

Leveling up 951

Chapter 951: Challenging the Moons

Jeremy was already at the peak when Dallion's group arrived. The dragon, of course, was with him. Glaring at Simon, the giant creature let out a snort of fire, then growled.

"So, that's the famed dryad emperor," Jeremy said, deliberately ignoring everyone else. "Magic or something else?"

"Magic," Lyulak replied in a tone of voice that made it look like he was addressing a servant. "Like all true conquerors here."

The comment made Jeremy smirk. It was beyond doubt that magic provided a huge advantage. As far as Dallion knew, all three banished leaders had been born with the magic trait, as had Jeremy. He and Euryale were considered common, although they had obtained the empathy trait before becoming domain rulers. Simon remained an unknown. It was just as possible that he was born with all seven traits as it was for him to have been born with only the basic five .

"I see we have another dragon." Jeremy turned to Euryale. "He's a bit young, though."

"Two more," Simon corrected. "Dal's hiding another in his realm."

"Right. Along with the rest of his pet menagerie. She's too young to do much, though."

"She killed your echo." Dallion couldn't help himself.

"Great." Jeremy laughed. If the emotions coming from him were any indication, he wasn't in the least bit upset. "She destroyed a broken toy. I guess we can hope that the Moons are broken too."

Miniscule spikes formed all over Euryale's armor. Some could mistake it as a response to the comment, but in truth, she was mentally preparing for the battle to come. While her combat experience vastly exceeded Dallion's, her awakened power was the least of all. Also, she was the only one of the seven that didn't have a magic trait. For that reason, she'd have to make up for it in combat.

"Where's the seventh?" Lyulak asked.

"She'll be here," Simon said through a yawn. "She's wondering if she can wipe us all out with a mega spell."

Barely had he said that when Dallion felt a world level combat splitting. The entire world felt like being split apart, creating twenty different versions. In all but one a magic ball of light the size of a meteor shot out from the ocean, flying straight for the group.

Five seconds, Dallion thought. That was the approximate time it would take for the spell to reach them and—one might expect—the length of the combat splitting Tiallia could maintain.

Immediately, Pan, Lyulak, Simon, and Jeremy sprung into action.

Jeremy's approach was to order Aurun to blast a cone of fire in the direction of the approaching spell. Lyulak has a distortion spell that changed reality and sent the flaming projectile off course. Pan created a sequence of giant spell circles that—as far as Dallion could make out—were meant to diminish the effects of the upcoming spell. Finally, Simon surrounded everyone with an impenetrable sphere of green aether.

Three seconds in, all but one of the instances became reality—the one in which the spell had never occurred.

“That was interesting,” the dryad said. “Seems I’m not the only one that isn’t pleased with this alliance.”

“Call it a final dispensing of doubt,” Simon said. “Who would join a group they could easily kill?”

Within Dallion's personal realm, Aquilequia let out a roar.

Stay calm, Aqui, Dallion said. He can't hurt you now.

Half a minute later, Tiallia arrived at the scene. Her clothes, unlike before, were made entirely of sea iron. This was the only time that Dallion had seen her in person. Now that she was present in her physical form, the nymph wasn't at all talkative or confrontational, quietly waiting for Simon's plan to go into action. And, as expected, it did.

“Who goes first?” Jeremy asked.

“Optimally, the weakest,” Simon replied without hesitation. “We just need to make sure that we don't go over three quarters. That should let everyone reach a hundred and forty, give or take.”

“Why not a hundred and fifty?” the dryad asked.

“Safety precautions. Everyone has a trick up their sleeve. If it's more than one-forty, someone might snatch everything that's left.”

Trust in their mutual distrust—that's what united everyone. Not to mention that it was certain that not everyone would survive the clash with the Moons. No one had mentioned it openly, but there was no denying it. The greatest strength in the world in all the history of time had gathered here, yet there was no way to compare it to the Moons who watched above everything.

“I go last,” Dallion said, surprising everyone.

“You fancy yourself the strongest?” The dryad mused.

“You know that it won't matter, right?” Simon tilted his head slightly. “Once we challenge the Moons we lose all our domains until the outcome of the battle.”

“I'm the one forming the party.” Dallion looked the archbishop straight in the eyes. “I'm the one who's issuing the challenge. I want to be last.”

“Suit yourself.” Simon shrugged. “Let’s start.”

You have granted full control of the Land of ALLIANCE to EURYALE.

You have granted full control of the Land of SANDSTORM to EURYALE.

This narrative has been unlawfully taken from Royal Road. If you see it on Amazon, please report it.

You have granted full control of the Land of LANITOL to EURYALE.

You have granted full control of the Land of NEROSAL to EURYALE.

You have granted full control of the Land of ACADEMY to EURYALE.

A flow of rectangles flashed before Dallion as three quarters of his domains left his possession. The fallen south and the forbidden north were the only ones that he deliberately did not share, along with Dherma.

In a fraction of a second, new power emanated from the gorgon. The simple coordinated action had briefly made her the highest level awakened within the world. That didn’t last long, though.

Second to receive the boost was Simon. The archbishop, while possessing many unique powers, was quite weak when it came to practical combat. From there on, the mages took turns: Lyulak, Tiallia, and Jeremy.

Dallion was rather surprised to find that Pan was considered the most powerful of them all. Given that he was the first, one would assume that all his skills and methods would have been copied, discussed, and improved. Clearly, the knowledge was lost in the depths of time.

Then, finally, it was his turn.

You have broken through your one hundred and fifty-seventh barrier

You are level 157.

Choose 26 traits that you value the most.

Dallion felt vast swaths of land join his domain. Most of the continent, along with a large part of the ocean, suddenly became his to control.

A hundred and fifty-seven? Dallion wondered.

At first, he had thought that either Tiallia or Jeremy had given him a greater chunk by accident. Checking his domain, though, it quickly proved not to be the case. While unable to measure it to the last square mile, Dallion had a pretty good estimate of the size of his domain and it was well within the three-quarter limit that Simon had insisted upon.

The only explanation was that the extra seventeen points had come from special achievements that had earned Dallion awakening levels.

You sneaky bastard. Dallion glanced at the archbishop. You had foreseen this as well.

If one level separated Dallion from the coveted one-sixty, he might have made a gamble and attacked the least defended domain in the world to make up the difference. With this much, he couldn't dare it, especially with Euryale here. Even with Pan on his side, he wouldn't stand a chance in a direct confrontation.

"Anything wrong?" Simon asked, making it clear that he knew what was going through Dallion's mind.

"Distributing trait points," Dallion replied.

It was tempting to put all of them on body. Dallion had seen what the golden colossus was capable of. With a few spells, he'd be able to boost the trait, anyway.

Magic was another option, but with so many mages in the group, that might become a bit redundant.

Let's hope I'm not reading too much into this... Dallion put twenty-four of the points on empathy, increasing the trait to a hundred and twenty-five. The Green Moon had said he'd given him a boon, so maybe that would help make use of it. The remaining two points Dallion put on mind, increasing it to a hundred and ten.

"Ready." Dallion said and mentally invited everyone to join him, forming a party. The six rectangles that flashed in front of his eyes confirmed that each of the people had accepted.

It had finally come to this.

Dallion took the Moon emblem from around his neck. Maybe because of the light, it seemed that each of the Moonstones was glowing, similar to the Moons in the sky. There was no turning back now.

"I just say it?" Dallion glanced towards Simon.

"It would help if you actually think it as well," the boy said. "The Moons dislike half-hearted approaches."

"Don't we need to discuss a plan before that?" Euryale asked.

Tiallia, Jeremy, and Lyulak stared at her as if she had stepped on a cockroach.

"The plan is obvious," Jeremy said. "We focus on Galatea. Magic is the most harmful. Once he's done, we move to the nearest."

It wasn't much of a plan, but where deities were concerned, there couldn't be anything better. There was no way to out-strategize, so the only logical approach was to rely on brute strength, dealing with one at a time.

"And if there happens to be only one, we all focus on him," Tiallia added.

Dallion took a deep breath.

“I seek an audience to challenge you.” Dallion held the emblem high above his head. The moment he blinked, the Moons had vanished from the sky, replaced by their humanoid avatars.

Each of the seven deities was present, including Astreza himself. They had the exact appearance they were depicted in every statue and temple of the Order to the very clothes. Dallion had seen most of them during his awakening journey. Now, he saw them all at once. The magic threads that made up their very beings were unlike anything else he’d seen. In all his conversations, be it in dreams or in awakening trials, they had deliberately hidden their true power.

BLUE MOON - ASTREZA

Species: MOON

Health: 100%

Traits: 160

Skills: 160

Weakness: NONE

Never before had Dallion seen such a white rectangle. There was no illusion magic involved, neither was there any reason to specify the traits and skills that the Moons had. It was clear that they had everything. The only information of importance was the number.

Despite the massive difference, Dallion felt relief. At a hundred and sixty, the Moons would be incredibly difficult opponents, yet remained within reach.

“Very clever, Simon,” Astreza said.

“I try not to disappoint.” The archbishop bowed.

“Heh.” Galatea, the Purple Moon, crossed his arms. As he did, his aetherbird familiar appeared on his shoulder. “I bet you think you’re so smart? You think that because all of you are challenging us, we won’t dare banish you all?”

All of us? Dallion thought. The furies aren’t—

“Jeremy is the ruler of the furies now,” Dararr, the Orange Moon, interrupted. Even now, they could still read thoughts. “He gained the title after winning the great fury war. No, the rulers of all seven races are present. But some of you knew that already.”

“There’s a certain logic to your hypothesis,” Berannah, the Cyan Moon, nodded. “What’s a world if no people are living in it? Without people, there won’t be anyone for us to guide and protect, nor would there be an environment for us to place otherworlders in.”

“You’re right about that,” Astreza said. “A barren world is a barren world. Forming an alliance would force us to make a choice: ignore the challenge and leave one race to take over the world, or banish everyone and do nothing.”

“At least this way we have a chance,” Lyulak said. Two curved wooden scimitars had appeared in his hands.”

“Indeed.” The Blue Moon nodded. “Or you would have if all this hadn’t happened before.”

Chapter 952: World Combat Initiated

The sky turned purple. Looking closer, a thin membrane glittered, keeping the endless void from pouring into the world.

All seven challengers prepared themselves, summoning weapons and casting spells. The Moons, though, remained completely unimpressed.

“I’ll give you an A for effort,” the Blue Moon went on. “Chances were, you would have killed each other before getting here. For making it interesting, you’ve earned a handicap. I won’t take part in the fight.”

The words would have sounded arrogant coming from anyone else. Being the first of the seven Moons put things into perspective. On the surface, that was supposed to be a good thing. It meant that if they took out the Moon of Magic, things might get close to a level playing field.

“We’ll also let you make the first move,” Centor said, holding a massive battle ax. “Get your armor, call your minions, finish your spells, then when you’re ready, come at us.”

That sounded a bit too favorable.

“What happened before?” Euryale asked in a loud voice.

“One with curiosity.” The Emion, the white Moon smiled. “I’d have thought your husband would ask the question.”

“He did,” Felygn noted. “He was just too slow.”

“The last time the entire world challenged a Moon, they all lost,” Astreza said firmly. “Every single living being was banished, leaving this place a barren rock. Then, the Moon summoned us.”

“The Eighth Moon...” Dallion felt himself say.

“Yes, finally the answer to the question you’ve been asking for so long. The eighth Moon wasn’t the eighth Moon, but the first. When all life was banished, there was nothing the Moon held dear. Using up all of its power, it did the only thing it was able to do to keep the world from being swallowed by the void—it summoned us.”

Back when Dallion was a child on Earth, there had been times when he’d often try to do something he wasn’t supposed to. He’d be fully aware of the risk, certain that it was bad, and moments before getting caught had felt an icy feeling within him. This was similar. Despite his fears, he’d seen this

as the best chance there was of preventing the complete glassing of the world. Now, he had been made aware that should they fail, there wouldn't be anyone left to appreciate his efforts.

"An entire world gone," Galatea said.

"An entire world replaced," Berannah added.

"Everyone who lived banished," Emion said.

"The colossi," Dallion said. "They were the true inhabitants of the world."

