

Hunter 811

Chapter 811: Nevermore: Classic Training

You gotta dodge, Jake said telepathically as Temlat was attacked by the centaur-like creature. Stop trying to block everything or trade blows. That only ever works against those weaker than yourself.

Jake floated above the clouds nearly a hundred kilometers up in the air as he observed this battle as he tried to stop himself from face-palming.

Below, Temlat held his usual dagger coated with curse energy as he yelled while attacking. His style was hyper-aggressive, which Jake was fine with, as long as the young man didn't act like he had a Transcendent making him immortal like the Necromancer from the Colosseum of Mortals.

Swinging his dagger, he released waves of dense curse energy that sought to tear apart anything it touched. Temlat was still only level 189, and the centaur he faced was 185, but despite the level disparity, the young man found himself pushed back as his opponent swung his halberd like a skilled warrior. His swings were wide, giving Jake's little student no space to get close and attack, forcing him to only make his pretty weak ranged attacks.

When Temlat did try to get close, he found himself with a nasty cut or got blasted back as the centaur wielded some wind magic. From an outside perspective, Temlat was clearly on the losing side but to Jake, that wasn't the case. Assuming the young half-elf didn't act like an idiot.

You wield curses; you're not some brawler. Curses are not known for their immediate destructive power but are slower and far more insidious. Reign in your own anger and let it loose with purpose and intent to infect your foe. Remember, time is on your side in a fight like this. You just need to last long enough for the curse to do its thing, Jake sent telepathically once there was a slight break in the fight after the centaur retreated to make some distance.

Temlat listened to Jake for once and restrained himself as he summoned two bolts of black fire. This was something Jake had noticed early on he was capable of, something even Jake wasn't really sure how to do. Temlat had a class in E-grade that revolved around fire magic, as that school tended to be the most useful in production jobs and whatnot. When he evolved and his curse energy manifested, the young man learned to let his curse energy take the form of flames, even keeping some of the inherent concepts of the fire affinity. It was a good combo with his curse of hatred, as both fire and a budding Wrath Sin Curse had a lot to do with destruction, which made it a shame Temlat didn't focus more on this direction compared to becoming a good knife fighter.

Throwing two black fireballs, Temlat managed to take the centaur by surprise as it only had time to dodge one, and when it swung to destroy the second, it exploded and bathed its body in black flames. Screaming loudly, the centaur stumbled, but the flames quickly subsided as they seemed to merge with its body.

Learn when it is your time to land decisive blows. Right now, its a slow back and forth, but you need to act without hesitation when you see that one all-important opening. To you, that opening is something you create by yourself as the curse energy accumulates, but you still need to determine when the curse energy is sufficient to end the fight once and for all. If you move too early, you risk your foe eliminating all the curse energy before you win the fight, while if you move too late, you just waste time and resources. So choose your moment of ignition carefully, but not cowardly.

A constant stream of black flames shot out from Telmat toward the centaur as the creature in vain tried to block with its halberd and wind magic but found itself still afflicted by the curse energy. Its swings got more and more furious as its otherwise calm demeanor changed until finally, the centaur yelled loudly as it charged, eyes red with anger.

It had lost its marbles and no longer acted like an expert fighter but just a dumb beast. The curse energy had thoroughly taken hold of its mind, inflicting it with an uncontrollable surge of anger. Telmat managed to take advantage well as he retreated constantly, and even if he still got hit way more than he should have, he managed to hold on long enough until it was time to land the killing blow.

The centaur had just finished a furious flurry of swings as Temlat simply raised his hand and pointed. Right as he did, black veins appeared all over the centaurs body as black flames erupted. The curse energy turned against its own temporary vessel with hatred as it consumed the centaurs body whole. Its arms were hued black before turning to ash as the halberd fell to the ground. Its legs gave out, making it fall to the ground, and all its flesh turned black and wooden before slowly disintegrating.

Yet, despite all this, the centaur kept trying to crawl toward Temlat with only anger in its eyes. There was no sense of self-preservation or instinct to survive, only a singular will to destroy whatever was before its eyes. Even as its eyes turned to black orbs that cracked soon after, its gaze had been full of hate.

Temlat, seeing his foe had died, fell to the ground exhausted as he took out one of the healing potions Jake had handed him before going out on this particular training mission. Jake, standing up in the air and looking down, had a mixed look on his face as he sighed.

Well, that was kind of shit but I guess he won, Jake muttered to himself. That amount of curse energy had been crazy overkill, but hopefully, Temlat would get better with time.

Jake was not an expert when it came to combat, even if he was an expert fighter. He had a fighting style that worked for him, and while it had proven highly effective, it only worked for Jake due to his Bloodline. So even if Jake tried to teach someone his own fighting style, it would prove detrimental compared to learning more standard styles. Jakes style relied pretty much solely on his Bloodline-empowered instincts, and anyone who didnt have it would be unable to follow his expert advice of just dodge everything and stab when you feel like it.

Also, he wasnt like the Sword Saint, who could explain in-depth how and why something the old man did worked for him and, more accurately, could point out what would work for others. Jake couldnt look at someone swinging a sword and instantly point out how the way they placed their index finger was slightly wrong or how they needed to shift their center of gravity when swinging. The best Jake could do was tell someone they were doing something wrong and give some basic advice. All of this is to say Jake sucked at teaching others how to fight.

However, Jake did know one method of teaching combat that was approved multiversally by every single faction: practical experience. Nothing was better at teaching someone how to fight than live combat. Sure, live combat also carried the risk of the person getting trained dying due to some fuck-up, so most factions wanted to at least have their members reach a good baseline before it was time for life-and-death battles.

With Temlat, Jake would teach him how to fight the same way Jake had been taught. He would throw the young man into life-and-death fights right from the get-go and hope he made it. Temlat knew a bit about how to fight from the streets already, but he still sucked ass, to put it nicely.

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The planet Jake had found, which he deemed suitable for Temlats practice, was one filled with large plains and different humanoid and semi-humanoid creatures. Their levels were nice and varied, and considering it was a planet that was constantly at war, their combatants were all pretty skilled. Skilled enough to be better than Temlat, for sure.

In pure power, Temlat actually had a good shot against even the peak D-grades. His stat gains hadn't been horrible from the looks of it, and his class was already pretty good even before Jake took him in as a student, with the profession also acceptable. After Jake had helped him make his curse stronger, he now had a pretty good advantage against equal-leveled opponents stat-wise.

Jake, using One Step, teleported down from up in the air within a few steps before he appeared in front of Temlat. The young man quickly gathered himself and kneeled. I apologize for my horrible display.

Dont apologize, but improve. Your foes will not care how sorry you are, and the targets of your hatred will not hesitate either just because you aren't powerful or skilled enough to carry out your revenge. These centaurs are nothing compared to even the guards of the woman who kept you as a pet. And I am not talking about the C-grades like the captain, but the D-grades ones, Jake said in a pretty harsh tone.

I will do my best, he quickly answered.

And I ask of nothing more, Jake said in an attempt to not be all stick and no carrot. You are already improving rapidly, far more rapidly than any of those you wish to kill. With time, you will catch up and end them. C-grade shall be your turning point, and upon evolving, I believe you should become capable of holding your own in the power department. However, when it comes to pure skill and learning how to use your curse energy, you still have a long way to go, which is why we're here.

What does Lord Thayne want me to do? Temlat asked.

Remember where the portal we entered from was? Jake questioned.

It was that way, the young man said as he pointed in a direction. Jake couldn't really fault him for being disorientated, as Jake had brought him there using One Step and his wings, but at least he had the general direction right.

So you know the way back, Jake smiled under his mask. So, meet me back at the lab.

I what? Temlat asked, confused enough to forget being courteous.

Make your own way back alive. Thats what I want you to do.

Thats the young half-elf muttered as he steeled himself. I shall do my utmost.

Great, Jake said as he took out a bag of healing potions and placed them down on the ground. Good luck then, and remember not to die.

With those words, Jake turned around and flew into the air, quickly getting away from the still-kneeling young half-elf. He flew high up and kept observing him as Temlat slowly gathered himself while picking up all the potions. Jake kept observing for an hour or so more as his little student seemed to realize Jake was serious and began making his way back slowly and carefully. He seemed to plan on sneaking back, but Jake knew that wasnt going to work.

There was a large centaur encampment directly in the way, and if he wanted to make it to the portal, he had to make it past it. As he was currently, Temlat wouldnt have a chance, so he would have to use his head and abilities or be stuck in this world forever.

This entire scenario would also serve as a good way for Temlat to get more life experience and see more things. He had been stuck in that megacity his entire life, and seeing new things like this and experiencing an entirely new world filled with greenery had to be healthy, right? Ignoring the murderous centaur running around in the area, of course.

Jake was fully aware this training method was harsh, but he had never claimed to be a gentle teacher. He just did what he thought was best and the most efficient while using rather elementary training methods. And, lets be fair, throwing a student into the wilderness and asking them to survive was as classic a training method as they came.

Naturally, there was a chance Temlat would die, but it was a risk Jake was willing to take. Temlat had also said he would do anything to make his goal possible, and Jake genuinely believed this was a good method. If he made it back alive, he would do so notably improved, while if he died, it would suck. Ultimately, though, should he die, perhaps Temlat was just never meant to get strong.

After being satisfied with Temlats initial approach to this trial, Jake headed back to the House of the Architect building to keep working on his own stuff. It was probably rude to admit, but Jake felt a sense of relief from not having to think about Temlat for a little while as the young man did his trial. Or, well,

didn't do his trial, but hopefully, he would return safe, sound, and less incompetent in the staying-alive department.

With no one around to disturb him, Jake would dedicate his entire focus to his special curse-nurturing poison. He would make the best damn curse-feed the Architect had ever seen.

As Jake began his focused crafting session, other top contenders for the Leaderboards also began to make their way into the House of the Architect. Compared to all the prior Challenge Dungeons, this one stood out for requiring something none of the others did: creativity and the ability to make something.

One thing many top geniuses had in common was a singular focus on a specific Path. Even if someone was enlightened and had a profession, this profession was often chosen with the express purpose of making them more powerful in combat. Moreover, what they could make with their profession was also focused.

Azal the Ghost King was a brilliant example of this. He was an expert combatant who had only lost in the Colosseum of Mortals when he faced Valdemar and had even managed to get his recognition, netting him a 20% point amplifier. He also did well in the Test of Character, with even Minagas Labyrinth going well. The Labyrinth was primarily due to his profession.

He was something known as a Spirit Architect. Whenever someone died, their Truesoul would return to the system, but some energy would always linger behind from the broken soul. This energy could take many forms, including curse energy, affinity-filled energy based on who died, or just mana in its purest form, turning the area into a blessed land for monsters.

However, sometimes, spirits were also formed. Monsters that fed on the energy released. These ghosts were not truly something related to the person, even if they could sometimes possess emotions and even fragmented memories of the deceased.

Azal had the ability to collect these spirits within himself. Not only that, he could manipulate them and even merge different spirits. These spirits could then be used in different formations, controlled as summon-like creatures, or consumed directly to empower himself by effectively letting them possess him or his equipment. His blade was tailor-made to be possessed and was a blade he constantly empowered by merging souls into it. Everything he did was with the purpose of getting more powerful.

It was inarguable that Azal had a high-tier profession. One worthy of a top genius of the multiverse. But it was also limited. It dealt only with spirits, and even if there were many ways to use them, Azal had never had to or wanted to learn more nuanced disciplines. He had supporters to do all that, so why would he need to learn how to, for example, craft a piece of equipment or even a catalyst for a spirit to inhabit? The only weapon he ever worked on himself was his Soulbound sword, which he had successfully gotten to mythical rarity through constant feeding and maintenance. It was also a blade directly bound to his profession and was his primary method of housing spirits outside of a hidden internal space in his body.

Anyway, the answer to whether Azal would need to learn more nuanced crafts was that he didnt when he had the entire support system of the Risen behind him. Which became a weakness when he entered the House of the Architect.

Even if he could make a few good Creations, the fact you had to make ten became the big limiter for him and many others. At some point, it also became a question of efficiency. Would it be worth it for him to spend years trying to get a slightly higher score or to try to clear one more floor once he was done with the Challenge Dungeons? To many, Azal included, the answer was clear.

This turned the House of the Architect into what many considered a place to quickly get done with. You would just do what you could and accept the result before moving on to more important matters. Even if you spent a few extra years, that potential 5% extra Nevermore Points wouldnt be worth it to learn something entirely new. Getting to 10% was entirely possible, but anything more than that just became too hard.

Besides, it wasnt like there was any reward for getting a high score in all the Challenge Dungeons, right? And even if there was, who would be crazy enough to go for it?

Chapter 812: Nevermore: To Feed Thy Curse

So, Jake actually ran into a bit of a problem with his experimentation. Testing out the effectiveness of his poison and curse shouldnt be that hard, right? Except who was Jake supposed to test it out on? The defenseless prisoners down in the cellar of the House of the Architect? Random beasts or low-level monsters in one of the worlds? No, all the options were shit, and not just because it would leave a bad taste in Jakes mouth, but because he wanted to give Eternal Hunger something tasty. Something it actually wanted to eat.

Weak creatures didnt strike the cursed weapons fancy, and Jake wanted a poison that would really help turn the curse energy ravenous when it mattered. There was also the problem that Jake needed similar

targets to compare results. Most alchemists achieved this by testing on live targets that they then healed up again, this often even being people who could give feedback on the torture they had to endure a fate Meira nearly suffered as a slave.

Yeah, Jake wasn't going to randomly become a torturer. He also wasn't even sure it would work. The entire point was to turn his curse energy uncontrollable, so it was a foregone conclusion that Jake wouldn't be in full control. Due to that, he had no way of ensuring he wouldn't accidentally kill his target. If he did that, any experimentation would be wasted as he needed to start over with a new test subject, which seemed needlessly cruel.

He then considered if he could just use himself, but no matter what he did, his curse energy didn't hurt him. It was probably because he wasn't just the user of the curse energy but also the source. Even if the Sin Curse was hungry beyond anything, it still didn't make any moves to devour Jake himself, which was kind of a new discovery in itself. He did wonder why this was for a while until he quickly reached the conclusion that it was due to Sim-Jake having merged with the curse.

Records of his other self existed within the curse energy, and the curse energy would never try to devour itself. In the same vein, it would now not try to ever devour Jake. At least, that was his best guess. It could also be that Sim-Jake has blessed the Sin Curse with faint instinctual self-preservation that made it aware that killing Jake would also result in it killing itself.

It had to be noted here that Jake was very different compared to Casper and Temlat as a curse user. Both of them created their own curse energy using their souls and resources, while Jake just wielded a weapon with a powerful curse. He didn't have any inherent curse energy but happened to have sealed and bound an insurmountable amount of curse energy within his own Soulspace. This was also why Jake couldn't do something like summon curse bolts or whatever by just transforming his energy. If he wanted to do something like that, he would have to channel the energy from the Soulspace.

This also resulted in Jake theoretically having a finite amount of curse energy. The word theoretically being used in this case as Eternal Hunger was pretty damn good at keeping itself fed and even fattening itself up through Jake's actions.

Anyway, to return from the sidetrack, the reality was that his own katar didn't want to eat him, requiring Jake to find another unfortunate victim to experiment on.

That is when Jake got a brilliant idea. He needed people to experiment on who would be receptive and not fight back during the experiments while not suffering at the same time. It would have to be

someone pretty much immortal and highly helpful. This was usually not a thing outside of perhaps Eron if Jake could convince him - but here in the House of the Architect, Jake had the perfect candidates.

Excuse me, could you help me with something? Jake asked as he went up to one of the many attendants walking around doing nothing in the House of the Architect.

Most certainly, the attendant responded with a smile. How can I assist you?

Would you be able to be my test subject regarding a Creation I am working on? Ah, for clarity, I will need you to have near-infinite health points and be immortal during the experimentation while giving me feedback on the results of my tests. Oh, finally, can you make yourself level lets just say 320? Jake asked.

I will do my utmost, but I must warn you that any energy extracted from my body will not be useable as part of any Creations, the attendant answered without a moment of hesitation to Jakes ridiculous request.

