

## Hunter 821

### Chapter 821: Nevermore: Checks & Balances

Isn't it entirely expected a few of his Creations will be entirely hidden even from you? You know how the system is with Bloodlines, Natures Attendant spoke up within the divine watch party living room. If I am correct, little Dina must also have submitted some items that were restricted when she did the House of the Architect.

She did, the Wyrmgod confirmed. However, it is rare that Nevermore herself shows interest in a Creation. Much less several Creations within a short time span. My attention wasn't truly on the Chosen of the Lifesoul Daolord, as while his methods and Path are interesting, it isn't one I find particularly appealing. However, it seems there is more to him than I initially believed.

All Bloodlines have secrets and are irregular by definition, Vilastromoz shrugged, fine that the topic had switched away from Jake. For him to have his own special means is indeed only to be expected.

The Viper wouldn't say he was worried about how things would go in the House of the Architect for his Chosen. Both when it came to Jake doing well and regarding if he would reveal something, he probably shouldn't. The Bound God of the World Wonder was a quasi-system entity, making her subject to its rules. Even if she wanted to share all of Jake's secrets, she would be unable to.

It did annoy the Viper a bit that Nevermore knew more about Jake and his secrets than his Patron god, but there wasn't really anything to do about it.

When it came to the overall evaluation Jake would get, the Viper also had great confidence. Even without factoring in Jake's Bloodline, alchemists tended to do very well in this Challenge Dungeon. Statistics showed that of all the popular profession archetypes, alchemists were the overall top performers in this Challenge Dungeon simply due to how diverse of a craft it was. Poisons, potions, elixirs, pills, transmutation, magic circles, herbology, and many more disciplines were part of the art of alchemy. All very different, with the only truly common thing being their requirement for high-level mana control.

This also meant that his Order was one of the factions that had the best average performance. Alright, it also helped that the Order only tended to accept elites, but the fact it was an alchemy-focused faction was definitely the most important factor.

With all that in mind, Jake would likely get a decent evaluation even if he only had his alchemy to rely on. But Jake, of course, didn't only have his alchemy. Throwing in the Bloodline meant that Jake had a great whiff of uniqueness in there, and the Viper was sure Jake would pull off something impressive, bringing him from a decent to a great evaluation.

However, it was far from assured Jake would get a top-tier Grand Achievement.

Jake and even Dina would definitely have earned a top score if this was Nevermore back right after it got established, Natures Attendant shared with a nostalgic smile. It sure was interesting back then before all the checks and balances.

The Wyrmgod scoffed. Balance had to be achieved. With the further propagation of Bloodlines, something simply had to change. A Bloodline should not result in an automatic top-tier evaluation. At least Record inflation meant that the Leaderboards from back then are now useless.

I think we should give poor Jake a helping hand by allowing him full points even for stuff that is fully Bloodline-reliant. The guy is clearly starved of points, Minaga said in a fake sad tone.

I am sure hell be just fine, Natures Attendant chuckled.

The Viper smiled at the conversation, remembering how Nevermore changed and adapted with time. It was true that Nevermore once had far fewer balancing factors and far more things to exploit. There was quite a period where the evaluations in all these Challenge Dungeons were made entirely based on the Records contributed. This, in nearly all cases, resulted in anything using a Bloodline leading to an automatic top score, as few things could be more unique than a unique Bloodline. Well, besides maybe a Transcendant skill, something that would also automatically qualify someone to get a top-tier evaluation back then.

Now, things had changed significantly. No longer was a Bloodline an unsurmountable advantage, even if they were still a big bonus. It also mattered how well one used ones Bloodline now, and the overall quality of the items submitted using it.

Even so, the Viper was confident. As long as he remembered to submit a damn Grimoire, at least.

Ah, by the way, that human from your Chosens Planet just got done with the Challenge Dungeon. The one who walks a Path of the Void under the influence of Oras, the Wyrmgod shared with the room a bit about three months - later as he looked at Vilastromoz.

So? the Viper questioned, finding himself a bit intrigued but not overly interested. He already had a good idea of how that man would do.

A 25% Grand Achievement earned, the Wyrmgod said, finally getting the attention of many of those in the room. 25% was incredibly rare, after all, and unless Bloodlines or Transcendent Skills got involved in breaking a scenario, they were considered borderline impossible. The fact that the man following Oras had neither made this outcome an event worth noticing, even for the gods present.

Vilastromoz wasnt overly surprised, though. He had seen what the man had created, and out of everyone there, he was one of the people most knowledgeable about Oras. He knew the Void God wouldnt ever bother with anyone who didnt surpass comprehension in at least some areas.

How? the Blightfather, who had been silent for a long time, asked. From what I gathered, he had a mechanical profession. The variety of methods and Creations he can submit should be limited, and he didnt even spend overly long in there.

You know that is not a question I can answer, the Wyrmgod shook his head with a sigh. All I do know is that underestimating the mind of a man who walks side by side with Oras and keeps his sanity isnt wise.

A notion none of the gods present would ever disagree with. The Void Gods were incredibly well-respected entities, after all. They were gods that existed outside of the physical realm while rarely interfering directly with reality. Not because they couldnt, even if they were severely restricted outside of the void. However, even if they rarely interfered, one could never truly make them enemies for doing so would mean the void would become a place even a Primordial should reconsider visiting.

Then there was also the fact they were just so alien that not even the Viper was sure what their deal was most of the time.

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So, will your Chosen also walk out with a 25% Grand Achievement? Minaga asked the Viper. If he does, things could get very interesting on those Leaderboards. Not to say it wont get interesting even if he gets lower, but, you know, it will leave a lot up to the final Challenge Dungeon. Not that I think he will do badly there at all in fact, I am very much looking forward to the experience.

The Viper listened to Minagas long rant as he just answered the initial question as honestly as possible.

How would I know how Jake will do? I havent seen any of the Challenge Dungeon as the screen only flickers on for the minutes he walks around the atrium.

Oh yeah, fair enough.

--

Jake had no idea his small marble had left a Bound God who had existed since the second era pondering in genuine puzzlement. Much less the happenings in the streaming room. Not that he had any time to think about such things, even if he had known. He was a busy man, after all, and was working hard on his current poison project. A project that had experienced what Jake believed could aptly be described as the concept known as feature creep.

The original plan had expanded several times as Jake got more and more small ideas to improve things. At first, Jake had wanted to make either a really strong Hemotoxin or a really strong Necrotic Poison. Mind you, Jake had at least been clear from the start he wanted a poison that targeted life-affinity lifeforms. A poison tailor-made for those would be better than trying to mix in stuff to also target something like elementals, so thats why he went with a more focused one.

Also, the vast majority of foes Jake hunted were flesh and blood lifeforms. Beasts of different sorts, primarily, and while he did throw in the occasional plant, elemental, or mechanical creature, his Blood of the Malefic Viper usually did the job fine against those. Plus, as a hunter, Jake could choose his own prey, so if he only had poison good against flesh and blood, he could just only target flesh and blood prey. And currently, the only things Jake was itching to put arrows in were quite susceptible to both bleeding and necrosis.

At least Jake was fairly confident ElHakan wouldnt enjoy having his body rot and bleed from the inside.

His original plan to make either a strong Hemotoxin or Necrotic Poison quickly morphed into Jake asking himself a very simple question: why not both? Well, the answer was that different poisons very rarely mixed well, resulting in the final product turning out worse than if you had just focused fully on either. Alas, this was a problem Jake knew could be overcome as merging poisons was something Jake had read a lot about and knew as possible from prior projects. He just needed a way to make his two best types of poison compatible.

Now, Jake did also consider merging in a few concepts from his Sleeping Night poison but ended up quickly scratching that idea as he felt like trying to mix in Neurotoxins would just make the entire project way too damn complicated. Plus, if he struggled to merge two poisons in a satisfactory way, how was trying to merge three going to make things any better?

To clarify, the Sleeping Night Toxin had contained elements of hemo- and necrotic toxins, but he hadn't outright merged two fully-created poisons together to make it. That poison had also been far more subtle due to the ethtoxin infused to calm the two other kinds of toxins down until it was time to go wild. Finally, even in Sleeping Night, the two toxins didn't exactly mix well together. It was just that their violent clash would only happen once awakened, and as it would take place within the target's body, it wasn't really a problem.

To start this new and exciting project, Jake had first needed to make two powerful poisons to merge. One Hemotoxin and one Necrotic Poison, both firmly in the rare rarity, to then hopefully merge them even into an even better rare rarity poison.

Once more, it had to be reiterated that poison rarities were quite a bit different from many other types. A bit like potions. The rarity was a lot more set than in other things, and even just making rare poisons in C-grade was considered pretty damn good. In fact, Jake had been told by Villy that should he manage to create an epic rarity poison and upgrade the skill to epic while still in C-grade, it would be very impressive.

Shit, it wasn't uncommon for some alchemists to never even reach rare rarity with their poison crafting while in C-grade.

One of the reasons why the rarities for these crafting skills were a bit different was because they were never downgraded. Every evolution from now on B, A, and S-grade would result in every single skill getting evaluated and potentially downgraded. The only ones immune to this were Jake's unique skills and his crafting skills. Elixir making, potion brewing, and poison concocting to be more accurate. So, if one wanted to look at Jake's rare poison skill in a more arrogant and definitely not accurate light, one

could imagine it was actually meant to be three rarities higher as it would dodge three downgrades, making it already a legendary skill.

Yeah, alright, that wasn't how it worked, but Jake liked to imagine it was. Anyway, this peculiar nature of the crafting skills also resulted in the spectrum within each rarity being far, far wider. Jake could make a rare rarity poison that was dozens of times more powerful than another and still stay within the same rarity, while if he did that with most other projects, the sheer power difference would result in a rarity difference also showing up. It did feel a bit weird that Jake could toss a dozen legendary rarity ingredients together and end up with a rare poison, but what can you do.

All of this is to say that despite Jake only aiming to craft another rare rarity poison, it didn't make the final result any less impressive. He didn't even consider making an epic rarity poison, as he knew it wasn't going to happen. In fact, he had a way higher chance of making one of ancient rarity due to Malefic Vipers Poison proccing. Something he seriously doubted would happen due to how damn low its proc rate was.

Jake even regretted using that Venom from the horrible statue Felix made, but then again, it would probably have counted as a crafting ingredient and not something Jake could use during the Challenge Dungeon.

Back on the topic of this poison in question, Jake had rapidly made progress over the last many months, and when he transitioned into only focusing on this specific one, things only picked up further.

Before he began, Jake had been quite a bit better at making Hemotoxins compared to Necrotic Poison, but he quickly shored that up and got them to just about the same level. That was necessary if he wanted to merge them and create something new. Something Jake had come across that had a damn impressive and highly innovative name:

Hemonecrotic Poison.

Alright, it was just a combination of the words hemotoxin and necrotic. But the poison itself was actually pretty damn good.

One of Necrotic Poisons biggest weaknesses was how effective it was. It sounded counterproductive, but it tended to simply rot away the area it affected too quickly and ran itself dry of energy. This even

happened with the higher-quality Necrotic Poisons that released necrotic light into their surroundings. The result was that anyone who was inflicted could more accurately target the poison with their vital energies or even just cut off the affected area.

Some enemies Jake had faced on the different Nevermore floors even sealed off the area he had affected and let it rot away until the necrotic energy ran out to then swoop in and cut off the very small affected area. This could result in a potent Necrotic Poison doing nothing more than rotting away a thumb-sized hole around where his arrow had struck, doing far less damage than he would have liked.

In many ways, Necrotic Poison was the most straightforward kind of poison there was, with no real hidden tricks. Just a shitload of death-affinity energy trying to make stuff die. It was both its biggest strength and biggest weakness.

However, what if the Necrotic Poison, with its incredibly potent death-affinity energy, was allowed to spread throughout the body? If it rapidly began to affect several places in the body at once instead of just one localized area?

To then make matters worse, this necrotic energy would be merged with a Hemotoxin one of the notoriously most difficult poisons to get rid of as it bonded to the blood and vital energy of the infected person. It was a real double-whammy of damage that would create a high-damage, high-resistance poison. The kind Jake could confidently build up throughout a long fight.

The kind of poison he would happily use on his prey.

Jake was excited about finally getting it done, and as he researched, what he had hoped would happen even ended up happening. He found something else that seemed interesting to craft he found what could very well become his tenth and final Creation.

## Chapter 822: Nevermore: A Corrosive Idea

Poison came in many shapes and forms. Jake usually relied on the classic poison in liquid form that he coated his weapons with, but powdered poison was just as normal. Powder had the great properties of being dissolved in water or even burned to create a mist or smoke with toxic properties. If this powder was dissolved in purified water, one could even have a do-it-yourself poison kit.

Jake felt like he could quite easily make a powder, and this was one of the things he considered as his final Creation. It didnt take much more than putting in certain catalysts and then boiling a mixture long enough for all the water to evaporate. Getting a working method down shouldnt take more than a month or two. Jake found a few use cases for a powder, but ultimately, it wasnt something he thought worthy of submitting, so he didnt bother getting more familiar with the craft.

However, as he briefly studied these powder poisons and worked on crafting his Hemonecrotic Poison, he came across another form of poison Jake had neglected for a long time. A form of poison Jake had encountered before, and he kind of questioned if it should even be called a poison.

It was something many other professions also used. Jewelers and blacksmiths used it to remove impurities when crafting, weaponsmiths while tempering arms, and Jake had even seen Arnold use some that he had acquired from who-knows-where.

He was naturally talking about the wonderful world of acids. Alright, calling it a wonderful world was probably overdoing it, as dying to an acid was probably one of the worst ways to go. Jake should know. One of his first really close encounters with death was that time in Villys Challenge Dungeon, where he barely touched some acid and nearly had his entire body corroded and melted away.

The poison back then had been of the necrotic kind and made to dissolve anything alive. Thats also why there could be an entire basin of it, as it wouldnt do anything to anything non-living and this was actually where one of the big differences between poisons and acids appeared.

If Jake opened a poison bottle and poured it into a bowl, the bowl would begin to take heavy damage as the energies within the toxins would leak into it. Even if it was a poison made to kill flesh and blood lifeforms, the antagonistic mana within was simply too reactive with anything it was in contact with.

This was also the reason why poison lost its effects pretty quickly when out of the bottle. If Jake didnt have Malefic Vipers Poison, it would last minutes, not hours, when he coated a weapon and had it out in the open. Another reason why his quiver was also a godsend at it allowed Jake to have poisoned arrows in there for way longer without losing potency.

Acids, on the other hand, were far more stable unless they came in contact with what they were made to corrode. Jake could leave an open barrel of acid just sitting there for years without it losing much, if any, potency as long as no one consumed any of the energy within by dissolving anything.



Jake had never really worked on acids, as, in many ways, they were just worse than the poisons he used. Splashing a few drops of Necrotic Poison on an open wound would corrode an arm away, while a few drops of acid with necrotic properties would only melt away a tiny bit of flesh where the liquid hit.

The mention of open wounds here was quite important because this was where acids differed quite a lot from regular poisons again.

While throwing a bottle of poison on someone did do some level of damage and would act slightly acidic, it was very inefficient. Nearly all of Jake's poisons worked through injection with sharp objects like arrows or katars. He needed to personally deliver the poison to the inside of the Soulshape, or it would have little to no effect.

Acids you could just throw at people. It didn't really matter; as long as someone was hit, it would do its thing. Sure, an open wound would be nice, but it was secondary to just splashing someone with plenty of it. And Jake did mean plenty of it because just throwing small bottles of acid would rarely do much unless it was really potent acid.

Now, the ultimate question was why Jake suddenly got so damn interested in acids. In truth, Jake didn't really need to learn how to craft it. Combat-wise, it wouldn't even do that much for him. However, there were some instances where acids were just straight-up better than any kind of poison Jake could craft.

He still vividly remembered his fight with the Altmar Census Golem. That damn thing had been entirely immune to all his poisons, and sharp weapons didn't really work. The only way he had eked out a victory had been through Touch of the Malefic Viper, which managed to corrode through the Golem's defenses. Back then, the energy Jake had released may as well just have been him making his hands into acid due to the nature of the toxins released.

In one of the books, Jake actually read an interesting analogy. It said that if the usual poisons were the swords, daggers, and spears of toxins, then acid was the hammers, maces, and staffs. The blunt weapon of the toxic world. This was mainly because of the targets it was considered good against and how a blunt weapon would hit a large area with far more overall force, especially effective when sharp weapons just wouldn't get the job done, while at the same time recognizing that when a sharp weapon did work, it tended to be a lot more effective.