"Yes." Astreza nodded. "There were others, but they were the ones who challenged their Moon. And their Moon accepted the challenge."

The tension in the air was thick enough to be cut with a knife. Dallion could feel it coming from his entire party. A fraction of a second later, the first move was made.

Now, Simon said, within everyone's awakened realm.

COMBAT INITIATED

A red rectangle emerged, and was instantly followed by an array of spells and combat splits. Chained spell spheres emerged as Tiallia, Pan, and Lyulak cast a common mass area spell that aimed to isolate Galatea from the rest of the Moons. Two great dragons, along with all of Dallion's companion weapons, emerged, as did the Purple Moon's aetherbird.

Follow me, Dallion instructed as he darted towards the left flank of the deity.

Meanwhile, Jeremy and Simon also paired up, flying towards the right. The coordination of their movements was perfect, suggesting that despite the enmity of several centuries at some point, they had fought together against common foes and frequently at that. Curious what enemies they were fighting against. Wilderness monsters? Other high-powered awakened? The Star? Incarnations of the Void?

Five other Moons flew forward, summoning weapons. Astreza, keeping faithful to his word, flew away at a speed greater than Dallion could achieve, even with magic symbol enhancements.

Second barrier, Simon ordered.

The three mages cast another combined spell, creating a second sphere around the Purple Moon. Testing the waters, Dallion performed several spiral attacks in fifty of his instances.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by GALATEA.

Attack has no effect.

On a certain level, it was normal to consider magic capable of affecting the principles of physics, even in a world such as this. Back in the Academy, Dallion had managed to draw a few comparisons, making him a lot better at it than the average student, though even he wasn't able to come to a direct conversion. The Purple Moon undoubtedly had a lot of superior knowledge, but he also had one significant weakness—the supreme arrogance born of strength, that believed beyond a

shadow of a doubt that no one could copy his spells. It was impossibly rare that a Moon would do magic openly in front of people, so he didn't use any anti-copying spell techniques.

Moon spells can be copied, Dallion shouted in his realm.

Barely had he done so when Jeremy continued with his own attack, sending dozens of rays of destruction towards Galatea.

The Purple Moon didn't react, letting them bounce off, as if they were a nuisance. The rays continued hitting the surface of the large aether sphere, only to bounce off of it as well.

"Useless," The Purple Moon, then drew a new spell in the air.

The links and symbols were complex to the point that Dallion wasn't able to make anything out. The effect, though, was a beam many times stronger than anything Dallion had witnessed so far. The same raw force that had created the fallen south flew towards Jeremy. Before reaching him, Simon cast a protection sphere. The new barrier proved strong enough to withstand the magic attack, although both he and Jeremy were pushed back in the process.

Magic music spark attack, Dallion thought, slashing the air with his harpsisword.

If you encounter this narrative on Amazon, note that it's taken without the author's consent. Report it.

"Careful!" Euryale flew right into him, pushing Dallion to the side.

A ray of destruction passed by them.

I didn't even see that, Dallion told himself. If not for his wife's observation trait, he could well have been dead by now. Galatea had timed the attack flawlessly for it to coincide with the moment Dallion paused to split into a new hundred instances. If the ray had struck, it wouldn't have been only an instance that would have been vaporized.

SPELL NEGATED

Aether sphere has been shattered by EMION.

Spell has no effect.

SPELL NEGATED

Aether sphere has been shattered by EMION.

Spell has no effect.

Both barriers were instantly shattered and all by a Moon with a dartbow. Not only that, but the bolt also struck Simon's protective barrier, cracking it as well.

"Keep him isolated!" Jeremy shouted.

From the world below, a host of rockets emerged like flickering stars, aiming at Astreza.

A new triple spell was instantly cast, creating yet another barrier between Galatea and the rest of the Moons. In the eyes of anyone else, the whole battle would have seemed like a desperate attempt at survival. So far, all the challengers' attempts had ended up in utter failure. Yet, there was one thing that no one took into account—close to three seconds had passed since the start of combat and the entire party was still alive. Each time before, the fight had already been over. Even a single opponent had proved too much for each of the world conquerors. All of them had undoubtedly used all of their skills to cast defensive or attack spells, only to be defeated by the Purple Moon. Now that they had moved beyond their death limit, they stood a chance.

Rows of aether spears emerged from the new barrier, shooting out in the millions. Each weapon was of high enough density to wound anything, possibly even a Moon.

“Amusing,” Cantor said, slamming the air in front of him in a point attack. The force was so great that it shattered thousands of spears in the air, sending them back into the barrier.

A short distance away, Berannah split into a thousand instances, finding the series of holes in the incoming attack and stepping in while the spears flew past.

Vines emerged from Felygn, grabbing any spear that would harm him tens of feet in advance. Next to him, Dararr almost sluggishly deflected each weapon through a simple series of hits at a mindboggling speed. As for Emion, she simply targeted all threatening spears with her dartbow.

Explosions resounded from below as giant balls of white flame emerged. Both Jeremy and Simon knew that no rocket would be able to hit a Moon directly, so their attack was aimed at using the strength of the blast to distract and hopefully wound some of them. In the process, huge chunks of land were also lost as the enhanced strength of the fireblast also touched them, melting mountains as they did.

“I’m relying on you,” Dallion said to Eury as he started casting a spell.

That’s not a spell that you should be casting! Adzorg said in terror. It’s not meant for this world!

“The Moons can only banish me once,” Dallion replied as he flew straight for Galatea again. Lux, do your thing!

Hundreds of ingots emerged around Dallion. One by one they were propelled in the direction of the Purple Moon, obtaining the destructive power of meteors.

Aware of the attack’s power, Galatea cast a series of aether parries of his own.

Copy that! Simon shouted just as another triple spell was complete. This time a multitude of spell circles emerged throughout the air, all shooting out magic draining chains.

Too proud to move from his spot in the air, Galatea cast a series of barrier spells, but even so, several of the chains managed to slip through, tangling around his left foot.

Yes! Dallion thought. All that he had to do now was to complete casting the pearl of destruction and

“You never give up, do you?” a flash of purple emerged in front of Dallion. Quickly it gained shape, transforming into a giant purple bird made completely of aether.

Using one of his instances, Dallion glanced to where Aurun and Aquilequia had been fighting the divine familiar. To his mild surprise, he saw the battle still taking place.

“Magic is always the exception,” Dallion whispered.

The ingot projectiles changed focus, targeting the new creature instead. Unfortunately for Lux, they merely went through without causing any damage whatsoever.

“You didn’t have to reach this point.” The aetherbird’s feathers turned into aether shards. “You’d have been a lot happier before.”

“I guess I’m just that good.” Dallion completed the spell, causing a ball of dark purple to emerge in the air. Summoning a new ingot, he propelled it forward, straight at the aetherbird.

CRITICAL HIT

Dealt damage increased by 200%

The familiar attempted to shift form, but no matter how many times he did so, the pearl kept on consuming parts of him, creating an ever-present hole in his body.

Taking advantage of the situation, hundreds of spark-infused tendrils shot out from Euryale’s armor, heading straight at Aether.

Scores of red rectangles emerged, dealing additional damage as the pearl kept on doing its thing.

In close to a hundred instances, the aetherbird exploded, releasing aether fragments like shrapnel.

“Expand!” Dallion ordered, summoning his aether shield in front in one instance.

MINOR WOUND

GEM’s health has been reduced by 5%

MINOR WOUND

GEM’s health has been reduced by 5%

MINOR WOUND

GEM’s health has been reduced by 5%

Multiple red rectangles emerged, yet none of the shards affected Dallion and Euryale. Glancing at the dragon battle, it seemed that the aetherbird’s original form had also suffered some minor damage due to this incident. That was good, but even better—Dallion had a direct line of attack. The pearl of destruction remained in the air, seeking a new source of magic and Dallion was determined to provide it with one.

Sorry, he said mentally as he slammed the devouring spell in the direction of the Purple Moon with another ingot.

MINOR HIT

Dealt damage increased by 10%

The nearly black ball drilled through the aether barrier that the Moon had cast, burying itself in his chest. The damage wasn't a lot by far, but that wasn't the point. Now that the pearl was there, it would cause a serious drain to Galatea's magic, allowing the others in the party to focus their efforts and deal with the issue before the rest of the Moons could join in.

"You hit me?" Galatea asked, as he calmly reached into his chest with his right hand and grabbed the pearl. A sound similar to metal clawing granite filled the air, following immediately by loud crunching, then silence. Once the Moon took his hand out, the pearl was gone along with his wound. "No more handicap," he said with a frown. "From here on, I attack."

Chapter 953: World Combat Initiated

The sky turned purple. Looking closer, a thin membrane glittered, keeping the endless void from pouring into the world.

All seven challengers prepared themselves, summoning weapons and casting spells. The Moons, though, remained completely unimpressed.

"I'll give you an A for effort," the Blue Moon went on. "Chances were, you would have killed each other before getting here. For making it interesting, you've earned a handicap. I won't take part in the fight."

The words would have sounded arrogant coming from anyone else. Being the first of the seven Moons put things into perspective. On the surface, that was supposed to be a good thing. It meant that if they took out the Moon of Magic, things might get close to a level playing field.

"We'll also let you make the first move," Centor said, holding a massive battle ax. "Get your armor, call your minions, finish your spells, then when you're ready, come at us."

That sounded a bit too favorable.

"What happened before?" Euryale asked in a loud voice.

"One with curiosity." The Emion, the white Moon smiled. "I'd have thought your husband would ask the question."

"He did," Felygn noted. "He was just too slow."

"The last time the entire world challenged a Moon, they all lost," Astreza said firmly. "Every single living being was banished, leaving this place a barren rock. Then, the Moon summoned us."

"The Eighth Moon..." Dallion felt himself say.

“Yes, finally the answer to the question you’ve been asking for so long. The eighth Moon wasn’t the eighth Moon, but the first. When all life was banished, there was nothing the Moon held dear. Using up all of its power, it did the only thing it was able to do to keep the world from being swallowed by the void—it summoned us.”

Back when Dallion was a child on Earth, there had been times when he’d often try to do something he wasn’t supposed to. He’d be fully aware of the risk, certain that it was bad, and moments before getting caught had felt an icy feeling within him. This was similar. Despite his fears, he’d seen this as the best chance there was of preventing the complete glassing of the world. Now, he had been made aware that should they fail, there wouldn’t be anyone left to appreciate his efforts.

“An entire world gone,” Galatea said.

“An entire world replaced,” Berannah added.

“Everyone who lived banished,” Emion said.

“The colossi,” Dallion said. “They were the true inhabitants of the world.”

“Yes.” Astreza nodded. “There were others, but they were the ones who challenged their Moon. And their Moon accepted the challenge.”

The tension in the air was thick enough to be cut with a knife. Dallion could feel it coming from his entire party. A fraction of a second later, the first move was made.

Now, Simon said, within everyone’s awakened realm.

COMBAT INITIATED

A red rectangle emerged, and was instantly followed by an array of spells and combat splits. Chained spell spheres emerged as Tiallia, Pan, and Lyulak cast a common mass area spell that aimed to isolate Galatea from the rest of the Moons. Two great dragons, along with all of Dallion’s companion weapons, emerged, as did the Purple Moon’s aetherbird.

Follow me, Dallion instructed as he darted towards the left flank of the deity.

Meanwhile, Jeremy and Simon also paired up, flying towards the right. The coordination of their movements was perfect, suggesting that despite the enmity of several centuries at some point, they had fought together against common foes and frequently at that. Curious what enemies they were fighting against. Wilderness monsters? Other high-powered awakened? The Star? Incarnations of the Void?

Five other Moons flew forward, summoning weapons. Astreza, keeping faithful to his word, flew away at a speed greater than Dallion could achieve, even with magic symbol enhancements.

Second barrier, Simon ordered.

The three mages cast another combined spell, creating a second sphere around the Purple Moon. Testing the waters, Dallion performed several spiral attacks in fifty of his instances.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by GALATEA.

Attack has no effect.

On a certain level, it was normal to consider magic capable of affecting the principles of physics, even in a world such as this. Back in the Academy, Dallion had managed to draw a few comparisons, making him a lot better at it than the average student, though even he wasn't able to come to a direct conversion. The Purple Moon undoubtedly had a lot of superior knowledge, but he also had one significant weakness—the supreme arrogance born of strength, that believed beyond a shadow of a doubt that no one could copy his spells. It was impossibly rare that a Moon would do magic openly in front of people, so he didn't use any anti-copying spell techniques.