Oh, thats fine; I just want to test the potency of a mix between a curse and a poison, Jake said casually.

I see. I must add further that when it comes to feedback, I will only be able to answer any questions and not volunteer information, the attendant further elaborated. More restrictions may also apply. Is this acceptable to the Creator? If not, there are plenty of potential test subjects in the worlds through the portals and the lower floors of the House.

The terms are just fine, Jake said with a nod. Ah, finally, can you turn off your own perception of pain to not make this an unpleasant experience?

I can if that is what the Creator wants, the attendant nodded, being very helpful.

Just like that, Jake recruited the best test subject one could imagine and quickly got experimenting. The attendant quickly followed him to the lab, where he took off his robe and wore only a pair of pants to allow Jake to see the visual response of his attacks better.

Jake entered a hardcore session of constant experimentation from here on out, with the attendant gladly helping whenever he could. Having already prepared a few potential mixes before he went to grab his test subject, Jake got started right away.

Eternal Hunger in hand, Jake started out by doing a few baseline tests by punching the attendant in the stomach while activating the curse energy in the mythical weapon. His katar easily penetrated flesh and drew blood from the male human attendant, yet the man didn't even react, even as he had a bloody hole in his stomach.

Pulling Eternal Hunger back out, Jake saw the curse do its thing for a little while as it absorbed some of the attendant's life energy. Alas, Jake felt that only a few seconds later, this energy dispersed, having not truly benefitted the weapon or Jake in any way. So that was one exploit out the window.

Jake continued his test a few hundred more times as he had the attendant compare the effectiveness of each attack, and Jake noted down the baseline damage number as 100. Each hit Jake made dealt between 97-103 damage on this scale. This number was after Jake factored out the damage done from the stab alone by also doing a few stabs with Eternal Hunger while he suppressed the curse energy entirely. As for how he got this number? Well, he just asked how many health points the attendant lost. Pretty simple, actually.

He also only needed a few of these stabs to establish he could hit pretty much in the exact same way several times in a row if he so wished. Jake had brilliant control and had a good feel clearly due to his wonderful Perception - for precisely how hard he was hitting every time, which made this a lot easier.

Anyway, with a baseline down, it was time to test some of Jake's poison.

Taking out Eternal Hunger again, he coated it in the poison he had created prior. It seemed to nearly instantly evaporate, but it, in fact, stuck to the weapon as it seemed to almost merge with it. With the weapon in hand, Jake went over to the attendant and got ready.

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Prepare yourself, Jake said.

Very well.

Without waiting further, Jake stabbed forward as he stirred the curse and made it come to life. The katar penetrated the attendants stomach easily before Jake pulled it out and observed the results. He counted down how long it took for the curse to be eliminated by the attendants vital energy and got a feel for the damage as he looked at the man.

After some quick calculations and asking him how much health he lost, Jake frowned. A 91, huh? But the curse energy dispersed in nearly half the time

So, Jake had weakened the curse, probably by making it consume some of its energy to eat the poison, but he had also made it work with twice its usual speed. Curses were usually slow burns, much like poisons. They took time to properly take effect. Jakes Eternal Hunger curse was a bit different as it was usually pretty fast-acting, especially due to most working to eliminate it immediately, making it devour some vital energy quickly before running out of steam.

However, this time, the curse worked even faster. Which was, in all honesty, not something Jake was really interested in. Sure, if it worked faster, it was fine, but not at the loss of potency. So, back to the drawing board.

A week later, Jake was stabbing the attendant again as he once more evaluated the results.

A 134? Good on paper, but Jake muttered. This time, the problem was the exact opposite. The curse energy had acted slow as fuck, so even if it had done more damage overall, its damage per second was far, far lower, having taken nearly four times as long. Moreover, the curse had somehow gotten even less aggressive compared to before and only really bothered to eat the vital energy that got close to it.

Jake once more sat down to think as he went back to testing different things. He ended up making many more concoctions over the next few days, most of which he could sell back for a Merit Point profit after he tested some from each batch. He got different results, some of which were purely positive and kind of did what he wanted, but he still wasn't satisfied.

He couldn't figure out what he was missing and even began looking in the books to see if there was some crucial ingredient that could help him, but nothing came up.

Suddenly, one day, Jake was reading a book about more effectively using cursed items. It wasn't even directly related to what Jake was doing, but as he read the book, he had an epiphany. He realized he had been looking at the problem all wrong.

Why am I just trying to make the existing curse energy more potent. I should draw out more, Jake muttered.

The book talked about how one would often use bait to activate certain cursed items to draw out their energy more easily, which got Jake thinking why didn't he do that? If there was something he had a lot of, it was curse energy. In fact, the amount Jake accumulated had only grown since Yalsten as Eternal Hunger devoured more than it used when he used it.

Even now, it held enough pure curse energy to flood at least an entire solar system, which was, needless to say, far more than Jake could ever use or control as a C-grade. It was a bit like how he walked around with a drop of blood from the Malefic Viper that could probably poison a god to death if Jake had any way of using the power and Records within.

Jake quickly adapted his plans after getting this new idea related to using bait. He used some of the ingredients it suggested, which, luckily enough, turned out to primarily be a slightly modified version of the usual healing potion. Jake was very lucky in many ways, as the Sin Curse of Hunger was considered the simplest of them all due to how it wanted to eat pretty much anything.

Only three days later, Jake made his first uncommon rarity version of this poison and quickly tested it with his very helpful assistant.

Coating Eternal Hunger with this new poison, Jake prepared to stab the man the same way as always as he drew out some of the curse energy. As he did so, it was like more energy hidden inside wanted to come along, making it far easier for Jake to pour out more than before as extremely dark-red mist began to seep out of the weapon as the poison coating turned blacker and more reddish sheen. Jake could tell the energy was mixing, but the curse hadn't pounced yet. Feeling the energy, he gladly let the curse have at it as he stabbed forward and drew blood.

Once more, the attendant didn't really react, even as the weapon embedded itself in his stomach. Jake felt the coating rapidly being consumed, especially when the energy of the attendant was thrown into the mix. Black veins spread from the attendant's wounds as Jake pulled back his weapon and felt the results with Sense of the Malefic Viper and his other senses as best as he could.

The curse energy ended up taking about the same time to be consumed as when he didn't use any coating at all, but the result was far better.

168, Jake said happily. Other alchemists would probably have found his happiness odd, though, as the cost of this increased power was Jake having used more than three times the usual curse energy to only inflict around seventy percent more damage. The efficiency had gone way down, but Jake was still happy as he would gladly spend curse energy like some trust fund kid in a toy store if it meant he could do more damage faster.

Finding himself on the right track, Jake began to refine his concoction over the next week and a half. All in all, it didn't end up being as complicated as he had feared, and in a pretty quick fashion, he created a product he was satisfied with.

[Cursed Stimulant of Hunger (Rare)] A poison created with the express purpose of feeding a cursed item related to the Sin Curse of Hunger, allowing it to indulge in gluttony uncontrollably. Whenever this poison comes into contact with curse energy related to the Sin Curse of Hunger, it shall be rapidly consumed to attract and draw out more curse energy from nearby mediums and serve as a stimulant for the curse by turning it far more volatile and consume significantly more curse energy in the process.

It was an entirely new poison, unlike anything Jake had ever created before. He kind of liked how it framed the fact it consumed more energy as one of the benefits of the poison, which was kind of correct. This was ultimately still a poison that worked against the Sin Curse of Hunger in particular, and if Jake fought some creature relying on the Sin Curse, it would not want to be hit by the poison at all. Of course, the volatility did make it deal far more damage in the same time span, but the increased cost and lack of control would rarely, if ever, be worth it. Unless they were Jake. And as for how much more damage it dealt now?

242, Jake concluded after his final tests with a huge grin.

Nearly one and a half times the damage with each stab from the curse energy. It was about as good as he could ever expect.

When it came to downsides, it now consumed roughly eleven times more curse energy than regular. For a one-hundred and forty percent increase, this was even more inefficient than the uncommon rarity versions Jake made, but he didn't care.

He did consider improving it further, but he realized that diminishing returns were kicking in hard. Maybe he could push it to 260 or 265, but at that point, it would consume sixteen to eighteen times more curse energy. No, he would have to make some hardcore qualitative improvements if he wanted to make a better version, and that just wasn't worth it. Thus, he would simply be satisfied with this one.

Sure, it was only a rare rarity poison, but Jake genuinely believed this was a good item to submit. Rarity wasn't everything, after all, and this item had a good story related to its crafting process, especially the part where he had an attendant help him. So, to conclude, one more Creation down, eight to go.

Ah, and speaking of another Creation-in-progress, it had been about two months since Jake sent Temlat on his training mission. Jake had only gone once to check about three weeks ago to see if the guy was still alive, and he most definitely was. Based on how the centaur camp was on high alert and definitely on edge, he seemed to be creating some trouble, even if he had yet to get through.

The only reason why Jake waited that long to check in was because he felt like Temlat was still alive. Even now, he still felt the young man still kicking, and if he trusted anything, it was his guts. In fact, he got the feeling the young man would soon be back, and just in time for Jake having finished his poison.

Now, there was one last thing to address how good would this poison be in actual combat? Well, to put it nicely, it was completely and utterly useless when he could use any of his other poisons, as quite frankly, a good dose of necrotic poison did far more damage than even a double-damage dose of Eternal Hungers curse. One could argue the life-stealing effect of the curse would make up for this, but not really. There was also the problem that all the poison got consumed in just a single stab, requiring him to reapply it all the time.

So, to conclude, it kinda sucked from a practical standpoint. However, that didn't mean it would continue to be that way, and Jake was certain he would find use of this kind of poison in the future who knows, maybe he could even use some of what he learned when it was time to play with rituals later on in the Challenge Dungeon.

But for now, it was time to go and turn in his second Creation to the Architect.

Chapter 813: Nevermore: The Prodigal Son Returns

So, youre not angry I had one of your employees act like a test dummy for several weeks? Imagine how many perfectly pristine statues he could have looked like he was cleaning during that time! Jake joked as he stood in front of the Bound God after having presented his second Creation.

Calling them my employees is not entirely accurate, now is it? They are merely summoned creatures, created to serve a simple function and give ambiance to the House of the Architect, the Architect answered as she was already done putting away Jakes poison.

Can I, you know, get a little hint of how good this Creation was? I know it isnt as unique as the first one, but just a tiny bit of direction would be great, Jake said with a smile.

No, the Architect outright denied him. Now, be on your way before you try to glean any more information than you should.

No thoughts on any of my current projects? Anything to say regarding my little student? Hes an interesting lad, dont you thi-

Jake still had his mouth open when he appeared standing in front of the entrance to the Architects room, the door shut. He stood there for a moment before shaking his head. The Bound God was really stingy when it came to giving out tips or even allowing Jake to be in her presence. It sucked a bit, as Jake would have loved to have gleaned some things he shouldnt, as she said.

Returning back to the alchemy lab, Jake wondered what his next project should be. He had worked on poisons for a good while now and considered if he should go in an entirely different direction. Referring back to his list, Jake put on his thinking cap.

He considered looking into making an elixir or perhaps a ritual. He also had the skill improvements to think about so much to do and so much time if he was fine fucking over his party members by spending several years within this Challenge Dungeon. Something Jake obviously wouldnt do, which was part of the reason he had submitted a rare poison and not tried to make something more impressive.

Considering Temlat should also soon be back assuming he survived Jake went with just reading some books on something he knew he would want to craft no matter what. So, walking to the stacks of books he had left so Temlat could take what he wanted, he began to go through them. He had noticed how

Temlat had brought a few books with him, but Jake didnt really care. Jake would get them back at some point anyway, and even if his student died, he could just go retrieve them himself.

After looking through the stacks a bit, Jake finally found one that looked promising as a starter: Grimoire Creation: To Forge a Legacy.

It was a bloody huge tome that Jake picked up and began to slowly go through. Even if he had a skill that gave him some instinctive knowledge, it never hurt to also study a bit on the subject. He also saw a few more books on the subject when he picked this one up, so he definitely had plenty of reading material for a good while.

Five or so days went by before an attendant walked into the alchemy room, giving Jake a big smile on his lips. Putting the book away and getting up from the bed he had been lying in, Jake walked out of the lab and toward the portal room, where he knew a certain someone had just arrived. He had asked the attendants to inform him when someone arrived through one of the portals, and it appeared someone just had.

Entering the portal room, Jake saw a young man lying on the ground, breathing heavily. Blood colored the otherwise pristine white floor as it dropped from several wounds, both new and old. Temlat was looking bloody exhausted, and a dense air hung around him, infused with his cursed energy, and without even having to check, Jake knew the young half-elf had made quite some progress.

[Half-elf lvl 194]

Temlat had already maxed out his profession before following Jake, meaning he had gained levels solely from leveling his class. Ten or so class levels, it appeared, all in the span of two and a half months or so. Great progress, especially at late-tier D-grade, which proved he hadnt been slacking off.

Still alive, huh? Jake said, smiling beneath his mask as he walked over.

The young half-elf groaned as he sat up and looked at Jake. I am.

His gaze held a level of defiance and indignation Jake found endearing. Whats more, Jake detected a minor hint of hatred that stemmed not just from the fact he was surrounded by the curse energy but a

small grudge against Jake for having put him through this kind of hellish training. At least Jake assumed that was the reason.

Are you angry with me? Jake said as he stood over the sitting Temlat. Do you think this method was too harsh? Too risky? Do you despise me because you nearly died more than a few times?

Temlat didnt answer, but his silence was good enough of a response. Articulate why you feel this. Explain to me your indignation.

Jakes student remained silent for a while before he finally answered. You just threw me away to fend for myself.

I am perfectly aware of that, Jake said without arguing. But so what?

You you barely taught me anything and then just left me there to die what did you even do? How are you even teaching me? I if I died, everything up till now would have been for nothing! Temlat practically yelled as he gritted his teeth, clearly having built up quite the resentment over these last couple of months.

Remember what you asked of me when I took you in as a student. You want me to make you strong, and that is exactly what I am doing. Do you think power comes without risk? Do you think anyone truly powerful hasnt risked their life innumerable times throughout their Path? What exactly did you expect when you accepted my offer? That we would sit in a lab for a few years, and you would emerge an expert capable of fulfilling all your desires without ever having to risk your life? Jake said in an admonishing tone.

But if I died, I-

Being dead is a preferential alternative to being weak, Jake cut him off. You always have the choice of going back to your old life. Your former owner didnt look like she would ever risk your life if you could even call what you had back then a life. Besides, wasnt it you who said it? That you would rather die than go back? You may have just said it in the heat of the moment, but I took that seriously.

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Temlat just stared back at Jake with a mixed expression on his face. Jake got the feeling he wasn't sure what to say, taking the lead instead. He was meant to be the grown-up in this relationship, after all.

I am merely sticking to my promise of helping you get strong, so you stick to your promise of doing whatever you can to do just that. I am not interested in seeing you die, but I will expect you to take risks that could result in your death if you mess up. The key part of this being that you would need to mess up. As long as you do your best and don't get incredibly unlucky, you will eventually reach your goals and get your revenge, alright? Jake asked.

Temlat slowly nodded, making Jake smile. Now go on back to your room and rest up. Come find me when you are back in peak condition and feel ready to continue. Ah, but don't dally too much; you don't want me to be the one coming to find you.

Thank you Lord Thayne, the young half-elf said as he stood up and began walking slowly back toward the alchemy lab. The hatred in his eyes had lessened, and his anger was replaced with introspection. He would have plenty of time to ponder while limping back and recovering in a bed.

Could Jake have given him a health potion? Sure. The young man had clearly run out, but Jake purposefully chose not to. He wasn't just being harsh to be an asshole either but relied on the only person whose teaching style he did know, and the half-elf being in some pain wouldn't hurt him in the long run.

Jake, having no experience with teaching, chose to just go with the teaching style the Viper used. Which was the one where he wanted Temlat to mostly figure out stuff himself while helping him in some areas, such as progressing his curse energy. He would do this while instilling the mentality of the law of the jungle that both Jake and the Viper subscribed to, making Temlat understand that he shouldn't just feel like he wanted to get stronger. He should feel like he had to get stronger and like it was the most important goal in life. Because without power, he would never be able to do what he wanted, and to stagnate and stop progressing was no different from lying down and dying.