Jake liked that analogy quite a lot, and right now, he didn't really have any blunt weapons. His closest thing was arcane explosions, and that wasn't really a blunt weapon, now was it? So, there would likely be some combat applications if Jake made a good acid.

As for how acids worked a bit more in-depth well, there were a few ways. Acids had to be targeted against something specific, the same as regular poisons, but in a far more deliberate way. Mixing different acids to corrode more things also didnt really work, and honestly, why would you even want that in most cases? The acids you could mix also had to be in the same ballpark, or they were utterly incompatible. At least they were to someone like Jake, who was still working on his very first acid.

Choosing what you wanted to corrode wasnt that much different from before the system, but instead of targeting certain chemical compounds, you targeted affinities and even concepts. All metals partly shared an affinity, and they all had the same conceptual Records of being metal. So, if Jake made a metal-melting acid, it would work on all metals, at least somewhat.

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The same was true if Jake made something that was just a mana-melting acid. As for what acids could target, the more narrow it was, the more potent the acid tended to be against that specific thing. So, if Jake made an acid targeting earth-affinity mana, it would be much more effective than one generally targeting mana. Whats more, it could target only that one thing while ignoring everything else around it, not wasting any energy on what Jake didnt want to get rid of.

There was one other big reason Jake thought creating his very first acid would be a good idea. Jake had nine Creations he had planned to submit, and while all of them used his arcane affinity none of them really made any use of the destructive aspects of his affinity. They had all been about the stable elements, especially the small marble he submitted though that entire thing had more to do with Jake Juice than anything else, his arcane energy just the packaging to show off the energy.

Jake did use his destructive arcane affinity when doing alchemy. He used it to eliminate things he didnt want or need during crafting. To break apart certain ingredients. Something that was extremely similar to how acids worked.

Using his destructive arcane energy was incredibly difficult in his usual poisons due to its well, destructive tendencies. It liked to destroy anything that wasnt stable arcane energy and coupled with volatile poison that also wanted to kill stuff, the two of them went for each other the second Jake wasnt holding the reins.

Acids were a lot more stable. It wouldn't fight back as long as the acid wasn't made to corrode Jake's arcane affinity. This meant Jake only had to address the destructive arcane energy to make it calm down. A task that wasn't as difficult as one would expect as long as it wasn't actively being attacked. Jake's arcane affinity was a lot about balance, so all Jake needed to do was stabilize the destructive arcane energy just enough to not want to consume itself along with the acid. He would put it in sync with the acid and do so his arcane affinity would work in tandem with it, helping with the corrosion. Make it so that when the acid became aggressive, so would the arcane energy.

It also wasn't like acid wouldn't have uses outside of combat, especially not if he infused his arcane energy. There would be many instances where he could use it together with transmutation to corrode away unwanted parts of an item he planned to transmute, and the experience of learning how to make a good acid and how exactly acids worked would surely prove useful. Especially if one considered how an acid could target very specific things to corrode.

Finally, Jake had one more reason he wanted to learn acids one many probably wouldn't expect:

Blood of the Malefic Viper.

Jake had noted before how his blood was pretty much acid in its own right, even if it was a pretty weak one, and he knew that a part of the Path of the Malefic Viper revolved around acids. He also highly suspected that either Palate due to stomach acid, though that may be a stretch and/or Blood of the Malefic Viper were skills more directly related to it.

If Jake actually learned how to make acids and even consumed a lot of it, his blood would also get more potent acidic properties which would also help when he used his blood as a crafting ingredient. Considering how damn much blood Jake could spill these days, he could see that prove very potent. So, yeah, one of the reasons Jake wanted to learn how to make acids was because he thought it would be part of upgrading Legacy of the Malefic Viper skills and because he wanted to make his own blood more acidic.

Anyway, these were all the many reasons and thoughts Jake had in regard to making an acid. As for the Hemonecrotic Poison Jake was also working on? Well, he only had all this time to work on his acid because he was already done with that one:

[Potent Hemonecrotic Poison (Rare)] Mixing potent Hemotoxin and Necrotic Poisons, a Hemonecrotic Poison has been made, capable of rotting your foe from the inside. If injected, this poison will bind itself to your foe's vital energies and blood, using it as a vehicle to spread necrotic toxins. Wounds caused by

necrotic poison are extremely difficult to heal. Cleansing the Hemonecrotic Poison vital energy is extremely difficult.

Alright, it wasn't really right to say he was done, but he had made one. Reading its description, it did exactly what Jake had wanted it to. It had the good properties of both Necrotic Poison and Hemotoxins, making it an extremely difficult poison to deal with for anyone unlucky enough to get it into their system.

The entire crafting process had been precisely as Jake expected. It was just a lot of work to make the two poisons properly mix while checking books whenever something didn't work, and if the books didn't have any answers, to just keep trying until he eventually found the problem himself.

This poison was probably Jake's strongest yet against other humanoids or beasts. It would deal a lot more damage than his usual poisons, for sure. So, Jake had done the only logical thing he could and promptly went to the Merit Exchange Store and sold his very first Hemonecrotic Poison.

What? Jake wasn't going to actually submit this one. Jake had checked the time and out of all the Challenge Dungeons, he would definitely spend the most time in this one. As he had been pretty damn fast in Minagas Labyrinth despite clearing so many Sections, he was even ahead of schedule. Two years had been allocated for all the Challenge Dungeons, and Jake hadn't even spent that long in any of them so far. It had gotten close with the Colosseum of Mortals and Test of Character Challenge Dungeons, but it hadn't taken quite that long.

This meant Jake was fine with spending a bit longer in the House of the Architect as long as he saved two years for the Endless Journey.

He also had to consider Temlat. The half-elf was improving, yes, but Jake didn't want to pressure him and put him on a timer, and who knows when he would evolve? He sure as hell wouldn't tell his student he had to evolve just because Jake got tired of waiting. That would go against any kind of teaching style Jake would ever want to be associated with.

Plus, Jake had kind of forgotten that Evolution Quests were a thing, and Temlat had come to him a few days prior and said he still needed to do those. So, yeah, that added a bit to the time Jake thought he would originally take to evolve.

That's why Jake settled on just letting Temlat decide when Jake would be done with the House of the Architect. He wouldn't rush himself to complete the Hemonecrotic Poison. He would only submit one to the Architect after Temlat was also submitted.

If not, all Jake would be doing was making himself impatient, waiting for Temlat to get done.

As for the acid, Jake decided that he would be fine submitting that even before Temlat had reached his final form. Even if he did want to make a good acid, the regular poison was still his biggest priority, so that would be the final thing he submitted. It did kind of go against the notion of waiting with the best till last, but the Architect had never mentioned that was a thing, so Jake should be fine.

Time quickly passed as the usual routine continued. Jake had more time to focus on Temlat as his poison and acid project didn't take up all his time, especially the poison, as he was just reiterating and improving on the current poison at this point while making a few small improvements.

Finally, one day, Temlat approached him

Lord Thayne, he said in his usual semi-respectful voice.

His body looked a lot different than when Jake first met him. He had a dark aura around him and had begun to wear a cloak at all times, with shadowy energy hiding him due to his stealth skill. His eyes looked full of determination, and Jake could feel a faint bloodlust within him. A suppressed anger.

[Half-elf lvl 199]

Seeing his level, Jake had a good idea why he was there.

You got your race evolution quest? he asked.

Yes, Temlat answered in a solemn and serious tone, making Jake frown a bit.

What do you need to do?

It asks me to reaffirm or reject the source of my hatred

Jake wasn't sure what it meant but quickly got a good idea as he sighed. Well, it seems like its time for you to finally visit your homeworld again.

Because, surely, nothing could go wrong there, right?

#### Chapter 823: Nevermore: Temlat's Path

Temlat hadn't been home ever since the day Jake fetched him from the dystopian futuristic world he came from. He hadn't even asked to go once. Instead, he had stuck primarily to the centaur world and the jungle world for all his training sessions.

His reasoning was that he didn't want to risk losing control of his emotions. Also, he was certain he was still wanted in his homeworld after having escaped from that noble woman on the floating island. Jake had briefly asked Temlat if he wanted Jake to go and check things out, but the half-elf had answered in the negative. He didn't even want Jake to tell the lady Temlat was dead or anything like that.

One of the reasons for this was also his desire to protect those he actually did care about. The freedom fighting force he had been working with were the only people in that entire dystopian world he considered friends and family, and he feared getting them involved wouldn't end well. If they knew Jake had taken Temlat in, they would want to see him, and if they were told he had died, Temlat feared they may go for revenge or do something dumb. Jake also sensed that Temlat was afraid of how they would look at him these days. He had changed a lot in the time he had spent with Jake, the curse energy affecting him a lot.

Jake had simply done as Temlat asked as he continued to go with his free-range teaching style. However, even so, he gladly joined his student when he asked Jake to join him on this first visit back.

Standing in the portal room, Jake gave Temlat a look, noticing he was hesitating.

Nervous?

I what if they cant recognize me? My friends, that is, Temlat muttered. You know the last time they saw me, I was running from some monstrous cloaked guy, and now I have suddenly been gone for nearly two years. I feel like I have changed a lot during this time too I know I have changed.

Any changes will surely be easily explained away by telling them that the monstrous cloaked guy decided to help you get stronger, Jake said casually and calmly, trying to reassure his student.

Temlat flashed a light smile, the curse energy around him temporarily fading a bit. Yeah, probably. No matter what, theyre gonna be ecstatic when they learn why I am back. When they learn what we can now do to set things right.

Jake just nodded, genuinely hoping his reunion would go well. Jake knew the feeling Temlat was currently experiencing, as he had felt something very similar when he had first gone to see his parents after the integration.

To return to loved ones a changed man wasnt easy. You wondered if they would accept you, and even if they did accept you if they would begin to treat you differently. Especially if you experienced a large shift in your status. Jake had already been tired of everyone acting all weird because he was the Chosen of Villy, and he really didnt want his parents to also act differently back then. Jake had gotten lucky, and he hoped Temlat would share the same fate.

Lets not delay anymore, Jake finally said as he gave Temlat a pat on the back. Lets go.

Right, Temlat nodded.

It was time for him to either reaffirm or reject the source of his hatred. In order to do that, he would first meet up with the freedom fighter organization to learn what had happened during his absence. To have clarified how shit the world still was and to hear their opinions on if his deep hatred was truly justified. In other words, he would have a discourse about his own hatred to either come out feeling vindicated in what was to come or reconsider his entire Path. Needless to say, Jake wanted him to feel confident in the Path he was walking, but even if he ended up rejecting the curse and evolving in another direction, it would be interesting for sure.

Jake wouldnt involve himself either way. It wasnt his job or why he was there. He was just there to guide Temlat in whatever direction he decided to take his life.

Walking through the portal, Jake was instantly hit by the slightly metallic smell and taste of the futuristic world. He didn't like it at all, and his Sense of the Malefic Viper unprompted made him aware that pretty much nothing alchemical could grow anywhere nearby. Yeah, definitely happy Haven has strict building codes.

It looks the same, Temlat muttered as the curse energy around him fully retracted, Temlat absorbing it into himself to keep it hidden.

Even if you have changed a lot in recent times, two years is just an insignificant blip in the existence of a world like this, Jake commented. Especially if those who live there have no desire to pursue change.

Temlat looked at the floating mansions still high up in the sky, adding: Or if those who hold power do not allow any change to happen.

That too, Jake agreed. Anyhow, this is all you. I'm just gonna be the little spirit that I'll follow along as you decide what you want to do. Feel free to ask me if you need something, but I won't interfere in anything unless you ask me directly, alright?

Temlat nodded with determination. Thank you, Teacher.

Jake had already been focusing as they talked, his body slowly shifting on the spectrum of Perception. The stable arcane mana covered his body, and soon, his form faded away, making him invisible to anyone who wasn't Temlat. Temlat was only able to see Jake was there because he already knew Jake was there, to begin with.

The two of them headed into the city, Temlat flying over it with confidence. His own stealth skill wasn't all too shabby, and Jake knew most weaker C-grade couldn't see him unless they really tried. Even if they were spotted, Temlat had good odds of defending himself, even if a C-grade got mixed in there.

While Jake hadn't been the most attentive, he did keep up with Temlat's progress. He knew the young half-elf had gotten a lot stronger in the nearly two years since Jake took him in, to the level where he had even managed to take down a handful of C-grades, that centaur warlord included. Sure, he did sometimes use tricks to get it done, but as a hunter who liked to start a fight with an extremely strong Powershot, Jake couldn't exactly fault him for getting early advantages.



Temlat and Jake had appeared quite far up in the air after going through the portal but soon headed downward toward the slums. The city was absolutely massive, but Temlat clearly knew where to go as he beelined for a certain area Jake recognized. It was close to where he had originally been kidnapped by Jake and also close to the headquarters of their particular freedom fighter squad.

Also, while Jake had said he wouldn't interfere, he could ask questions.

Did your former friends have any C-grades among them? Jake asked while wondering if they ever even stood a chance against the C-grades living in their mansions with C-grade guards.

We had one, Temlat shared as they kept flying. Our leader. He used to work security for one of the mansion owners, but after a particularly bad case, he quit. The government tried to make trouble because he didn't work for any of the people in power, but he managed to convince them he had retired and that he would contact them if he ever wanted to go back to work. Now, he is under surveillance, but as long as he stays in the same area, there shouldn't be any problems.

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I see, Jake nodded solemnly.

He didn't say anything more because he felt the area in front of him. There wasn't a single C-grade anywhere to be found below any of the highrises or the floating islands, at least not in the entire area of his Pulse of Perception. Jake didn't want to jump to conclusions, but he got a bad feeling.

Soon, they arrived in the area district where Temlat's squad used to reside. Jake could feel the half-elf's excitement but bit his tongue even as they landed, and Temlat began to scout the area. They went toward a few warehouses that stored ores from the underground mines, where they headed inside and toward a hidden staircase.

Temlat frowned a bit as he went closer, muttering to himself. It hasn't been reinforced for a while our leader was the one who did that

With a careful demeanor, he unlocked the hidden pathway and entered using some secret code, Jake following. Down below the warehouse, Jake saw several people gathered, none of them particularly powerful. At least none of them matched up to Temlat at all.

The people in the room had also noticed Temlat was there, as the entryway also included a detection spell. One that Jake naturally dodged easily with his stealth skill. Anyway, the people in the room quickly hid themselves, likely preparing for an ambush.

Right before they reached the final door, Temlat stopped and raised a knuckle. He knocked in an odd pattern as he also spoke up. The Broken Collar has returned.

One would assume the people inside would calm down with this revelation, but instead, they tensed up. Jake was quite curious as he saw they nearly all of them carried what looked like laser rifles or guns, and while he very much wanted to disassemble, that wasn't why he was there.

Temlat opened the door only to have all the weapons trained on him. The half-elf was confused, but before he could say anything, a woman who also happened to have the highest level in the room 190 raised her voice.

Temlat!? What the fuck are you doing here? No, where have you been!?

I just got back, Temlat stammered. He had removed his hood and hidden the curse energy as best he could, but Jake still saw some of it shimmer beneath the surface, barely being suppressed. As for where I was a lot has happened, and I cannot tell you exactly-

Fuck that! Give us a proper explanation! one of the others yelled.

None of the guns had been lowered yet, and their aggressiveness was over the top, in Jake's opinion. It was more than just nervousness, suspicion, and agitation. They were genuinely angry, and as someone who had a budding Sin Curse of Wrath, how couldn't Temlat recognize that?

I was taken away by my teacher to train and get powerful, Temlat shared, not going into details about exactly who Jake was. I have come back now because there are things I have to do before I can evolve.

Silence took over the room for a few seconds before the woman spoke up.

Thats it? Thats your fucking excuse?

What? Temlat asked, confused. Jake was also a bit perplexed about what exactly had happened.

You just waltz in here with some bullshit story about a teacher and expect us to believe you? Do you know what the fuck youve done?

No, I quite obviously dont, Temlat shot back, failing to suppress some of his anger.

Oh, do you remember Isaia? the woman said in a cold tone. You know, the man who saved your pathetic life and brought you here?

Of course I remember, Temlat said in a calm tone.

Jake quickly put two and two together that this Isaia was the leader.

Then do you know what he did for you? the woman spat out, not even giving Temlat time to answer. When you didnt return, he went to that owner of yours, acting like a buyer trying to get you back how the hell dont you know any of this!? A year! A fucking year the announcement was up!

Temlat only looked increasingly confused as the woman and the other seven people in the room only got madder. Their anger, in turn, also affecting Temlat.