Moon spells can be copied, Dallion shouted in his realm.

Barely had he done so when Jeremy continued with his own attack, sending dozens of rays of destruction towards Galatea.

The Purple Moon didn't react, letting them bounce off, as if they were a nuisance. The rays continued hitting the surface of the large aether sphere, only to bounce off of it as well.

“Useless,” The Purple Moon, then drew a new spell in the air.

The links and symbols were complex to the point that Dallion wasn't able to make anything out. The effect, though, was a beam many times stronger than anything Dallion had witnessed so far. The same raw force that had created the fallen south flew towards Jeremy. Before reaching him, Simon cast a protection sphere. The new barrier proved strong enough to withstand the magic attack, although both he and Jeremy were pushed back in the process.

Magic music spark attack, Dallion thought, slashing the air with his harpsisword.

The author's tale has been misappropriated; report any instances of this story on Amazon.

“Careful!” Euryale flew right into him, pushing Dallion to the side.

A ray of destruction passed by them.

I didn't even see that, Dallion told himself. If not for his wife's observation trait, he could well have been dead by now. Galatea had timed the attack flawlessly for it to coincide with the moment Dallion paused to split into a new hundred instances. If the ray had struck, it wouldn't have been only an instance that would have been vaporized.

SPELL NEGATED

Aether sphere has been shattered by EMION.

Spell has no effect.

SPELL NEGATED

Aether sphere has been shattered by EMION.

Spell has no effect.

Both barriers were instantly shattered and all by a Moon with a dartbow. Not only that, but the bolt also struck Simon's protective barrier, cracking it as well.

"Keep him isolated!" Jeremy shouted.

From the world below, a host of rockets emerged like flickering stars, aiming at Astreza.

A new triple spell was instantly cast, creating yet another barrier between Galatea and the rest of the Moons. In the eyes of anyone else, the whole battle would have seemed like a desperate attempt at survival. So far, all the challengers' attempts had ended up in utter failure. Yet, there was one thing that no one took into account—close to three seconds had passed since the start of combat and the entire party was still alive. Each time before, the fight had already been over. Even a single opponent had proved too much for each of the world conquerors. All of them had undoubtedly used all of their skills to cast defensive or attack spells, only to be defeated by the Purple Moon. Now that they had moved beyond their death limit, they stood a chance.

Rows of aether spears emerged from the new barrier, shooting out in the millions. Each weapon was of high enough density to wound anything, possibly even a Moon.

"Amusing," Cantor said, slamming the air in front of him in a point attack. The force was so great that it shattered thousands of spears in the air, sending them back into the barrier.

A short distance away, Berannah split into a thousand instances, finding the series of holes in the incoming attack and stepping in while the spears flew past.

Vines emerged from Felygn, grabbing any spear that would harm him tens of feet in advance. Next to him, Dararr almost sluggishly deflected each weapon through a simple series of hits at a mindboggling speed. As for Emion, she simply targeted all threatening spears with her dartbow.

Explosions resounded from below as giant balls of white flame emerged. Both Jeremy and Simon knew that no rocket would be able to hit a Moon directly, so their attack was aimed at using the strength of the blast to distract and hopefully wound some of them. In the process, huge chunks of land were also lost as the enhanced strength of the fireblast also touched them, melting mountains as they did.

"I'm relying on you," Dallion said to Eury as he started casting a spell.

That's not a spell that you should be casting! Adzorg said in terror. It's not meant for this world!

"The Moons can only banish me once," Dallion replied as he flew straight for Galatea again. Lux, do your thing!

Hundreds of ingots emerged around Dallion. One by one they were propelled in the direction of the Purple Moon, obtaining the destructive power of meteors.

Aware of the attack's power, Galatea cast a series of aether parries of his own.

Copy that! Simon shouted just as another triple spell was complete. This time a multitude of spell circles emerged throughout the air, all shooting out magic draining chains.

Too proud to move from his spot in the air, Galatea cast a series of barrier spells, but even so, several of the chains managed to slip through, tangling around his left foot.

Yes! Dallion thought. All that he had to do now was to complete casting the pearl of destruction and —

“You never give up, do you?” a flash of purple emerged in front of Dallion. Quickly it gained shape, transforming into a giant purple bird made completely of aether.

Using one of his instances, Dallion glanced to where Aurun and Aquilequia had been fighting the divine familiar. To his mild surprise, he saw the battle still taking place.

“Magic is always the exception,” Dallion whispered.

The ingot projectiles changed focus, targeting the new creature instead. Unfortunately for Lux, they merely went through without causing any damage whatsoever.

“You didn’t have to reach this point.” The aetherbird’s feathers turned into aether shards. “You’d have been a lot happier before.”

“I guess I’m just that good.” Dallion completed the spell, causing a ball of dark purple to emerge in the air. Summoning a new ingot, he propelled it forward, straight at the aetherbird.

CRITICAL HIT

Dealt damage increased by 200%

The familiar attempted to shift form, but no matter how many times he did so, the pearl kept on consuming parts of him, creating an ever-present hole in his body.

Taking advantage of the situation, hundreds of spark-infused tendrils shot out from Euryale’s armor, heading straight at Aether.

Scores of red rectangles emerged, dealing additional damage as the pearl kept on doing its thing.

In close to a hundred instances, the aetherbird exploded, releasing aether fragments like shrapnel.

“Expand!” Dallion ordered, summoning his aether shield in front in one instance.

MINOR WOUND

GEM’s health has been reduced by 5%

MINOR WOUND

GEM’s health has been reduced by 5%

MINOR WOUND

GEM's health has been reduced by 5%

Multiple red rectangles emerged, yet none of the shards affected Dallion and Euryale. Glancing at the dragon battle, it seemed that the aetherbird's original form had also suffered some minor damage due to this incident. That was good, but even better—Dallion had a direct line of attack. The pearl of destruction remained in the air, seeking a new source of magic and Dallion was determined to provide it with one.

Sorry, he said mentally as he slammed the devouring spell in the direction of the Purple Moon with another ingot.

MINOR HIT

Dealt damage increased by 10%

The nearly black ball drilled through the aether barrier that the Moon had cast, burying itself in his chest. The damage wasn't a lot by far, but that wasn't the point. Now that the pearl was there, it would cause a serious drain to Galatea's magic, allowing the others in the party to focus their efforts and deal with the issue before the rest of the Moons could join in.

"You hit me?" Galatea asked, as he calmly reached into his chest with his right hand and grabbed the pearl. A sound similar to metal clawing granite filled the air, following immediately by loud crunching, then silence. Once the Moon took his hand out, the pearl was gone along with his wound. "No more handicap," he said with a frown. "From here on, I attack."

Chapter 954: The fall of Magic

The air around Dallion suddenly hardened. It wasn't just the space around him, but the air in his lungs and stomach. Deep inside Dallion's mind, the tiny voice of manic screamed, yelling that he was doomed.

Dallion chose to ignore it.

AREA AWAKENING

Everything around him disappeared, replaced by an endlessness of clouds and sky. This time, Euryale hadn't joined Dallion in the realm, remaining in the real world. The outlines of the Moons, though, were present.

"Where are you?" Dallion concentrated, focusing on his empathy trait to pinpoint the location of the area guardian. Since they were in a domain of air surrounded by clouds, it was logical to assume that the guardian would be a cloud creature of some sort. Finding which one in a realm this size was going to take longer than he had time for, provided that he used the standard way.

To his surprise, the search didn't take long. No sooner had Dallion sensed a cluster of emotions than one of the clouds shifted form, changing into a massive dolphin.

Air Guardian

Species: AIRPHIN

Class: CLOUD

Health: 90%

Traits:

- **BODY 0**
- **MIND 100**
- **REACTION 20**
- **PERCEPTION 100**
- **MAGIC 80**

Skills:

- **ATTACK**
- **ATHLETICS**
- **GUARD**

- **SPELLCRAFT**
- **CLOUD FORM (Species Unique)**
- **FLIGHT (Species Unique)**

Weakness: NONE

Seeing the creature head towards him, Dallion boosted his own spell to halve the time to contact.

“Any chance you’d surrender?” he shouted, suspecting the answer.

None of us can surrender, the guardian replied. Even if we wish you luck.

Dallion had heard the same whisper from a lot of the other area guardians he’d heard in the real world. For some reason, the majority were intent on him and the other challengers winning. That had slightly decreased since Simon’s switching sides, yet remained surprising.

“Why?” Dallion asked.

Why we wish you luck? The form of the guardian grew larger as it approached, taking on the appearance of a whale. Because we’re hoping you’d win.

“You’re not pleased with the Moons, are you?”

It’s not about the Moons. It’s about the change. The Moons can’t provide that. They can only maintain.

COMBAT INITIATED

The question Dallion had in mind vanished away as the red rectangle appeared. As Adzorg had told him ages ago, the secret to moving forward quickly is focusing on what was immediately important. Everything else was distractions.

“Sorry,” Dallion said, then performed a music spark attack.

Threads emerged from his harpsisword as he slashed the air in front of him, releasing hundreds of white strands. Effortlessly, they pierced through the cloud, creating cascades of red rectangles.

AIR Level increased

AIR cannot be improved further.

A flash of curiosity went through Dallion as he considered what options there would have been. It was something he didn't even want to think about, given that until recently he didn't know that there could be domains entirely of nothing. Apparently, being a moon gave one control over the entire atmosphere.

Reality blinked again, returning him to the fight. The sensation of heaviness instantly vanished as the air returned to its formal state.

“Magic?” Euryale asked behind him.

“Realm,” Dallion replied, putting in all his effort to finish casting another pearl of destruction.

This tale has been unlawfully obtained from Royal Road. If you discover it on Amazon, kindly report it.

SPELL NEGATED

Aether sphere has been shattered by CENTOR.

Spell has no effect.

The entire purple aether barrier shattered as the Red Moon slammed it with his hammer. Even Galatea's own spell was not enough to stop an attack of such magnitude. Almost simultaneously, Simon's barrier vanished as well.

One more second! Dallion told himself.

That was all the time he and Eury needed to reach the Purple Moon and attempt to defeat him. if they didn't manage, then there was no point even trying to win the overall fight.

“No, you don't.” Centor threw his hammer in Dallion's direction.

Euryale immediately turned around, casting a multitude of point attacks at the weapon in an attempt to slow its speed, or at least change its course. Nothing seemed to work, as it continued undeterred straight for Dallion.

“Galatea!” Dallion shouted, splitting into three hundred instances.

Three hundred hammer variants slightly changed course, all still heading towards their target.

For a split second, the purple Moon stopped distorting reality and looked in Dallion's direction. Supreme confidence emanated from him. Most likely, he believed it impossible that anyone could get to a point to hurt him. In less than a second, he would be proven wrong. The pearl of destruction had come into being, ready to be propelled in any direction he wished. That presented Dallion with

a choice. He knew from his instances that Centor's hammer was still flying towards him. The Moon of dwarves had put a lot of strength into it, guaranteeing a one hit kill if it came into contact. The hammer, as the Moon itself, was made out of divine magic, so the pearl had the power to affect it. Yet, if Dallion were to save his life, it guaranteed that he'd miss his chance of defeating Galatea.

In his mind, the scene kept on playing over and over hundreds of times. Was there a way for him to survive the hit? If he took down Galatea, the original plan could work out. Centor would be the next target, and hopefully quick to take out thanks to the efforts of two mages. Yet, wouldn't that defeat the purpose? What was the point of having his party win if Dallion wasn't able to join them as a new Moon?

"Do it!" Euryale flew between Dallion and the Red Moon's hammer. As she did, the dragon helping her fly transformed back into its full form and let out a torrent of wind against the divine weapons.

Dallion's hesitation disappeared. While he was considering putting his life at risk, he wasn't ready to let his wife sacrifice herself for him. Gritting his teeth, he stopped his forward advance, flying to the side where he summoned a sky silver ingot and used it to propel the pearl in the direction of the hammer.

"Touching," Galatea said with icy coldness.