He had no way of knowing if this was the best approach, but it seemed to be working out so far. Besides, if he taught like the Viper would, he would play his role as the Chosen of the Malefic Viper way better.

Looking at the portal to the world with the centaurs in, Jake entered to take a look at the carnage Temlat had left behind. Appearing on the other side, Jakes Sphere of Perception instantly spread out, making Jake frown and turn around as a figure was standing there.

It was a centaur a bit larger than any of the others Jake had seen, and it was even wearing armor. It had a few cuts on its body and a single arrow sticking out of its side, wielding a halberd filled with blood. A faint curse energy could be felt from the centaur himself, but way more came from his weapon. Using Identify, Jake checked the creatures level while also releasing a Pulse of Perception to see the surrounding area.

[Centaurian Warlord lvl 203]

Below the risen stone platform they were standing on, a sprawling centaur village had once been. Now, it was filled with corpses and had a dark aura hanging all over it, while the survivors mourned or were filled with hateful looks. Whats more, nearly all of the centaurs looked like they hadnt been killed by Temlat but by each other. From the many who were cleaved cleanly in two, the Centaurian Warlord in front of him had clearly done his fair share of killing himself.

You who are you? the centaur said in an angry voice. Where did the half-human go?

He went home, Jake answered casually as he studied the centaur closely. As for who I am his teacher, I guess?

Jakes answer instantly got a rise out of the Centaur Warlord as its body exploded with a mix of wind and earth-affinity mana as it pointed its weapon toward Jake. Then you die!

Despite the clear aggression, Jake didnt make any moves as the Centaur Warlord got into a position to charge. The anger he felt from the centaur was extremely powerful, but in all honesty, who could excuse the C-grade? He had just been confronted with someone claiming to be the teacher of the person who had ruined his home.

The curse energy was doing very little to amplify the anger that was already there. One didnt need to be cursed to lose all rationality, and it appeared that Temlats actions had been enough to push this Warlord over the edge, even if he didnt affect the C-grade with curse energy.

Jake looked as the C-grade centaur charged, but he didn't bother to move. Instead, he just looked at it as his eyes glowed. Instantly, a feeling that far surpassed that of anger overtook the Centaur Warlord. The one emotion that trumped all: fear. A sense of fear so overwhelming it made the centaur's survival instinct kick in instantly as all attempts to attack were abandoned, and the C-grade jumped back, shivering, too scared to even try and continue his retreat.

I will not apologize for what he did, but neither will I offer any form of recompense, Jake said with a sigh. So let the matter end here. Ah, but one warning if he does come back, be better prepared the next time. Assuming your job was to protect this place, you failed miserably and only got yourself to blame that someone so much weaker than you could wreak this level of havoc.

With those words, Jake turned around and walked back through the portal again. He no doubt looked like some divine being in the eyes of the centaur as he managed to disappear entirely out of nowhere, considering it couldn't see the portal.

Back in the portal room, Jake could admit he had pretty mixed feelings after seeing the devastation Temlat had managed to wreak. From the looks of it, he had spent most of the time he was in the world slowly picking off centaurs while somehow spreading his curse throughout the village.

Even if he had failed to kill anything with the curse, he had managed to fuel their emotions of anger above a boiling point. Most of them had killed each other in what quickly became a self-fueled circle of violence and hatred. Someone may have done something wrong, making another lash out in anger and attack. What was meant to just be a punch of rage escalated as the one who got punched felt righteous fury from someone daring to strike them. From there, a brawl would turn into a fight that eventually resulted in death.

Relatives or friends of the killed would have their anger toward the killer empowered, making them seek out revenge, and from there, a near-unstoppable cycle would be formed. The curse energy would fuel itself through all the hate and spread autonomously as long as the original source Temlat still existed.

This was one part of the reason why curses were so feared. They were hard to understand, could be fueled merely by emotions, and were often hard to detect for those inflicted. Especially considering how the curse would alter the mental state of those affected, making their ability to address their own out-of-character actions severely inhibited.

Jake's guess for how this particular centaur conflict ended was through the C-grade coming back and putting a stop to everything. As a C-grade, the Warlord would have been able to resist the curse created

by a D-grade and keep a clear head long enough to address the carnage. It had clearly taken a few deaths as the Warlord was a fighter and not someone with the ability to heal or dispel the curse, but after a bit of killing, it seemed like he had calmed the situation down enough.

Sighing, Jake walked back to the lab, and once he entered, he saw the sleeping half-elf inside his room through the sphere. He looked peaceful despite having just led to the deaths of nearly a thousand. His actions had clearly been exhausting, and he hadn't even changed out of his ruined clothes before flopping down on the bed.

He's getting more powerful for sure. I guess that was the goal all along, so I shouldn't really be complaining; he is progressing fast, Jake muttered to himself. His only real problem now was that he had no idea what Temlat would ultimately turn into.

Which was one-hundred percent a problem for future Jake to address.

For now, he had tomes to study and a Grimoire to make. Who knew? Maybe he could even get some other forms of crafting in there and bang out some quick Creations though he should probably keep an eye on Temlat in the meanwhile and make sure he didn't lose himself completely to the curse he was nurturing. There definitely weren't going to be any more portal adventures in the next little while.

Chapter 814: Nevermore: A More Holistic Approach

Jake had wanted to just focus on making a Grimoire. He truly had. The problem was that he couldn't just do as he usually did and experiment until he pumped something good out for one simple reason he had kind of forgotten, even if it was expressly mentioned in the skill description. It was only when Jake tried to craft one he brought up the skill description again and was reminded.

[Grimoire of the Heretic-Chosen (Unique)] Expand your Path and allow others to walk in your footsteps. Allows the Heretic-Chosen to craft a Grimoire related to his Path, allowing another of the enlightened races to consume it, granting them either a class or profession. The nature of the Grimoire depends on a multitude of factors, including crafting ingredients, the will of the creator, and several unknowns. Requirements to use the Grimoire vary. A cooldown period is required between each crafting attempt, and a longer cooldown is triggered after a successful Grimoire craft. Due to your unique Path, every Grimoire created will be more potent by default and receive additional Records based on all your stats.

A cooldown period. Yeah, that one definitely threw a spanner into the works. To make matters worse, the failed Grimoire Jake had tried to make while experimenting just turned into ash, wasting all of the

materials. Materials that were in no way cheap at the Merit Point Exchange, as stronger Paths required better base ingredients, and Jake felt fairly confident the reason he failed the first time around was due to his attempt to cheap out.

The cooldown period wasn't even short. It was an entire damn month, even if Jake failed, making him wonder if it wouldn't be over a year when he succeeded. The only good thing was that the Records Jake tried to pour into the Grimoire were fully refunded even when he failed the crafting attempt, so nothing besides the ingredients was wasted.

On that note, Jake read in the books that the good thing about Grimoires was that the Records gained from crafting one always equaled out with those poured into it, meaning one never truly lost anything. It could still easily turn into a bad investment as making a Grimoire wasn't cheap, and some jackass could get and waste the evolution granted, but luckily that wasn't of any concern to Jake, considering he would just give the final product to the Architect.

Anyway, with the longer cooldown, should he succeed, he would likely only have one real shot, though, so he had to be careful.

With Grimoire-crafting temporarily shelved due to cooldown-related delays, Jake focused on other projects he also needed to get done. One of them was naturally the entire Temlat matter, but things had gone a lot more smoothly there than Jake had initially anticipated. He had sought out Jake only three days after he got back with a significantly better demeanor than before.

After some rest and reflection, he even seemed thankful for the experience in the centaur world. He had learned he had abilities he didn't even know about and applications of curse energy he hadn't ever considered. Jake wanted to hear more as he got Temlat to explain what had happened inside of the centaur world more in-depth and what the young half-elf had discovered.

I always thought of my curse energy as just another kind of energy to kill with, a way to improve my destructive power. That it was the essence of my own hatred toward others but I never really considered how much it can affect others outside of combat. I did know it made my opponent more reckless when we fought, but they obviously knew that was due to the curse and would work to eliminate it once the fight was over, Temlat explained as Jake encouraged him to continue.

But one day, in that world, I killed a centaur hunter who spotted and tried to hunt me down. We ended up fighting, and I won in the end, killing him. Right after, I heard its allies nearby and ran to hide just in time for them to find the corpse of their friend. I saw their rage and anger as they picked up the corpse

and brought it back to a small temporary camp they had made nearby. That is when I noticed the curse energy on the corpse still seeping out and influencing the centaurs and their own anger. Whats more, none of them made any efforts to eliminate it, almost as if they didnt even notice.

Following them to their temporary camp, I saw them have heated discussions. I dont know what they were saying, but I felt something I hadnt ever imagined. My curse energy within them was growing despite me doing nothing. They fueled it all by themselves. I knew that if I did something, they would notice, so I just kept watching. A few hours later, the hunters decided to head back to their main encampment, and on their way, they encountered a pretty powerful beast. Even if they won, you could see how frustrated they were with one another. Every minor mistake was scrutinized, and by the time they returned home, they clearly hated each other.

I couldnt follow them all the way into their settlement but I could still feel their curse energy even from far away. So, I kept observing for two days until the curse within one of the three disappeared. I was afraid they had discovered the curse and would all soon be cured until I found the cursed ones corpse being buried outside of the encampment along with two others whom I felt very faint traces of the curse also on. That is when I began to understand the true power of my curse. Of my power.

Temlat told his story with excitement that was almost childlike. He was proud of what he had done, and even if it wasnt Jakes style, he wasnt going to judge Temlat for how he achieved things. He did things the best he could, and it was indisputable that Temlat would have never had a chance against the centaur settlement in a direct confrontation.

Jake kept listening as Temlat kept explaining how he managed to spread the curse slowly through the encampment by killing some of their hunters and even once threw a head into the encampment filled with even more curse energy. Not to mention all the times he threw in normal fireballs and set fire to their houses just to make them even more mad.

It took him around three weeks before he had the settlement fully on edge. Their hatred of this unknown enemy who killed their kin and even sometimes burned down their homes was truly staggering, and he didnt plan on giving them any outlet. Temlat had fully waged a psychological war fueled by curse energy until, one day, it boiled over.

Temlat saw his chance and ignited much of the curse energy in the camp all at once during what he viewed as a huge and very heated town square meeting. Maybe some of them noticed something was wrong and identified the curse, but they didnt have time as others went berserk. A brawl broke out that soon escalated into a deadly fight where dozens died.

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The violence only spread from there, and Temlat took this chance to try to sneak through the settlement and get to the platform on top of a small rocky hill sitting in the middle where he knew the portal was located.

On the way, he set fire to things to mask his presence even more, but things hadn't worked out as he expected. The C-grade Centaur Warlord, who had otherwise barely shown itself, came out at that very moment to quell the conflict and, in the process, quickly identified Temlat as the source of everything.

Jake's student had to run with all his might. He flew up to the rocky platform as the Centaur Warlord chased, and those around it attacked with ranged weapons. That was partly how Temlat had gotten so injured, as he was hit by several things in those final moments, and with the halberd practically touching his back, he had stumbled through the portal.

That was also why he had been so on edge when Jake walked in. He had nearly just died and was for lack of a better word in shock. However, that didn't mean the feelings he had poured out during their talk were any less genuine.

After hearing Temlat's story, Jake didn't really have any advice. He realized that Temlat had reached his own conclusions when it came to a different kind of Path he wanted to take. Rather than someone who used his curse energy as a destructive force with his black flames, he wanted to be far more of a schemer. A far more classical curse user, if you may. This was a Path Jake was definitely not qualified to give any advice on, so he could only encourage his student to do whatever he deemed best while still helping him to nurture and make his curse more powerful. Because no matter the Path, the curse Temlat nurtured was still the core.

Jake did have one piece of advice he wanted to give, though.

Right now, your only goal is revenge, right? I believe it is time to also think beyond that. What happens when you're done exacting your vengeance? What will you do, and what will you become when that happens? What person do you want to be, and what Path do you want to take? While your curse is the source of your power, do not let it be the only thing that defines and controls your actions. In the end, it is nothing but a tool for you to use, not the other way around, Jake said, trying to give some actual advice that he honestly wasn't sure was good or bad.

He just had the feeling that Temlat would gladly shoot himself through the chest to hit the ones he hated in the head. And while that could work, Jake wasn't sure that kind of approach was best. This was also why Jake insisted on keeping up his presence-resistance training, as that helped Temlat remain grounded, even as his curse grew in power.

I will keep your words in mind, Lord Thayne, Temlat bowed. Also I have a question are there poisons or something like that I can use to better spread my curses?

Jake considered for a while. The short answer was yes, as the curse energy Temlat had would be totally useable even in poisons, unlike Jake's, as long as he made the mix right. The problem was that Jake doubted the half-elf could make anything useful even if he had a couple of years. He didn't have any alchemy experience, after all, and with usual poisons, you were kind of forced to start from the bottom.

That is when Jake remembered one book he had stumbled upon when doing his own research. However, he quickly discarded it after reading in the introduction that his Sin Curse wouldn't be compatible with most of the methods discussed within. Looking at the stack of books nearby, Jake sent out a string of mana, picked it up where he remembered he had left it, and checked the cover.

An Introduction To Curse Proliferation: Methods Based On Practical Demonstrations of the Malefic One.

It was a damn long cover, with the author bragging he had attended one of the many times Villy liked to show off way back in the day. Jake did remember that the book mentioned that the Sin Curse of Wrath was compatible with the methods discussed in the book, so it should be useable for Temlat even if he didn't have a Sin Curse quite yet.

Check this one out, Jake said as he handed Temlat the book, and he pointed to a stack of books off to the side of the big pile. There are about thirty more by the same author right there, so if this one is a hit, probably check those out.

Thank you, Lord Thayne, Temlat said politely as he accepted the book gracefully and quickly went to study it.

Jake watched him leave with a smile, wondering if he would figure out the methods within. It would be very interesting if he did because Jake really wanted to see if Temlat could actually use plague theory as a way to spread his curse.

What?

He had read the introduction that clearly mentioned plagues as one of the primary methods, and Jake was curious, so who could blame him. Making plagues himself seemed like a bad idea, but he did want to see someone study it, and what place was better than a Challenge Dungeon where, no matter the result, there wouldn't be any permanent consequences? Was he potentially creating a living natural disaster that could kill countless people? Sure, but at least the living disaster would be strong, and considering that was what his student had asked him to help with, Jake would consider it a job well done even if Temlat turned into someone who would be on a multiversal watch-list.

Speaking of doing a job well Temlat's approach to that entire training mission hadn't actually been what Jake expected. He had instead expected Temlat to take a far stealthier approach. The young half-elf already had pretty good stealth skills, and it seemed like an opportune time to improve those if he had to sneak past the centaurs.

Jake's original intention was to help Temlat become a good assassin of sorts. To give him the skills to sneak in and kill those he wished dead. Things had changed now where Temlat had taken a more, let's just say, holistic approach to spreading his curse energy, but Jake still thought his stealth idea was good.

Which had got him wondering why the hell did Jake suck so much at being stealthy himself? Shit, his skill was still only rare, even after all this time, and as he opened the description and read it over, he felt a bit conflicted.

[Arcane Stealth (Rare)] An upgraded version of the Expert Stealth skill, retaining all benefits while infusing in additional abilities related to your arcane affinity. You find it easier than ever to blend into the environment, making your presence, mana, and nearly all traces of your existence hidden as you wait for your prey to be vulnerable. You have enhanced your stealth capabilities through magic, allowing you to mask your physical shape to become one with the environment, even to the sense of touch and most magical scans. Adds a small bonus to the effect of Agility, Perception, Willpower, and Intelligence while successfully remaining undetected.

In truth, it wasn't like the effects of the skill were bad. It was a good skill that did its job, and it saved Jake's ass when he used it to hide from the Termite King, but it was definitely a skill that was due for an upgrade.

Jake had been putting off upgrading it for far too long as he simply never found a good chance while doing Nevermore with a party of five. There weren't many good excuses to sneak around solo, and more often than not, being sneaky had no big benefits.