What announcement!? Just tell me what is going on and stop acting like whatever the fuck happened is my fault!

They knew you worked for him! another person yelled. They captured him and they said if you didnt return they would would a fucking year! It was there for a year, and you just hid away, not doing shit!

How could I do anything if I didnt know!? What the hell happened? Just tell it to me I am getting sick of this shit! Temlat yelled, agitated and angry. Jake understood why. Emotions were high, and in all honesty, they had probably both underestimated the impact of Temlats passive curse aura amplifying everyones anger. As he had only ever really spent time around Jake, the Attendants, and his enemies. This meant he had never been required to learn how to fully suppress it.

What do you think happened? the woman asked in a cold tone. What do you think they did to him when you didnt turn yourself in?

Temlat clenched his fists hard enough for his nails to pierce his own skin as he cursed out loud. Fuck! Why did he go to them!? What was he thinking!?

You have the gall to blame him? the woman shot back. But, hey, at least we agree! He shouldnt have gone and tried to save your worthless life.

Her words were full of spite as she continued.

No, he should have never taken in a pathetic half-breed like you at all. You know he only did it because he felt bad for your pathetic whore of a mother, right? Isaia always had a soft spot for pitiful things.

Jake considered speaking up but stayed silent, not interfering. He saw Temlat standing there trembling for a few seconds before he suddenly calmed down and took a deep breath.

I dont even remember my own mother anymore, Temlat said, the curse aura around him slightly moving. Isaia very much took on a fatherly role but even so, he always had the mission as his top priority. Have you all forgotten?

What fucking mission? one of the others yelled. They are hunting us! Just because some bitch didnt want to let her pet go, nearly all of us have been killed already. There is no mission. It died the day you let Isaia die.

Temlats coldness only increased as he nodded. You are right that Isaias mission died but his ideal lives on. He wanted the world to change and for those in power to pay for what theyve done. So I ask all of you, if you had the chance to fulfill that ideal, would you do it? Would you risk your lives for the cause?

Did your soul get fucked up or something? the woman said in a mocking tone. Without Isaia, we cant do shit to anyone, even if-

Why did I even ask? Temlat said in a casual tone. It wasnt a choice to begin with.

A dark wave of energy was released from Temlat as he unleashed his curse. Only now did those in the room seem to realize the young half-elf had gotten a lot stronger than before. His skill allowing him to hide his level had done so none could see it.

What happened to you? the woman muttered, her eyes wide open.

I found my Path and I reaffirmed what I must do.

Without any warning, Temlat took out a disc, and a ritual circle appeared all around him. It had been the ritual Temlat had worked on for this entire duration as Jakes student. Jake felt the concepts within it instantly but chose to remain silent still.

Curse energy erupted from the floor, was what looked like black chains of flames engulfed every single person in the room besides Jake and Temlat. The flames instantly began to burn the freedom fighters as they all screamed in pain, the central woman screaming the loudest as she cursed Temlat.

You fucking lunatic! What are you doing!? Ill fucking kill you, Ill-

Thank you, Temlat just said. Your anger is very helpful.

With a wave of his hand, the flames all intensified as none of them could speak. They all became fuel as Temlat turned and threw Jake a look. Thank you, Teacher. From the beginning, all I wanted was revenge on those of this world who only deserve death and you made that possible. Even if I dont turn out as you had hoped.

Temlat bowed deeply as Jake nodded. Your Path is your own, not one for me to define. Do what you think you have to.

The half-elf nodded as the curse energy released from the sacrifices began to make its way toward him. His own aura began to intensify as soon even Temlat's body erupted in flames. The light smile on Temlat's face disappeared entirely as all emotions were burned away.

Finally, he took out his dagger the one he had when Jake first met him and pressed it against his own chest.

Right before the final emotion that wasn't pure hatred and anger disappeared, Temlat plunged the dagger into his own heart. A black burst of flames erupted from the stab wound, and in the very next second, Temlat popped out of existence, having gone to the evolution space.

Jake sighed as he wondered what would return and as he felt the aura of the room begin to change, he got a clue as he sensed something he hadn't since he met the Dark Witch on floor forty-one.

The unmistakable scent of a plague.

#### Chapter 824: Nevermore: The Child Who Is Not Embraced By the Planet Will Spread His Plague

The curse energy within the underground room kept increasing with every passing second. The former freedom fighters stood catatonically as their bodies still burned, and Jake felt that their souls had already mostly been extinguished. They were being reduced to nothing more than the hatred within their hearts.

Plague energy also slowly began to emerge, infecting the mostly dead people. Jake realized now it had come from the dagger Temlat had used to stab himself with. The half-elf had changed it to somehow inhabit a nascent plague of some sort. It wasn't a true plague yet, though. Temlat was far from being capable of making something like that, but it had the fundamental building blocks.

Building blocks Temlat had merged into himself right as he evolved.

Jake remained an observer as he waited for nearly a minute, the curse energy in the room continuing to rise. It was feeding into the evolution as far as Jake could tell, affecting Temlat's evolution just as he had wanted it to.

He didn't know what would emerge once the evolution was complete. However, he didn't have a good feeling it would be something acceptable. Curses and plagues were both less-than-fondly looked upon in the multiverse, and a merge of the two could only end in disaster. Especially with what Temlat had done right as he evolved. He had purposefully damaged parts of his own soul, as far as Jake could tell.

Which meant he didn't plan on emerging as anything even close to a normal person anymore.

Soon, the energy reached a crescendo. Jake felt the Sin Curse within his own Soulspace rumble to life as curse energy tried to infect Jake, Eternal Hunger gladly eating it all up. Jake breathed in through his nose as Palate faintly activated, eliminating the traces of a plague that attempted to infect him.

Then, out of nothingness, a figure appeared. A cloaked being that looked surrounded by darkness, its form not entirely corporeal. It looked vaguely like Temlat had with his hood up but Jake barely felt the familiar aura of his student. Instead, he felt only a bubbling mass of anger, and with a deep breath, he analyzed the being in front of him.

[Cursed Plague Remnant of Wrath lvl 200]

The former freedom fighters all turned to black energy as they fed the Plague Remnant, the magic circle beneath him fading right after, having done its job. Jake considered what to do, genuinely unsure what his next actions should be.

He knew what Plague Spirits were. They were the premier example of beings that should be killed on sight if anyone encountered one. Mostly, they appeared when powerful death-affinity energy gathered in an area and was nothing more than mindless elemental-like beings who lived only according to their instinct to spread their plague and consume all life.

Jake also knew of another creature called Curse Remnants. These were very similar to Plague Spirits, but instead of a plague, they spread their curse energy far and wide, cursing anything and everything. As with Plague Spirits, these were also simply mindless creatures with nothing more than an instinct to spread their namesake to the world.

Both were considered living calamities. Beings to destroy. However Jake didn't remember ever coming across anything called a Plague Remnant. Much less a Plague Remnant of Wrath, indicating Temlat managed to finally evolve his curse of hatred into the Sin Curse of Wrath.

The easy explanation was that Temlat had truly managed to fuse the two into one. To create a cursed plague which actually didn't seem that weird. The two concepts mixed well, both being highly infectious magical ailments that could infect from one person to another without needing the original source to get involved.

One thing was clear: the being before him was a living calamity. Even if Jake didn't recognize it, he knew it was dangerous. What's more, the aura it gave off wasn't meek by any standards. It was still only a C-grade, but Jake knew that it was a powerful variant.

Paths tended to be more powerful if they also included giving something up or having severe restrictions. Jake's class was the easiest example; his Path making it so he couldn't get any experience from anything lower level than himself. Temlat's Path had taken far more from him than simply that.

The Plague Remnant in front of him began to slowly move as it turned into a dark smoke that quickly sought outside the underground chamber. As the Remnant left, Jake knew what would happen if he did so. He knew that everything around him would be infected and a chain reaction would start. A snowball of cataclysmic proportions.

However, as Jake looked at what Temlat had become and analyzed the plague energy trying to constantly affect him, Palate quickly gave him an understanding. If he killed Temlat here and now, everything would end. The world would be saved.

Jake seriously considered it for a second until the smoke stopped just before the exit of the chamber and took on the form of a hooded figure once more.

Thank you, Teacher. Thank you for allowing me to finally spread true justice upon this filthy world and for granting me the power to do so. If you are still here witness as I expunge my Wrath. Witness as a wrong is made right. Witness me.

Sighing, Jake realized the young half-elf had lost his ability to perceive Jake after he evolved and quickly made it so Temlat could see him and flashed his student a smile. Go get em.



The former young half-elf didn't respond but quickly turned back into his remnant form. Jake was both happy and conflicted, knowing that Temlat's psyche persisted, though it probably shouldn't have surprised him too much.

It was similar to the Yalsten Shade of Eternal Resentment. Jake wouldn't be surprised if that creature had also once been a Curse Remnant, but as it ran out of targets to infect, it died and was reborn into the shade it had been when Jake encountered it. Even that creature back then had retained some level of thought.

Curses were based on emotions, and in order to truly feel emotions, one needed a more complex mind. Perhaps not to the level of being fully sapient, but at least sentience was required. Of course, the psyche of such beings was very rarely just that of one person or in any way cohesive, which nearly always made Curse Remnants act illogical and on instinct as the only thing all the different psyches could agree on was their one shared emotion.

Jake would guess that inside Temlat's head, he heard the voices of the former freedom fighters he consumed, and with every death, the choir of voices would grow. The faint curse energy released upon their deaths would become one with Temlat, empowering him and becoming one with him.

Following Temlat outside, a geyser of black smoke erupted out of the warehouse. As if a smoke bomb had been dropped, it rolled out with Temlat in the middle, slowly spreading out. It was barely noticeable due to the usual constant smog that hung in the lower parts of the megacity, and it took people a while to notice anything was even wrong by the time they did, it was too late. The D-grades simply had no way to resist the influence of a C-grade Cursed Plague Remnant.

As Jake had noted many times, this megacity was ridiculously massive, with a population density absolutely insane. Hundreds of billions, if not trillions, lived on the planet, and due to how crammed they lived to one another, there was no escaping the Cursed Plague Remnant of Wrath.

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Jake observed as the smoke entered the mines. The miners working there began to get agitated and angry. Swinging wildly when the annoying ore refused to get free from the damn rock. This earned them an angry foreman who screamed at them only for the miners to all turn as they charged the one foreman. The foreman killed dozens before he was overwhelmed and hacked to death by the workers.

On the lower floors of the megastructures, the mayhem began to break out. Any small inconvenience became a cause for conflict as fights broke out. This was also where the truly insidious aspects of a plague were shown.

Not everyone was affected the same, as some had stronger mentalities or were simply a lot less emotional by default. They fled, afraid as they got attacked by others, going to somewhere the conflict had not broken out yet bringing with them the Cursed Plague of Wrath. Their very presence made them spreaders, as their attempts to garner help only resulted in anger from those asked.

However, as Jake observed, it quickly became clear the anger was not indiscriminate. The curse was not without cause. Students killed teachers, miners killed foremen, children their parents or disciplinarians, and workers killed managers rather than simply mindless anger, it was wrath towards authority.

Jake remained a silent observer as he saw the cursed plague spread. He saw how every death, no, even just every infected person, fed Temlat, the source of everything. Minutes turned to hours as Jake kept looking on, choosing to take this as an experience to learn and a solemn moment to reflect.

To observe a scene like this wasn't something anyone could just do. Sure, Jake could probably find a recording if he wanted to, but this was vastly different than merely watching something unfold. It was closer to what he got while using Path of the Heretic-Chosen.

He felt everything. Took it in. Even if he knew this entire world was fake, he never liked to think of them as such. To these people, they were as real as Jake himself, and they had full lives. Their lives just couldn't impact the wider multiverse in any way.

This begged the question what would Jake have done if Temlat had been a student Jake had taken outside of Nevermore? What if this exact same scenario played out? Jake wanted to tell himself he would have advised Temlat against researching plagues, but in all honesty, he probably wouldn't have. Even if he did, he wouldn't have insisted if there was the slightest pushback.

Jake's teaching style was a lot closer to Villys than anyone else's. It was a style that could barely make one acknowledged as a teacher, more a sparring partner or external advisor. Jake didn't want to tell someone what to do or give them unsolicited advice. From the very beginning, he wanted Temlat to find his own Path. To decide what he wanted to do and not fit into a mold Jake created.

So perhaps that was Jakes biggest fault he hadnt chosen his student properly. Temlat was talented, he had a rare compatibility with curses, but he lacked ambition. His goal had always just been to get revenge, which was such a weak motivation. But for Jake, who knew he only had a few years in the House of the Architect at max, this goal was good enough. In many ways, he had just taken advantage of Temlats short-term goal to get a better result for himself, which made Jake feel even more conflicted if he did choose to step in and interfere now that Temlat was finally capable of realizing his dream.

As Jake reflected on his entire approach, he kept watching Temlat. He kept watching, even as the first megastructure began to tumble and the people charged toward the sky and the mansions up there. Only a few hours had passed at this point, and when Jake looked down and saw the ever-growing Cursed Plague Remnant of Wrath still within the warehouse, he could only sigh.

[Cursed Plague Remnant of Wrath lvl 212]

He leveled up at an unprecedented speed, and from the looks of it, things were barely slowing down. At least not yet. Jake knew he was an empty cup that was just slowly getting filled with shitty muddy water. The curse energy that made up the Plague Remnant was getting contaminated by all the beings that were consumed along the way, and it would take a long time for him to properly consolidate himself once he was done.

Yet Jake doubted he cared. In fact, he doubted Temlat would be able to even feel the emotion of caring much longer as the curse energy from all the infected and dead people mixed with his own. At least Jake thought so, but to his surprise, he still sensed Temlat. He saw that he still maintained his humanoid figure standing in the middle of the warehouse.

He retains an ego even now is it because of the presence-resistance training we did?

Jake had been able to hold onto his mind when he consumed all the curse energy from Eternal Hunger because of his Bloodline-empowered psyche, so it was entirely possible Temlat had built up enough resistance to handle the influx of curse energy he experienced. Compared to the curse energy that eventually gave birth to and still resided within Eternal Hunger, Temlats current form was nothing. One had to remember that this planet only had C-grades on the weaker side as their strongest, and barely any of those had even fallen yet.

Time passed as the cursed plague spread further and further. Attacks on the sky mansions had begun to happen, but their defenses were far more impressive compared to anywhere else. The formations alone

were nearly enough, and when most of them sprung large laser towers and what looked like Tesla Coils, Jake thought the masses were done for.

However, that was when the nobles showed they truly had no idea what they were dealing with. Be it in a foolish attempt to save resources or pure ignorance, they began to send out their security forces to fight. The automatic defenses would not be affected by the cursed plague, but these guards?

Hundred were instantly killed by each C-grade bodyguard as they dominated the sky, killing in droves. The D-grades and even E-grades who had joined the assault didn't stand a chance, but this was where another scary aspect of cursed plagues was seen.

With every kill, a bit of the energy invaded these C-grades bodies. With every kill, they got more and more infected, and as they had no time to sit down and purge the energy, the outcome was obvious.

It was one of the strongest guards who had also killed the most that fell first. His eyes were bloodshot, and right after killing a dozen D-grades, he turned around and roared as he released a massive blast of fire toward the floating island where he used to be employed. His hatred toward the owner who forced him to perform a massacre was obvious. The automatic defense system instantly triggered and attacked him, but he defended himself well. The other C-grades saw their friend being attacked, which seemed to also push them over the edge as they also began to attack the nearby sky island.

In the meantime, the D-grades kept coming for the guards and the island both. It was pure pandemonium, and Jake could only watch in silence as the barrier broke on one of the smaller sky islands. The woman who used to call the living calamity currently washing across the world a pet lived in one of the larger ones where the defenses still held out, but it was only a matter of time.

Temlat had been the first domino that started a cascade effect that appeared unstoppable. Millions more were infected every single minute as Temlat no longer even needed to do anything. The cursed plague was spreading all by itself, causing destruction all across the planet.

Jake had flown high up into the air as he stared down. The spread was impressively fast, and as the planet wasn't overly large, Jake guessed it would reach everywhere within a week at most.

A single week for an entire planet to fall to one newly evolved C-grade Jake understood why Plague Theory and curses were both not anything to be taken lightly. It was something most factions outright

banned, to the level of hunting down people they believed were researching it unauthorized or while not part of a big faction.

The former half-elf himself was also growing in power still. After half a day, when nearly half of the sky islands near the original source of the cursed plague had fallen, he had already gained nearly thirty levels from the billions upon billions of infections and deaths he had caused.