A short distance away, the hammer came into contact with the pearl, then both vanished in a red and purple flash.

MINOR HIT

Damage dealt has increased by 5%

A red rectangle appeared. Strangely enough, it appeared right above Centor.

"It's not like you ever had a chance." The Purple Moon started a new spell, floating slowly towards Dallion. "But at least you'd have done some more damage."

In the distance, behind Centor, the rest of the Moons were visible. Without the aether barrier, nothing prevented them from joining the fight. At this point, they had effectively won, even without Simon's betrayal.

Seeing that there was no further point in exerting himself, the archbishop stopped maintaining his own barrier, causing it to disappear as well.

"I'll make sure the two of you end up together." The Purple Moon raised his hand. "You were among the more interesting to watch."

The start of a spell was drawn, yet never finished, for fractions of a second later, Pan and Tiallia emerged on both sides of Galatea. A complex spell—the scale of which Dallion couldn't even contemplate—had already been cast by both of them in tandem. Two parts of a ring, larger than any spell sphere Dallion had seen, covered their sides and back. It was made of hundreds of millions of complex magic threads forming one single magic circuit with more symbols than there were letters in Dallion's first library.

Faster than even a Moon could react, both halves snapped together, trapping him.

Dallion was just about to let out a sigh of relief when he felt it—the sense of relief and regret mixed into one. The unlikely duo hadn't cast a trap—they were sacrificing themselves to take a Moon with them.

Time seemed to freeze. As the spell-ring activated, distorting everything within it, Dallion could sense their emotions with such clarity it was almost the same if they had said it. Both entities were ancient, both had tried to take over the world for various reasons, and both knew the consequences of failure. This very moment, both of them had other things they valued more than their lives.

Tiallia wished for her sister and her entire race to remain in the world. As much as she despised Dallion, and distrusted the rest, she knew they were the best chance they'd ever have.

Pan had formed attachments to Hannah, Dallion, and all the people he'd served while pretending to be a cook. His race had long been banished or made into spies of the Order, and he didn't want his friends to go through the same fate.

It's always easier the second time, Dallion thought he heard the copyette say before the ring and everything in it imploded to a single speck of purple dust that vanished away.

GALATEA has been defeated.

A yellow rectangle appeared. One of the Moons had fallen. Five more remained.

Summoning a new hammer, Centor glanced at Dallion. As he did, a small portal emerged a step away from him. A torrent of roots and vines shot out, continuously trying to wrap themselves around him. Surprisingly, they had an effect. Being the physically strongest of the Moons, Centor had no issue tearing the vines up, yet no matter how many times he did so, more vines kept on shooting out.

“Dal!” Euryale did a point attack straight at him.

MODERATE WOUND

Your health has been reduced by 20%

Dozens of Dallion's instances were pushed back, just in time to see Emion's white bolt fly past the spot he had been.

“She needs to be next!” the gorgon shouted.

Unexpectedly, a new aether wall emerged between the Moons and the remaining conquerors. Just as before, Simon wasn't among the Moons. The second unexpected thing was that time had come to an abrupt stop.

ESCAPE TRIGGERED

If you wish to escape combat, smash the window.

Guard sequence? Dallion wondered.

The mere concept was absurd. Someone in his party had to have completed a series of guard sequences to gain their bonus effect. Yet, what did the explanation even mean? If he smashed the rectangle, would the fight be over? Would they be cast out into the void?

“This really is like a realm,” Jeremy said, his voice coming from miles away.

“You did this?” Dallion asked.

“The sequence or the barrier? In both cases, yes.” Even in such circumstances, the Tamin emperor remained highly arrogant. “Simon is nothing if not predictable.”

Looking in the archbishop's direction, Dallion was able to see him casting a multitude of thin rays at Jeremy. That must have been the way through which the time freeze had occurred. And, of course, since Simon had left the party, he had been affected as well.

“You’re suggesting we try to flee?” Lyulak asked in a mocking tone. “This isn’t an awakening trial.”

“I see why your race was banished,” Jeremy snapped back. “Inability to think. The Moons are subject to rules. The freeze won’t last forever, but it gives us some time to plan our next move.”

“He’s already made up his decision,” Euryale whispered. “He just needs you.”

That made some sense, although Dallion would have chosen the dryad. Then again, Jeremy was always following several plans at once.

“Without Galatea, they have no mage,” Jeremy continued. “Now it’s key that we take out Simon. After that, we’ll pick out the rest one by one.”

“You make it sound a lot easier than it is,” the gorgon said.

“Would you prefer I went on and on about how outmatched we are? Maybe if I repeated it enough times, I’ll get a special bonus.”

Euryale clenched her fists, but remained quiet. Now was the worst time for infighting, and Jeremy knew it.

“How?” Dallion asked. “His barrier is invulnerable.” And currently Dallion didn’t have a way to change its properties again.

“True, but he’s not infallible. All we need is a distraction and you are it.”

“I should have guessed.” Dallion didn’t even bother to sigh.

“He can’t hurt you. He made a vow, right? If he thinks of hurting you, we win by default and get to focus on the real challenge. If not, you’ll give us a chance to remove him from the field. Then it’s us against the Moons.”

“Four against five,” Lyulak noted.

“As I said, without Galatea they don’t have a mage. We have two and a half. That should change the odds.”

Chapter 955: New Attack Strategy

Aurun, Aquilequia, and Dark combined forces, focusing all their destructive power on the aetherbird’s afterimage. The Purple Moon’s familiar should have vanished along with its owner, yet the magic within it allowed it to keep on fighting a bit longer after its demise.

Purple wings spread open, each made out of millions of aether-flames, then slammed together, sending out a wave of light in all directions. Within moments, all magic barriers vanished.

“Lux!” Dallion ordered.

Another mountain pillar rose up, then burst into fragments, allowing the firebird to send a meteor shower in the wide area of the Moons.

Realm section damaged

Overall completion 67%

A rectangle emerged. Sadly, while the attack proved devastating to the world itself, it didn’t appear to harm a single Moon in any way.

Suddenly, the terrain below changed. The imperial capital appeared, launching hundreds of rockets straight up. Fire filled a massive part of the sky, progressively spreading upwards.

“Focus!” Jeremy shouted, trading light beams with Simon.

The archbishop had caught on to his previous mistake and was careful not to allow anyone to complete a guard sequence again.

“Dark!” Euryale shouted. She remained the only one incapable of flight.

Since there was no point for Lux to continue with the meteor attack, Dallion ordered the firebird to become the gorgon’s wings.

“Thanks.” She winked at Dallion. “I’ll distract Emion. You deal with the archbishop.”

“Gem, Aqui, go with her!” Dallion was almost about to order Gleam and Nox, but stopped himself on time. Of them, one was gone, and the other had used up most of her strength, rendering her virtually powerless. Still, the armadil shield quickly flew after the gorgon, extending as it did.

With a snort, the orange dragon flew in her direction as well.

“Aurun,” Jeremy ordered.

Dallion could feel the burst of disdain emanating from the other great dragon. Still the creature obeyed the order of its owner.

The terrain below changed again, this time turning into a massive forest that only got bigger. Lyulak had also resorted to using his domain ruler powers in the fight. Like the other world conquerors, he was a copycat, and just like the Tamin emperor, he excelled in it.

Branches as thick as small houses surrounded the Red Moon, entangling him far more effectively than the portal vines. A line attack quickly sliced them in half along with miles of earth beneath.

Realm section damaged

Overall completion 65%

The dryad emperor flew off, starting a new complex spell. Hundreds of instances of the Cyan Moon followed, each attempting to attack, yet more trees shot out, keeping Lyulak and his own instances safe.

Leaves broke off the thousands of trees, flying through the air like a hurricane of razor blades. Red rectangles stacked over ninety percent of the Moon's instances, forcing her to pause her attack.

"You've learned a lot since last time," a calm voice said, as Felygn gently floated towards him.

Neither leaves nor branches did any harm to him, moving away specifically to avoid contact.

"All this time, and it took someone else to show you that the world was under your control as well." The Green Moon kept on moving closer. It, too, was a dryad. He didn't have any weapons, wasn't casting any spells, just floated on surrounded by a bubble of calm.

"You never bothered to tell me." Lyulak cast a ray of destruction.

Leaves and twigs moved together, blocking the spell's path. A whole line of vegetation lit up like a matchstick, going all the way to the deity's shoulder. Avoiding it would have been elementary, yet Felygn didn't, letting the spell burn through his shoulder and continue onwards.

CRITICAL HIT

Dealt damage has been increased by 200%

Lyulak paused.

"You can still surrender," the Moon offered. "You can tell what the outcome would be."

"What happens if I do?" Several of the dryad emperor's instances looked about. Euryale and the dragons had engaged Emion. Dallion was in a fight with Simon, while Jeremy and Dararr were nowhere to be seen. "Do I get banished again?"

"You never had to be banished. I could have returned you to your world."

The vines and wooden armor on Lyulak turned red.

"There's nothing for me there. I'd rather be banished for half an eternity more than go back!" A crimson sword of wood emerged in the dryad's hand, threads of magic and spark flowing through it in large amounts. This wasn't just any enhanced weapon—it was the weapon of a conqueror that in the past had slain

through awakened, Star-spawn, and cities alike. “I was better this time. Next time I’ll take you d—”

If you spot this tale on Amazon, know that it has been stolen. Report the violation.

Lyulak wasn’t able to finish. The clothes he was wearing suddenly tightened for no obvious reason. He tried to adjust them, but quickly found that they had stiffened, effectively becoming a cage around his body. Even any attempts at venturing into their realms were treated as if he were an invader.

Even the sword Lyulak himself had created felt heavy, fighting to slip out of his hand. The dryad tightened his grip, but all that did was to cause the sword to burst into splinters.

“Never had a chance...” he whispered as all the leaves in the surrounding area spontaneously targeted him and his instances.

MAJOR WOUND

LYULAK’s health has been reduced by 50%

MAJOR WOUND

LYULAK’s health has been reduced by 50%

MAJOR WOUND

LYULAK’s health has been reduced by 50%

Hundreds of red rectangles emerged, surrounding the dryad on all sides like a crimson fountain.

“Sorry.” Felygn kept on watching. “There will be no third time.”

LYULAK has left your party

Damn it! One of Dallion’s instances looked at the cloud of leaves.

Already it was starting to clear out, and the forest itself had started retreating.

“No one has defeated a Moon,” Simon said, maintaining the protective aether sphere around him. Unused to fighting for so long, his plan seemed to have shifted to outlasting everyone else.

“You made a Moon vow, damn you!”

“Yes, and I was very careful not to harm you in the process. Ultimately, it doesn’t matter. Even if I had stayed on your side, you’d still have lost.”

Dallion finished casting a new pearl of destruction, then summoned an ingot to propel it forward. The forbidden spell burned through the archbishop’s aether sphere, yet no sooner had it done so than Simon cast a second, smaller one around him.

“The Moonstones aren’t enough to show me everything, but I still see enough fragments,” he said. “There’s still a way out for you. Change sides. The Moons

will forgive you. The plan was mine, so I'll be the one banished, but you'll remain in this world. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"After what you did, you think I'll trust anything you say?" Dallion infused his harpsisword with spark.

The pragmatic part of him considered the option. Only three remained against the Moons. Euryale wasn't a real conqueror, so she wouldn't be punished, either. Just Jeremy and Simon would get the blame, and Moons know they deserved it. It was the pair that had brought things to this point—plots within plots all for the sake of their own obsession. As long as they were gone Dallion didn't need to become a Moon.

"You can't take the step, can you?" Simon smiled. "That's the difference between you and Jeremy. Those who follow the path of magic are willing to take any opportunity to get what they want. Those that follow the path of the empath hesitate to take any opportunity, fearing the effects it would have on everyone else. Neither's a good fit for the world, but if I have to choose, it won't be Jeremy."

See the future. Dallion focused mentally.

He didn't have any Moonstones left, but he didn't need to see that far forward. All he wanted was a few seconds ahead, and that was something his mind trait should allow him. It was the trait of instances and echoes, so that meant it was also the trait of foresight. What was combat splitting but looking at slivers of the future? If one mastered it, they could see instances of the entire world. If they focused even more...

