect that made everything take on a rainbow sheen or made him feel like his feet were twice as big as before didn't register as detrimental, but who the hell was he to question the Legacy skill of a Primordial?

Oh wait, he was Jake, so of course he would question it.

Sometimes I do wonder to myself if there is any particular reason why psychedelic mushrooms don't register as purely poisonous to the Palate of the Malefic Viper? Oh, wait, is it related to how alcohol also has some effect despite clearly being a toxin? Could it possibly be that the Malefic One, in his infinite wisdom, purposefully wanted to still leave himself an opening to get both drunk and high? No, that possibly cannot be it, Jake spoke out loud while getting back to the alchemy room.

It was naturally purely coincidental he spoke to himself while in the only area the livestream was live, and he was pretty sure the Malefic Viper was listening. Coincidental, for sure.

Another reason why Jake chose this kind of poison was naturally due to how different it was from anything he usually made. This would add a lot to the journey part of the craft, and due to how different this kind of poison was, it opened up the possibility of Jake also submitting a more normal poison without much penalty if he ended up not making anything he thought was better.

Speaking of unique, Temlat was doing pretty damn well if Jake said so himself. He had brought the young man back from the dystopian megacity about a month prior, and by now, most of his nervousness had bled away and been replaced by a singular focus on getting stronger.

Jake had kept tempering him with his own curse energy over this period and had seen it slowly feed the young man's curse of hatred. Based on his talks with the guy, his progress was beyond anything he had ever seen before.

To try to boost his progress further, Jake had also considered giving him a Blessing but ultimately decided not to. First of all, Temlat didn't really exist. He was effectively just a copy of someone who died trillions of years ago, so Jake wasn't sure he even could bless him. Secondly, even if Jake could, he wasn't sure he wanted to, as it risked exposing Jake could bless someone without the Viper's approval. There was also that it was a bit of a dickmove to do it without the Viper saying it was okay in the first place. Oh, and finally, say Jake did give him a Blessing, wouldn't that just contaminate the Records Jake wanted to impart? Wouldn't the Records of a Primordial replace many of his own and make it much less Jake's Creation, worsening the final evaluation? Probably, which is why Jake stuck to just helping his student the usual way.

Progress-wise, Temlat had only gained a single level this month, but Jake was all good with that. The young man had instead improved many of his skills, and based on how fast the potency of his curse energy grew, Jake didn't doubt he would be able to level up fast when necessary.



In the alchemy department, Jakes little student had even made a bit of progress. Jake had expected him to have a profession related to being a pet, which he did kind of have, but it wasnt what Jake expected. The one he had was pretty much a double-agent kind of deal and gave him a bunch of skills to try and deceive people while keeping himself hidden. The profession was also related to curses, so that was a win for sure. Plus, there were a few skills in there he worked on turning more alchemy-like.

One skill he had that was already useable was one to condense curse fragments. It was pretty much a worse version of the skill Jake had been offering to make curse marbles, but it was a start. As for how he would use his curse energy, Jake wouldnt dictate. He was very much a hands-off teacher and just believed in creating the best environment for Temlat to figure shit out himself while helping him improve his fundamental power. Ah, but he did do some teacher-like things, like answering questions as best as he could.

I dont get this part of the ritual circle, Temlat asked as he brought a book related to rituals that could utilize curse energy. The lines dont seem to connect at all with the other segments

Jake studied the book for a bit as he recognized the issue Temlat spoke of. Its because the connection will be established by the liquid you need to pour into the formation indents here, here and here. Blood is recommended, but as you dont have the Legacy skill of the Malefic Viper, you need to figure out a way to make your own useful.

Can I use someone elses blood?

Sure, but they need to be strong enough for their blood to support the rest of the formation, and I reckon you need to infuse them with a lot of curse energy beforehand. Oh, and they need to be kept alive throughout, Jake gladly answered. If they die and their Truesoul disperses, so will their Records and the power in their blood. So at least keep the Truesoul around.

How would I do that? Temlat asked curiously.

There are many ways to delay someones soul from dispersing. In your case, modifying the ritual circle a bit to include focal points to seal in the creatures you want the blood from is probably recommended. That way, their soul will disperse the moment the ritual circle is done doing its job, Jake said as he sent out a string of mana and took a book from one of the big piles Jake had thrown there. Here, check this one out; it talks about it.

Thank you, Lord Thayne, Temlat said in a respectful voice. I will be sure to make you proud and hopefully make me worthy of being your student.

Just keep up the good work, yeah? Jake smiled, pretty satisfied so far, just happy that Temlat seemed very interested in something.

Also, Lord Thayne, I am allowed to study all the books here, right? Temlat asked. Nothing is off-limits?

Of course, Jake shrugged. That's why I brought them. Why, do you have any more questions regarding anything? While I am not sure what's in all the books, I have read quite a few of them.

No no, I simply wanted to make sure, Temlat said as he bowed. I shall return to my studies.

Don't forget resistance training later, Jake said, seeing the young man shiver at the mention of it.

Resistance training was, of course, Jake's signature presence-resistance training regiment. He knew from helping Caleb train his shadow assassins that just a little bit of resistance training did wonders, and from the looks of it, Temlat was also helped tremendously. It helped him manage his own energy better and keep his head calm even when wielding amounts of curse energy, which some would argue was too much for him.

Watching Temlat walk off after looking for a few books, Jake couldn't help but feel like things were really going smoothly.

Sadly, Jake did run into having to do a few more Merit Point missions. He learned that the things Temlat worked on couldn't be refunded to the exchange, and Jake had been experimenting a bit too much, losing more than he had earned. But he made something positive out of it as he scouted out all the other worlds properly.

He also took the opportunity to confirm that he could bring Temlat through portals to other worlds, which confirmed Jake's theory that once the young man had gone through a portal, he could use it from that point onward. This proved to be really advantageous when Jake discovered one of the worlds turned out to be a great place to level for someone like Temlat.

Something Jake, of course, made the young man do so he could get a grasp of Templats power level, and, well lets just say Jake would also have to throw some combat lessons in there.