[Cursed Plague Remnant of Wrath lvl 229]

His leveling speed had slowed down, though. His container for experience was just about full, and even if he kept growing stronger and absorbing more energy, it wouldn't translate into levels much longer. Jake also knew that once he did hit a wall, it would be incredibly hard for him to ever overcome it. This was one of the reasons why Villy was so insistent on Jake also making sure he had a good foundation leveling this fast felt nice and looked overpowered, but it was sacrificing long-term power for short-term gain. Alas, Temlat already knew this when he evolved...

No new developments happened for a good while. The massive cloud of pure curse energy around Temlat now covered several square kilometers, forming a domain all around him. He looked to be entirely focused on gathering this energy until suddenly, Jake saw it all begin to gather. A second later, he realized why.

The barrier to the mansion Temlat had once called a prison had been broken and the massive cloud of curse energy shot upwards, the Sin Curse making the air shiver in his wake. It gathered into the cloak, and to Jake's pleasant surprise, a face emerged within. Temlat's unmistakable visage didn't only tell Jake he still retained his ego... but that he was going to personally unleash his own Wrath on the woman who once dared call him her pet.

## Chapter 825: Nevermore: No Regrets

Temlat undoubtedly had one person he hated more than anyone. An individual that represented everything he despised above all else. Despised how she was just sitting up on her floating island, staring down with mockery at the average folk beneath. She had been such a shitty person Temlat had even awakened his innate curse affinity due to how much he hated her.

This hate was felt throughout a huge part of the planet as Temlat descended upon the cloud island. The others infected by the cursed plague, even the C-grades, backed away instinctively when they saw the

cloaked figure approach. Be it because they sensed the dangerous energies he emanated or simply his power, Jake didn't know.

Landing on the floating island, Temlat began levitating forward. A few times, he reached out and made a guard or servant erupt in black cursed flames, rapidly consuming them. Jake made the educated guess these were servants of the mansion he hadn't been a big fan of.

Following along, Jake remained true to his promise as he only observed. In his sphere, he saw the woman Temlat was aiming for, hiding with two others inside a room with heavy magical seals on it. A safe room of some kind, it appeared.

Considering the state of the mansion, a large metal box buried toward the middle stood out quite a bit, and Temlat approached it at a steady pace, not rushing at all but keeping a calm demeanor. One side of this metal box was partly transparent, allowing the people inside to look out but no one to look in outside of people like Jake who had high enough Perception to entirely ignore the one-way glass. Temlat clearly knew they could see out as he floated down in front of the box, and his voice echoed out from beneath the hood, showing the Cursed Plague Remnant had gotten a better hold of his new form, even capable of transmitting sound now.

I hear you've been looking for me well, here I am.

Promptly, the one-way glass became two-way, revealing to Temlat the three within. Standing at the glass was the woman who had originally hired Jake to retrieve her pet.

The woman who had set everything that was happening into motion. She looked through the glass at Temlat, clearly unsure what she was looking at.

My dear? What happe-

A huge blast of black flames shot at the metal box, making it rumble, and the magical formations crackle from the sheer energy.

Do not call me that!

I why are you doing this? No, it cannot be; my sweet little one isnt like this, the woman said in denial as she leaned onto the side of the wall, looking scared. However, some-fucking-how, she gathered herself and took on an adversarial stance. You are from those dirty slums, arent you!? Ill tell you, when the security forces arrive, youll be in big trouble! Are you also the one who hurt my dear little one and stole its gentle visage?

Temlat looked at her, seemingly lost for words for a moment before he just started laughing. The cloud of curse energy around him ebbed and flowed as Jake found not a single trace of happiness or humor in his voice.

It. You keep calling me an it. Tell me what is the name of your former dear little pet? Do you even know it?

The woman just stared as she seemed offended. My dear was always called my dear; it didnt have a name.

The response was swift and decisive. A massive inferno of black flames erupted all around the metal box, burning away at it incredibly rapidly. Curse energy and plagues both sucked against magic formations like this, but the sheer energy output was enough to rapidly overwhelm the defenses. One crackle after another sounded out as the magic formations broke, and the metal itself began to break apart.

Then allow me to remind you. Let my name be the last word you ever hear and your final memory: Temlat.

With that, the metal box broke apart. The two other women in the box died instantly as nothing more than collateral damage as the flames enveloped the source of Temlats hatred. She didnt share the same quick death as they suffered. Her screams began to echo as the Cursed Plague Remnant floated in front of her, controlling the black curse flame.

For a good while, the only thing Jake heard was the womans screams, with only the faint echoes of battle in the background. Temlat was not in a hurry, as he did what he could to make it the most painful death imaginable.

Jake stared for a while at Temlat's actions before he finally sighed and used One Step, appearing right beside Temlat, standing firmly within the cloud of cursed plague energy.

It's enough, Jake said.

Enough!? No, this bitch could burn for eternity, and it would never be enough! She deserves more than I could ever do to her! Temlat's enraged voice echoed out as his curse energy rumbled like a thundercloud. Jake absorbed the pure curse energy of hatred as he understood as least as best as he could.

I said it's enough. Simply torturing her will accomplish nothing beyond this point, Jake spoke in a calm voice. To end her Path is the ultimate revenge. To sever her impact on the world and allow her Records to fade into obscurity. That is the true way to destroy someone. Erase her from existence and show her just how insignificant she is.

Temlat's attention was on Jake for a moment as he finally released a pulse of power. The flames intensified, and after a final scream of pain, the woman's entire body disappeared, not even leaving ash behind. In the final moments, a bit of curse energy was released from her dead body, but Temlat instantly motioned and scattered it, refusing to allow it to be absorbed into him.

Jake had said before he wouldn't interfere, and yet he had stepped in anyway. Not just because he believed that Temlat was doing something senseless but because of what had to come next.

It was his time to take responsibility as a teacher. To see if Temlat truly realized the consequences of the Path he had chosen.

Sin Curses were the most powerful but they were also insatiable. They would never be satisfied and never reach their goal. Jake's Eternal Hunger would always demand more, always be a glutton, to the level where it would try to consume Jake if it got too famished. In the same way, Temlat would always need an outlet for his Sin Curse of Wrath. Sin Curses were based on emotions that couldn't be killed simply by fulfilling them. Wrath was something internal. What you yourself felt, regardless of what you direct your wrath at. You would always find a new target to hate, always find a new outlet. Not feeding the curse would only result in an internal collapse as the hatred turned toward the one and the only thing it could: himself.



The anger would be fully directed toward Temlat. Toward his own existence. He would begin to hate life itself, hate the entire world. This often resulted in someone infected by a Sin Curse of Wrath simply losing their minds and beginning to mindlessly destroy anything and anyone around them, only stopping when slain.

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That's why people used Sin Curses so sparingly, and if they began to lose control because the curse grew too powerful for them, they sealed it away. A bit similar to what Villy had proposed Jake could do with Eternal Hunger if the weapon ever got too much. He could sever it from himself and have it sealed away and drained of energy until the weapon just became an inert object many, many years later. It seemed like a waste, but it was better than Eternal Hunger getting hungry enough to just outright eat Jake, even if it would result in its own demise.

Temlat couldn't seal away his curse. He was the curse incarnate.

There was no breaking free of the curse's influence, no escape from its effects. Temlat's Path was to be a Cursed Plague Remnant until the day he died. He was to spread the Sin Curse of Wrath, with the only reprieve coming when the curse also took his own mind or if he managed to fight it long enough and stay lucid, see himself fade away and die in a struggle against his own emotions of wrath.

What will you do now? Jake asked after a long silence.

Temlat didn't answer right away as he just stood there, looking at where the source of his hatred had died. Where he had killed her. Jake felt that a sense of emptiness and lack of purpose had begun to affect the curse energy around him, but after Jake asked, it refocused.

End what I started. She was a symptom of a disease one that only a plague can cure.

Jake nodded, understanding what Temlat would do.

Then do as you have to. I will stay and watch as promised and once you're done, let us speak once more. As you said, I'll be a witness to your Path.

Temlat turned to Jake, his face clearer than ever, even seeming to have a bit of color to it. He nodded decisively as he took to the air, Jake focusing on reentering his stealth state before following. Jake also quickly saw where his student was headed.

The woman had mentioned it, but the most powerful people on the planet hadn't fallen yet. While the whole planet was effectively just one massive city, there were more dense areas than others. Temlat had resided in the second-to-most dense area, with only one other place having more people living there. With more people also came more C-grades and the closest thing to a government this world had.

One could view this fighting force as the army, even if they called themselves security forces. There were thousands of C-grades in the mix, but they all faced an opponent they weren't fit to fight. Temlat also had an army with him, as the central government was the main focus of the outrage of many. A full-on war was happening as the soldiers tried to defend their stations, but killing only served to turn them to the side of the enemy.

Some could resist, but they were in the minority. Mages and those with high Willpower, more often than not, managed to stay clear-headed even as the cursed plague infected them, but their calmness only made them targets of the irrational rage of others.

As time passed, Jake noticed how Temlat had begun to slightly change the target of the curse of wrath. No longer was it merely those in power it became those with power, too. Those with the potential to grow powerful and become the ruling class once more.

The army quickly fell to Temlat and his army of infected. From there, the slaughter truly began. Those who had been fighting side by side before began to butt heads, and the D-grades turned toward the C-grades, while the C-grades turned to the C-grades higher level than themselves.

Jake's estimation of the cursed plague taking an entire week to infect the planet also turned out to be off by two days. Five days was all it took for the cursed plague to infect practically every single person on the entire planet. Due to how everything was constructed, there were truly no places to hide, and as long as someone knew who and where you were, you too would become infected. It also helped that the planet was pretty small compared to something like Earth.

Slaughter roamed every street and building. Megastructures fell like dominos, and every single sky island was brought to the ground, viewed as monuments of oppression. The mines were blown up and collapsed, as barely anyone was spared.

A week after Temlat had appeared, the planet was borderline unrecognizable. Not a single towering building remained standing as the entire surface of the world was covered in debris. Trillions had died and killed each other in rage.

Throughout it all, Jake had kept to his promise and witnessed Temlat carrying out his Path. He nearly stepped in many times, but at every instance, he stopped himself upon confirmation that Temlat remained lucid and in control despite everything. As long as that was the case, Jake wouldn't directly interfere.

Everything seemed senseless, but Jake began to see a purpose. At the end of the day, he also saw that Temlat had grown in level far more than he had ever expected possible for a newly evolved C-grade but he had also seen how it hadn't increased in a day, communicating he had hit a wall. One he would find very difficult to ever overcome. He had gotten powerful, though.

[Cursed Plague Remnant of Wrath lvl 248]

Temlat himself had finished off the last C-grades on the planet, meaning none remained. Jake released a Pulse of Perception and did see some survivors. Not many, but there were some hidden beneath. E-grades, children, the weak and oppressed who had been living in squalor only a week prior.

Flying down, Jake appeared standing beside Temlat, who was floating above where the governmental head office had once been. Now, it was only a huge black crater as Temlat had burned away even the debris to erase information about the society that once was.

My question comes again what now? Jake asked.

The feeling of emptiness from the Cursed Plague Remnant of Wrath was even stronger than before. With everything destroyed, he would soon need a new target. Seconds ticked by before Temlat finally spoke, his voice as empty as his aura.

From the very beginning, I just wanted revenge. I wanted that bitch to die and see the world that allowed someone like her to exist crumble to the ground. Both of those things have now become a reality. The only survivors are those who remember the injustice who were so pitiful no one even felt any wrath toward them. Let them be the ones to rebuild a new world for themselves, one that is better than what was, Temlat said, having clearly given this entire scenario a lot of thought.

Jake simply listened, knowing now was not the time to add his two cents to the situation.

Even now, I feel it creeping up. I feel my mind being consumed because I suppress my own urges. I want to just fly into the multiverse and look for my next target to infect everything. Without you, Teacher, I wouldn't even be able to remain lucid right now

Temlat looked toward the sky as he began to condense his form. The huge cloud of curse energy gathered into one singular humanoid form as Jake saw the half-elf he had first seen appear before him once more. He kept looking upward for a while before turning to Jake.

Teacher am I an idiot?

Very much so, Jake nodded. But you at least chose to be an idiot yourself. Chose your own Path.

Temlat smiled despite the Sin Curse. I did and it was totally worth it. I do not regret my decision to become what I am in order to fulfill my goals. But I do have one regret

What is it? Jake asked.

I don't want to just die with this world. Your words that allowing Records to fall into obscurity is the ultimate revenge to be forgotten I don't want that, Temlat said, turning to look at Jake. Will you remember me?

I am known for having a shitty memory, but I think you'll be hard to forget, Jake shook his head and put a hand on Temlat's shoulder. Even with his student's control of the cursed plague, it still tried to constantly infect Jake, failing at every turn when faced with Palate and Eternal Hunger.

Thank you, Temlat muttered. Then, could you fulfill one final selfish request of mine?

Jake already had a good idea of what he wanted as he nodded. If its something I am capable of.

Please allow me to die when I am still me and have no regrets of my actions. Consume my existence so my Records can at least still persist in some way, Temlat finally said. Please consume me with your own Sin Curse.

Alright, Jake simply agreed, knowing Temlat had thought this through.

Motioning, Eternal Hunger appeared in his hand. Without Jake even doing anything, it began to give off a hungering aura toward Temlat, wanting to devour him.

Temlat looked at the katar as he bowed deeply. Thank you for giving my life meaning and allowing me to do something with it.

With those words, Temlats form began to break apart. Eternal Hunger lashed out to eat, and Jake, for once, didnt hold it back but just held up the weapon. Temlats form began a torrent of black smoke that buried itself into the black katar, getting consumed in the process as one Sin Curse devoured another.

After less than a minute, nothing remained, and as Jake looked down at the mythical weapon in his hand, he could only sigh loudly as he clenched his fists.

My first student Temlat and this is how it ends. Fuck Im a shitty teacher

## Chapter 826: Nevermore: Brittle

Jake floated silently in the air as the aura of Temlat slowly faded away. With his death, the curse and plague both disappeared, curing all those who had been infected nearly instantly. Looking down at Eternal Hunger, he wondered if anything had changed but found no obvious changes to the weapon, at least not besides its clear satisfaction with having consumed another Sin Curse to fuel itself. He did feel that the Records of another Sin Curse had slightly affected it, but Temlat had simply been far too weak to truly affect the mythical weapon in a major way.

Sighing yet again, Jake headed toward one of the portals leading back to the House of the Architect. He had no reason to stay on the ruined planet and would leave while only offering it a few more thoughts. As Temlat had said, chances were the survivors would eventually rise again. While ninety-nine point nine percent of the population had died, hundreds of thousands, if not a few million, had survived. With no wild beasts on the planet either, there was no threat to these people, and using the materials of the old world, they should be able to rebuild.

Hopefully, the memory of Temlat would persist for a long time. It would be good if he could serve as a legend and a warning that should they indulge too much and become too corrupt, another being like him could appear. Jake hoped this, even if he knew that a case like Temlat rarely happened. In most cases, the fucked up society would just persist.

Cases like this megacity weren't rare across the multiverse. For there to be a clear divide between grades and those who had power and those who didn't wasn't anything new. To take advantage of those below you was just the natural next step in the eyes of many.

Jake would also leave Temlat's world with a lesson on what Earth absolutely couldn't become. He wasn't averse to those in power having more, well, power, but that didn't mean one could just exploit others without any consequences. If that was allowed, how would people be able to rise and claim power for themselves?

After blowing away some debris, Jake arrived at one of the portals and left Temlat's world behind. He walked straight toward the room of the Architect to submit his eighth Creation even if it felt damn weird calling what had happened a Creation.

He had given little thought to what Temlat's Path would mean for his submission, much less if his death would have any impact. Even if he had considered these things, Jake sure as hell wouldn't have refused his first student's final request just because he wanted some more Nevermore Points.

Arriving at the door, Jake once more didn't even have to knock as he just walked in, seeing the Architect already waiting for him.

"I'm here to submit my eighth Creation," Jake said in a calm tone.

The Architect nodded, motioning for Jake to clarify exactly what he was submitting.

I would like to submit Temlats Path. From when he became my student till his end, Jake said.

The evaluation will only take into account the impacts on his Path that you had, the Architect clarified for Jake. Be they directly or indirectly.

Jake just nodded. Alright.

The Architects eyes flashed golden for a moment before the light faded. It has been done.

The room was silent for a while as Jake just stood there, deep in thought. The Architect didnt make any moves to throw him out immediately, quite clearly reading he had more to say.

Hey I have a question. Off the records, Jake muttered.