Dallion saw Euryale fighting her deity. The dragons and Lux did little to faze the White Moon. With the explosions of Jeremy's rockets fading away, Emion effortlessly countered the chunks of rock that Lux was propelling her way. Flames and lightning bolts fared no differently, which was why Euryale risked it all on a final charge... and failed.

Dallin felt a jolt of pain as he saw two bolts pierce her chest, followed by a rectangle that she had left the party. His heart tightened in horror, yet that wasn't the only thing he saw. Simon had taken advantage of the distraction and cast a protective sphere around Dallion. Once fully formed the sphere was impenetrable and spiral strikes were absorbed with no effect.

So, that was the plan—imprisoning Dallion wasn't harming him. On the contrary, it could be considered keeping him safe from all the fighting going on.

The vision abruptly ended, ripped away from reality. Dallion didn't quit, though, instantly focusing on another. This time, he ignored Euryale's fight, anchoring his attention to Simon.

In this version of the future, Dallion charged forward, performing a multi attack. His strength, combined with the spark of his harpsisword, would shatter parts of the aether sphere, though never enough to allow a follow-up attack. It was as if Simon was deliberately allowing him to achieve just enough success to keep trying, but not achieve anything significant.

Suddenly, it made sense. He was stalling, waiting for the moment in which Euryale died. That was his opening. That was also what Dallion had to avoid at all costs. However, two could play at that game.

Gripping his harpsisiwrd, Dallion went on and performed a spiral attack. This, too, had been foreseen by Simon, for he moved down ten feet—just enough to let the attack shatter the sphere without harming him. Clearly, a lot more went into prophetic visions than a simple sliver of the future. The archbishop had probably been careful to observe all combat-oriented outcomes, which meant he had a ready plan of action.

What do you think about this, then? Dallion flew straight at him.

Similar to the vision snippet, Simon moved away, though at such a speed that Dallion could easily catch up. At this point, he'd maintain just enough of the protective spell to create the illusion that he was vulnerable. Yet, Dallion didn't attack. Letting go of both his weapons, he continued straight on towards the aether sphere.

It took a fraction of a second for him to get there. At this speed, Simon didn't have the means to move away to avoid collision, so he did the only thing he could—break the spell.

“Got you!” Dallion burst into instances. He had learned to be cautious when dealing with enemies of such caliber. As Hannah and Adzorg had taught him, it was when victory seemed inevitable that one was at his most vulnerable.

The harpsisword flew back to Dallion's hand, but before he could use it to strike, a massive ray of destruction vaporized four-fifths of his instances.

Immediately, Dallion split again, expecting to face off against a Moon. Instead, he saw Jeremy less than half a mile away.

“Good job,” the Tamin emperor said without a note of apology. “Now for the final move.” He flew past Dallion.

Lux, Gem, Aqi, get Eury away from Emion! Dallion ordered through his realm as he flew after Jeremy. Tell everyone to join us.

A trail of instances emerged after Dallion, making sure that the vision he'd seen didn't come to pass. Thankfully, the outcome was different. With Lux still propelling solid objects, the White Moon couldn't outright go on the offensive.

There was a sharp burst of annoyance coming from Euryale. She wasn't pleased with the meddling, but smart and experienced enough not to make things worse by going against the familiars Dallion had lent her. What was more, she had continued the practice of summoning objects for the firebird to propel at the Moons. Since the world had become a realm allowing for awakened powers, she had no reason not to.

“Where are we headed?” Dallion caught up to Jeremy. “I hope your new plan is better than your aim.”

“You're fine. I could risk Simon getting away.”

“With Lyulak gone, we're still three against five.”

“That’s why it’s time to flip the script.” Jeremy’s face lost all expression. “We’re going for Astreza.”

Chapter 956: Void Tech vs Moon Wave

As Dallion cast another pearl, he concentrated on future visions. Despite all his efforts, he proved incapable of glimpsing anything further than half a second away. As Simon had said, prophetic visions required a lot. Then again, half a second was a long time.

No sooner had he completed the spell than he released it in the air, then took a sharp turn.

CRITICAL HIT

Dealt damage increased by 200%

Darrar suddenly emerged, smack into the forbidden spell. Like Galatea, the Orange Moon grabbed the part of her body where the pearl had taken hold. Her fingers pulled it out of the magic threads that composed her being. Without sentiment or hesitation, the Moon tightened her grip, causing the spell to dissolve.

MINOR HIT

Dealt damage increased by 10%

MINOR HIT

Dealt damage increased by 10%

MINOR HIT

Dealt damage increased by 10%

A series of explosions flashed all over the Moon’s body, propelling her towards the horizon.

“And that’s the last,” Jeremy said, letting go of a rocket crossbow. It was of similar design to the one Dallion had made, only smaller—the perfect close-range weapon, provided one had the opportunity to use it.

“The last?”

“The last one capable of catching up,” Jeremy clarified as he cast a speed enhancement spell.

Both of them combat split, creating a new mass of instances. Several of them were instantly shot out of existence by Emion.

Aqui, get here, Dallion ordered. I need you to take us—

Suddenly, his clothes tightened. This wasn’t another realm of air being manipulated again. Rather, he felt someone gain control of the items’ realms all at once. Normally, that shouldn’t be possible. Realm invasions weren’t that fast and required direct contact. On the other hand, it could be said that every realm was in contact with the real world. As long as one had full dominion over it, they could easily invade anything.

I won’t let you,

Dallion thought.

ITEM AWAKENING

The sky vanished, replaced by a room made of Moon platinum.

You are in a vast platinum domain.

Defeat the guardian to change the HARPSISWORD's destiny.

The space was wider than Dallion remembered it. All the furniture and decorations were made of water that rose up from the liquid flood. In the corner of the room, next to a pair of massive windows, rose a large harp, but there was no one at it this time. Instead, Giaccia stood ready in hull nymph armor, holding a thin saber.

REALM INVASION

92% ongoing

A red rectangle glowed in the center of the room.

“You caught on, didn’t you?” Felygn said. Once again, he had taken on the appearance of a skinny human teen in green hair. Torn green jeans, a green t-shirt, and a pair of green rollers composed his outfit, making him seem even more menacing for some reason. “Maybe it’s better this way.”

“You could have done this from the start,” Dallion said. In his mind, he was going through options of what to do. Magic was the Green Moon’s weakness. As long as he could devise a method to use that adequately, there was a good chance for him to stop the invasions. “Why didn’t you?”

“I told you. Even we’re bound by rules.” Felygn smirked. “Actually, that’s not true. We’ve never had to fight to such an extent. All challenges so far lasted less than a tenth of this fight.”

This tale has been unlawfully lifted from Royal Road; report any instances of this story if found elsewhere.

COMBAT INITIATED

Dallion didn’t wait, attacking right away with a magic music strike.

Threads of magic rose up from the floor, surrounding Felygn. Giaccia also joined in Dallion’s attack, causing thousands of water droplets to shoot out towards the Moon.

Vines emerged out of the Moon’s body, wrapping him as a shield as the projectiles struck. The threads of magic, on the other hand, managed to cut in deeper.

MINOR HIT

Dealt damage increased by 10%

MINOR HIT

Dealt damage increased by 10%

Two rectangles emerged, at which point the entire vine cocoon exploded, filling the room with projectiles of its own.

A wall of water rose up in front of Dallion, quickly stopping the vine fragments. Spikes emerged from it as it then flew in the direction of the Moon. Before it could do any harm, an identical wall rose in front of Felygn. Both blocks of water slammed against one another, creating a blast of thunder.

“You’ve really established a connection with your items,” the Moon said as the water splashed down to the floor. “A pity you never got the hang of dealing with people.”

“I’ve done well enough.”

“You certainly think you do.” Felygn sighed. “Anyone can succeed when facing someone weaker on all levels. It’s how you deal with those equal in strength that matters.”

More Moon-talk. Was that a comment on Simon? Or was it a warning about Jeremy? There was no way to be certain. Jeremy was definitely one to betray Dallion at the first opportunity, but he still needed him if they were to take down the Blue Moon.

Dallion summoned his aura sword and was just about to attack Felygn directly, when the deity suddenly vanished.

INVASION ENDED

That was suspiciously easy. Holding the sword, Dallion split into instances, in case any of the Moon tried to repeat the invasion.

“Too easy,” Giaccia agreed with him.

Come to think of it, the entire fight so far had been. Had the Moons had a bit more ingenuity, they could have killed off the challenges within moments. The aether wall, while wide and impenetrable, shouldn’t have been a deterrent. The latest attacks proved that. The Moons could have resorted to their domain powers of personal abilities. Instead, they acted like overpowered awakened.

Suddenly, a thought emerged. What if they really were overpowered awakened? The thought wasn’t new. They themselves had said that they were originally brought to this world by the Eighth Moon. Could that mean that they had started out as Dallion? After so much time in this world, it would be normal that their ingenuity and creativity would fade away as they focused more on rules relating to this place. The reason they had become stronger in the course of the fight was because they were copying what they had seen, adding elements of their own powers into the mix. Continuing that logic...

“Crap!”

Dallion immediately returned to the real world.

“We mustn’t take him on!” he shouted, splitting into instances. “Astreza is the epitome of humans!”

Unfortunately, it was already too late. Jeremy had been right when he had said that only Dararr could stop them from reaching the Moon of Awakening. Twenty miles away, staying perfectly still in the sky, was the Blue Moon. The deity wasn’t wearing any armor. He hadn’t summoned any weapons or minions to fight for him. He just stood there, looking and waiting.

Gleam, can you fly? Dallion asked.

There was no answer.

Ruby, I’m trusting you on this. Focusing on the world realm, Dallion pulled the entire crater of the fallen south, causing it to emerge beneath. Fill the skies!

The glow of a four-circle magic spell, thousands of miles wide, flickered below. Billions of shardflies who entered this world in magic combined their strength to cast a single spell, all aimed to make them as fast and deadly as lightning bolts. Days ago, during the wars of conquest, Dallion had considered using the spell to render them capable of cutting through any obstacles and conquering enemy cities. He had never expected them to use the spell on such a grand scale, but he was more than happy that they did.

Like reverse-rain, the insects flew up into the sky: only a few hundred scattered about, followed by more and more until an entire mass of emerald green rose up like a cloud.

“Nice touch,” Jeremy said. “That’ll give us a few seconds alone with Astreza.”

“That’s not the point! They’re to help us get away from him!”

“Why do that?”

“He’s the Moon of humans! The crossbows, the rockets, the living armor... He has the knowledge to create it all. Even if he’d had forgotten, he’s been watching us fight from the start and—”

“Gorgon!” Jeremy yelled. “Keep the Moons from interfering.”

The emperor’s armor transformed, growing to twice its initial size. That much could be expected. What Dallion didn’t expect to see was a pair of heavy machine guns attached to the armor’s arms. Not only that, but he could clearly tell that the alloy they were made from contained void matter.

“We’ll take care of the Blue Moon.” Jeremy started shooting.

At their speed, the distance between them and Astreza had been halved five times so far, making him well within range. The weapon terrified Aquilequia, who flashed out of existence appearing a mile away.

“Void tech?” Dallion asked in disbelief.

“Keep your trump card as the final resort,” Jeremy replied, completely missing the point.

Damn you! Dallion cursed mentally. There were some lines he didn't want to cross, yet the Tamin emperor had done it for him. From here on, he had no choice but to resort to the most destructive weapons and abilities he knew would hurt Moons.

Letting go of his harpsisword, Dallion summoned his whip blade. As Jeremy continued forward, like a fighter jet zooming in on its target, Dallion extended his magic threads through his blades. Lines and symbols spread along the weapons until the entire aura sword and whip blade were covered from hilt to tip. Then, in the blink of an eye, both weapons turned dark purple.

That's not a spell I taught you, dear boy, Adzorg said in amazement, witnessing his pearl of destruction be transformed into something equally horrifying.

"I'm an otherworlder," Dallion said beneath his breath. "I excel in copying and modifying things."

Massive sheets of Moon platinum materialized between Astreza and his attackers. The Blue Moon also excelled at copying what he had seen.

Sparks flew as void bullets struck the defensive sheets, shredding them to bits. That didn't alarm Astreza one bit. Instead, pulled up a chunk of the ground below, moving it between him and his attacker.