However, what time was better than now? He wanted to submit improved skills as Creations, and he believed Arcane Stealth was a prime candidate. He even had a few good ideas for good stealth skills, and one upgrade path especially tickled his fancy. Funnily enough, it had even been told to him by a person who also happened to tickle his fancy: Artemis.

As a more traditional hunter, she also had many traditional skills, and during their practice sessions, she often complained about how Jake so easily saw through it when she tried to use the concepts of her stealth skill to hide. These were definitely concepts Jake quite liked when he heard about them because they relied on something that mega-tickled Jake's fancy: the one and only Perception stat.

Chapter 815: Nevermore: Spectrum of Perception

To be stealthy.

An ancient art learned by many teenagers with wary parents and creaky floorboards to remain undetected as they were up to no good. That, or because they just needed to go to the bathroom really late in the night and didn't want to wake anyone up.

However, this was but one part of the stealth: the art of avoiding sound. Others were stealthy by melding into the environment through camouflage or even found ways to hide their heat signatures or other traces of their existence.

There were countless methods in the multiverse to remain undetected, with Jake's current method akin to being able to summon a fake boulder he could hide within, which also helped mask his presence and energy. It was far from perfect, and moving around while using it wasn't advised, but so far, it had kind of gotten the job done.

However, now, it was high time to improve it, and he may as well learn from the best while doing so.

In the multiverse, Jake knew of two beings who had reached the ultimate peak of stealthiness. One of them was naturally Umbra, the leader of the Court of Shadows. Her ability to remain undetected until the moment she decided to strike was unparalleled as she could hide within the shadows themselves only to emerge when she so desired. Her form of stealth was the most classical sort, but there was one person in the multiverse who surpassed her when it came to remaining undetected.

Because another branch of stealth was one where you could be seen, but no one truly noticed you. Where you could stand next to your target on the street without them looking twice your way. The being who had reached the apex of this was, needless to say, Eversmile, the ultimate shapeshifter. He could take any form and become anyone or anything he wanted. His form wasn't just limited to people, as far as Jake had been told, but he could even mimic objects or non-humanoid races.

So, if one apex emerged out of nowhere, the other emerged from right next to you unexpectedly. These two methods were often recognized as the main branches: obscurity and blending in. Jake was currently doing a bit of both which most stealth methods did but he did both kind of poorly.

Jake wanted to still do a bit of both with his improved method, primarily because he wanted to try and learn what Artemis had talked about. At least he wanted to integrate concepts of what she explained, even if it was pretty damn complicated. He did have their entire discussion committed to memory, though, as he recalled what she said during what Jake would call a great discussion on progression methods, while others would probably define it as pillow talk.

My method of stealth is a lot more simple than what you described, Artemis had explained. The Path of the Hunter is naturally intertwined with the world around us. It is one of the most natural Paths to anyone in the system, and anyone who fights and kills partly steps into the Path of the Hunter at least a few times in their lives. Hunters are merely the name we use instead of predators for those of the enlightened races, and many civilizations even call those who fight monsters hunters by default, no matter what weapon or form of combat they use.

The basis for the entire stealth method Artemis used was to be a natural hunter. A part of an ecosystem. At least, that is the mentality Artemis had when she first learned and improved the skill.

My form of stealth leans into becoming one with the environment in a more literal sense. Feel the natural mana around you, feel the presence of the world itself, and breathe it in. Let it fill you and become one with everything. Perceive the world as you let it perceive you, and through that, you will know how to hide at the end of Perception. Seek the very edge of where you recognize your own form

within the world and obscure what little remains of you that remain as you blend in. If you do this, you will be able to move without hesitation and act entirely normal, as you will simply disappear from everyones spectrum of what they perceive. You will never be perfect in this; no one is, but if they cannot perceive the world as well as you do, finding you will prove difficult. Well, unless they have a cheat-like Bloodline, Artemis had further elaborated.

Jake had probed further and had kind of formed his own interpretation using more pre-system terms. Jake would liken this kind of method to changing how you appear on the color spectrum. The human eye, before the system, was unable to see things like ultraviolet light but had a limited spectrum. The same was true for what one could hear, and Jake wouldnt be surprised if the same had been true for smells and pretty much everything else.

With the system, the spectrum had expanded. Magical elements were introduced; one could see and feel mana, and Jake could see things he never would have been able to before. With his Perception alone, he could easily peer through things like naturally-formed mist or clouds despite it being completely impossible to see through before the system, and with time, he knew he would even be able to see through things like non-magically reinforced walls.

Where this spectrum being expanded truly mattered was in the realm of concepts. It was one of the reasons why someone like Arnold also had Perception as his highest stat, as it allowed him to perceive things others couldnt. Jake was the same, and as an example, he had only recognized and gained his arcane affinity because his growing Perception allowed him to notice it.

This spectrum continued to expand even now, and while Perception was far from the only criterion to see concepts and become able to understand them, it was definitely an essential factor. Not to say everyone needed it to reach the peak, as someone like the Sword Saint was so in tune with the concepts that mattered to him, it wasnt as much about perceiving them as it was simply living them, if that made sense.

All of this is to say that Perception allowed you to detect and see more on the spectrum of the world. This spectrum was eternally expanding without any end. Jakes Bloodline allowed him to see everything within the physical spectrum with his Sphere, and as it existed outside of the system, it wasnt limited. Of course, it wasnt entirely accurate to say that he saw everything as if he actually could; his brain would explode from perceiving concepts even Primordials couldnt comprehend. It was more right to say he saw everything he already knew could exist, with perhaps a bit more shown here and there.

Also upon reflection, what had happened in the final moments of Jake fighting Valdemar probably included expanding this spectrum far more than he could usually handle, which was also why Jake

couldnt remember everything he had felt back then anymore. He had touched upon things that simply didnt exist to him yet.

Anyway, to get back on the topic of creating a stealth skill, the method Artemis used was to see yourself on this spectrum of the world and then become one with it. To move yourself on the spectrum from where even a level 0 could see you to somewhere no one would know you were there, even if you stood right next to and breathed them down the neck. Simply because they wouldnt be capable of registering you even existed. Jake would liken it to himself from the visual spectrum of light into the ultraviolet in pre-system terms and move every sound he made into the ultrasonic, with the same being done for every other trace of his existence.

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Of course, this was Artemis method, and Jake had the feeling he wouldnt be able to replicate something like this perfectly. In fact, he was pretty damn sure he wouldnt be able to, as that sounded like at least a Mythical C-grade skill that would effectively make Jake entirely undetectable to anyone who had less Perception than himself.

Whats more, Artemis said that her stealth skill even worked in combat to help keep her hidden, even if the effect was lessened while fighting due to how much energy one had to give off that inadvertently disrupted and warped the natural world around her. Not that it mattered, as this was definitely out of Jakes realm of possibility.

However, he did believe he could move himself in the physical realm of Perception. He had plenty of experience observing that, after all, and could even make use of some of what he learned from his Bloodline. As for the rest of the stealth capabilities? That would have to be mimicked using other means. Primarily, his arcane energy, where he already had some good ideas and a stealth skill already with that ability.

It had to be reiterated once more that Jake had thought about how to improve his stealth for a long time and just never got the opportunity. That is where all his ideas for using arcane energy came from. Artemis had just given him even more good ideas to put on top, and now, in this House of the Architect, Jake would throw them all together.

Whats more, he wanted to build a skill that could serve as a foundation for more upgrades. One that he could potentially even train on together with Artemis if they ever got the chance to further improve it.

This is how Jakes next period of intense practice began. He would spend his time working on the stealth skill at the House or doing practical testing while also completing some Merit Point Missions, which would fund his Grimoire experimentation once a month or so. In between, he would sometimes help out Temlat and make sure he was also making progress.

After only the first two weeks, Jake already had his first little bit of progress as he implemented some improvements to the stealth skill he had long been considering, which resulted in a nice little notification.

Skill Upgraded: [Arcane Stealth (Rare)] --> [Improved Arcane Stealth (Rare)]

It was small and nice indeed. The skill stayed within the same rarity, which indicated it had been a pretty low-level C-grade rare skill after Jake evolved. Which made sense, considering the skill had avoided getting downgraded a rank after he evolved. This upgrade had brought it back to be considered a pretty good C-grade rare skill, but it was naturally far from enough. All Jake had really done was tighten up what the skill already did and improve all aspects of it using all he had learned since he made the skill while still in D-grade.

Only another one and a half months later, Jake had failed another two Grimoire crafts primarily because he wanted a good one and felt both wouldnt turn out well but had also made plenty of progress when it came to improving his stealth skill.

He infused more stability into the mana constructs around him, making him appear more like a physical thing and not a person than ever before. When he stood still, he became nearly indiscernible from his surroundings when he camouflaged the mana around him, and even if he moved and used energy within this construct, it couldnt be detected on the outside. It became as if he had placed a dome around himself, hiding him away from the world. The concept of Jakes original Arcane Stealth skill had been taken to an extreme, and the system recognized it.

Skill Upgraded: [Improved Arcane Stealth (Rare)] --> [Supreme Arcane Stealth (Epic)]

Now, this is where the truly hard part began. Jakes newly acquired Supreme Arcane Stealth was a good skill in its own right, but it had severe drawbacks. First of all, he couldnt really move when it was fully activated. He had to maintain the construct around him to stay hidden, and if he did move, it would look as if some big rock or something was gliding around.

This led to another problem: the skill could only really be used in places where there were other things to mimic. He could use it on an open field and try to just make it entirely transparent, but it wouldn't work nearly as well as, say, within a forest. Plus, he would still have the problem of being unable to move around, as even if it was transparent, it would still affect the world around him and leave faint distortion.

To conclude, Jake's original upgrade path for Arcane Stealth was severely limited by design. It was essentially a camping skill for Jake to sit still and wait for his moment to attack while even hiding him when he charged up his often devastating opening strike.

It did this extremely well, but its limitations did mean getting it above epic rarity wasn't likely. This is where the concepts Artemis spoke of came in.

Jake simply wasn't skilled enough to move everything on the spectrum of Perception like Artemis talked about. However, he was confident in moving himself when it came purely to the visual realm. He kind of already did something similar when he made his arcane construct invisible, as concepts would bleed through, but this time, he wanted to do it fully.

This in itself would usually not result in a good stealth skill. Hiding from sight was, in general, not considered super difficult; the truly hard part was hiding everything else. Your energy signature, presence, mana, internal energy you gave off, traces you leave behind, and so forth.

However, for Jake in particular, he was confident in sealing in those things. That is what his entire Arcane Stealth path was all about, after all.

His plan was to merge these two concepts. On the one hand, he would make himself one with the world when it came to the visual realm, and on the other, he would hide everything about himself using his stable arcane energy that didn't exist in the physical realm.

This was not as good of a technique as what Artemis talked about, as Jake wouldn't truly make himself one with the world as she talked about, where everything that was Jake would merge with the environment. Even so, it would allow Jake to do things he couldn't before. It would allow him to move around even while using his stealth skill, and sneak to a better position to attack from.

Jake wanted to retain the functionality of effectively creating a camping dome when he wanted to attack, as it was very difficult to hide the level of energy he gave off otherwise. This did mean that Jake couldn't use skills that required too much energy while using the stealth skill he wanted to make, but that was a sacrifice he had to make. He wasn't going for perfection the first time around, after all.

Days turned to weeks, and weeks turned to months. Jake was getting close with his Grimoire project but still wasn't satisfied and purposefully failed every craft so far, even if he could have succeeded. In the stealth department, things were also moving along, but this final step on the upgrade path was by far the hardest, as Jake had to integrate a new and pretty high-level concept. There was progress, though.

One day, Jake was meditating on a bed in one of the many rooms in the lab area as he worked on his stealth skill. He breathed deeply as he tried to mimic his environment and move himself on the spectrum as he had done many times before. Once more, he felt a faint shift, and opening his eyes, things appeared distorted for a fraction of a moment until everything returned to normal once more. Jake kept focusing as he tried to remember this feeling, not even knowing if he had succeeded with anything that mattered.

Just then, a figure peeked into the room. Temlat walked by the door with a book as he looked in, and Jake was just about to greet him when his student frowned. He looked around and seemed to focus a bit on where Jake was sitting as he muttered. Weird, I'm sure Lord Thayne was in here

Right as he turned around to leave, Jake spoke up: I am here.

When he did, Temlat whipped his head and looked straight at Jake, clearly capable of seeing him. Alright, when I announce myself like this, the effect drops as others become aware of my existence got it.

Lord Thayne, did you just arrive, or? Temlat asked, confused.

Just working on something, Jake smiled. Can you tell me, when you entered the room, did you know I was here?

I felt your presence, but I couldn't see you, so I just figured you had just left, Temlat answered honestly. Am I interrupting? I can come back later.

No, its fine, I think I am ready to move on to the next step of my experiment. Now, did you have a question?

As he looked at his student, he got a nice idea. Wouldnt his little student be the perfect test subject for Jake while he improved? You know, sneak around and see if Temlat could find him and try to mess with him a bit purely for research purposes, of course. Definitely not something Jake would ever take pleasure in.

Chapter 816: Nevermore: Nearly Halfway

Multi-tasking wasnt something Jake would consider himself good at, but what he was pretty decent at was switching his hyperfocus between different subjects one at a time. This did result in Jake often forgetting a few of his current projects, but in the House of the Architect, Jake found a cheat:

Attendants.

They were like super-assistants who didnt actually wanna assist with anything unless explicitly asked and couldnt do anything that required any skill. However, what they did do was work as perfect alarm clocks that Jake could ask to come tell him whenever he had to switch to another project. They could even follow semi-complex requests, such as not disturbing Jake if he was in meditation but waiting till he was out if he asked for that.

What he primarily used these attendants for these days was to remind him once the cooldown period for crafting Grimoires was soon over. He had them tell him five or so days before every new attempt so Jake could switch and research a bit more on the topic while also making sure he had all the necessary ingredients for when it was crafting time. There were also quite a few things to consider when it came to crafting Grimoires, as it wasnt as if there was just one type to craft.

Now, for a bit of clarification. Jake had come across three Grimoires in the past, all of them Akashic Tomes. Akashic Tomes were pretty much just a high-level version of Grimoires that granted a specific class or profession. They were highly focused Records on doing just that, and while that was certainly powerful, it didnt mean they were superior to other forms of Grimoires.

They did vary a bit from usual Grimoires, though. There existed several ways to make Grimoires, and one wasnt entirely in control of which one was chosen during the crafting process and the primary difference came from the cost and skill required to do different kinds. As an example, If one was

incredibly skilled and invested enough time, an Akashic Tome could be made like any other Grimoire; however, many instead ended up making them the easy way.

The easy way, in this case, being the one where you added too much of the core ingredient: your own Records. As Akashic Tomes were nearly always an attempt to make direct copies of prior professions or classes to pass down, one could cheat the crafting process by just pouring in more Records. Sadly, this did result in one not getting the full refund for a successful craft. Yet, despite this, Akashic Tomes were by far the most popular type of Grimoire out there, and for a simple reason:

They were sometimes the only option. Also, in many cases, the person who made them didn't care about this extra cost. They were people who had already given up on progressing and just wanted to leave a successor, or people who were approaching the end of their lifespan and wanted their Path to survive even after their death.

Crafting other forms of Grimoires took either a lot of research and dedication or a skill specifically suited for it, such as the one Jake got. Grimoire-making skills weren't actually that rare, but many of them sucked and still only made Akashic Tomes the only real option. Many theorized the effectiveness of the Grimoire-crafting skill correlated to how much the system wanted to propagate a Path, which meant rarer Paths got better versions. So, needless to say, Jake got quite a good version.

These people with lesser crafting skills or no crafting skills for Grimoires at all would thus use the easy crafting method by nearly entirely using their own Records to make Akashic Tomes. This was how the vast majority of Grimoires were created, as Grimoire-crafting was difficult in the multiverse, especially if you wanted to make decent ones. Additionally, the system loved distributing these more than regular Grimoires, improving the chance of finding a good successor.