I am not giving any advice on Creations, she said, but luckily didnt just throw him out like usual.

It isnt that. Its just youve been here for a long time and seen a lot, right? I know I could ask the Viper after this, but I feel like I need a qualified outside perspective that isnt from him, Jake began as he just laid it out straight. I am a shit teacher, right? My first student and he ends up turning into a living calamity that I eventually end up eating with my own Sin Curse weapon after he destroys a planet.

Answering that question with a simple yes or no isnt possible, the Architect said. It is all subjective. If your goal was to guide your student toward godhood, you did indeed fail. If your intentions were for him to realize his goals and form his own Path with you only acting as a supporting pillar, you were a great teacher.

People take students for a myriad of reasons. Some selfish, some out of pure benevolence, and some out of obligation. The student also takes a teacher for similar reasons. In the end, it is a relationship between two people. If the student and teacher are both satisfied with an outcome, who else is to say either party was good or bad? So I think the only thing you need to ask yourself is if you are alright with what happened. If you got an outcome that you can, at the very least, accept.

I see your point, but... I did also allow Temlat to walk down a Path of self-destruction that ultimately resulted in him taking his own life, Jake protested.

You say you allowed him to do something as if you were responsible for the Path he chose, Nevermore said. If you had taken responsibility for him, and you promised to help him live a long and fulfilling life, you did indeed mess up, but your student walked into this with both eyes open. He knew what he was doing.

Even if you say that, isnt it my responsibility to at least warn him? To nudge him away from pitfalls like that? Temlat wasnt in a good state of mind, one where it could be argued he wasnt fully capable of making the best choices for himself.

We are back to the purpose of your teachings once more. Were you his guide? His guardian? His friend? Such things need to be decided before anyone can talk about if there were any failures. If you do feel like you made a mistake, it is something to reflect upon, but your conflicted emotions on the matter do not mean you failed in the eyes of others, not even your students, the Architect continued.

Is that a nice way of telling me Temlat never blamed me for the doomed Path he walked down? Jake questioned, despite already knowing the answer. He knew Temlat hadnt once blamed Jake but only felt gratitude for allowing him to succeed in his goal.

If he had felt even the slightest tinge of anger, how would someone with the Sin Curse of Wrath be able to suppress even hinting it? The answer was that he couldnt. Never once had Jake been the source of Temlats anger or resentment which, for some reason, didnt make Jake feel much better.

You can choose to interpret it as such, the Architect answered in a relaxed tone. I do not think it is my place to give you advice on teaching, but I will say one thing. You are used to your own perspective where you value absolute freedom, and that style isnt compatible with many. However, in the cases where it does work, it is the one style that doesnt impede your students natural growth and the most optimal to allow them to build their own Records. The Path one defines by themselves is the most powerful, after all. There are ways to do what you are doing, so dont get too discouraged.

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Jake listened attentively, but he still felt unsure about how he had approached everything. He had tried to act a bit like Villy by just allowing Temlat to do whatever he wanted and only answered questions when asked, never volunteering any advice. In some ways, it had worked, but Jake didn't feel good about the outcome.

Upon reflecting, Jake did realize one major flaw with how he had done things. As Nevermore said, Jake was too used to his own perspective, and he also had to consider that the advice Villy gave was with whom Jake was taken into account. Jake had his damn Bloodline, which was essentially a cheat against making horrible decisions, as his intuition would always scream at him whenever he tried to do something too dumb. Villy practically never really had to caution Jake compared to other advisors, even if he did sometimes give minor warnings during their conversations.

If Jake could go back, he would have sat down and properly understood what Temlat wanted to do. He would have discussed the outcomes Temlat wanted and made clear to him the consequences of the Path he had chosen. If Temlat still insisted to keep going after that Jake honestly couldn't say he would have stopped him. He would just have supported Temlat in realizing his dream, even if realizing it would mean his death.

Because, as Nevermore had said Jake didn't want to be the type to allow someone he was teaching to do something. Well, unless it was something that Jake believed crossed a line that shouldn't be crossed which wholesale slaughter of a deeply corrupt megacity planet surprisingly wasn't. Alright, he wasn't sure how he would have acted if it had happened in the real multiverse which in itself was probably a questionable moral stance to have.

Anyway, Jake knew what the Bound God in front of him was doing. She was doing that thing where she said things not necessarily because it was her true thoughts but because it would make Jake think and reflect the same tactic Villy liked to use. Maybe it was just a god-thing

You look like you have a lot to think over, the Architect said with a smile. I believe it would make more sense to do so outside of my chambers. Good luck.

Jake was teleported out in an instant, still a bit lost in his thoughts as he appeared in front of the closed door.

Shaking his head, Jake got his shit together and began heading back toward the lab. He had to keep his head in the game and keep moving forward. Jake was still in a Challenge Dungeon, and he had just

wasted a bit over a week in the megacity world with Temlat. He didnt regret having done so, but he knew he couldnt keep delaying his crafting.

Speaking of the Challenge Dungeon and its objective Jake had no idea how good or bad the submission he had just made was. He truly didnt. Out of everything, even that weird small arcane marble, this was the one he felt the most unsure about. It probably didnt help Jake felt like he had done a shitty job. Alas, there was nothing to do now besides just finishing the House of the Architect and hopefully at least honoring some of Temlats memory by getting a good evaluation.

But first, Jake needed to calm down his own emotions. Returning to the lab area, Jake went toward one of the rooms to gather his thoughts. On the way, he walked by where Temlat had stayed and stopped in the doorway. He looked inside and saw the sheets had been taken off, cleaned, and neatly folded on top of it. The entire room was clean to a fault and looked practically unused, making Jake look down and clench his fists.

He knew he wasnt coming back, didnt he?

Jake turned and continued into the room he usually used and sat down to meditate and calm himself. He ended up sitting there for over three full days as he mulled over all his time in the House of the Architect and everything that had happened with Temlat. After these three days, Jake opened his eyes again, having calmed himself enough. He wasnt sure if what he had done could be called grieving but he had at least reached the state of acceptance and the realization that sitting on his ass would do no one any good.

Willpower was truly one hell of a stat.

Returning to the lab room, Jake got to work without pause. He had pretty much completed both the poison and acid he wanted to create already, and now it was just the last stretch to get the final products in the bag. The first of which would be the acid.

Jake had considered the project plenty already, and he went with as simple a form as he could. One that truly made use of his destructive arcane energies to corrode other types of mana and materials. He had considered for a good while how he wanted to attune his acid but ultimately just went with pure mana. The reason for this was simple.

If he made it focus on pure mana, Jake believed he could make the acid almost adaptive. Make it so he could infuse it using Touch of the Malefic Viper right before using it if he wanted it to work on something that wasn't just pure mana.

The creation process for acids was quite different from similar poisons. While making a poison usually required you to mix herbs and extract its energy, acids-creation was far closer to old-school chemistry. It was to primarily mix different liquids together while occasionally adding a solid catalyst. There were some plants that could also be helpful, but Jake didn't use any of these for this acid.

As mentioned before, acids were far more stable than regular poisons. They didn't really give off any passive energy or consumed themselves by simply existing, which was also the one reason he could make his destructive arcane affinity work with it. Jake could infuse it in a calm state where it wouldn't react with the liquid it was placed inside. Only when the rest of the acid saw something and became active would the arcane mana also react to break down and destroy the item in question.

It took quite a while to properly get the arcane affinity to do what he wanted, but when he got that down, the rest was pretty smooth sailing, to be honest.

This wasn't Jake's first time making it, but after a few days of getting the final parts fully down and getting himself into a properly focused state, Jake made the best acid he had created so far.

Jake sat with his cauldron in front of him and stared at the transparent liquid with a faint purple hue, nodding in satisfaction as he used Identify.

[Adaptable Arcane Acid of Brittleness (Rare)] An acid created with a mix of highly mana-corrosive acids and destructive arcane energy as its base, specifically created to corrode other forms of pure mana. Upon coming into contact with pure mana, this acid will turn highly destructive and begin to corrode it. Has an increased ability to intrude into physical objects and corrode the pure mana within. This acid is significantly more effective against passive environmental pure mana. The Arcane Acid is highly adaptable to changes in its nature that will cause it to target other forms of mana. This change can only happen once.

Without waiting, Jake poured out a bit of it into a glass beaker and took out an ingot of metal. It was a form of iron that Jake couldn't easily damage even if he wanted to, and he usually had to use Alchemical Flame if he wanted to break down.

Starting his test, Jake put a single finger inside the acid. Nothing happened, and Jake promptly activated Touch of the Malefic Viper. A bit of energy entered the acid, and Jake saw the purple hue begin to swirl within for a moment until it stabilized. Jake quickly used Identify to confirm and nodded in satisfaction at the result.

[Metal-Adapted Arcane Acid of Brittleness (Rare)] An acid created with a mix of highly mana-corrosive acids and destructive arcane energy as its base, specifically created to corrode other forms of metal-affinity mana. Upon coming into contact with metal-affinity mana, this acid will turn highly destructive and begin to corrode it. Has an increased ability to intrude into physical objects and corrode the metal-affinity mana within. This acid is significantly more effective against passive environmental metal-affinity mana. The Arcane Acid has been adapted to metal-affinity mana.

Taking the metal ingot, Jake placed it inside of the acid. The reaction began instantly as the entire thing began to bubble, and Jake saw the metal slowly begin to change color as it looked like small purple sparks constantly nibbled at it. After ten or so seconds, Jake took out the ingot again and held it in his hand.

Appearance-wise, it looked nearly the same, except for some chipping in the corners. However, on the inside, the entire ingot was a mess.

Clenching the ingot in his hand, the entire thing crumbled between his hands, the metal so brittle it could barely keep itself together.

Ninth Creation down one to go.

## Chapter 827: Nevermore: A Black Heart

Submitting the acid was uneventful, which shouldn't really surprise anyone, considering Jake and Nevermore had spoken only a few days prior.

By now, Jake just wanted to be done with the Challenge Dungeon and move on to the next. He didn't like spending too much time in the laboratory as he had caught himself with less-than-pleasant thoughts more than once. Especially after one of his more focused crafting attempts, Jake exited it excitedly, and as he looked at his concoction, he briefly wondered why Temlat hadn't come to ask him anything recently, only for realization to instantly set in right after.

There were just too many bad memories and reminders there, so without any unnecessary delays, he went to work on the final Creation.

The Hemonecrotic Poison, like the acid, had more or less already been completed before. In fact, he had already managed to create an improved version of the Potent Hemonecrotic Poison before, one that he nearly felt was good enough to submit.

[Heartrot Poison (Rare)] The heart blackens as it rots away. Blood pumps throughout the body as every beat brings with it only death. Mixing potent Hemotoxin and Necrotic Poisons, a Hemonecrotic Poison has been made, capable of rotting your foe from the inside. If inflicted, the poison will spread throughout the bloodstream, binding itself to your foes vital energies and using it as a vehicle to spread necrotic toxins. This poison seeks toward the heart and binds itself to it, making it linger for far longer and spread faster. Wounds caused by necrotic poison are extremely difficult to heal. Cleansing the Hemonecrotic Poison from the bloodstream is extremely difficult.

This poison was an improvement over the general Hemonecrotic Poison in every way. Rather than simply infect the bloodstream, this one would seek out the heart and try to bind itself to it. This would not only make the poison a lot harder to heal, but effectively contaminate the vital energy of whoever Jake hit. Coupled with the stickiness of hemotoxins and the damaging aspects of necrotic poison, this poison would surely do a number on any vitality-based lifeform he hit it with.

Whats more, it was great at accumulating. As it all gathered in one spot, Jake would have an easier time controlling and amplifying it with Touch of the Malefic Viper, making it even better.

It was, without a doubt, Jakes best poison to date, but he still decided to keep crafting more until he ran out of ingredients with the hope of making the best concoction he could.

Jake had asked the attendants, as he didnt want to waste the time of Nevermore, what would happen to any excess Merit Points he had once he exited the Challenge Dungeon and had it confirmed he would lose them. He then considered just buying some rare stuff before leaving but was promptly informed that any materials he bought within the Challenge Dungeon would also be lost upon exiting. So Jake had to use everything, or it would go to waste. He couldnt even bring any of what he had created out with him, but at least he could use the materials for a bit more crafting experience.

After Jake had crafted a particularly good Heartrot Poison, he considered calling it quits but saw he had materials for one more attempt. After that, he would be out of both Merit Points and ingredients, and

Jake thought it would be cathartic to use this last batch. To have a clean break with the Challenge Dungeon to allow him to move on more easily.

Sitting with his cauldron, Jake first poured in some purified water, followed by some of his blood, naturally infused with Blood of the Malefic Viper. Mixing everything for a bit, Jake soon tossed in the epic rarity black moss he had bought, followed by a mix of mushrooms and roots that either contained hemotoxins or necrotic toxins, with a few also in there to serve as binding agents for the two, allowing them to work together. Finally, he just straight-up poured in two pre-crafted poisons of the hemotoxic and necrotic kind.

As Jake placed the last ingredients in the cauldron, he let his mind wander.

The House of the Architect had been a weird Challenge Dungeon for Jake. He had made some great progress in many aspects, especially his alchemy. Many things had begun to fall behind during these last many years doing Nevermore, and now he had time to finally play catch-up. Not only that, Jake had even managed to upgrade his stealth skill to legendary rarity, something he was incredibly happy about.

It did suck that he had to use what little Jake Juice he had managed to replenish, but he didn't regret doing so. He believed it had been a good call.

Shit, Jake had even learned to craft a Grimoire. That was a great and invaluable experience, and he knew the next one he made would be even better. If he had a scribe produce the ink and make the book itself for him to use during the creation process, one that could make them to Jake's exact specifications, things would only get better.

Out of any timespan Jake had spent focusing on his alchemy, this was definitely the most fruitful when it came to pure progress, only capable of being slightly rivaled by the time shortly after he went to the Order of the Malefic Viper. However, it was indisputable the gains of this Challenge Dungeon had been plentiful, and Jake had gotten a lot more done than he thought possible.

His only regret during the House of the Architect was how he had approached his first student. Jake was far from adequate to do anything like taking students yet and would need a lot of time to properly learn how to not suck ass at teaching. To be able to have at least some confidence in what he was doing. Even if he wanted to be a free-range teacher who fostered independence and self-study, he at least wanted to be good at doing that.

Jake wanted to, at the very least, be able to look at his students with a smile and feel like he didn't let them down.

As Jake finished up the final batch of poison, he was barely paying attention to what he was doing and practically running on autopilot. Yet right then, something stirred him. He looked down, and his eyes narrowed as he felt the mixture between his hands near completion. It actually took him a millisecond to remember he was even crafting right now which was why it didn't make sense that what he saw felt like, by far, the best poison he had made in this dungeon so far.

Before he could even fully process why this particular concoction was so good, everything around him rumbled as a presence descended from above. Jake felt as if reality itself began to warp as what looked like a single scaled finger momentarily appeared from above, seemingly piercing through every layer of protection set by Nevermore and the system. At the tip of this finger, a small translucent drop of blood gathered before it fell right into the concoction.

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The finger disappeared as fast as it had come, reality returning to normal, but Jake instantly knew what it was. He had felt it a few times before, after all, which also meant the notifications that came next didn't surprise him.

\*DING! \*: [Malefic Vipers Poison] has been activated! The transcendent power of the Malefic Viper has forcefully increased the rarity of your creation to ancient, increasing all effects substantially.

\*You have successfully crafted [Malefic Blackheart Poison (Ancient)] A new kind of creation has been made.\*

It was the class-specific skill Malefic Vipers Poison once again. This time, not forcibly triggered by using the venom from Felix's statue, but through what Jake felt had to be sheer luck though Jake doubted it was that simple. The skill always seemed to trigger at odd or highly impactful times, like when he helped create the core that gave birth to Sylphie or when he passed the Malefic Viper Challenge Dungeon all the way back in the Tutorial.

Jake looked down at his concoction and used Identify.

[Malefic Blackheart Poison (Ancient)] Turn the heart of your foe black, as only death awaits them. Mixing potent Hemotoxin and Necrotic Poisons, a Hemonecrotic Poison has been made, capable of rotting your foe from the inside. If inflicted, this poison will merge with the heart, turning it black as death overtakes it, forcing it to pump out necrotic toxins into the body rather than vital energy. Wounds caused by necrotic poison are extremely difficult to heal. Cleansing the Blackheart Poison is impossible unless the heart is completely destroyed. Should the heart be destroyed, all the remaining necrotic energy within will instantly spread throughout the body.