Now it was Dallion's turn. Striking with both swords, he performed two merged line attacks, like the letter X.

The massive chunk of rock was instantly split into four, despite its size, allowing Jeremy to blast it apart with another rocket bolt he launched from his armor.

Void bullets and rockets? Dallion thought. That definitely seemed like a lot of firepower, but the main issue remained: projectile weapons remained close-range weapons. Astreza, like all Moons, would find it child's play to avoid them. That was unless Dallion managed to strike him with either of his mana devouring blades.

"I'll take him on from the other side," he shouted, splitting off from Jeremy. "Don't hit me!"

The other laughed, but made no promises.

What about me? Aquilequia asked. As most powerful creatures, she was eager to take part in the fight, yet aware she was completely outmatched.

Go help Eury, he ordered. And keep an eye on Jeremy's dragon.

The order was given loud and clear. Just because they were allies, Dallion didn't trust the Tamin emperor. When the party was composed of seven, it was easier to guarantee he wouldn't pull something fishy. Ironically, Simon had beaten him to that, wasting the party's initial advantage. Now, there were only three left. If Jeremy would do any betraying, it would be now.

A range marker appeared on the Blue Moon's shoulder.

Instantly, Dallion struck with his whip blade. The fragments split apart, held together only by a magic thread. The tip made an attempt to come into contact with the marker, but was blocked by a very common cast iron shield that emerged out of thin air.

Despite everything said so far, the Blue Moon didn't seem particularly imaginative.

Splitting into two hundred instances, Dallion attacked again. This time, he pulled back his whip blade, performing a spiral attack with his aura sword.

In his mind, Dallion was already playing out actions three moves ahead. The longer the Moon remained defensive, the better for him it was going to be. Yet, deep inside, he knew that at some point, Astreza would go on the offensive.

A massive wave of water appeared out of nowhere, absorbing the force of Dallion's spiral attack.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by ASTREZA.

Attack has no effect.

Once that was done, the wave extended, heading straight towards Dallion.

Chapter 957: The Gorgon's Duel

Two more bolts flew past the armadil shield. Despite his best effort, Gem proved incapable of effectively stopping the White Moon's attacks. Vihrogon had been a lot better at the job, but then again, he had an eternity to learn. The aetherfish, despite putting it all, was merely acting as an additional obstacle. Thankfully, that was all Euryale needed. Twisting her upper body, she let the projectiles avoid her, after which she summoned two crossbows and fired all eight rockets at the deity.

Aware of the Moon's skills and abilities, the aim wasn't to hit her outright, but have four pairs of explosions temporarily disrupt her.

"Dark, back!" Euryale ordered.

Attuned to her way of fighting, the green dragon immediately swooped down. Aurun, confident in his own strength, remained where he was, taking on part of the explosion's force.

AVERAGE WOUND

AURUN's health has been reduced by 10%

Having the ability to heal, the massive creature snorted as if to himself.

A bolt that flew through the balls of fire quickly made him reconsider.

MAJOR WOUND

AURUN's health has been reduced by 50%

With a roar, the dragon let out a torrent of fire, then flapped its wings, effectively retreating from the scene.

"Idiot," Eury said beneath her breath. The so-called-great imperial dragon was just like its owner: arrogant, overconfident, yet surprisingly prone to unforced

mistakes. It was almost as if he had something to prove by taking as much abuse as possible on the battlefield.

Magic symbols appeared on Dark's scales, causing dozens of illusory copies of him and the gorgon to emerge, all flying off in different directions.

"Dive into the shardflies," Euryale ordered. "The Moons won't fall for tricks."

As if to confirm her point, two more bolts emerged.

The first was deflected, impressively enough, by Gem. By extending the armadil shield to its limit, the familiar managed to stop one of the projectiles. The other, though, struck the real Dark in the left wing.

MAJOR WOUND

DARK's health has been reduced by 50%

"Dive now!" Euryale ordered.

Roaring in pain, the dragon did just that, descending beneath the shardfly cover. The creatures, aware that she was the wife of their domain ruler, formed a bubble of space, avoiding the gorgon and her mount.

You okay? A voice asked.

A single red shardfly flew out of the mass of green, landing on Euryale's shoulder.

"Ruby." The gorgon instantly recognized it. "You shouldn't be this close."

Gleam's still weak, the shardfly replied. I must lead.

"You shouldn't be this close to a Moon."

Barely had she said it when a line attack ripped a section of the shardfly cloud, revealing Emion. The White Moon had switched her dartbow for a pair of gauntlet claws.

"Every pretender gets a chance," the Moon said. "If Tiallia had chosen the other side of the continent, you'd have been leading the party and Dal would have been your subordinate."

"I don't have magic." Two blades emerged from Euryale's own gauntlets.

"Not every pretender has the magic trait. Besides, you'd have had Dal and everyone with him," the Moon continued. "You could have taken Priscord, possibly with some support. That would have provided you with enough Moonstones to get Simon to approach. After that..." Emion looked around. "You know the rest."

"Ruby," Euryale whispered. "Fly away."

The shardfly, which had used its natural illusion to grow three times its standard size, started shrinking again. Having lived with Euryale and Dallion for a while back in Nerosal, it could tell when she was dead serious.

Gradually shrinking to his usual size, Ruby flew off. A large part of the shardflies in the area followed him, increasing the empty space within the cloud.

“One attack,” the White Moon said. “Your move. That’s all the advantage I could allow.”

It was a tempting offer, almost too good to be true. The difference in strength was obvious, but if Euryale managed to succeed, she’d reduce the number of Moons by one. Not that that was the most important, though. Doing this increased Dallion’s chances of survival. Jeremy’s plan left a lot to be desired, but he was right—they had a greater chance of defeating the Blue Moon than all the rest. With luck, that would prove enough to complete the challenge.

A mountain slowly rose up from below. Reaching ten feet beneath Dark’s current location, it stopped. The offer was clear—the challenge was meant for the gorgon alone, not friends, allies, or Dallion’s familiars.

“Lux, Gem, go back to Dal,” she said.

No, big sis! The firebird chirped. We’ll help.

“I know you want to, but there’s nothing you can do. The same goes for you too, Dark.”

“You can use a dragon,” the White Moon said. “Being unable to fly is too much a disadvantage.”

“Why the mountain, then?”

“You won’t use this dragon,” the deity clarified. “In a few seconds, the fast one will appear. Your husband has started his fight with Astreza, so he sent the fast one to assist.”

Euryale shook her head.

“Sweet.” The snakes on Emion’s head swirled. “But also fragile. I see why you stuck with him.”

The green dragon let out a low growl, but allowed the gorgon to jump off of it onto the mountaintop. The surface was absolutely level, and almost as smooth as a floor.

“Get out of here, kid.” Eury patted the large creature.

Things will be fine, right? Dark asked.

Unauthorized usage: this tale is on Amazon without the author's consent. Report any sightings.

Eury only smiled.

In the distance, another explosion took place. Apparently, Dallion and Jeremy had also resorted to using rockets in battle. It was unlikely that it provided as large an advantage as they hoped, but there was always a chance it did.

Dark looked at the White Moon, then back at Eury. The usually talkative creature had nothing to say either, so it flapped its wings, quickly disappearing into the surrounding swarm of shardflies.

“Does it matter?” Euryale asked, watching the dragon vanish. “Does it matter who reaches the awakening gate?”

“Everything matters until it doesn’t,” the White Moon replied. “There’s always a benefit to your champion crossing the finish line.”

A series of lightning flashes emerged in the sky, constantly moving closer until it finally stopped in the oasis of space among the shardflies.

You can see the future, Euryale thought.

“And you can try to defy my expectations,” the White Moon countered. “Facing us was never meant to be easy.”

No, nothing was meant to be easy, although some people made it appear to be.

“Aquilequia, be my wings.”

Why should I?

the orange dragon instinctively asked. She remained rebellious, as well as eager and frightened at the same time.

Flapping her wings demonstratively, she puffed up her chest, then slowly flew towards the gorgon. Once she reached fifty feet, Aquilequia vanished in an orange flash, reappearing moments later as a pair of orange wings on Euryale’s armor.

“Win or lose, you’ll let her go,” Euryale demanded, rising into the air. “I’m the one fighting.”

“For a while,” the White Moon replied. “She’s still Dal’s familiar.”

That was a fair point. Euryale nodded, concentrating on the other’s motions.

All the snakes on her head, along with the eyes on her face, followed every minute movement, using it to build up outcomes in her mind. Emion was likely doing the same, with the difference that she could also predict the future. The latter was unlikely, though—there was no challenge in winning a fight that was already decided. Even someone with such an overwhelming advantage would want to have a chance of failure. It was the nature of the gorgons.

“If I don’t make it, tell Dallion that he made life worthwhile,” Euryale whispered. “Go.”

Both gorgons darted at each other simultaneously. The space between them filled with hundreds of markers: guard markers, attack markers, acrobatic markers... Neither even considered using magic or music. Neither summoned any additional weapons, estimating the attack of their opponent.

It was said that the first to make a move was the first to lose. Eury had never followed the principle, even back before she had entered the awakened world. Her entire body bent and twisted, leaving echo after images.

Emion met her approach with a spiral strike directly forward. Avoiding it at this speed and distance was going to be difficult, which was why Euryale didn't even bother, performing a series of point attacks, instead.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by EMION's.

Attack has no effect.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by EMION's.

Attack has no effect.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by EMION's.

Attack has no effect.

Red rectangles stacked up. The gorgon didn't slow down. Each of her attacks was individually weaker, yet in world or realm, there was no such thing as a wasted attack. Like a drop of water wearing away a block of marble, the strikes continued until a different rectangle emerged.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by EMION's.

Attack has no effect.

A single hole had formed in the middle of the spiral attack, allowing Euryale to fly through unscathed. The two were twenty feet from each other now.

Sun Gold tendrils shot out of the gorgon's armor. Only to be consistently sliced off by a series of slashing attacks.

Euryale spun around in dance-like fashion, aiming to strike the deity with a one-eighty kick.

AVERAGE WOUND

Your health has been reduced by 10%

A red rectangle emerged as the gorgon's leg struck the claw gauntlet of the deity.

MINOR STRIKE

Dealt damage is increased by 10%

MINOR STRIKE

Dealt damage is increased by 10%

MINOR STRIKE

Dealt damage is increased by 10%

Three new red rectangles followed as the armor of Euryale's leg extended, piercing the Moon's right arm.

"Got you," Euryale whispered, mentally laughing at her comment. She'd definitely been spending too much time with Dallion.

The armor covering her right arm transformed into a massive blade. She immediately swung in an attack that caught the deity by surprise. The target wasn't Emion, but the gorgon's own leg, severing it from the knee down.

MODERATE WOUND

Your health has been reduced by 20%

The experience was painful, but allowed her to regain her freedom of movement. A multi-attack followed, causing dozens of more rectangles to fill the air.

There was no way to tell how much the remaining health of the Moon was, but there was no denying that it was continuously decreasing.

After a tenth of a second the Moon was able to react, blocking the strikes, while also engaging with several of her own.

Without warning, the attacks on both sides turned into line strikes, cutting into the mass of shardflies around their combat area.

"It's over." The White Moon's palm touched Euryale's stomach.

TERMINAL WOUND

Your health has been reduced by 100%

A point attack drilled through the gorgon's armor, sending chunks of her flying out. There was no surviving this.

"I know..." the gorgon managed to say.

While lethal, the final attack had made the Moon vulnerable, allowing for Euryale to use her armor to drill spikes of sun gold through her enemy. There was no way the deity hadn't foreseen this, and that was exactly what made it worth the risk—the uncertainty of whether the single blow would manage to kill without response or not. Now, both had their answer.

The aria on Euryale's arm glowed. Thousands of thoughts and memories went through her mind in the last instants she had. There was a lot she wished she could have said to Dallion, yet not for a single moment did she feel pity or regret. She had gone through life achieving her goals, which was what any gorgon could hope for. The only thing left was to cherish the journey.

A blue rectangle emerged, displaying the achievement of defeating a Moon. For the first time in her life, Euryale found she didn't have the perception necessary to read the full text.

Elsewhere in the battle area a blue rectangle emerged.