Jake had considered trying to create an Akashic Tome but found himself unsure how to do that properly and instead decided to go for a far more general one, the risks associated with Akashic Tomes also playing a role in putting him off them. These general Grimoires were simply collections of Records regarding a certain Path for someone to consume just before evolving. The incredible influx of Records would, in nearly all cases, lead to huge impacts during the evolution, allowing the user to choose a new class or profession related to the Records associated with the Grimoire.

Also, it had to be emphasized it was class or profession. When crafting a Grimoire, you had to focus the Records on one Path, which in Jake's case was the profession, primarily because he used a profession skill to create the Grimoire. Trying to do both class and profession would end up just being useless, even if Jake read it was technically possible. Just ill-advised.

Either way, Jake wanted to go for a high-level, regular, profession-focused Grimoire. If he was satisfied with just an okay Grimoire, he could have made one months ago, but he may as well make a decent one, right?

Now, it was just a question of what would come first: his new stealth skill or the Grimoire. In between working on these two and some other things, time quickly passed, with Jake especially enjoying messing with innocent beings within the different worlds to test his stealth skill. Temlat also didnt escape unscathed, as Jake often attempted to quickly hide before he entered a room Jake was in. This proved to be really valuable training, as hiding from someone who knew you were there and hiding from those completely unaware were very different.

Ultimately, the winner ended up being the Grimoire. Jake hadnt even expected it to be the case, but on that day, he had just really gotten in the groove while crafting the book. To clarify, yes, one did have to make an actual physical book. The ingredients one needed to craft a Grimoire were very much expected, with there being three primary ingredients: the book itself, the Records, and the ink.

Funnily enough, the book didnt actually matter much; it was the content. One could often buy books that could be used for Grimoires cheap, and the Merit Point Exchange did sell them. The ink was a whole other story. Jake had decided to mix the ink himself as the method wasnt that different from alchemy, so he just bought the herbs, rocks, and this odd liquid mana of sorts and mixed it all together to create this odd multi-colored ink that looked a bit like oil spilled on water.

One would expect this ink would then be used to draw magic circles or something like that on the inside of the books pages. This was what many of Jakes drawings looked like, but it wasnt like it was a requirement. In truth, it didnt matter what one drew on the inside; all that mattered was that the crafter was the one who drew it, as one had to infuse energy and Records during the entire process. Jake chose to make different symbols he remembered from alchemy as he believed that represented his Path as an alchemist, but he also made different motifs here and there. Perhaps there was even a beer bottle or two mixed in on some of the pages as Jake poured in memories of his journey so far along with his Records.

Jake had expected to purposefully discard the book toward the end of the craft but stopped himself. Everything just felt right this time along, and as Jake finished the last stroke, he didnt have any complaints. This was where he could either choose to summon his Alchemical Flame to burn the book and start over or commit and this time, he committed. With a sigh, Jake grasped both sides of the book and slammed it shut as a faint shockwave of energy was released and the book sealed shut.

The entire thing locked up as the pages seemed to merge, and the book was filled with energy that turned it into more than just a simple collection of pages. Its durability skyrocketed as it began floating by itself in front of Jake, and the entire aura of the room changed.

In the next moment, it felt as if something descended from the system itself as runes Jake couldn't recognize formed on the cover of the book as a title was written with a motif also forming on the cover just beneath this title. The runes and new drawing hummed for several seconds before everything fell silent, and the book began falling to the ground. Jake quickly caught it and stared at the overly large tome right as a system notification came.

You have successfully crafted [Originators Grimoire of the Heretic-Blessed (Unique)] A new kind of creation has been made.

The book was leatherbound with the title written on top and the motif of what looked like two mountains standing side by side with humanoid figures standing atop both. Symbolizing equality between the two or something, Jake guessed. After checking the cover, he continued with excitement and checked out the description of his newly made item.

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[Originators Grimoire of the Heretic-Blessed (Unique)] Grants the opportunity to potentially unlock a Heretic-Blessed profession if compatible. Must be consumed within 1 day (24 hours) of evolving a profession at maximum, or all effects are lost.

Requirements: Lvl 99-199 in any profession. Compatible user.

Alright, Jake had to admit that the description wasn't overly exciting and looked as basic as it could be. Then again, it looked nearly exactly like the Akashic Tomes Jake had encountered before, with the only new addition here being the requirement to use the Grimoire within 24 hours of evolving. The others naturally didn't have that, as they would directly just cause an evolution to happen if you could use them. This one, not so much.

Consuming an Akashic Tome would always trigger an evolution, even if one used the Grimoire in the middle of a grade, such as at level 140 or something. Jake's Grimoire could also trigger an evolution at any level, but it was only a chance, not a guarantee. This was why most people or factions saved

Grimoires to be used right before natural evolutions and not in the middle of grades, as if one didn't trigger the evolution mid-grade, the Grimoire would be wasted.

However, despite the basic description, Jake wasn't disappointed. In fact, he was incredibly pleased when he saw the Originator's tag in the book title. It had been just the thing he was going for, and seeing it there made him confident it would be a damn good submission.

As the name implied, the Originator tag signified the item was made by someone who originated the Path. In Jake's case, he was the one who pioneered the Heretic-Chosen Path, which the Heretic-Blessed Path seemed to be a lesser version of. He could admit he was a bit perplexed no one had been Heretic-Blessed before, but maybe no one just ever been able to make a proper Path out of it. Who knows, and honestly, who cares Jake being the first was only a good thing for him.

This prefix, signifying it was made by the Originator, added more Records than usual, and just to get the tag, you needed a certain level of Records for it to be recognized. In the uniqueness department, it also couldn't get any better, as what was more unique than a unique Path never really seen before, crafted by its progenitor? So, yeah, to conclude, it was a damn good creation Jake was proud of and felt certain it would add a lot of bonus points.

With the Grimoire in the bag, the next project to complete was his stealth skill, which was taking longer than he would have hoped. It was that final snag of moving himself on the visual spectrum that really messed him up every time. He was making some progress, though.

When sitting still, he had gotten really good at hiding himself completely, to the level where Temlat had no way to find him. He even fooled the C-grades in the different worlds enough to be able to stand in the middle of a group of them without anyone knowing he was there.

His only minor problem was that this was only while he was still. He couldn't move, or the gig would be up instantly. There really wasn't any sudden moment of insight or anything Jake lacked to understand what he had to do at this point. All he could do was practice as the idea of the upgraded skill began to ever so slowly materialize.

Jake went from having to stand entirely still to being able to take single steps without anyone noticing. It progressed to several steps quickly from there before Jake could walk without any problems. It did take a lot of focus to do, though, and he had to make sure he didn't give himself away.

The primary problem was that whenever Jake moved, he used stamina, which would inadvertently release some energy. This energy could then be picked up by pretty much anyone, as it included Jakes energy signature.

If Jake wanted to be able to run around and even use some skills, he couldnt let anything leak at all. Any kind of distortion ruined his shifting on the visual spectrum, but Jake believed he was getting close to achieving his goal as the days passed. Close enough that as he made his progress, yet another skill upgrade had appeared when Jake pushed for it.

Skill Upgraded: [Superior Arcane Stealth (Epic)] --> [Superior Arcane Hunters Stealth (Ancient)]

This upgrade added traces of the concept Jake wanted to bring forth. It was a skill that would allow Jake to stay entirely hidden as long as he didnt exert himself too much. He could walk and run casually in the middle of a crowd, and even if he slightly bumped into someone, as long as others were nearby, they wouldnt notice.

It was as if Jake didnt exist in their minds until they recognized he did. The problem with this method of stealth was that the moment you were seen, getting into stealth mode again was incredibly difficult. It was akin to how someone could look at a picture for an hour without noticing anything was wrong with it, but the second someone pointed out a minor error, you couldnt unsee it. This was sadly just one of the downsides of this stealth method, but compared to some others, it was incredibly minor. Plus, Jake already had some budding ideas as to how he could exploit the concept but all of that wasnt for this upgrade but something far down the line.

For now, his only goal was to make the kind of stealth skill Jake had wanted for a long time. He had one more upgrade to go, and this one would likely be the biggest as it was the one that would bring everything together.

Weeks turned to months and soon nine entire months had passed since Jake first entered the House of the Architect.

On one fateful day that would be remembered in the kingdom for centuries to come, Jake found himself walking in the capital city of the medieval worlds largest faction as he approached a castle. A transparent and extremely thin barrier of stable arcane mana covered his entire body, making his form look slightly see-through and shimmering, reminiscent of those cloaking devices in games pre-system. He definitely looked out of place with his cloak and mask and shimmering form, yet no one seemed to notice him.

He didn't exist to anyone, as he even grabbed a fruit from one of the many stalls and tossed a few coins of the local currency into the till. The moment he had the fruit in hand, it was affected by his stable arcane barrier, too, promptly disappearing. If anyone had been looking, they likely wouldn't even have registered what had happened.

Walking up the stairs to the castle, Jake easily slipped by the many guards who didn't even glance at him. Opening the gate to get inside wasn't something Jake had confidence in doing undetected, though, so he had to take a small break. However, he did notice that the detection magic circle didn't pick him up at all, so that was nice to see.

A minute or so later, the gate opened as a guest arrived, and Jake slipped inside and went toward the throne room. Today would be the day he would succeed. It had to. Jake was running out of major factions' capital cities to do this kind of thing in.

Reaching the throne room, it was smack-full, just as expected. Jake had chosen this day on purpose as he knew it would be full, which would give him more test subjects. The throne room had a classic design, with a king and queen sitting on thrones up a few steps, with ministers and such lining the sides of the throne room. The middle was entirely clear, which made this a brilliant place to test something else Jake would bake into the skill.

At the entrance to the long throne room, Jake took a deep breath as he tested the first thing that had to work. Taking a step forward, everything around him distorted as Jake used One Step and appeared twenty meters ahead, only seven or eight meters from the king and queen. The two royals were both around level 230, with the highest-leveled individual in the room and the entire kingdom a level 239 general.

As he used the skill, Jake focused on stabilizing his arcane barrier and keeping himself hidden. After the teleport, Jake stood extremely still as he observed everyone around him, but no one had noticed anything, not even the king, who seemed to be looking around where Jake had just appeared.

So far, so good, Jake thought with relief. He had done this before, and he had a feeling he would have gotten an upgrade already if he mentally pushed for it the first time he succeeded but Jake wanted more.

Standing there in the middle of the throne room with dozens of C-grades nearby, Jake took out his bow. His eyes opened wide as he focused with all his might. The stable arcane barrier that hugged his body began to slowly shimmer as it moved. It began expanding as a bubble was formed with Jake in the center. It soon had a radius of nearly five meters as Jake stopped, finding himself safely within the stable arcane sphere.

No one had noticed him yet it was time for the final test.

Feeling a bit nervous and strained mentally, Jake lifted his bow and nocked an arrow. The barrier around him remained stable as Jake kept focusing on keeping it hidden as he took a final deep breath.

Here goes nothing.

Arcane Awakening activated with full power as Jake's entire body erupted with burning arcane energy. The nocked arrow and bow also began burning with energy as Arcane Powershot was charged, Jake aiming his bow directly at the king sitting on his throne.

Yet, despite all this no one even glanced his way as the king whispered something to his wife, and they both laughed.

Jake smiled in unison with them as the system recognized his efforts the moment he mentally pushed for the upgrade and consolidated his insights.

***Skill Upgraded*:** [Superior Arcane Hunters Stealth (Ancient)] --> [Unseen Arcane Hunter (Legendary)]

Grinning to himself, Jake aimed the Arcane Powershot upwards as he released the string. His stealth bubble shattered immediately as a large arcane explosion obliterated the roof of the entire castle, sending rubble and burning arcane energy flying everywhere. The throne room was instantly in a panic as everyone noticed Jake who just gave them a wave.

Thanks for the assist, everyone!

With those words, he jumped through the hole in the roof he had just made and summoned his wings, flying away before anyone could react. By the time they did, Jake was already far gone, feeling quite good about himself.

Four Creations down nearly halfway.

Chapter 817: Nevermore: Unseen Arcane Hunter

The silence within the throne room was absolutely deafening. The king, queen, general, and ministers stared at the now broken roof, all unable to utter a single word. Finally, the silence was broken as one of the ministers fell to his knees and muttered: No, it cannot be it was meant to be a legend. how?

This was the very same minister who only days before, claimed that the rumors going around were simply just that: rumors. But who could blame him? Who could possibly believe that such preposterous stories could be true? Who would ever believe in this silly tale that in the many different kingdoms, even in the one empire, this very same figure had appeared? A masked man wearing all black clothes suddenly showing up out of nowhere without any warning, wielding a bow in the middle of the throne room. Sometimes even in the middle of festivals or other large gatherings with many powerful people. It all sounded so incredibly silly.

In fact, the ministers theory had been that the other factions had made up this mystical figure to excuse some grand magic ritual they were working on. Many had observed the pillars of energy shooting up where each attack happened, but who would believe all of this was due to some person firing an arrow into the air with enough power to slay the most powerful person in the realm?

Well perhaps they should have believed.

Your your majesty should we follow or- the general began to utter.

No! the king quickly yelled to shut down the notion. No we cannot risk angering such an entity further. Even without provocation, it attacked us within your heartlands.

I wonder, the queen muttered. Why did he speak as if we assisted him?

The king shook his head. Who are we to try and understand such a being? Who is to say it even possesses logic similar to ours?

Are you sure it wasn't a human? the queen questioned further.

Impossible, the king said as he suppressed a shiver. I met the eyes of that thing before it delivered its message of destruction. That was no man.

No one else spoke for several more seconds before someone finally raised a hand. Should we you know find someone to fix the ceiling?

A good idea sadly for the kingdom, all the craftsmen who specialized in building castles were already busy repairing the roofs of other royal buildings throughout the land, even if some held back on repairing, fearing the entity would return.

Alas, he never did but the legend of the mythical Roofbreaker would live on for generations to come.

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Submitting two Creations at once, I see, Nevermore the Architect said right as Jake entered her room.

I figured I would shake things up a bit, Jake smiled. Why, isn't it allowed?

No rules state if you can submit more than one Creation at a time. Even if you couldn't, what would stop you from submitting them one after another, having to merely exit and enter a few times? That simply sounds like wasted time for both of us, the Architect answered. Also, it isn't uncommon for people to submit all ten Creations at once. Likely to ensure they have ten they are satisfied with before locking themselves into any of the Creations, considered a submission cannot be taken back.

Wait, should I have done that? Jake wondered out loud.

You could have, but in your instance, I doubt it would have benefitted you much. Based on my observations, your creation process is very sporadic, and I doubt your methods are very compatible with a carefully laid-out plan, the Bound God commented.

I feel very called out right now, and I get the feeling you peeked at my very comprehensive list of planned Creations I made, Jake muttered. And, in my defense, it isn't like I haven't stuck to it for the most part. Besides, the best plans and strategies aren't those set in stone, but those fluid enough to always adapt to take advantage of any situation.

In that case, you truly are an expert strategist, the Architect definitely called him out, but before Jake could further respond, she cut the conversation short. Now, let us skip these pleasantries. Please proceed with your submissions.

Alright, alright, Jake agreed as he decided to submit the Creations in the order he made them, naturally starting with the Grimoire.

Jake had made sure to keep the Grimoire in his spatial storage at all times when in the common areas where the gods who had a watch party could observe. He had a strong feeling that just revealing the cover of the book wouldn't be a good idea, as his Path of a Heretic-Chosen could be seen as well, heretical. Especially factions like the Holy Church wouldn't like the thought of Jake being able to spread professions and classes related to being a Heretic-Blessed.

Hence why Jake kept it stored away until it was submission time. The Architect had promised to keep anything he submitted hidden so the Grimoire wouldn't leak and be revealed to the outside world. Jake was fully aware his Path would be revealed one day, but C-grade was probably a bit too early to do that.

Submitting the Grimoire, the Architect took it and actually had a comment.

I can understand why you asked about keeping your submissions hidden. This little tome could cause quite the uproar if I leaked its properties, the Architect said with a smile.

Which has to add to its value, right? People love forbidden things, Jake said in a cheeky tone.