It was just like his Heartrot Poison but improved in every single way. Seeing it, Jake honestly had some mixed emotions and not just because of everything with his student and how his wayward thoughts regarding him had partly somehow led to this Creation.

No, what truly miffed him was that he couldn't just keep the damn poison for himself and hand in the regular Heartrot Poison. Jake would very much like to just keep this one as an ace up his sleeves. Alas, that wasn't possible, so Jake did the next best thing he could.

Bottling the poison up, he had five bottles total. Jake felt pretty darn certain submitting more or less of the poison wouldn't matter for the evaluation, so he did what any reasonable person would do, which also happened to be the one way he knew for him to keep a part of the poison with him. Starting with the Heartrot Poison he had left over that wouldn't make any sense to turn into Merit Points, Jake began to chug down his own poison.

It tasted like shit.

Drinking one's own poison using Palate rarely had many benefits and honestly wasn't worth it, but there were some minor gains, and Jake honestly had nothing better to do with it. However, something he did know was good to drink was whatever Malefic Vipers Poison transformed.

Both the Unstable Amalgamation of Malefic Vitae he had made during the Tutorial and the poison he made during his fight with Minaga had been either partly or fully consumed by Jake. Especially the first poison had given Jake some great insights into vital energy and whatnot, with him sadly only passively absorbing a bit of the poison he used to kill Minaga. Well, a Minaga.

This was likely because it included insights directly from the Viper himself and not just Jake. It was effectively a way for Jake to absorb Records of an extremely powerful poison while at the same time having the benefits of being recognized as the crafter of it. Actually, thinking about it, Jake wouldn't be surprised if this skill was another attempt from Villy to exploit some loophole in the system.



Anyway, when Jake was done with the Heartrot Poison, it was time to move on to the main course. Jake was a bit more careful with this one as he only dripped a few drops of the poison on his tongue at first. As it entered his stomach, Jake felt the energy it gave off was far more potent than the regular poison, but it was still more than manageable. Drinking the rest of the first of four bottles he was to consume, Jake meditated as he slowly absorbed the poison into his body.

Jake opened his eyes not long after, frowning a bit. Its not quite enough

That is when he got a brilliant idea as he took out his katar. Coating his weapon, he not only made the effect of it more powerful through his passive skills, but he could even consume the poison in a far more effective way. Turning the weapon on himself, he stabbed himself in the arm, allowing the poison to fully infect him and his bloodstream.

Feeling the poison worm its way to his heart felt a bit icky, but he soon realized there had been a bit of a lie in the description, or perhaps Jake had just misunderstood a word. While it was true the poison could not be cleansed from the heart, Jake sure as hell could absorb it. It probably made sense, as Jake was sure there was no such thing as something being impossible, and maybe to cleanse something had a special meaning. Who knows? What mattered was that Jake got far more out of the second bottle than the first.

For the third bottle, Jake felt a bit more frisky as he stabbed himself in the stomach, allowing more of the poison to affect him faster. When it was time for the fourth and final bottle, Jake felt confident enough to get the full Malefic Blackheart experience as he stabbed himself right in his own heart.

It hurt like hell and definitely couldnt be recommended, but Jake gritted his teeth as his heart turned black. Hemonecrotic toxins were pumped through his veins and spread throughout his entire body as his veins turned black, and dark spots began to appear on his skin before it started to rot shortly after.

His extremities were hit first as his fingers began to fully blacken, and his toes went entirely numb. Yet Jake did nothing but rotate the poison, even reining in Palate a bit for the poison to really do its thing. Only after a few minutes did Jake decide it was enough as he actively worked to eliminate all the poison.

Fifteen minutes later, Jake opened his eyes, the black spots gone. He did end up losing two toes and a pinky finger, but that wasnt anything a quick health potion couldnt fix. After properly regenerating and making himself look just semi-representable by not being covered in rotten flesh and blood, Jake

headed toward the Architect to submit his final Creation and finally get the hell out of the Challenge Dungeon.

With this Malefic Blackheart Poison, Jake felt a lot better about his final submission, and he hoped it would help contribute to the final evaluation. Though, if he was being perfectly honest, Jake didnt know how much impact a single item would have.

Jake had thought a lot about how this evaluation would work. Nevermore had said that it was an overall evaluation of all items, which made Jake think that one couldnt get the top score by submitting one top-tier Creation and a load of shit afterward. Instead, everything you submitted had to be at least decent, with a few top-tier products in there.

In Jakes opinion, he had three top-tier submissions. The Grimoire, the legendary stealth skill, and finally, the poison he had just made. Meanwhile, the arcane marble and his horrible attempt at being a teacher were extreme wild cards. There was also Jakes very first submission, which was just a conversation... yeah, Jake had no idea how good or bad that was, but hey, at least it was very different from everything else, so it should get some bonus points for that.

Arriving in front of the Architects door, it opened by itself as always as the woman within raised her gaze upon his entry.

Here with my final Creation to submit, Jake said as he took out the poison bottle. I want to submit this Malefic Blackheart Poison. Also, I hope the skill I triggered didnt cause too much of a disturbance.

Its not anything for you to worry about, the Architect said as the bottle in Jakes hand disappeared. Nevermores eyes glowed for a second as she looked at Jake.

With the tenth submission, it is time for the final evaluation. Shall we proceed now, or do you have unfinished business within the House of the Architect you want to finish first?

No, lets just get this over with, Jake sighed as he began to feel a bit nervous. He felt like he was doing an exam back in university all of a sudden and Jake had never been a big fan of exams. Well, except for those multiple-choice ones, as he could often just rely on his guts on those ones, effectively cheating.

In that case, let us begin, Nevermore said with a smile as the door behind Jake closed, and the final evaluation began.

#### Chapter 828: Nevermore: Evaluation (1)

So, how exactly does this evaluation work? I would assume all of the submissions have already been evaluated upon submission, Jake asked. And even if they hadnt, I doubt doing so would take you much time.

Indeed, each evaluation has already been completed. However, this final part is a bit different. This evaluation is not for anyones benefit, but your own, the Architect answered. Part of the purpose of this Challenge Dungeon is to benefit you, after all. Tell me, have you noticed something different about this House of the Architect compared to where you usually work?

A lot of things, considering its a Challenge Dungeon inside a World Wonder, Jake responded in a rather deadpan tone. Unless you expected me to notice something specific?

The Architect sighed. The environment. With your senses, you should have noticed a slight difference. Tell me, how would you evaluate your gains during your time spent here?

I felt like I made a lot of progress? Jake semi-asked. More than usual, but there can be many explanations for that one of which is that the environment is actively helping somehow. But it isnt like its anything extreme.

To you, perhaps it didnt feel like it helped much, but to others, it is far more extreme, the Architect said before elaborating further. The environment in which you are crafting is incredibly impactful on what you can make, and the House of the Architect is filled with the Records of C-grade crafters throughout the eras. The effect was weaker for you compared to many others as you already do many things at a high level, but it will help uplift the Records of many of those who are struggling, allowing them to accomplish new feats they thought impossible.

Jake frowned a bit at the explanation as a thought occurred. Does that mean I make better things when I craft at the Order of the Malefic Viper compared to at my lodge back on Earth?

No, the differences in Records between those two places simply arent enough. They arent focused enough. Also, the environment itself wasnt designed by a higher being to support crafting, and even if

the Viper wished to do it, it would inadvertently come at the cost of weakening other forms of Records. In fact, places like this are nearly exclusively found at Challenge Dungeons or very unique locales, such as World Wonders, Nevermore explained.

Huh, Jake let out, guessing that the Challenge Dungeon he had done when he first got his profession probably also counted.

Are all the Challenge Dungeons in Nevermore like this? Jake questioned, remembering when Nevermore first mentioned that one of the reasons why Challenge Dungeons didn't give levels was to improve Records. Maybe every single Challenge Dungeon was also designed with special Records there in mind.

In some aspects, yes, but it varies dependent on the era and the Challenge Dungeons in question. The Challenge Dungeons are ultimately evaluations for a grander achievement, and that is their primary design above all else.

Jake nodded as he moved along the conversation. So what does it mean when you say this evaluation is to my benefit?

Rather than simply give you an achievement and throw you out, we will go through your submissions and you will receive feedback. However, only the feedback you ask for yourself, outside of some very broad conclusions, the Architect explained. I will also give you a general oversight as to how good each submission is if that is something you want.

Damn, feels almost weird being told I won't just be thrown out of the room for asking one question too many, Jake smiled.

That can still be arranged if you want, Nevermore responded in what Jake really hoped was a joking tone. I do have some leeway, after all. This part isn't anything the system demands but merely an extra reward, so to say.

But there will still be a real reward after, right? Jake said, trying to change the subject.

That we will discuss later for now, let us proceed with your submissions, starting with your first one, the Architect said. So, any questions regarding the submission of our first meeting?

Well was I an idiot for deciding to submit it? Jake asked, a bit unsure.

That first submission had been made entirely on impulse, and after over two years in the House, Jake felt more uncertain than ever if it had been a good idea.

Answering that question is far from straightforward, as in order to provide a satisfactory conclusion, I would need to know what you would have submitted instead, Nevermore answered, and honestly, she had a good point. However, I will say that the submission didnt drag down your overall evaluation when it comes to the ten Creations you submitted. Its uniqueness and vanity were enough to allow it to stand on its own. Also, if nothing else, it was highly time-efficient, was it not?

So, I wasnt entirely an idiot, got it, Jake nodded. Now for my other submissions... I am not sure its worth it to go super into detail about all of them, so can we just batch all the mediocre or even bad ones together? Do a quick-fire round, so to say?

Very well, the Architect said as she summoned a few projections showing Jakes Creations. First of all is the Cursed Stimulant of Hunger. This submission is rather unique due to its curse-related properties, but the Creation itself isnt of extraordinary quality compared to all the others. From my observations, you are already aware of its shortcomings, so it does not appear pertinent to go into detail.

Next is the ritual circle, which, while fine and also satisfactorily diverse, isnt that impressive either relative to your other submissions. The Elemental Confluence Spirit Orb falls into the same camp as the prior two, where it is different but not outstanding on its own. It did help these two that you managed to upgrade your Sense of the Malefic Viper during their creation process, but the impact wasnt extreme. Finally, we have the Adaptable Arcane Acid of Brittleness, which admittedly is the best of these four, but from a pure quality standpoint, it simply isnt that impressive. The fact that this was your first time crafting an acid and the uniqueness of your arcane affinity did manage to uplift it significantly, but not enough for it to truly be considered a great submission in relative terms. Do you have any further questions regarding these four Creations?

Honestly? Not really, Jake said. He had created the latter three not with the intent to make great submissions but because they were in fields he wanted to work on anyway. He was a bit surprised the Architect hadnt tossed his final poison in there, which was a pleasant surprise. Jake also felt oddly happy that Temlat wasnt mentioned in this batch, showing his Path hadnt been one of the things the Architect evaluated as mediocre or bad. He did have one thing to add, though.

You use the word relative a lot, Jake pointed out.

Making absolute comparisons during this evaluation strikes me as meaningless, the Architect answered, shaking her head. Your definition of mediocre may be the peak of others or below average for a third person. When Creations are also put into the context of their crafting journey and the crafters themselves, it complicates matters further, so the only thing I will compare your Creations to are those of your own making.

Cant you throw me a small hint? Like, how did I do compared to, lets say Jake thought for a bit about the best crafter he knew as a face instantly appeared. Arnold, that weird guy. He must have done well in here if he has done this Challenge Dungeon already.

No hints, the Architect shook her head. Now, did you have any questions or can we move on?

No questions at least not any I think you will answer, Jake muttered.

Pretty quickly, they had gone over half of his submitted Creations, just leaving the Blackheart Poison, Unseen Arcane Hunter skill upgrade, weird Arcane Marble, Grimoire, and, of course, Jakes first student.

Then let us proceed, the Architect said. With the remaining five, how do you wish to approach the evaluation?

Stolen from its rightful place, this narrative is not meant to be on Amazon; report any sightings.

Just go from worst to best, Jake said.

When you say worst from best, do remember this is only in comparison to everything else you have submitted, so if a particular Creation is too close in nature to another, its evaluation will naturally fall due to a lack of uniqueness and repeated concepts.

I am fully aware of that, Jake nodded.

Alright then. The fifth best submission we will look at is the Malefic Blackheart Poison. In terms of absolute quality, this one is without a doubt ranked as one of the best possible I would expect to see out of a C-grade. However, the evaluation is severely harmed due to the overflowing Records of the Malefic Viper that has been mixed in. Moreover, as a poison, it aligns closely with several of your other Creations, not to mention the journey you took to create it didnt require much substantial innovation but more simply procedural iteration on prior ideas. Overall, the quality of the item does make it an excellent submission and most definitely one to be proud of.

Would it have been better if I just submitted a regular Heartrot Poison? Jake asked, wondering if maybe submitting an item that benefitted from the Malefic Vipers Poison had been a mistake.

No, most certainly not. If you had done that, it would have been batched in with the other mediocre submissions, the Architect shook her head.

Alright, thats good, at least, Jake nodded, happy to have even gotten a straight answer. I dont really have any other questions.

The fourth best is the Unseen Arcane Hunter skill upgrade. This is once more a skill of impressive quality, and the upgrade was most certainly substantial and integrated many new concepts, but its evaluation is harmed primarily due to two things. First of all the fact it relied on many prior insights and ideas. Simply upgrading the skill a few rarities wasnt too difficult, and while what you accomplished was a feat, it was primarily forced through due to your Bloodline and, quite frankly, ridiculously high Perception stat for someone who is barely mid-tier C-grade, the Architect said, Jake only taking the last part about Perception as praise. The second reason the evaluation is harmed is in part due to one of your later submissions already showcasing concepts of your Bloodline and arcane affinity.

The arcane marble, Jake quickly concluded. It was actually a bit surprising it hadnt been mentioned yet, but Jake only saw that as a good thing. At least, he really hoped it was a good thing.

Any questions? the Architect asked.

Hm, not really, Jake shrugged. He didnt have much he needed to ask and partly considered that asking could be harmful. If she threw him off with her evaluation, making Jake doubt something he had done, it could hurt upgrades in the future. Her clear attempt to not mention anything negative about the details of the Creations themselves also wasnt lost on him. Clearly, she was careful about her words.

As you will, Nevermore nodded as she had a slight pause. With these last three submissions, it is a bit difficult to separate them in terms of the value of their evaluations, so I would deem it best to not do so. The Grimoire, Perennial Arcane Marble, and the Path of your student Temlat are all unique and stand tall on their own. So, rather than simply saying which one is best, I will explain the good and bad points of them all. Is that acceptable to you? If you so wish, I could also simply rank them all one by one.

Jake initially felt a bit disappointed at not just being given a top-three list but ultimately just nodded as he realized how little it mattered. He also got the feeling Nevermore was partly doing it like this for his sake, as he kind of felt scummy having to think about Temlats life and Path just being reduced to a placement on a list.

Just do it your way.

Then let us start with the most peculiar of all your submissions: the Perennial Arcane Marble. This item exists solely due to your Bloodline and, despite not having any actual use cases, is by far the most valuable item of the bunch from any outside perspective simply due to its research value. However, since this Creation exemplifies your Bloodline and the many concepts related to it in such an overwhelming fashion, the impact it has on all your other Creations that utilize your Bloodline or arcane affinity is not to be underestimated. I can say that if you had only submitted a single Creation within this Challenge Dungeon, this one would have been the best by far out of them all, the Architect explained as a projection of the small sphere hung in the air. Of course, if you had only submitted one Creation, your overall evaluation would have been horrible.

Jake looked at the projection of the marble as he got an idea. Hiding a mischievous smile, he asked: So, I have been wondering can you give me a more in-depth review of the item? Some details regarding the energy sealed within the stable arcane marble specifically, and the true meanings of that Perennial tag in front of the Arcane Marble name?

The Architect looked at him before sighing. Truthfully, I would be more than happy to do that, but I am unable to. This isnt simply me withholding information but a system-imposed rule specifically regarding Bloodlines and Transcendent skills. Nothing can be shared with anyone, not even the ones who submit it. Sometimes, I can still bend the rules a bit and offer some information, but this Creation of yours only consists of elements related to your Bloodline, so I cant give you anything more than you can already glean.

Fair enough, Jake conceded. He did know the system could be a real stickler when it came to stuff like that. It was as bad as Villy when it came to wanting Jake to just find out shit about his Bloodline himself.