EURYALE has left your party.

Chapter 958: Moon of Awakening

It was naïve to think that facing the Moons would be without losses. Even so, it wasn't something anyone could be prepared for.

Ever since Dallion had moved in with Eury back in Nerosal, he knew that each hunting job could be her last or his. Both of them had accepted it, confident in the other's ability to return alive. With time and levels, the dangers kept on getting stronger and stronger until it had finally happened.

The truth was that Dallion always expected he'd be the one to go first. There had been several times that he almost had. During his latest fight at the Academy, it was Euryale that had helped him survive and win. Now she was gone. The sensation was so foreign that it went beyond sadness, numbing him to everything. The concept felt too foreign to grasp, making it seem unreal.

Realm section damaged

Overall completion 59%

Mountains shot through the layer of shardflies, getting sliced up in the process. Astreza was becoming more and more destructive in his fight, using the world itself against his opponents. As Dallion had become aware, though, the world was not only the Moon's to control.

Reaching out with his domain ruler powers, he took control, shifting the target from himself to the Blue Moon. A brief tug of war ensued, resulting in massive chunks of mountain flying by and not hitting anyone.

That wasn't the only weapon in Astreza's arsenal, sadly. While not engaging in any actual combat, the wave of water around him had grown to the size of a large lake. Acting both as shield and weapon, it absorbed any and all attacks, often repelling just as much force at the attacker. Only two things seemed to be effective against it: Dallion's blades of destruction and the void bullets that Jeremy kept firing with constant intensity.

"I'll take the front," the Tamin emperor said, firing another rocket from his armor.

The large projectile hit the sheet of water surrounding the Blue Moon and stood there, incapable of exploding. Fearing a counterattack, Dallion performed a multi-spiral-attack.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by ASTREZA.

Attack has no effect.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by ASTREZA.

Attack has no effect.

ATTACK NEGATED

Your attack has been absorbed by ASTREZA.

Attack has no effect.

The strength and intensity weren't enough to break through the Moon's defenses, but they managed to hold the water back, preventing it from expanding in Dallion's direction. The force was immediately converted to the other side of the giant blob, sending a wave towards Jeremy.

You're not a nymph, Dallion thought. So, how do you control water?

As a domain ruler, there was nothing that said he couldn't, but it still remained a weird choice. There had to be a reason for that particular choice. Either the Blue Moon was accustomed to using it as a weapon, or—

A strange thought popped into Dallion's mind—one so completely absurd that only a middle schooler from Earth could come up with it. The issue was that in the awakened world, even absurd ideas could become true.

“Fly away!” Dallion shouted as he flew back, simultaneously summoning his armadil shield. “It's not the rocket, it's—”

Before he could finish, all the water surrounding Astreza transformed into fire that burst in all directions.

MINOR WOUND

GEM's health has been reduced by 5%

MINOR WOUND

GEM's health has been reduced by 5%

MINOR WOUND

GEM's health has been reduced by 5%

The shield extended, attempting to block as much of the flames as possible. The raw power was more than it could handle. Thankfully, half a second in Dallion unsummoned it, returning Gem to his personal realm; he had lost enough already.

The two blades combined in one double spiral attack, eating through the flames. This time, there was nothing that could stop them. Fire was meant for attack and didn't have the density of water. Once the shield had taken on the brunt of the burning wave, the spiral attack easily tunneled through to Astreza himself.

For a split second, Dallion caught sight of the Moon's face. The coldness he expected to see wasn't there, just an entity stronger than him and countless of times older.

Astreza looked at Dallion, as an apprentice, but also as someone who could potentially replace him, then struck the air in front of him, meeting the air with a punch.

If you discover this narrative on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report the violation.

ATTACK DE-LEVELLED

Your attack has been de-levelled to a level 50 point attack.

ATTACK DE-LEVELLED

Your attack has been de-levelled to a level 50 point attack.

ATTACK DE-LEVELLED

Your attack has been de-levelled to a level 50 point attack.

Three green rectangles appeared, after which a series of minute bruises appeared on the Moon's knuckles. One couldn't help but feel awe. Right before Dallion's eyes, an attack that was able to destroy mountains was reduced to a low-level punch. Now he understood the Moon's way of fighting. It didn't involve magic, realm invasion, or even human ingenuity. The power he had was the ability to play with the awakened level of anything.

"Simon was your chosen," Dallion whispered. "That's why only he could de-level awakened."

Darting forward, Dallion extended his whip blade, striking Astreza in the shoulder.

WHIP BLADE DE-LEVELLED

The whip blade has been de-levelled to steel.

WHIP BLADE DE-LEVELLED

The whip blade has been de-levelled to steel.

WHIP BLADE DE-LEVELLED

The whip blade has been de-levelled to steel.

Dallion's weapon lost its venomous glow. Meanwhile, the simple fabric the Moon was wearing transformed into sky silver, easily deflecting the attack.

"The reason I don't fight," the Moon began, "is because I'm not good at it. And the reason for that is—"

"That you don't have to be."

Every awakened instinctively feared losing their powers. The moment a person reached level two, they dreaded going back to level one. The Blue Moon was that power. No one ever explained it, not even the Order, and for good reason. If people were fully aware of what it truly meant to be the Moon of Awakening, they would spend all their days cowering in fear.

Now that Dallion had come to that realization, what should he do? Facing a Moon came at a cost. In order to defeat him, the cost had to be greater. After everything he had lost, could he give up, though?

In his mind, Dallion went through the fight so far. What he believed to be a manipulation of water might as well have been that, or it could have been moisture level up to droplets that were leveled up to a mass of water... and then fire. The magic Academy had taught Dallion to select the material

of improved objects, but that was merely a hack. Astreza didn't have to select one among thousands of options—he created the options for others to select from.

“You're not invincible.” Dallion let go of his aura sword. The harpsisword appeared in his hand.

“Your final guardian protector,” the Moon noted. “I can't de-level you or her, but I can still de-level her shell.”

“I know. I'll still try.”

The Moon nodded. There were no attempts to change his mind, no offers of a consolation prize or anything similar. Both could see Dallion's determination to bring this to the end.

“What makes you think I can be defeated?” the Moon asked.

“You can. Otherwise, you wouldn't have allowed the challenge. As you said, even you are bound by rules. This is a trial to pass the sixth awakening gate and there's a way to pass every trial.”

“Maybe so, but there were many trials you didn't pass on the first go.”

A layer of water covered the blade of the harpsisword.

“Then I just have to get better.”

Dallion split into instances. Just as he did, something hit him in the left shoulder.

MINOR WOUND

Your health has been reduced by 5%

All but one of the instances faded away as a projectile drilled through his armor, continuing towards Astreza. Instinctively, Dallion turned around.

Dozens more projectiles were flying at him. Even high-level awakened would have found the speed impressive, though not him. Increasing the density of the layer of water covering his harpsisword, Dallion deflected each of the projectiles, simultaneously seeking their source. There didn't seem to be anything or anyone around, just cloudless sky. His empathy trait, however, let him feel a sensation he hadn't experienced in a long time—the icy nothingness that could be associated with only one thing.

“Void,” he said, through gritted teeth.

“You really have invested a lot in that useless trait,” a voice said, though not the voice Dallion expected.

A segment of air rippled, transforming into a black silhouette. On the silhouette, the face of Jeremy became fully visible. There was more to him than that. The living armor he had been fighting with moments ago had turned completely black. This was no alloy, but pure unadulterated void matter.

“You're the new Star?” he asked in disbelief.

“The Star is just a title,” Jeremy replied unapologetically. “Nothing but the means to an end.”

“But why?”

“I thought you, of all people, would have figured it out by now. There’s only one thing stronger than the Moons.” He aimed his void machine gun at Dallion. “Void matter. Simon did his best to erase the knowledge, but he couldn’t. Otherworlders aren’t fully affected, especially those tasked with helping him cover it all up.”

“You’re an idiot.”

“Because I took advantage of what was offered?” Jeremy smirked. “Give me a break.”

“It will consume everything.”

“The void is a tool that only consumes those weaker than it. After centuries of fighting the stuff, I know its dangers far better than you. And, as I said, it’s only a means to the goal. Some might say becoming the Star is enough. I say becoming a Moon is better.”

Both machine guns aimed at Dallion and opened fire. The scene brought back memories of Dallion’s encounter with the Star’s echo years ago. Back then, it could be said that the balance of power had been the same as it was now. The difference was that Dallion had vastly fewer things to take advantage of. His guardians and familiars were gone or weakened to the extreme. There were no realm surroundings he could use to his advantage, and even magic was a field in which Jeremy was more than a match.

Music spark attack! Dallion slashed with his harpsisword, as he burst into instances.

If void matter had the power to injure Moons, spark had the strength to purge void matter.

Jeremy didn’t hold back, combat splitting to match. Hundreds of instances were everywhere, shooting, attacking and defending each other. Spiral and music spark attacks were met with void projectiles and rocket explosions. Dozens of instances would be wiped out every second, only to be recreated immediately after.

A sphere of water formed around the Blue Moon, in an attempt to minimize the damages. Even so, every now and again, a projectile would pass through, inflicting a certain amount of damage.

“You can’t win,” Dallion shouted as hundreds of spark infused sound threads struck Jeremy.

The Tamin emperor wasn’t in the least bit impressed, casting off all the void layers that had been affected by Dallion’s attacks.

“He can spark all your void out of existence!”

“Dal,” Jeremy laughed. “Have I told you the joke about the bear?” All of his instances tripled in size, turning into a massive living armor made entirely of void. “I don’t need to be stronger than the Moon, just stronger than you.”

Thousands of tendrils shot out, all aimed at Dallion.

Knowing what would happen if they reached him, Dallion did a series of spark infused spiral attacks, vaporizing the void tendrils out of existence. Unfortunately, that was a losing strategy. Just as in his early awakened fights, this had transformed into a battle of endurance. Although his level and trait had risen to near Moon levels, he remained mortal and, after so many spiral attacks, it was starting to show. For the moment, Dallion was managing to put up with the increasing tension in his arms, but each next attack took more and more effort.

Confidence emanated from Jeremy. While he, too, was putting a lot of effort into the fight, it was undeniable that he held the upper hand. In a few seconds, the difference in strength would become more apparent and unless Dallion came up with a game changing strategy, it was unlikely that he’d survive.

Let me deal with him, Giaccia said from within his realm.

No. Dallion was adamant.

There’s no other option. I was almost a world conqueror once. In a realm, I’m more than a match. I’ll only lose you, too.

That’s my decision. When you saved me, I said I’d be with you until the end. The layer of water surrounding the harpsisword hardened, starting to slip from Dallion’s fingers. We are at the end.

Time seemed to stop. Dallion fought through the building pain in his arm to tighten his grip. Meanwhile, the harpsisword guardian kept on the pressure in her attempt to break loose. Before either of them could succeed, a blade of light emerged from the chest of Jeremy’s void armor.

CRITICAL STRIKE

Dealt damage has been increased by 200%

All of Jeremy’s instances but one faded out of existence.

“Did I tell you the joke about the bear?” Simon asked from the void armor’s back.

Chapter 959: Approved Contender

Orange wings detached from Simon’s back, quickly transforming into Aquilequia. Given the sheer terror that she felt towards the archbishop, something extraordinary must have happened to have her agree to such a temporary alliance.

“Simon, you bastard.” Tendrils shot out of the void armor, piercing the archduke. Cascades of red rectangles appeared, leaving no doubt that his health was depleted. And still, he refused to let go of the weapon he was holding. “You foresaw this, didn’t you?”

“You always missed the finer details,” the archbishop noted.

“You used magic.”

“I didn’t have to. You never made sure I was dead.” Spark covered Simon’s entire body, burning through his clothes until even the human outline was gone. The void armor bubbled, as even the furthest void matter wasn’t able to withstand the intensity. Then, in one single moment, it all splattered into the air, desperately trying not to melt.

Only Jeremy was left. He didn’t seem threatening or majestic, just a normal person dressed in normal clothes. The blade of light that had pierced him had vanished, though the wound it had inflicted remained.

Now! Dallion reacted on instinct.

The struggle between him and the harpsisword quickly ended, as dozens of instances flew to the emperor and thrust the weapon into his chest.