Perhaps, the Bound God answered as the Grimoire disappeared. Now, what is your next submission?

I thought you already knew, Jake muttered.

I do, but I need you to vocalize it to make the submission official.

Fair enough. So, how do I submit a skill I improved? Also, will anything happen to the skill? Jake questioned.

Nothing will happen. As for how you submit it simply say what you are submitting, the Architect explained.

Alright, Jake said. I want to submit the skill-improvement of Arcane Stealth evolving into Unseen Arcane Hunter. The entire journey from when I began to improve it till now.

The Architects eyes flashed golden for a second before she gave him a smile. Submission complete. Now, did you have anything more to submit?

No, tha-

Before Jake could finish, he was thrown out of the room again, finding himself standing outside the door.

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-ts it damn, Ms. Architect really doesnt like spending time with me, Jake shrugged, not really feeling bad about it. Alright, he felt a little bad, but that was trumped by the happiness he felt from his newly improved stealth skill. He was also confident it was a damn good submission, especially when you considered he improved it all the way from rare to legendary in less than a year. Jake really was a genius if he had to say so himself.

Now, when it came to the stealth skill itself, Jake was more than happy with its effects. Did the thought of trying to upgrade it to mythical rarity strike him? Sure, but Jake had a feeling he would be thrown out of Nevermore from running out of time before that would happen. Even an upgrade still staying within

the legendary rarity would likely take long enough to piss off Jakes party members due to Jake taking years in excess doing the Challenge Dungeons. So, yeah, Legendary had to be good enough. Besides, Jake believed it was a pretty good legendary skill.

Moreover, considering he had upgraded it himself and not simply picked it during a skill selection, the skill already suited him incredibly well, and he had a high level of innate understanding. Of course, there was still plenty of room to improve, but Jake was definitely satisfied for now.

Opening up his system menu, he admired the description of the skill one more time.

[Unseen Arcane Hunter (Legendary)] As the leaves rustle and your ears perk up, you cannot help but wonder: was it merely the wind, or has the Unseen Arcane Hunter chosen you as his next prey? Allows the Hunter to blend into the environment, making you unseen even to the eyes of some of the most alert predators as your form escapes the very realm they are capable of perceiving. A layer of stable arcane energy covers your body, suppressing all energy and aura emanating from your body, making you near-undetectable to anyone who cannot notice your physical form. The arcane mana perfectly seals in any inner energy released, allowing some skills to be used. When standing still, this stable layer can be expanded, sealing the Hunter within a small area, allowing you to conceal all traces of your existence within. All effects of Unseen Arcane Hunter are determined by Perception and Wisdom.

It had a nice and long description and even a bit of fun flavor text in the beginning. The effects were exactly what Jake wanted, and the only thing he had lost were some of the now-useless stat scaling and the ability to make himself look like a rock. Instead, he could create a stealth field where no one could see or feel any of his energy within. Only while stationary, though, but that was already pretty damn awesome.

Of course, the biggest benefit of all was that it was now a skill at all, meaning system assistance had set in. Before, Jake had to dedicate some mental energy to make sure the skill didn't lose its effect, while now, everything was on auto-pilot. He didn't have to think about anything but could just let the system do its thing.

When it came to upkeep, the cost was also nearly non-existent. The skill did require an upfront investment that was quite steep to create the arcane layer and shift Jakes entire being on the visual spectrum. It also took a good ten seconds to activate the skill fully, meaning it wasn't exactly made for quick mid-combat re-stealths.

Anyway, the first thing Jake did after coming back from the Architect was to give Temlat a good jumpscare. His little student was improving nicely even while Jake was busy with his stealthy escapades and was rapidly approaching evolution time. He still had a few more levels to go, though.

[Half-elf lvl 195]

Jake wasn't overly worried if he would get good evolutions, either. His improvement speed was high, and Jake was nearly done nurturing his curse of hatred with his own Sin Curse. Temlat's curse wouldn't evolve into a Sin Curse of Wrath quite yet, but Jake would bet good money it would either shortly before or after the C-grade evolution.

Resistance training was undoubtedly Jake's trump card in his training regiment. Its effects were far more than merely being able to resist someone at a higher grade; but also helped Temlat handle energies that were usually too powerful for him and tempered his mind to stay calm even when under pressure. Jake wouldn't quite say it made the Willpower stat better, but it definitely did help his power of will.

With Temlat not needing any help, Jake was left to figure out what to do next. He needed to make five more Creations, assuming Temlat would be one, and he wasn't quite certain what those would be. He did know one of them had to heavily involve his Bloodline, though, and he definitely wanted to throw a little bit of the already limited Jake Juice he had into a Creation. Far from enough to do something like help birth a new True Royal or perpetually hungry space worm, but enough to give him a good submission.

Referring back to the list he had kind of stuck to recently, Jake considered his next move. Taking out the small notebook he had made it in originally, he quickly made some edits and nodded at the slightly changed list.

1. A classic poison.
2. Something transmutation-based.
3. Use Teachings of the Heretic-Chosen for something work in progress with Temlat.
4. Skill-related thing. Based on magic and mana.

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

6. Something weird Bloodline-related?

7. Ritual stuff.

Jake had removed the things he had already done and promptly removed the elixir one. Jake had a good feeling he couldn't make a good elixir that would match up to any prior creations, so he shelved that semi-indefinitely. The skill had upgraded in rarity during his time in Nevermore, and he had crafted quite a few elixirs, which was also why he knew he had kind of plateaued in his improvement speed.

About fifteen minutes passed as Jake wracked his brain to find future plans, and after much deliberation, Jake knew his next three projects.

One of them would be a ritual. What kind of ritual? Well, the kind Villy really liked to talk about. Kind of, at least. While researching and creating a planetary sacrifice did sound a little fun, Jake wanted to make something he could actually use.

Sacrificial rituals used sacrifices as fuel to accomplish something, and Jake wanted to do something similar, just not with people. The core part of the ritual was that one could force unwilling entities to have their energies absorbed by the ritual to power it, and that was something Jake viewed as interesting. Not necessarily to use living things as sacrifices but to help subdue certain natural treasures and non-intelligent beings with an innate nature to resist being part of any ritual.

He had also been a bit inspired by the Dark Witch and how she had tapped into the energy in the World Core something that was notoriously difficult to influence using any rituals. Jake wanted to do something similar by simply becoming able to make a circle that could be forcibly linked with certain objects even if they resisted, allowing Jake to draw or send energy into the object. What's more, Jake already had a good idea of how to do this from some instances on prior floors, so it shouldn't take overly long. Of course, even if he took inspiration from other places, he still wanted to mix in a bit of that Primal Hunter flavor to help suppress any entity that refused to back down. Plus, adding his new flavor would give it some bonus points for uniqueness.

The second project Jake wanted to get started was to transmute something. What exactly he wanted to transmute, Jake wasn't clear on yet, but he did have an idea that may or may not prove feasible. If it was feasible, it would be great and even something he could use in conjunction with the aforementioned ritual down the line.

Thirdly was the most boring of the bunch. Jake wanted to just make a damn good poison. This was chosen partly out of necessity as he realized he would need to craft a lot anyway to make sure he had enough Merit Points to do everything else he wanted.

A ritual circle would not net any items he could sell back, while the transmutation experimentation he wanted to do wasn't the type to yield anything to return either. In fact, he would be surprised if there was anything left to return most of the time.

Also, it wasn't like it was a bad idea to submit something that was just a good classic poison with any curse or soul mumbo-jumbo. Just a mixture of extremely deadly toxins found in the wild mixed together to create an even more toxic substance that would do some serious damage.

Alright Jake had another reason he wanted to make this poison. After being done with the Challenge Dungeons in just a few more years, Jake would have spent forty years in Nevermore. While Jake had done plenty of alchemy during this time, it was very varied alchemy. He had been the supplier of potions for his party, worked on a lot of rituals where needed, had to craft poisons for everyday use, and, oh yeah, also been the sole supplier of Elixirs to make sure everyone always had all the bonus stats they could get from consuming those. To add on, Jake often had to just craft with whatever they found on the floors as they were constantly on the move to try and get a good time for a potential achievement or to complete a bonus objective.

This meant he hadn't had time to just sit down and focus solely on improving his craft. To not need to produce something useable for a good while. However, in this House of the Architect, things were different, and even if the poison Jake made wouldn't be the best submission, he would make it anyway.

To summarize, Jake just really wanted to make a poison, so he would make a poison.

Chapter 818: Nevermore: A Sense of Progress

Jake had done the impossible. Accomplished something that surely deserved a 25% bonus to Nevermore Points simply due to this momentous achievement. As for what kind of miracle Jake had pulled off?

He had managed to actually stick to a plan.

Three Creations had been planned, and Jake had worked on them without any distractions or random things stealing away his attention. He didnt even go fuck around in any of the worlds but just hunkered down and did his alchemy, with any expedition he did make highly focused on his goal.

For the transmutation, Jake wanted to pull out an old method from the Order that Jake had never really learned. Jakes Touch of the Malefic Viper had begun to integrate parts of his arcane affinity in the transmutation process early on, which had certainly led to many advantages, but there were also drawbacks.

Jakes arcane affinity had powerful innate concepts, but so did the original Touch of the Malefic Viper skill. The Path of the Malefic Viper was a Path that had led to the pinnacle and allowed a lowly snake to ascend all the way to godhood. Yet Jake didnt really use many of these Records in any of his transmutation efforts. This was a weakness Jake sought to address as he wanted to also be able to use a way of transmutation the Viper was incredibly well known for:

Corruption.

This wasnt anything new to Jake. He had corrupted many things before but recently had kind of stopped. Now, he only corrupted stuff using his curse energy, and he wouldnt even call what he did with his arcane energy corruption.

Jake recalled his fight against the Great White Stag, where he corrupted a ritual using his poison and Touch. He recalled when he infused the Quintessence with dark and poison energy down in the lake during the final dungeon in the Tutorial. Those times were far more classic cases of corruption where Jake infused concepts innate to toxins into objects or magical constructs to corrupt them.

Mind you, none of this would be an attempt to upgrade his Touch of the Malefic Viper. He wasnt trying to do anything the skill didnt already explicitly allow, but instead, something he had neglected properly learning how to do.

In some ways, one could view transmuting something through corruption to be akin to permanently poisoning an object.

Now, the process of learning or perhaps relearning just at a higher conceptual level was quite simple. Jake would just go around and corrupt whatever items he could find. Jake was kind of lucky that the factions in the many worlds did have items, even if they all tended to suck and never reached above epic rarity while at the same time barely being for C-grades. Alas, they were good enough when it came to learning how to corrupt things.

Ah, that was another thing. The prior times Jake corrupted stuff, he had kind of just rolled with it. He had no real control or end goal but had just poured in whatever toxic energy he could, hoping things would work out. He had focused too much on merely making an object toxic to its surroundings and never thought about controlling the corruption.

The reason why the Malefic Viper was so feared in the multiverse wasn't just because of his ability to spread corruption it was his ability to meticulously control it. To change an entity into something it was never meant to be, his every action made with intent behind it. In fact, his name itself came from his ability to corrupt things. It was the basis of the malefic-affinity, after all.

So to summarize, Jake wanted to learn how to control the malefic concept infused through Touch of the Malefic Viper. At least the aspects of the concept he needed to transmute things. It was a pretty slow and arduous process, but with enough trial and error, Jake quickly got it down as he looted the armories of most of the factions in the medieval world everyone still too distracted by the fact some maniac had blown up all their castle roofs to notice the sneaky thief who stole all their weapons.

The second thing Jake worked hard on was his ritual, which he managed to complete a lot faster than he had ever expected. Perhaps he had set the bar too low for what he wanted to accomplish, or perhaps it was something else that had ended up playing a role.

You see, even if Jake had stuck to his plan, that didn't mean unexpected gains couldn't appear. During the last many years, and even recently with his Unseen Arcane Hunter skill, Jake had truly pushed his Perception to the limit. During all this crafting, Jake poured in all his focus and attention as he scanned and kept an eye on everything during the crafting process.

One day, when he felt especially frustrated while trying to make his ritual work, Jake did everything to try and find the flaw. Kneeling down, Jake put both his hands on the magic circle as he poured in energy to try and identify what he was doing wrong, but he found nothing. At that moment, he was annoyed. It was so much easier when he used a cauldron as Jake had an almost innate feeling for everything going

on within as he practically merged with it while crafting. That is when he questioned why couldn't he treat the entire ritual circle like his cauldron?

Why couldn't he make it feel as if it was one with his body? So Jake tried to do just that as he attempted to pour in some of his soul energy. At first, it didn't work at all, but after a bit of pushing, he found an opening, and ever-so-slowly it slipped inside. Jake began to feel the entire magic circle far more intimately, and through that also discovered a minor flaw that led to a bottleneck in the energy transfers within, which was what currently hindered his progress.

Having done so, Jake had a thought and decided to just give it a go. Perception was his most powerful stat by far, and in all honesty, perhaps this was overdue, so Jake finally consolidated all of his improvements since before even evolving to C-grade.

Sense of the Malefic Viper was one of those skills Jake rarely thought about but always used. Whenever he did any kind of alchemy, he would immerse his senses in the craft, and when he held a cauldron, it was as if it merged with his soul, allowing him to far more easily keep track and thus control everything going on within.

He also used it when looking for alchemical ingredients in all of the many different floors he had gone through. He had even made several improvements to the skill already, even if it hadn't gotten him an upgrade. When he evolved the skill originally, it only gave him the ability to feel alchemical ingredients in his surroundings, but this had many limitations.

Herbs and toxins of high quality often had ways of hiding themselves or had defenders that helped hide them. While Sense could sometimes get around this, there were also many times it couldn't.

However, no matter how well something was hidden, Jake's Sphere of Perception and Pulse of Perception would still pick it up. Before evolving to C-grade, everything within his sphere would also be more than close enough for him to feel it using Sense of the Malefic Viper, but after evolving, that had changed, especially when introducing Pulse.

Pulse of Perception was hundreds of kilometers in radius, even going below ground, which his Sense had a hard time penetrating. When going through the floors, Jake often had to forage for his own ingredients, and using Pulse had proven invaluable there. Without even thinking about it, he quickly adapted Sense of the Malefic Viper to even work with things he only saw using Pulse. It wasn't as good as if he laid eyes on them, but it gave him a good general understanding of the properties of whatever he found.

There were many other things, but none were represented in the skill description itself. Jake wondered if all of this would be enough, but after only a little bit of pushing, the skill gave way as a notification popped up in front of him.

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[Sense of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)] The Malefic Vipers greed for natural treasures is neverending; his desire to discover all the world has to offer ceaseless. Gives a passive ability to detect herbs and poisons in different forms and a strong feeling of their properties and affinities. Allows the alchemist to far more easily detect affinities in the environment and detect areas optimal for cultivating herbs. Massively improves your ability to sense the poison you have inflicted and its effects on any inflicted entities. Allows you to temporarily merge a part of your soul into a Soulbound cauldron or similar crafting device, making it effectively act as part of your body. Even without fully merging your soul, you will still receive all sensory benefits from using a Soulbound cauldron or similar crafting device. Adds an increase to the effectiveness of Sense of the Malefic Viper based on Perception. All effects of Sense of the Malefic Viper are further improved within the body of the alchemist. Passively provides 3 Perception per level in Alchemist of the Malefic Viper. May your gaze scour the multiverse for all that is rightfully yours; may all truths lay bare before you.

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[Sense of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)] The Malefic Vipers greed for natural treasures is neverending; his desire to discover all the world has to offer ceaseless. Gives a passive ability to detect alchemical ingredients and gain an innate understanding of their properties, no matter the detection method used to uncover them. Allows the alchemist to far more easily detect affinities in the environment and detect areas optimal for cultivating herbs. Massively improves your ability to sense all energies you have inflicted other entities with. Allows you to temporarily merge a part of your soul into objects and magical constructs you are in physical contact with during crafting, effectively making it a part of your body. Adds an increase to the effectiveness of Sense of the Malefic Viper based on Perception. All effects of Sense of the Malefic Viper are further improved within the body of the alchemist. Passively provides 9 Perception per level in Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper (C-grade variant). May your senses transcend comprehension as you scour the multiverse for all that is rightfully yours, as all truths lay bare before you.