Moving on, let us discuss the Grimoire you submitted. In truth, there is not much to say here. It is a high-tier Grimoire related to your very unique Path and mentality toward your Patron. There are many new concepts in there for sure, and even if your mentality is once more heavily based on your Bloodline, as it is only a side effect, the penalty in uniqueness is minimal, the Architect explained. Ah, and on a personal note, I would heavily advise you against publicizing any of your Grimoires. The response will more likely than not be negative and get you into more problems than I believe you desire.

So, keep it between me and closely trusted people who won't throw a fit that I got a bit of heretic in me, got it, Jake said with a nod. But, I do actually have a question related to this one, especially the uniqueness part. Something that is pretty hard to ask anyone about and that I feel the Viper can't really offer a proper perspective of either is this Path really that unique? From what I have seen from others, there are many who treat their Patrons more as friends or supporters rather than, well, Patrons. Shit, I have a few friends, just to mention a few, and even if they are only like that due to being influenced by me, are you really telling me no one with some kind of presence resistance like me has ever been around before?

This was legitimately one of the things Jake had wondered for a long time. Jake understood he was considered a heretic because he viewed Villy as a friend and not just a Patron, while he got the Chosen part by still being, well, his Chosen. Also, he was fully aware that his questions had been more of a ramble than a concise one.

I may be overstepping here but alright, Nevermore began. The uniqueness of your Path does not merely come from how you want to treat your Patron, but from how you are capable of treating the Malefic Viper. As you have said, others out there also treat their Patrons more as friends or allies, especially when the one blessed is an S-tier or even a demigod, but you do not merely treat the Malefic Viper as a friend but as an equal.

Still can't see the difference, Jake muttered.

Nevermore seemed to think for a bit before he elaborated. Usually, the relationship between a Patron and someone blessed is a one-way street of giving. The god gives to the one who is blessed, with all returns coming in the shape of Records and other such intangible things. At the same time, the god can take back any privileges if they so desire, holding all the power.

Jake nodded. He already knew all that from talks with Villy. However, that didn't explain how he got the Heretic Chosen profession in the first place. It was true one of the effects was that the Viper couldn't

take back the Blessing even if he wanted unless one of them died, but again, that was an effect from the evolution and not something Jake had caused beforehand.

Your relationship with the Malefic Viper is far more two-way. As I said, I may be overstepping, but he benefits more from you than a usual Chosen. As do you benefit more than usual. The ultimate cause of this is not your mutual willingness to be friends or partners or whatever else you desire it is your ability to make it so. No matter how much a god and a mortal wish to be equal, they are fundamentally not. The mortal will always be positioned lower in the hierarchy, and they simply do not have the ability to leverage their Blessing to take anything from the one who blessed them.

But I can, Jake mumbled. He remembered taking that drop of blood from the Viper right after the Tutorial had that been the trigger?

Precisely. You are capable of taking despite being blessed. But do you know what the name of those who are not blessed yet still manage to obtain Records of a god, without said gods permission, is usually called?

A heretic?

Nevermore simply nodded as she finished her explanation. The reason why you can take from the Viper without permission while remaining blessed is because you are capable of being his equal. Your Truesoul is capable of standing up to his. The fact that you both accept this dynamic is ultimately what gave birth to a Heretic-Chosen. If you had tried something similar with a god who had other sentiments and found your attitude unacceptable, I doubt we would be speaking right now.

I see, Jake muttered. Just to clarify, you didnt mean that I have a Truesoul rivaling that of a Primordial, right?

No, yours is naturally far weaker as it is merely that of a C-grade mortal, Nevermore shook her head. However, when it comes to the pure quality of it, things get complicated, as every Truesoul of someone who has a Bloodline is effectively mutated. If you want my personal opinion, then no, your Truesoul is far from being able to rival any gods not that I think you will ever acknowledge someone else as fundamentally superior to yourself.

Of course, I recognize that, Jake scoffed. Any god is, of course, stronger than me right now.

I said superior to you.

Superior in power, sure for now. Ill catch up eventually.

Nevermore looked at Jake with a smile for a few seconds before Jake just scratched the back of his head. Alright, point proven, but in my defense, Im the one thats right here can we move on now?

Very well, the Architect nodded, clearly finding the situation amusing. However, quickly, her face turned a bit more solemn as she spoke. Now let us discuss the final Creation the Path of Temlat, your first student.

#### Chapter 829: Nevermore: Evaluation (2)

Jake could admit he had not been looking forward to this part. He had already talked a bit with Nevermore about his feelings of inadequacy as a teacher, but they had never really discussed the outcome of Jakes teachings. Never talked about how good of a submission Temlats Path was and, by extension, how well what Jake had taught was viewed. Assuming one could even call what Jake had done teaching.

We have discussed your feelings on the matter before, but be aware that your thoughts on everything are not in any way deciding factors in the evaluation of the submission. The Path of your student is judged instead from my point of view, and his growth in Records, power, and the overall outcome of your teachings are what truly matters.

Which is why Im surprised its rated so highly, considering the outcome was his death.

The Architect sighed. The outcome of nearly all Paths is death, and it has to be compared to what else your student would have accomplished. Temlat, the young man you picked up, would have died at level 199, never succeeding in reaching C-grade. His death would occur in an attempt to attack a major conference approximately nineteen years from the time you picked him up as a student, killed by a casual attack from a C-grade security captain.

Jake remained silent, which the Architect took as a prompt to continue.

He would never have accomplished any of his goals, and his Path would end there. Instead, you changed his Path entirely the day you took him in. You helped him gain power far above anything he should have ever been capable of reaching. You nurtured his curse to the level it could evolve into a Sin Curse, you made him refine his mindset through your resistance training, and last but not least, you made him realize the true power he held and the limit of his potential. The true power of curses. At the same time, you gave him confidence in pursuing what he would have otherwise thought impossible, and you even opened his eyes to the concept of plagues.

Temlat did nearly all of those things by himself, Jake protested. I was just around, and he put in all the work. He taught himself.

It is rare that people argue their evaluations should be worse, the Architect sighed. Alas, that isn't how this works. Whether you want to accept it or not, you changed the outcome of Temlat's Path from being someone who died a meaningless death to someone who evolved into an incredibly rare variant creature wielding the power of cursed plagues. Perhaps you can argue this was all him and his own innate talents, which allowed him to reach the power he did. However, you cannot argue your influence in the most outstanding part of your student's evolution.

What do you mean? Jake asked, unsure what she meant.

Cursed Plague Remnants are not beings who retain sentience. Not truly. They are nothing more than a jumbled mixture of thoughts and desires focused on whatever the curse is about. There is no ego. What Temlat became wasn't that. Through your training and the influence you had on him, Temlat managed to remain himself not only through the evolution process, but until the very end. He was allowed to determine how his own Path ended after he accomplished all he had set out to do. In other words, you allowed him to choose not only the direction of his Path but even its endpoint. Something that is incredibly rare in its own right.

Jake simply listened, frowning a bit.

What he became and what his goals were also doesn't matter from a moral perspective in this evaluation. With that in mind, the fact you managed to uplift someone from being incapable of ever killing a C-grade to being able to wipe out a planet filled with them within a week is a great achievement. All accomplished in such a short time span. And, once more, it has to be reiterated how impressive it is that he remained himself even after he was done with his slaughter and could resist his very nature and choose to die.

In conclusion you uplifted Temlat from a nobody to what he became, allowed him to redefine his Path to one far more ambitious, and then stood alongside him as he carried out all his goals. Once completed, he then chose his own ending, his Records now living on through you. That is a fate I think you fail to understand how many would envy.

The room went silent for a few moments as Jake still just stood there, thinking. After five or so seconds, he finally sighed. I still cant help but feel like shit for how things went down.

And that is fine. Just dont feel sorry for your student, for he never had a single regret and only held gratitude toward you for allowing him to accomplish his goals. More than anything, do not feel pity, for nothing would be more disrespectful toward someone who decided their Path and fate.

By now, the topic had been beaten like a dead horse, but Jake still couldnt help how he felt towards things. He didnt feel pity, though. It was more that he felt annoyed at himself for not having done things properly, and despite Nevermores words, he remained adamant that he wouldnt take on any students in the near future, if ever. And if he did, he would make it very clear he was at most a sparring partner for questions and in no way a real teacher.

I get the feeling you dont have more questions regarding your final Creation, the Architect said after Jake didnt say anything for a good while.

Right, Jake nodded. I guess, if nothing else, I can be happy that despite how much I believe I suck as a teacher, at least others value what Temlat managed to accomplish highly.

The Architect didnt comment on what Jake said but simply waved her hand as ten projections appeared floating in the air, depicting all of his Creations.

Then let us wrap this up with the final overall conclusion of this evaluation, she said. This is also the only part where I will actually compare you to others, as the Grand Achievements given are ultimately relative, comparing your performance to that of others.

Moment of truth, Jake smiled as the Architect continued.

While some of your Creations were classified as mediocre in our earlier discussion, they are certainly not seen as such from a more general viewpoint. If compared to the average Nevermore Attendee who has completed the House of the Architect, they would all have been considered high-tier Creations that even the average genius would be proud of. Your Path as the Heretic-Chosen of the Malefic Viper and a hunter is not only unique but both your class and profession are high-tier variants, which naturally lends itself to better final products. Whats more, the fact you have crafted a mythical item before, giving you the Myth Originator title has been a tremendous boost to all your Creations, the Architect began, with Jake feeling pretty good about all the praise and what it would mean for the Grand Achievement. Also, Jake had totally forgotten he even had that Myth Originator title from back when he made Eternal Hunger. It was one of those passive things he never thought about.

But

There is always a damn but

Your entire Path, and thus Creations, in turn, all have the same root: Your Bloodline. While it is normal for those with Bloodlines to have said Bloodline color most of what they do, for you, the case is almost too extreme. Everything you touch carries traces of your Bloodline which almost makes this evaluation one of your Bloodline and your ability to utilize it rather than merely your skills as a Creator. Luckily for you, your Bloodline is well, I dont think I have to evaluate that, now do I? the Architect finished as she looked at Jake. Any questions?

Eh just regarding that last part, how would you rate my Bloodline compared to others? Jake asked a bit cheekily.

I would not rate it, the Architect answered in a deadpan tone.

But if you had to.

I dont.

Hypothetically speaking-

We are not dealing with hypotheticals here. Now, do you have any other questions? the Architect shut down Jake hard.

Jake felt a bit defeated as he just sighed. No, not really.

Very well, then, the Architect nodded. Then this officially concludes the evaluation.

Congratulations! You have completed the House of the Architect Challenge Dungeon!

Congratulations on your exemplary performance indeed, the Architect added to the system message as a Grand Achievement popped up in front of Jake. He quickly skimmed it, hoping to see what kind of percentage amplifier he had hit.

Stolen from its rightful author, this tale is not meant to be on Amazon; report any sightings.

Grand Achievement earned: Successfully completed House of the Architect, showing both great skill and diversity in your Path. Through a mixture of innovation and improvement of your existing skills, you have created ten worthwhile Creations, with a few outstanding among them. In the realm of uniqueness, few can match you, and even in a competition of pure crafting ability, with your Bloodline guiding your hand, you have difficulty meeting an equal. Be proud of your creative mind. 86.109 Nevermore Points earned. Due to completing a Grand Achievement, you will receive a 20% multiplier of all Nevermore Points at the final calculation.

20%, Jake muttered to himself as a smile crept onto his lips. 20% was good. Even if he had gotten two times 25%, it wasn't lost on him that getting such a score was far from average. He was still curious, though.

To be clear, I am not complaining, but what would it have required for me to get a 25% amplifier? Jake asked, genuinely not expecting an answer.

For each of your Creations to have been considered top-tier according to the standards you already set, the Architect surprisingly answered. That is to say, ten Creations on-par with at least the legendary skill upgrade, Grimoire, your student, or the Arcane Marble while naturally maintaining the same level of diversity and uniqueness with all ten of them.

That sounds borderline impossible, Jake muttered. He couldn't even get on anything else he could have created

Accomplishing what is borderline impossible and perhaps even a bit across that line is exactly what the 25% achievement is for, the Architect said with a smile. You should know that, considering your prior performances. From what I hear, Minaga is still complaining.

I guess, Jake shrugged, glad to hear Minaga still suffered from Jake's labyrinth trip.

Now, onto the item reward, the Architect said as what looked like a coin appeared in her hand. With a fluid motion, she flicked it toward Jake. Catch.

Jake caught the coin and quickly looked down at it and used Identify.

[Mark of the Architect (Legendary)] the Mark of the Architect, also known as the Bound God of Nevermore. This Mark will allow you to claim a personal domain within the World Wonder of Nevermore. This domain can be accessed on any of the city floors and will remain persistent throughout all grades. With the legendary token, you will gain access to a more exclusive domain with more privileges, customization options, and Attendants. Only you can enter your personal domain. This personal domain will last for the remainder of the ninety-third era.

Requirements: Soulbound.

I see a trace of disappointment on your face, Nevermore said as Jake looked at her Mark.

Eh, sorry it's just that I'm not sure exactly what I will need this for, Jake muttered. A personal domain sounds all fine and good, but it isn't like I spend much time in the cities anyway, and since only I can enter the domain, it isn't like I can even use it as a secret meeting spot or anything. Also, my time in Nevermore is limited, right? I'm not sure I wanna spend it chilling in my own little space. Well, maybe outside sometimes doing a bit of alchemy in there but the Order already got quite a few spots secured in the cities for that anyway.



You seem to be missing the primary benefit of this personal domain, the Architect said, shaking her head. This domain will exist within Nevermore. That means it will be under the influence of the time dilation inherent to the World Wonder. So, now imagine you want to grow something in your personal domain or nurture certain treasures

Jake fell silent for a moment as he considered her words. So what you're saying is that I get my own personal garden with super time dilation built-in that comes without any downsides or upkeep?

That is an adequately accurate assessment, yes. If that is how you wish to design it, that is.

Damn, in that case, it may be worth looking into, Jake said. If I have the time. Doesn't sound like the best way to spend my limited time in C-grade when I want to compete on the Leaderboards. Say, how do I turn in this Mark and claim the domain? I just wanna at least pop by and check it out real quick.

You turn it in right here, the Architect said with a smile. This is the second part of your reward the help of an architect to prepare your domain. Do note I only do this for those who get a 20% multiplier or above. Others will have to make the Attendants provided do everything or do it themselves.

Well, sounds like I may as well get it done now, then wait, Attendants? Do Attendants come along with this personal domain?

Yes, they do it even said it in the description of the Mark you're holding. Ah, but to note, they cannot leave the domain for what I hope are obvious reasons, she said.

Jake nodded, understanding what she meant. If his guess was right, then each personal domain was pretty much just a small pseudo-dungeon within the larger mega-dungeon known as Nevermore. That likely meant many dungeon rules still applied.

And you said you would help me design this domain? Jake asked.

Yes, Nevermore nodded. According to set templates, that is. I am not going to personally customize everything, but I can take some minor input if you want some modifications.

Exactly how will this work? Jake asked.

Do you wish to claim your domain now? she asked.

Yes? Jake asked, a bit confused.

Then please turn in the coin to me.

But you just gave it to me

Nevermore just looked back at him for a few seconds before Jake sighed and flicked the coin back to her. It didn't even reach her but just disappeared mid-air.

Personal domain claimed, she smiled and snapped her fingers. Instantly, the entire chamber around Jake disappeared, replaced with an entirely white void. Then, in the center of the void between Jake and the Architect, a very detailed three-dimensional projection of what looked like a large floating landmass appeared.

This is a projection of a domain template that I assume would interest you. It includes a star and is primarily nature affinity, thus a good environment for plants to grow within. Underground, there are vast cave systems, with some caves having their own more unique affinities for you to grow other alchemical ingredients such as mushrooms and whatnot. By the way, I choose this template assuming you wish to use this domain to grow herbs, Nevermore explained.

Jake looked at it as he got an idea.

How long do we have for this customization part?

I will offer two hours at most.

Then, can you bring me there in person? Or make a replica? Jake asked.

Nevermore raised an eyebrow but quickly did as he asked.

The environment shifted once more as Jake suddenly felt the world around him expand. From a white room, he appeared standing on soft grass, surrounded by greenery. Instinctively, he released a Pulse of Perception that revealed the entire floating island of sorts they were standing on, including the underground environment. It was about a hundred kilometers across with a depth of forty or so.

Thank you, Jake said. Do I need to bring my own herbs and such to plant?

A certain amount will be provided based on your performance in the House of the Architect. Its part of the reward, Nevermore answered.

Got it, Jake smiled. Be right back.