Sometimes, the best gains were those least expected, and this was definitely one of those cases. Jake had not entered this Challenge Dungeon thinking he would improve any of his Malefic Viper skills, much less do it so easily.

Jake wasn't sure that simply expanding the ability to infuse parts of his soul into more than a cauldron or a crafting device would have been enough for an upgrade, which was why the improvement to its base detection was more than welcome. It was more of a formality to add it, even if it did have some interesting implications. The wording had also changed quite a bit, with especially the last sentence standing out:

Gives a passive ability to detect alchemical ingredients and gain an innate understanding of their properties, no matter the detection method used to uncover them.

This sentence pretty much just clarified that the skill would work no matter how Jake found the alchemical ingredients, even if it was through Bloodline stuff. He couldn't help but wonder if this would have other implications down the line and how exactly the skill interacted with his intuition when searching for alchemical ingredients, assuming it interacted with those instincts at all.

Now, one little piece of clarification. Jake had no interest in submitting this skill improvement at all, primarily because nearly all of the improvements had been gained outside of the House of the Architect. Plus, it was still an in-rarity upgrade, making it far worse than something like his new Unseen Arcane Hunter skill.

No, what he would submit were the two things he promptly used his newly improved Sense of the Malefic Viper to accomplish.

Because with the upgrade to his Sense of the Malefic Viper, both the transmutation and ritual projects went even more smoothly. Jake had already semi-cheated by merging with weapons using Fang of Man when holding them to better feel the energies moving within, but Sense getting upgraded just made everything even easier. Especially when he didn't try to corrupt a weapon.

About a month passed from when Jake gained his Sense of the Malefic Viper improvement till he was ready to make the final push for these two submissions the third project, the general poison, still far from ready.

Jake stood before a magic circle that was nearly thirty meters in diameter as a giant orb pulsed in the middle, having surrendered to Jake. The multi-colored orb was nearly five meters in radius and it looked like a glass marble with cloudy energy constantly moving within.

[Elemental Confluence Spirit Orb (Ancient)] An orb made up of a myriad of elemental orbs from C-grade elementals that died natural deaths. The elemental energies within retain some of the instinctual wills of when the elementals were still alive, making the Spirit Orb incredibly challenging to work with. Contains a mix of highly concentrated and untamed elemental-affinity mana within.

The Spirit Orb had been surprisingly cheap in the Merit Point Exchange, probably due to how hard it was to work with. Which had been exactly why Jake bought it. The Spirit Orb had fought everything Jake tried to do with it, vehemently resisting any attempts to affect or draw out any of the dense mana within, but now, it was entirely defenseless as Jake drew out its energies despite its resistance.

A dark green aura enveloped the orb the very next moment as the Spirit Orb quivered. It was as if an invisible hand grasped it, and Jake began to extract some of its energy as he separated elemental energies from the confluence. Two new small Spirit Orbs appeared, floating in two focal points of the magic circle, as Jake moved on to the next function of the magic circle.

And the next Creation, as it was now transmutation time. Thats right, this was a two-for-one. A ritual magic circle and a transmutation job.

With a smile, Jake quickly remerged these two small Spirit Orbs with the main one and activated Touch of the Malefic Viper as he touched the magic circle. Dense and powerful dark green energy wormed its way into the defenseless Spirit Orb as it began to take root. The energies within the orb once more tried to fight but were entirely pacified as the corruption slowly overtook the Spirit Orb. Within half an hour, the entire orb changed color. From a multi-colored rainbow, it became a mix of dark green with occasional flashes of multi-colored, yet oddly muted, light. Looking at it once more, Jake used Identify.

[Unstable Corrupted Confluence Spirit Orb (Ancient)] An orb once made up of myriad elemental orbs corrupted by powerful toxic energies. The elemental energies within have been corrupted nearly beyond recognition, making them highly volatile and destructive. Contains a mix of highly concentrated and equally unstable malefic elemental-affinity mana within. Due to its unnatural form and the lack of balance caused by the corruption, the Spirit Orb has become unstable: Unable to maintain its current form in: 127:11:57

This was where Jake usually stopped his corruption. He would make an unstable mess that would explode within less than a week but this wasnt what Jake was going for this time around as he activated Touch of the Malefic Viper once more.

True corruption requires stability and control. The malefic affinity was one used with intent and purpose and was very rarely found on anything that could be considered unstable. Despite its destructiveness and propensity for corruption, it was a very stable affinity created to follow the intent of its creator, so unless Jake wanted to or was fine with making the item he transmuted unstable, it shouldn't happen.

Infusing his energy into the orb once more, Jake continued the transmutation process. He sought to stabilize his Creation, but without using even a smidgen of his arcane affinity. He relied solely on the concepts inherent to the Touch of the Malefic Viper skill as the floating orb slowly became more muted. The multi-colored flashes stopped, and the dark green cloudy energy within became the only thing visible.

The entire process ended up taking nearly five hours, but in the end, Jake got a notification as he smiled while looking at the giant floating marble of pure malefic death.

[Malefic Confluence Spirit Orb (Ancient)] An orb once made up of myriad elemental orbs, now thoroughly corrupted by the Chosen of the Malefic One. The elemental energies within have been corrupted beyond recognition as the malefic affinity has taken root. Contains a mix of highly concentrated malefic affinity elemental mana within. The energy within is highly toxic and has many alchemical uses. The energies within remain highly hostile and resistant to anyone but the creator of the Malefic Confluence Spirit Orb.

The energies within stabilized, and Jake was left with a highly useable and equally destructive Spirit Orb that would also serve quite well as a bomb if he just gave it a small nudge. Of course, that wasn't what he was going to do with it.

This would be one of his Creations with the other one, the magic circle beneath he had channeled his energy through. Even if they worked together well, they were two entirely separate disciplines that required very different skill sets and relied on highly varied concepts.

About a year had passed at this point since Jake entered the House of the Architect, and he felt like things were going incredibly well if he had to say so himself.

One thing was for certain when Jake left the Challenge Dungeon, he would be an even better alchemist and significantly more skilled in several diverse disciplines. And, in some ways, wasn't progress a reward in its own right?

Ah, who was he kidding? Jake would get incredibly disappointed in himself if he didn't get a good overall evaluation.

Chapter 819: Nevermore: A Whole Lot of Mana

The submissions of Jake's two latest Creations went as smoothly as always, with no real surprises. The Architect was good at forcing him to leave once the job was done, not giving him any way to glean more details than she allowed.

Jake was fully aware both the transmuted Spirit Orb and the ritual itself weren't that good Creations, at least not by the standards of Jake being a Chosen. Sure, they were okay Creations and many would be proud of them, but nothing to write home about. In some ways, Jake had chosen to submit them not just because he wanted some diversity with his submissions but because he wanted to improve both those aspects of his current alchemy. Especially the two of them in conjunction with one another.

It would effectively allow Jake to set up far larger rituals to corrupt things. The ritual would naturally also work with his arcane affinity, and he could totally see himself laying that down for large-scale transmutation projects down the line.

Anyway, with the ritual and transmutation-based Creation submitted, Jake had four more overall but only needed to come up with two more. Temlat and his normal poison were both work-in-progress, and he had already semi-counted them.

With that in mind, Jake had a significantly shortened list remaining, with only three topics to work on though he may have to come up with more.

1. Skill-related thing. Based on magic and mana.
2. Origin-related Creation. This may be done during one of the prior Creations.
3. Something weird Bloodline-related?

It was a very short list, and it really put into perspective how difficult it was for someone to submit ten sufficiently different and valuable Creations. Even if you could include intangible things like skills, it took a lot of imagination to guess what a good Creation would be. Would it be considered good to submit a

Creation that was just Jake wiping out all life in the different worlds? Or would it instead be good to maybe submit one where he made peace between all the races in that medieval world? That was the kind of stuff Jake could definitely see someone like Jacob or even the Fallen King doing. Though their methods would differ quite noticeably.

These worlds added so many layers and possibilities. However, Jake still believed the best Creations came in the form of items. If he had to guess, then the Grimoire was probably Jakes best Creation so far, with the Unseen Arcane Hunter skill a pretty close second despite its intangible nature.

Temlat had a good chance to take the top spot, but Jake felt like he needed one or maybe even two more real bangers to ensure he got a great overall evaluation. However, with Jakes remaining list, he wasnt sure how to do just that.

The most obvious choice would be to just improve another skill the problem here was that Jake didnt have any he wanted to do that with. Sure, he did have an inferior-rarity Alchemists Purification, but honestly, that skill was just fodder for his Malefic Viper Legacy skills at this point. Even if he did improve it, Jake had no idea how to do it in a satisfactory way that didnt also risk messing up any potential fusions down the line.

He had confidence in getting it to maybe epic rarity just by infusing concepts he was already familiar with from his arcane affinity. However, that wouldnt even make for a good submission as it didnt require learning anything new, and besides, it would mess up fusing it later on. No, If he wanted to somehow make it a good one, it would just take way too much time, as Jake would have to learn a lot of new stuff. Something he didnt want to spend the time and effort on

Now, there was one other cheat-like option to get an upgrade Jake had purposefully been avoiding: Path of the Heretic-Chosen. In fact, Jake had kind of ignored using the skill during his entire time in C-grade as he felt he didnt want to waste it. He was up to two charges now and damn close to another. Even so, he wasnt sure if it was worth using, even if it helped get him a better evaluation in the Challenge Dungeon.

Not to mention, Jake wasnt sure if it even worked. The skill was very special, and Jake felt very unsure how exactly it would interact with Nevermore and the Challenge Dungeon rules. His main question was were any Records and improvements he gained during the vision considered as having been achieved within the Challenge Dungeon? The wording on the skill wasnt exactly precise:

Allows you to experience the Legacy of the Malefic Viper on a far more direct level by relying on your direct connection as a Chosen and the mentality of a heretic. Focusing on any core skill, event, or entity

related to the Malefic Vipers Legacy will allow you to peer into the True Records of the past as you journey through time, space, and reality to experience history firsthand

It specifically said Jake would journey through time and space. Based on what others had said, Jake would also disappear whenever he used the skill with even his physical body leaving. An anchor of sorts would remain, sure, but did this anchor count as Jake still being within the House of the Architect? Was he in both places at once? Would that make any gains only count for half, according to the Challenge Dungeon?

Jake had these doubts and even asked the Architect only to get the answer that she wouldnt answer that but for Jake to just give it a try and see, and then she would gladly accept the result as a submission. So, yeah, definitely not a risk Jake wanted to take, especially not considering one final thing

He still remembered the first vision he had of Valdemar. That vision had been far more valuable than any other but also consumed two charges at once. If he didnt have two back during the fight with baby Snappy, Jake likely wouldnt have gotten such a good vision. This begged the question, what would Jake see if he consumed even more charges at once? One could argue that there probably werent any individuals who warranted taking three charges to get a vision of, but there was one person Jake wanted to see more of than anyone else who he believed could require just that. The one man even the Viper recognized as a genius above geniuses:

The First Sage.

To glean some of his secrets couldnt be cheap. Hence why Jake didnt want to risk using Path of the Heretic-Chosen just to get some more Nevermore Points. Jake genuinely believed the visions he got would have an impact far beyond just this mega-dungeon, not to mention the Challenge Dungeon he was currently in.

With all that in consideration, in addition to there not being any other obvious skill-upgrade candidates, Jake moved on to something entirely different. He chose to instead use what he always used whenever he didnt know what to do: his Bloodline.

One of the two remaining Creations would obviously include him using his Jake Juice. Of course, he couldnt make anything that required a living being, as anything with a Truesoul couldnt be a submission in itself, but something like a core was an option.

The problem with that was Jake doubted he had enough juice to fully transform a core into a fully-fledged Origin Core... and even if he did, would he want to submit one? In either case, Jake had decided to go with something else a bit less impressive. At least, he thought it would be less impressive, but that was all up to the Architect, right?

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With a very loose plan, Jake began to work on a method to integrate his Jake Juice into a Creation. He also wanted something that would show off his skills in manipulating mana. Even if Jake had shown off a lot of his skills related to mana during many of his prior Creations most of them, in fact he still wanted to do one that was just pure freeform mana manipulation. Put a bit of that practice from his Puzzle Box of the Seeker into use in a more direct way.

Thus, Jake began to work on that project as he split his time between Temlat, the poison he was working on, and this mana creation. He quickly got on something he wanted to show off regarding his mana manipulation, and if everything worked out as he hoped, the submission should be pretty damn awesome.

Months slowly passed as Jake worked hard on all three projects, making impressive progress across the board. Temlat was still improving by the day, and even if his leveling wasn't fast, Jake knew he was improving his skills at a rapid pace. He also volunteered to go do combat practice all by himself, showing that his confidence-level had grown significantly. Jake believed that he would evolve before Jake had been in the House of the Architect for two years, which also showed Jake that getting a student fast after entering the Challenge Dungeon had been an excellent call.

Poison-wise, things were slow but steady. Out of everything Jake was doing besides maybe the first submission that was just Jake being Jake this was the thing he had the most experience with, and it only made sense this Creation would take the longest. Jake was trying to make a poison that he was happy to put on nearly all his arrows and katars going forward, so it was only natural he took his time to make something proper.

Finally, there was the mana project, which would definitely be the first one to finish. Jake studied quite a bit regarding what kind of mana construct he wanted to create, but more so, he worked on exploring to see if what he wanted to do with his Jake Juice was even possible.

He had to take a calm and studious approach, as he didn't have the Jake Juice to just experiment with willy-nilly. He had one shot, and if he failed that, he would be back to having two Creations to figure out. That's why he wanted to get this one right the first time around.

Even so, there was a limit to how much Jake could learn without just saying fuck it and giving it a go. So, one day, when everything just felt right, Jake stopped stalling and got to work.

Locking up the room, he made sure no one would disturb him as Jake regenerated and made sure he had full mana. Then, he just jumped right into it.

Jake needed no tools for this. He needed no skills or anything like that. Everything would just be purely mana and his Jake Juice. Yet Jake wanted to create an item which usually wouldn't be possible. But Jake had confidence as he began to summon monstrous levels of mana all at once.

Every pore of his body opened as he pumped out arcane mana and filled the room. At the same time, he began to gather it between his hands as he sat in a lotus position and focused on his sphere to take in everything around him.

Tens of thousands of mana gathered quickly as a small ball was formed. More and more mana was released from his body every second as soon, over a hundred thousand mana filled the room without any signs of stopping. This was another reason why Jake didn't want Temlat to enter on accident this kind of environment definitely wasn't healthy for a D-grade.

Jake's output of energy continued as more and more mana gathered in front of him as the minutes passed, with the ball rapidly also growing in size. Energy began to spin around the ball as Jake kept it in its mixed state, where it neither sought destruction nor stability. After nearly one hundred and fifty thousand mana had been poured into the orb floating in front of him, Jake began to feel the pressure.

What Jake was currently doing usually had little practical use. He was just gathering all of his mana outside of his body in an orb through a process that was far from fast, efficient, or generally considered useful. Hours went by as Jake had to slow down to remain in control, but once he gathered his mana in the maelstrom around the orb, he could keep it calm and simply revolve there without his direct need for control.

Every hour, Jake consumed a mana potion on the dot to make sure he wouldn't run out. He used a lot more mana than he gathered as the efficiency fell the more time passed, and he had to use the majority of his mana just to control the environment.

His Willpower and senses were strained as he took his foot off the gas. Jake continued slowly and steadily as he tamed the orb of pure mana floating in front of him. It was about the size of a wrecking ball at this point, which was far too large, and Jake knew it.

Feeling he was at the limits of what his mind could handle, Jake initiated the final part of this entire endeavor. With a deep breath, he forced the rest of the mana toward the giant mass of mana and began to condense it.

Gritting his teeth, Jake pressed with every inch of his Willpower to make it smaller, but even so, the ball of incredibly intense arcane energy got no smaller than one and a half meters in diameter.

Jake, standing up from his lotus position while pressing his palms together, opened his eyes wide as his body exploded with arcane energy as Arcane Awakening fully activated. A new rush of pure power allowed Jake to condense the orb further. However, the more pure mana he squashed together, the more unstable it became. Should Jake lose control for only a moment, the entire thing could explode, and while that wouldn't harm Jake much as it was his own arcane affinity, it would be a massive waste of time and effort.

Pressing on, the mana slowly grew denser and denser. Jake had to control every inch of energy he poured in and make it fit as the internal balance structure within the ball was constantly maintained. It was like trying to fill in all the gaps of a puzzle, where he had to carve out every puzzle piece himself to leave no gaps and use all the space efficiently. However, despite all his efforts, Jake couldn't hold on much longer when the mana orb was still the size of a large beachball. Blood began to pour out of his nose and ears as his skin peeled from the use of Arcane Awakening, signifying not just his mind but his body had reached its limits.

He had a choice to make: allow everything to break down or commit. Jake wasn't a quitter and chose the latter.

The sound of a heartbeat sounded out from deep within him as a single spark of energy was summoned. Jake instinctively knew what to do as he reached out and touched the giant dense orb that contained more than three hundred thousand arcane mana with just a single finger.

This small spark of energy traveled from around Jake's heart until it reached the orb and left his body as he sent it off only with his will in tow.

Without any warning, a shockwave sent Jake flying back, dealing no damage but pushing him away. Jake slammed into the back wall as he stared toward the arcane orb with a mix of anticipation and worry. He wasn't sure what had happened, but he knew that the moment he was blasted back, his connection to the orb was severed as he lost control. He expected an explosion to follow, as the mana was now entirely uncontrolled and unrestrained, but nothing happened.

Staring, Jake looked at where the orb had been but found it gone. Before any panic could set in, he instantly saw what had happened, as on the floor right below where the orb had been, something was lying on the ground. Jake quickly got to a standing position and walked over to pick it up, pinched between two fingers as he felt nothing dangerous coming from it.

Jake held the small marble, no larger than the tip of his finger. It was purple, but when Jake really focused, he could see what looked like an occasional small red dot deep in the center. Holding it, he instinctively got the feeling that trying to smash it would be utterly impossible and yet just a mere thought from him and a whisper of arcane mana wishing for it to be destroyed seemed to be capable of utterly unraveling it.

Shaking his head, Jake steeled himself. He had stalled enough, and it was time for the ultimate test. Jake took a deep breath as he used Identify on the small marble, fully not expecting any real result which was why it came as a delightful surprise when he did.

[Perennial Arcane Marble (Unique)] A marble made entirely from the arcane mana of the Harbinger of Primeval Origins. The arcane marble is perfectly stable, leaking no energy, and remains utterly unaffected by all outside influences that do not originate from its creator. This marble is incredibly durable, but should it be damaged, it shall react violently and lash out with the power of pure destruction at whatever broke it. A faint amount of pure, unrecognizable energy is sealed within the marble. Through this energy, a perennial existence awaits.

Jake flashed an exhausted smile as he read the description. He had no idea if this was a good outcome or not for what he had done, but in either case, Jake was bloody exhausted as he laid back and closed his eyes.

Dispensing Jake Juice always took a lot out of him, after all.

Chapter 820: Nevermore: A Peculiar Little Thing

If anyone else had seen what the person sitting on the ground with his arcane marble had just done, they likely wouldn't believe its legitimacy. Certain rules and norms existed that everyone assumed to be true, so it was natural that when someone didn't play by these rules and decided to make up their own laws for how things worked, no one would take them seriously.

However, Jake had never been one to just believe it when someone said something couldn't be done. Especially not when it came to anything his Bloodline could do. Jake still only had a faint grasp as to the gravity of what he had pulled off, but he knew it was impressive if anything the books claimed regarding mana constructs was correct.

Mana constructs were, by nature, temporary. No items made up entirely of mana could exist, and even mana with souls elementals had a limited lifespan. Mana itself was a malleable element that made up everything and was, in the eyes of many, the purest form of energy. It was one of the three fundamental energies, with many believing inner energy and vital energy were derived from mana. Jake didn't really believe this, as he had heard differently, so he kind of ignored those notes. It was this lack of caring about what others had researched and claimed should be possible that allowed him to make the small marble in his hand.

Jake had made a prediction that paid off. He had been told before that his stable arcane mana registered as something physical and not made of mana. However, it was more accurate to say that his stable arcane mana registered as non-summoned simply due to how stable it was. Any analyst would still be able to figure out it had mana in it everything did to some extent but Jake's stable arcane energy was more akin to a naturally occurring piece of metal than a pure mana construct.

That was actually a pretty good comparison. Jake's stable arcane affinity was very much akin to something like metal in that they were both very, well, stable.

Everything contained mana, and everything leaked and absorbed mana at different speeds, with absorption nearly always faster than the leakage, which was how raw materials grew in rarity and energy density as time passed. Most metals were known to be very slow at both of these things, making them take a long time to improve in rarity in the wild. This lack of leaking and absorption also made metals incredibly stable, which was where the entire concept of stability came from.

Stability merely meant to be unaffected by the environment both good and bad.

Yet, no matter how stable a magical construct was, it would never be as stable as a real item. It would always just be a collection of mana as it lacked aspects that made it truly physical and corporeal. Lacked the Records to be an independent item. Even if a metal or earth maga summoned a giant wall, it would disappear within a short period, assuming it wasn't just made by manipulating material that was already there. With time, the internal mana structure would simply be broken down if the source of the mana was a person and not environmental mana.

In the same way, a weapon summoned by a metal mage also needed to be constantly supplied with new mana. More importantly, it also wouldn't be identifiable despite looking very much like a regular item. Yet the arcane marble Jake had just made was. It registered as a standalone item, entirely separate from Jake's own existence and mana. This meant that even if Jake died, the orb would remain, something utterly impossible for any other kind of mana-summoned object. Holding it in his hand, Jake also felt it would remain for a long time. A very, very long time. Unsurprisingly, considering the word perennial in the item name.

Now, it had to be mentioned that creating an actual item out of nothing using only mana was theoretically possible; however, not for someone like Jake. With enough Willpower, it was possible to will something into existence, including real items, but the sheer Willpower required was entirely out of the realm of possibility for anyone doing this Challenge Dungeon. Making something from nothing was the kind of feat only gods or perhaps peak S-grades could reliably pull off.

In conclusion Jake had pulled off something a C-grade shouldn't be capable of. He had created a true item out of nothing but his own stable mana. He had created something real. A marble capable of existing, even long after Jake's own death, assuming he messed up dodging one time too many.

One may ask what the function of this item Jake had miraculously made was, and well it was very tough and would exist for a long time, so that was definitely two things. Ah, it was also a little pretty, and its sheer uniqueness definitely made it a nice collector's item. As for practical uses

Yeah it was entirely useless. It was just a very hard marble, and any Origin Energy within would instantly be destroyed should something break it. In fact, Jake felt that the Origin Energy would work actively to destroy itself and anything that broke the stable barrier that defended its existence. It was pure instinct to aim for mutual destruction, as should the marble break or leak in any way, the energy would instantly dissipate and greedily be absorbed by the environment.

Instinct was actually quite a keyword here. Jake hadn't been the one to really intend to create something called a Perennial Arcane Marble. It had all been up to the Origin Energy. In the same vein that Jake didn't intend how a core would mutate and transform when he infused this unique energy, he also didn't control what the energy would do this time. He only sent with it the hope that it would be stable and not break apart, with the Origin Energy then doing the rest of the work itself by forming the marble.

The more I think about it, the more this Origin Energy seems kind of alive, Jake thought to himself as he lifted the marble and looked at it more closely before he got up and headed straight toward the Architect to submit it. Or, maybe it's more correct to say it makes things come alive? It definitely makes whatever I infuse it into change by itself when infused.

Jake still felt very unsure exactly why this energy worked the way it did, and he felt he wouldn't fully figure it out for a long time. The best he could do was figure out aspects of the energy and be satisfied with that. To focus on the outcomes and not the underlying explanation for everything. Then again, maybe he could ask the Architect if she would spill a little bit of insight. With her direct system connection, she had to know something, right?

Reaching the door leading into her room, Jake didn't even have to knock as it opened by itself. Walking inside, the Architect sat in her usual spot and opened her eyes to regard Jake right as he stepped inside.

Quite a peculiar submission you have this time around if you are showing me what I believe you will show me, the Architect said, her eyes already fixated on the small, useless, arcane marble in Jake's hand.

Jake tossed the marble into the air before catching it again, noticing how the Architect's gaze never left the small thing. This gave Jake an idea, as he sighed loudly. I will be honest; I'm not even sure if it's worth submitting.

Oh? she questioned.

I have no idea if it's considered good or bad; it's technically just a bunch of mana made into a marble with a tiny smidgen of this albeit pretty unique energy within, Jake said, continuing to play with the marble as he faked being deep in thought. Actually, how long have I been in the House of Architect by now?

The narrative has been taken without authorization; if you see it on Amazon, report the incident.

A bit over sixteen months, the Architect answered.

In that case, I got time to do something else, Jake said, faking relief. I was pretty fast in some of the prior Challenge Dungeons too, and with the time me and my teammates allocated, I could easily spend a year more in here.

The Architect didnt say anything as Jake continued talking while holding up the marble and looking at it closely. I apologize for wasting your time; I dont think this one is worth submitting.

Jake waited patiently as the Architect just sighed after a few seconds of silence. You are not a particularly good actor, but fine, Ill bite. I do want that little marble of yours. As for why well, let me ask you something instead. All Nevermore Attendees make use of this World Wonder to gain power, levels, and Records. With that in mind, what do you think the Wyrmgod and I get out of all of you being here?

Information? Jake questioned. Nevermore collected data on everyone after all, so wait. No you get Records?

Nevermore the Architect smiled at his response. Precisely. As you harvest your gains, so do we harvest some of what you reap. We learn about all those who pass through here, and your Records become one with the World Wonder, allowing it to keep growing era by era. This is part of the reason why unique items are so highly valued in this Challenge Dungeon. It is still an evaluation of your skill, yes, but selfishly, we value uniqueness highly due to how much it benefits us as it expands the spectrum of Records available. Of course, everyone is unique in some way or another, and helps expand it. No two people have the exact same Records, but there will be inevitable overlap between those who follow similar Paths. Your Path is unique in its own right, and your Bloodline of the Primal Hunter is one of the most potent ones I have come across, meaning any Records related to it are highly valued. Far more than a mere evaluation in a Challenge Dungeon can make justice.

Jake slowly nodded, surprised he got the Architect to spill so much when she had been tight-lipped for over a year. She really wanted his small marble, huh? However, with the things she said, Jake still hadnt fully gotten his answer.

That is all very enlightening but that doesnt answer my question. Will this small marble even be considered a good submission? Despite its uniqueness, its still just a bunch of stable arcane mana squished together with some of my unique energy in the center. That it is considered a real item is probably impressive, but I am not sure exactly how impressive. Sure, you may value it due to how

unique you find it, but that doesn't make it a good submission according to the rules of this Challenge Dungeon, Jake pointed out.

You are aware I will not answer if something will receive a high evaluation or not before submitting it, but I will dispel some of your doubt. As I am well aware that you already know, creating an item from mana alone is far from a simple matter and carries many implications. This is not to mention the nature of the specific item you created. I cannot reveal much, but I will say that you are far from understanding the true meaning of this Primeval Energy. You all are far from fully understanding it, your Patron included, the Architect said. I will end my comments on the matter here. Decide to submit it or not. I will not force you, nor will I make any promises regarding an evaluation. The only promise I will make is that nothing regarding this little marble will be leaked to any other being, not even the Wyrmgod.

Jake didn't need to think much more as he chose to submit the arcane marble. He had always planned on doing so, but he had genuine doubts about how good of a submission it was. There still was some doubt, but much of it had been dispelled after this conversation.

The final sentence was a clue. For the Architect to specifically promise once more that she wouldn't leak anything meant that her leaking it would be a big deal. That communicated to Jake this little marble was a big deal, similar to his Grimoire, though probably in a very different way. The kind of way where more people would want to explore Jake's special little energy as they came to realize it potentially had more effects than just bringing out the Primeval Origins in cores to give birth to powerful ancient variants.

Either way, Jake had now submitted it, meaning he only had one more potential Creation he needed to come up with while he kept working on his poison and teaching Temlat here and there. Jake wouldn't really say he was teaching much, which was why he felt weird thinking about it as teaching. He was more just giving occasional advice, pointing the young half-elf towards books, and helped him out when stumped. True, there was also the curse nurturing and presence resistance training Jake still occasionally did, but those didn't really include Temlat learning anything.

Shaking off the thought, Jake focused his attention on this last Creation he had to come up with. For what felt like the umpteenth time, he went through all of his skills, not to look for one to upgrade, but to see if there was one that would give him any inspiration for a crafting venture.

Sure, there was still the possibility of just making an elixir even if Jake had written it off he could also just be boring and submit a potion? Nah, that would suck too much. As Jake was thinking, he suddenly got an idea that would be awesome if it worked.

With excitement, he tried to pull a certain item out of his inventory and, surprisingly enough, found himself successful. With a grin, he held the mythical rarity Cradle of Souls Kindling as he peeked inside with the hope of getting lucky. It would be perfect.

Using the extracted Soulflame, Jakes Alchemical Flame would upgrade several grades at once, and Jake would even have technically crafted it as it was fully born when he took it out of the Cradle. All that needed to happen was for Jake to get lucky by having a good Soulflame inside, and he would be golden.

However, reality proved cruel as Jake checked the Cradle and found no good Soulflame available. Soulflames had the qualities of elementary, low-tier, mid-tier, high-tier, pinnacle-tier, and Supreme Soulflames, and as Jake looked inside, he saw that while the area where arcane affinity Soulflames spawned was still expanding, the best Soulflame with his affinity was a mid-tier one. Ah, but he did spot a few high-tier Soulflames in there. Sadly, these were all of different affinities.

Alas, sometimes Jake couldnt get super lucky. After infusing what little mana he had remaining into the Cradle to give his arcane affinity a bit more of an edge in the battle of affinities, he put the Cradle away again, finding himself back at square one.

You know what fuck it, lets just focus on the poison, and I am sure I will get on something along the way. If not, maybe I can just submit my inability to get on anything good as a Creation Jake thought self-deprecatingly as he went toward the alchemy lab to play with poisons.

Within the Architects room, she was looking at the marble in front of her. It didnt look like much, as if it was just a small gem or pearl. There was none of the aura a high-quality item would usually leak, but just a completely inert object. Yet the Bound God found it more than intriguing, even if it raised more questions than it gave answers.

Still looking at it, she felt the probing of her fellow ruler of the World Wonder as the Wyrmgod curiously approached her. Likely because he had seen the Chosen leave her chambers.

I see he has handed in another submission. My guests grow curious, so-

No, Nevermore cut him off. Not only am I unwilling, I am incapable of sharing.

Incapable? the Wyrmgod questioned. Like with?

Yes, the same as with four of the Creations from the man called Eron, the Chosen of the Lifesoul Daolord. Truly curious to see two individuals with such aberrant Bloodlines appearing on the same planet, the Architect answered.

The Wyrmgod grumbled but stopped probing as Nevermore kept looking at the small marble. He knew that when the system set down a hard line like this, there was no need to keep trying. It had decided to block certain information, making it so there were things not even she could see, and what she could see, she was physically incapable of sharing with anyone.

She wanted to probe it more but she knew that even if the system allowed it, all she would be doing was breaking the marble. Breaking the stable energy surrounding the spark would result in the spark infusing the rest of the energy to destroy itself. A truly peculiar Creation with no real uses to anyone.

However, even if it didnt have any practical use cases, this small marble was Perennial. Everlasting. Something that shouldnt be possible. With time, all items degraded. A sword will lose its energy, becoming inert. A magic circle will need constant repairs to keep active. Any structure will require maintenance even a small rock would change with time, finding itself affected by the environment.

Yet, despite how much the world would change or how many eras would pass this small marble would remain. Unless destroyed, it could potentially continue to exist forever a fate usually only reserved for the divine. Achieved with not a single smidgen of divinity.

Peculiar indeed