Jake instantly used One Step to teleport toward one of the holes leading underground. Going as fast as he could, Jake scouted the underground tunnels, went up above ground again, and went around as much of the island as he could while scanning everything. About forty-five minutes later, he was back at Nevermore.

Aight, got some ideas.

What Jake had done was take a quick trip with Sense of the Malefic Viper in full effect. He rarely used that part of the skill, but a part of it included the ability to sense environments that were good for cultivating herbs and whatnot. With this trip, Jake had a good idea of where he wanted to plant stuff and, whats more, the places he wanted Nevermore to modify a bit to make it better.

The next hour was spent with Jake and Nevermore quickly fixing all the things Jake wanted fixed. When it came to herbs, Jake had Nevermore just throw in all the hemotoxic and necrotic toxins she could in the underground. This did mean Jake also now had a lake of blood deep underground in this personal space, so it was probably good it wasnt a place visitors could go to.

Above ground, it was primarily just flowers and then a whole lot of trees and herbs Jake had no idea about. When it came to any excess reward energy or whatever he had been given, Jake just allowed Nevermore to give him whatever she thought was good.

Finally, Jake went to the Attendants in this special little realm. There were ten of them total, and they all simply copied Jakes level. They also apparently had some weird dungeon-specific skills to take care of the place, and Jake only had to give them basic commands to ensure the herbs grew well.

With everything done, Jake stood proudly alongside Nevermore. Thanks for the help.

Just in time, too, Nevermore said. I hope what is cultivated here can bring you benefits in the future. I say this knowing full well you will likely not step foot in this space before you arrive at Nevermore in B-grade... but by the time you do, this will likely be a treasure trove. Ah, and should you die, I shall happily reclaim everything.

I wouldnt count on it me dying and stepping foot in here for a good while both, Jake grinned. Once again, thanks for everything. This Challenge Dungeon is definitely in the top five of the ones Ive done so far.

And with that little quip, I believe it is time to say our goodbyes. I look forward to seeing how your last years in here will play out and the ultimate outcome on the Leaderboards, Nevermore said as she raised her hand to teleport him out.

Jake was ready to be teleported as one final question popped into his head. One final thing! There was a meta-achievement for getting an overall 100% amplifier from all the Challenge Dungeons, right?

Nevermore stopped her hand for a fraction of a second as she just smiled. I guess youll have to find out after the Endless Journey.

So thats a ye-

He was teleported out and appeared in front of the Challenge Dungeon before he could finish his sentence, but he definitely took her non-answer as a confirmation.

Finding himself at the entrance to the five Challenge Dungeons once more, Jake quickly went a bit away to avoid being surrounded by people. He got a few weird looks as he had been teleported out mid-sentence and had let out a sound, but he quickly slipped away with everyone too busy doing their own

stuff. Honestly, Jake was kind of lucky his usual get-up was a cloak and mask, as that wasn't exactly a unique outfit.

Standing away from the crowd, Jake took quick status as he checked his Nevermore Points.

Nevermore Points: 1,141,916

He had built up quite a lot of points over all these Challenge Dungeons, and that was without even factoring in the ever-increasing percentage amplifiers that would come in at the end of Nevermore. Looking toward the many entrances to the Challenge Dungeons, Jake considered if he should wait a bit and see if he could contact his party members. However, after briefly checking the timer-painting the Sword Saint had given him when they split up and seeing there were over two and a half years left to do dungeons, Jake assumed chances were low anyone would be out and done by now.

With that in mind, there really was no need to delay as Jake quickly went straight from one Challenge Dungeon into another as it was time to finally take on the final one: the Neverending Journey.

#### Chapter 830: Nevermore: An Ingenious Mind

Nevermore shook her head after she threw the young human out of the Challenge Dungeon. The instance of the dungeon he had been occupying was already dematerializing and getting recycled, with the only thing remaining the ten Creations he had submitted and his new personal domain.

Of the Creations, the arcane marble was by far the most interesting and would be a great item to absorb for the World Wonder. She also had plenty of thoughts on the one who had submitted it and his peculiar nature. Nevermore also couldn't help but find it funny he had asked about the 25% bonus as if it was something anyone ever expected to get. Though, it was hard to blame him, considering he had already obtained it two times.

Perhaps if he had spent longer, he could have reached the 25% he strived for, but she doubted it. If he had wanted to reach that evaluation, he would have had to thoroughly expand the scope of what he worked with. As an alchemist, he already had many different advantages, but, as odd as it sounds, his Bloodline became his ultimate limiter.

Alas, he had been one of the better ones for sure. Nevermore wouldn't say she was disappointed at the lack of interest from most young geniuses when it came to crafting. It was a bit discouraging, though.

Creation was, after all, one of the most important abilities one could ever have for spreading their Records.

This is also why she truly appreciated when someone showed up who was a true creator. Someone who didnt merely achieve a high score through using their Bloodlines or Transcendents. That Chosen of Yip of Yore had already left a bad taste in her mouth with the way he had achieved his albeit impressive score.

Luckily, there had been one person also related to the Chosen of the Malefic Viper who had truly impressed her. A man without a Bloodline, Transcendant skill, or anything like that. Just a creative mind.

He didnt even walk around with a title like the Chosen of the Malefic Viper but had simply gone by Arnold. He was a man who didnt radiate the slightest arrogance or even confidence. He was a blank slate that seemed entirely unbothered with anything that didnt interest him.

His actions were cold. The worlds were nothing more than a means of production to him, and despite the fact that the resources on the planets werent meant to be used for crafting, he had done so anyway. The student of the Vipers Chosen had wiped out one of the worlds Arnold had transformed all seven of them as he drained them all of their resources. Except for two, that is, which he deemed unsuitable for harvest. For those, he instead managed to tap into the energy powering the portals and absorbed all the energy that way, turning them into generators.

The Creations submitted had all been sublime and incredibly diverse. The man was not limited by affinities, nor did he limit his use of materials. The void-based Creations he submitted were all sights to behold, and the sheer scale of all his actions was beyond impressive. To turn the world that the Malefic Vipers Chosens student had come from into what was effectively one big industrial planet within only two years didnt even seem realistic for a C-grade, yet he had done it.

He achieved this through self-replicating constructs. He would make one construct that could then make others, which snowballed endlessly. Usually, this would not be possible, but their original Creator made it so by constantly remaining connected to them. He had a way of feeding them energy through a void-based connection, she didnt doubt Oras had a hand in and allowed himself to effectively function as a central hub.

In many ways, he reminded Nevermore of the automata race. His mentality, approach to things, general lack of emotions, and analytical problem-solving technique except he put them to shame with how extreme he took the concept. Moreover, he took full advantage of the fact he still remained a human

and didn't have the same limitations automata would have primarily their severely lacking evolution and biological self-adaptation options.

Nevermore had told Jake that there were others out there who could also stand before a god unaffected without influence from his Bloodline. This man was one of them. It wasn't because he was resistant to the difference between grades, nor that he didn't recognize the gap. It was simply that he didn't actively consider it a relevant factor to his interactions most of the time. To try and suppress him with a superior aura was like trying to shine a bright light to blind a man without eyes. He simply didn't appear to have a brain that computed the difference like everyone else which was probably also the reason he could carry the Legacy of Oras without breaking his mind:

It was already broken from the beginning.

Yet the Bound God saw nothing wrong with this. To be slightly broken was to be different, and in trade for parts of Arnold not functioning as one would expect, he gained a brilliant mind in turn.

Looking at the two of the most impressive Creations he had submitted, she felt in awe at both. One of them was one of the odd devices he had used to drain the energy of the portals. It was filled with odd void magic and had been capable of exploiting the endless energy provided by the system to keep the portals active. It was an item split in two, looking like two rings with a thin black thread between them, where one part entered the portal, and the other remained on the other side. At least it looked like that.

In fact, the two items were constantly switching positions countless times every single second. Every time something entered or exited the portal, a very faint wisp of energy would be released, an amount so little that it barely registered. However, there was still some energy. These two odd void rings would absorb this energy at every position swap. As they switched what had to be easily trillions of times every single second, the energy absorbed was astronomical, with every shred of it feeding into Arnold, who merely functioned as a conduit to spread it out to his other machines. At least, he did for a good while until he made the second Creation she looked at.

The other item she looked at was something called a control matrix. A device made to keep track of and as the name implied control everything else he had made. It was an item he repeatedly expanded upon during the entirety of House of the Architect, slowly improving with new layers of magical scripts. Like an artificial mind of sorts, it slowly took the mental load and jobs off Arnold as time progressed, allowing him to free up his brain for other projects without slowing down any production.

They had both been legendary items and not bad legendary items either.

Arnold had been well on his way to a remarkable 20% score until the very last Creation that pushed him over the edge. With every item Arnold turned in, he had made exact replicas so he could keep using them because they would all be necessary for his final submission.

His final submission wasn't merely an item but the entire system he had created. He had thoroughly made the entire House of the Architect his own, integrated every single Attendant, and set up automatic purchase orders with the Merit Point Store. He effectively exploited that putting together raw materials from the store would nearly always result in a product one could sell back for more Merit Points than the cost. With the entire crafting process turning entirely automated, he made what could only be described as an ever-growing machine that would continually expand and never run out of resources.

Everything he had done had been building toward a whole that, when it came together, allowed Arnold to produce whatever he wanted completely autonomously. He had created something that would persist even after he had left the Challenge Dungeon and submitted that as his final Creation. It wasn't merely an item, but if Nevermore had to classify it as one, and considering all the parts in play, it would no doubt have been considered mythical rarity.

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The sheer level of forethought, planning, and ingenuity had been inspiring. Especially the fact he had taken everything the House of the Architect provided into consideration and integrated it into his grand plan proved he hadn't simply pre-planned the entire thing before entering the Challenge Dungeon. Proof that he had simply relied on an incredibly high level of base skill to make everything happen, actively exploiting the dungeon in every way he could, all without relying on any abilities considered outside the system.

He was a legitimate genius in the realm of creation, no doubt about it.

As for how good he was in other areas well, he was very lopsided in his skills. He could go far, but he wasn't truly a contender for the Nevermore Leaderboards, especially not with people like the Chosen of the Malefic Viper in the mix, who had a far more general set of abilities and a high level of adaptability to his environment.



Which was bound to serve him well in the final Challenge Dungeon something she couldnt say about Arnolds skills in there.

Vilastromoz opened his eyes just as another god in the room had a somewhat expected outburst.

Finally! God damn, I was getting tired of that horrible Challenge Dungeon. It sucked all the fun out of this otherwise wonderful viewing party! Minaga complained loudly, waking many of the gods in the room from their temporary slumber.

Alright, perhaps slumber was not the right word for what had just been them focusing their attention elsewhere than the avatar in the room. The majority of them were only there to observe what the influential gods said, after all, so they didnt bother to focus on it most of the time.

For the last two years or so, the Holy Mother, Blightfather, Valdemar, Malefic Viper, and Natures Attendant had all simply observed their own private livestreams of those they were interested in, and any communication had happened through telepathy. In truth, the only person the gods openly discussed was the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, Jake.

Not to say the gods werent interested in how others did. As they were in Nevermore anyway with an avatar, they had little excuse to not peek at how their C-grade prospects were doing. Valdemar and the Blightfatherdid also have a brief exchange when the young Ghost King known as Azal managed to gain Valdemars recognition within the Colosseum of Mortals.

Besides these small comments and exchanges here and there, when a member from one of the Primordials factions did something impressive, there had mostly been silence. That is until Minaga suddenly had his outburst, marking that the Chosen of the Malefic Viper was out of the Challenge Dungeon and available to be observed.

You know why the rules are in place to restrict any viewing, the Wyrmgod sighed.

Yeah, because Nevermore is stingy as hell and anti-fun, Minaga grumbled, clearly not a fan of the Bound God of the World Wonder.

From what the Viper knew, this dislike stemmed from the Bound God being what could best be described as a balancing voice in the World Wonder. She was the one who imposed restrictions on Minaga here and there, and as she spoke for the system, she had quickly become the boogieman in the Unique Lifeforms eyes.

Are you still angry she wont give out any details about the Creations submitted? Vilastromoz asked. The information she can give, I mean.

Damn straight I am, Minaga nodded. Bending the rules of the system is just what youre supposed to do, so why is she being such a stickler with things like that? In my opinion, the right to privacy is a scam and not something anyone needs. Heck, look at me. Ive never been alone for a single conscious moment in my entire life, and I turned out just fine!

Sure, sure, the Viper just shook his head. Now, what is this Endless Journey Challenge Dungeon? The first time I remember seeing this one. Minagas Labyrinth was too, but at least that one was easy to see through.

It is new indeed, the Wyrmgod said. It replaced the Adventure Time Challenge Dungeon. Too many issues arose from having to escort others around for extended periods, and it proved too detrimental for too many Paths, especially the non-humanoid ones. Even when we added a beast to be escorted alongside the humanoid. So it was replaced with this one. Similar concept, though with some more complicated interactions. But overall less escorting and more-

Mailman, Minaga chimed in, interrupting.

Courier, the Wyrmgod corrected.

I see, the Viper slowly nodded as he smiled. He got a pretty good feeling about how Jake would do in that one

For the record, I already placed a bet on Jakes performance in this one while he was doing my labyrinth floors, Minaga said.

Who did you even bet with? the Malefic Viper questioned. No one else had arrived at that point, and the Viper hadn't made that bet, while the Wyrmgod tended to avoid making bets with Minaga, considering the Unique Lifeform tended to worm his way out if he lost.

This friend of mine called Minaga. Great guy. You should meet him someday and definitely bet with him, the Unique Lifeform said shamelessly. Of course, I can't be responsible if he doesn't pay up. In fact, I'm not even sure he's gonna stay true to our bet.

The Viper didn't even bother responding as he just looked at the Wyrmgod, ignoring Minaga. Is this Challenge Dungeon fully spectator-friendly?

His fellow Primordial looked at him and smiled. Naturally so enjoy the show.

Jake headed straight back to the Challenge Dungeon entrances, where he promptly laid his hands on the final one before entering. While he could have sat down and chilled a bit, maybe even taken a slight break to craft some poisons before starting it, he decided against it. Considering its name was Endless Journey, he would be surprised if he didn't at least get the chance to find some time for himself at some point if he really needed to craft anything.

After his vision went dark for a moment, Jake felt solid ground beneath his feet once more. Opening his eyes and feeling his surroundings with Sphere, Jake instantly got an idea as to where he was.

He was currently standing in front of what looked like a checkpoint leading into a quite frankly massive city. A city that looked quite a bit different from what Jake had expected.

There wasn't any wall, but instead, just a tall metal fence surrounding it. The buildings he could see looked modern at least by the usual standards of medieval cities. If Jake had to place the city in a time period, he would say the nineteen twenties or maybe thirties. Modern, yet still not exactly contemporary.

As he was looking at the city primarily through a snapshot from Pulse of Perception, the expected system message appeared.

Nevermore Challenge Dungeon Entered!

You have entered the Endless Journey. A world of conflict, intrigue, powerful beings hidden in the shadows, and uncountable tasks and missions left unfinished. Your job is to maneuver this realm as you travel in an endless journey.

As a newcomer, you are trusted simply because you have no other affiliations. Trusted to take up one of the most risky yet important jobs in the realm: that of a courier.

Your task is to accept Courier Jobs as you travel the land and deliver whatever goods are provided to their predetermined destination or target individuals. However, beware that there are many who have their eyes on you and covet whatever you are transporting, not to mention those who seek to exploit your work.

Courier Jobs have varying difficulty ratings, and as you accept more and more difficult Courier Jobs, you can move on to more dangerous areas of the realm to complete jobs. In fact, as you complete jobs, your reputation will grow, making easier Courier Jobs no longer available while unlocking more and more difficult ones. Note that even if some Courier Jobs have identical difficulty ratings, the actual difficulty may vary, and every job may have unexpected twists.

Now, go forth as you maneuver the complex political climate of the realm. On your journey, watch out for those who wish to take what you are to deliver and those who wish you harm or to lead you astray. Trust is not to be given lightly, so stay forever vigilant.

Should you fail a Courier Job in any way, you will be teleported back to wherefrom you originally accepted the job. The Courier Job you accepted and failed will no longer be available. Should you die, you will return back to wherefrom you originally accepted the most recent Courier Job. The Courier Job you died in the midst of will no longer be available. You have three total lives. Failing a Courier Job without dying will not consume a life.

Good luck, and may the road be smooth.

Objective: Complete Courier Jobs.

Current objective: Accept and complete a Courier Job.

Lives Remaining: 3

Jake quickly scanned it and couldn't help but flash a wry smile. And here I swore to myself I would never work a delivery job again after graduating uni