TERMINAL STRIKE

Dealt damage is increased by 1000%

The definitive red rectangle emerged in each of the instances. Dallion wasn’t willing to risk it, though.

“Do it,” he ordered.

The harpsisword vibrated, causing tens more rectangles to appear. There was no point in it. Dallion could feel that the emperor had died. To avoid all suspicions, the body dissolved in a cloud of red and purple particles, which gently floated through the air.

JEREMY has left your party.

“Got you,” Dallion said.

The person described as the greatest threat in the world was gone. Sadly, the challenge was not over. Scattering his instances in all directions, Dallion briskly turned around, expecting an attack to follow. There was none. Not only that, but there was no world battlefield, either. Somehow, he found himself floating in an endlessness of air. There were no clouds, no ground, no entities other than himself and Astreza.

I told you I’d help you, Simon’s voice said. This was the only way...

“Simon?” Dallion looked about, yet there was no trace of the archbishop. Had he foreseen all this? Could it be that everything he’d done was for this exact outcome?

“Yes and no,” The Blue Moon said, once again proving that he could read Dallion’s thoughts even in the real world. “He took a chance on you. It was the outcome he thought most favorable, but he couldn’t guarantee you’d succeed.”

There was no joy in the Moon's voice. There was no reproach, either. It was almost as if nothing that occurred so far concerned him.

"Was he really your follower?" Dallion asked.

His left hand tried to tighten his grip round the hilt of the harpsisword, when he suddenly realized that there was nothing there. All his weapons and armor had vanished, leaving him in a simple peasant outfit. He could feel the toughness of the fabric, smell the layers of sweat that had been soaked into it. At the same time, he was unable to feel any guardian.

"Yes, he was one of mine. The one who could have had what it takes, but chose not to use it. Instead, he decided to take the role of protecting the world in all the wrong ways."

Dallion wouldn't have described the archbishop as anything like that. He had to admit that he'd only known him for a sliver of the time the Moon had. There was no denying that despite believing the world to be a game, he had become more attached to it than anyone else. By the looks of it, that was the reason for his failure.

"So, what now?" Dallion asked. "I know I can't defeat you."

"You don't have to. You're the last member of your party. You already control the entire world. We're just waiting for it to become official."

PAN has left your party.

A new rectangle emerged.

"That's why I don't like magic." Astreza crossed his arms. "Too many exceptions. Tiallia might take a bit longer. She was Galatea's."

No sooner had he said that than a second rectangle emerged.

TIALLIA has left your party.

If you spot this tale on Amazon, know that it has been stolen. Report the violation.

"Very funny," the Blue Moon grumbled.

A massive Moon platinum gate appeared in the air, right next to Astreza. It was composed of two parts made entirely of solid bars that glowed with their own light.

APPROVED CONTENDER

The awakening gate has been unlocked. That's all we can offer.

The blue rectangle of the achievement appeared. There were no points, no funny witticism, just a simple explanation of what Dallion already knew.

As Dallion kept on looking at the rectangle, the gates opened, revealing absolutely nothing new.

"Go on," Astreza urged. "He doesn't like to be kept waiting."

“He?” Even after everything, Dallion felt a shiver of excitement pass through his body. “I’m going to the Eight Moon?”

“No, just Galatea. And it won’t come as a surprise that he doesn’t like you much.”

“Galatea?” That was quite anticlimactic. “I guess you’re at the next gate?”

“No. You’ve already had your talk with me.”

The gate flew past Dallion, capturing him like a net would catch a butterfly. The strange thing was that nothing seemed to happen, or so it seemed. After a few moments, faint purple specks of dust became visible, floating through the endless blue. Looking closer, Dallion found that they weren’t dust, but minuscule spheres... spheres containing something within.

ETYBRA – Level 2

CASSANDRIA -Level 1

DINON -Level 1

Purple rectangles emerged above every speck containing only a name and a level. Concentrating, Dallion tried to use his aether vision to see more, but there was nothing.

Hello? He used his empathy trait, yet got no response.

“They’re worlds,” Galatea’s familiar voice said.

The Moon seemed less angry than Dallion thought he would be, taking on his nymph appearance. All his clothes were made out of liquid aether, making a set of robes that probably had gone out of fashion several eras ago. On his shoulder, Aether—the divine aetherbird familiar—stretched its wings.

“I didn’t expect you’d make it,” the Moon said in a dismissive tone. “Not Tiallia, either. She went overboard too many times.”

With a Moon like you, how wouldn’t she? Dallion thought, causing the aetherbird to chirp in laughter.

Galatea didn’t find it remotely amusing, yet continued, pretending as if nothing had happened.

“Anyway, you made it through the final gate, so you get to—”

“The final gate?” Dallion interrupted. “This is the sixth gate. There are seven Moons.” The moment he said it, he knew that he was wrong. “Eight. He quickly corrected himself. There are eight Moons.”

“Wrong,” the Purple Moon said flatly. “On so many counts. There were eight Moons, but never at once. When Devana summoned us, she ceased being a Moon. That moment, she became the world.”

“I saw the carvings in the dryad temples,” Dallion countered. “There were eight.”

“Seven Moons and one world.” Galatea reached in front of him.

A purple sphere—larger than the others—floated up, stopping between the Moon and Dallion. As large as a bowling ball, it glistened, covered by a layer of aether. It took less than a second for Dallion to recognize what it was—he himself had used maps to create a version of it during the war of conquest.

AWAKENING WORLD – LEVEL 3

“This world,” Galatea continued. “The shape, the rectangles, the rules that even we are bound by—that’s all that’s left of the eight Moon.”

“The dryads were worshiping nature as a deity?” Dallion could barely believe it.

“On and off. For the most part, they just picked up a few things from the colossi—the initial rulers of the world. Felygn was overly generous with his trait back then, letting dryads talk to guardians more than they should. Between that and the titans’ remnants in the world, some of them managed to weave a new thread into their beliefs. Naturally, Simon took it upon himself to erase any such memory he could find.”

“But he couldn’t erase what was in the world items,” Dallion added.

Seven Moons orbiting the eight. It sounded too simple to be true, though at the same time it also felt right. Unlike the Seven worlds the races had been brought from, this was the place in which everything was possible. Only here could the current Moons manifest their powers, granting people with awakening powers, traits, and skills.

“And as for the awakening gates—” the Purple Moon cast a quick spell “—you went through it in order to get here.”

A small square box emerged in front of Dallion. Looking closely inside, he saw that it wasn’t a box, but a room—one without doors or windows in which the only thing was a blue rectangle with “**YOU ARE LEVEL 1**” written on it.

Dallion thought back to that moment, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t remember what happened moments before he had found himself in the room. He remembered most of his life on Earth, although the faces of people had faded away. It was only that sliver of time that he couldn’t account for.

“The first awakening gate is the toughest and the simplest. All you have to do is answer a single question. Do you want to enter this world?” The Moon flicked a finger, causing the sealed off room to disappear. “You said yes.”

“Just like Alice in Wonderland,” Dallion thought. He didn’t remember much of the book. Other than a few cartoon and movie adaptations, he couldn’t be bothered to read the thing, especially since it had been required for school.

In his mind, he recalculated the awakening gates. The first was at level one, the second at level five, then at ten, twenty, forty, eighty, and now this. It sounded a lot more logical, now that it had been

explained. No doubt, the Moons had seen to it that everyone forgot that little detail. No. That sounded like something Simon would do. If every noble knew that world conquest was all that was needed to pass through the final gate, the wars would never end.

“Didn’t you see it strange that nearly no otherworlder had a desire to return to their world? You didn’t only agree to come here, you wanted to do so.”

“Jiroh wanted to go back.”

“Yeah, Dararr made a bit of a mess with her. Make your chosen follow the path of the traveler and she’d want to go to a place no one else could. She was the favorite to get here. If she hadn’t become obsessed with returning home, she’d have obtained the empathy trait from the world items your guild was exploring. She’d also have found that Aether was locked up in her sister.”

The aetherbird on the Moon’s shoulder chirped again. There was no doubt in Dallion’s mind that it would have offered to grant magic to anyone who’d free it.

“You arranged everything so she’d be the one, and she still found a way to tell you to fuck off.” Dallion cracked a bitter smile.

“We don’t arrange. We guide to what’s there. While there’s a slight difference depending on the person that makes it, it’s not that significant that we’d start fighting each other over it. Call it aesthetic differences. We might have various tastes, but we all want the best awakened there is. Everyone’s story starts differently, but as long as you fight your way through your inner demons, then prove through your actions and abilities that you’re the best person in the world, you get to take on the job.”

“I’m to become the new Blue Moon?”

Silence followed, only broken by the aetherbird flying to Galatea’s other shoulder.

“No,” the Moon said after a brief pause. “You get to become the new Architect. It’s your job to level up the world.”

Chapter 960: Leveling up the World

Dallion’s entire awakened life flashed through his eyes. It was safe to say that there had always been challenge, strife, and on occasion loss, yet never like it had been in the last few months.

“This is what it was all about?” He didn’t even try to hide his anger. “So many sacrificed themselves so someone could level up the world?”

“Don’t give me that.” The Purple Moon frowned. “If you didn’t have the heart to do this, you wouldn’t be here. Was it different when you brought millions of dryads into the world to fight for you? All that was so you stood a chance at reaching the gate. No one could be forced to become the Architect. Everyone who tried did so because they thought they were better than the alternative.”

Splitting into instances, Dallion tried summoning a weapon. None of his weapons responded. Three of his instances proceeded to cast a spell. Magic seemed to be still in effect, though the lack of reaction on Galatea's part made Dallion fade those instances before completion.

He had just gone through a war with the Moons. Nothing would be gained by losing his temper now. Ultimately, what angered him the most wasn't all the ones that died, or the friends he'd personally lost; it wasn't even Euryale sacrificing herself for him; it was the knowledge that Galatea was right. There were so many points at which he could have stopped, had he wanted. He could have stayed in Dherma after the defeat of Aspion. Odds were he would have gotten along with Gloria, married, and even had children, leading a calm and potentially fulfilled life in the middle of nowhere. He could have remained in the Icepicker guild, climbing up the ranks to lieutenant or even captain. Even later, he could have remained a hunter, marrying Euryale years before he did and continuing to roam the world fighting wilderness monsters and exploring ruins. Simon himself, despite his many faults, had specifically offered Dallion the option to give up on leveling and join the Order. It was Dallion who had refused, seeking to become a noble, and then more.

"I'm the eye of a hurricane," he repeated the words Hannah had told him in the past. "Hurting everyone around."

"All Architects were," the Moon said. "One has to have experienced great lows to have a basis for comparison, and also the strength to push through."

"What if Jeremy had come here?" Dallion asked. "Or anyone who became a Star in order to get here?"

"You've glimpsed Aether's memories. There've been many Stars who took advantage of the void to gain strength. None of them made it here. And if they did, they'd be very disappointed."

"Why would they? They get to shape the world."

"And dispel all the void in the process. That's the real role of the architect, one that even a Moon couldn't achieve. Simon thought he'd come up with a solution, sending high-level awakened to keep the void from seeping in. You saw how that worked out."

Dallion looked at the floating globe. It seemed so fragile, exceptional even with the current scars. In the end, it remained one giant realm. That's why the final trial involved conquering it. The Moons were nothing more than overseers. The real item guardian was the original Moon that had summoned them—the "Eight Moon." Only by gaining control over it could one claim to have fulfilled the requirements.

"Defeat the guardian to change the land's destiny." Dallion shook his head.

"What are the limits?"

"You've done this before, you should know. Your imagination is the limit. The first architect turned the world into one massive arena in which the strong clashed to determine their worth, the second created an eternal city of beauty and splendor. You be you."

“Can I bring back Eury?” Dallion snapped.

“Actually, you can.”

Dallion instantly switched his attention from the globe to the Moon.

“You are the Architect,” the Moon repeated with a sigh of annoyance. “You’ve brought the banished before, you can do it again on a massive scale. There’s hardly anything surprising about that.”

He could bring back the dead? That didn’t seem right. It was almost as if this was part of the awakening trial. While Dallion had brought back item guardians and even, through a combination of skills and magic, placed them into the real world, they had been banished. They weren’t living in the normal sense of the world. Could it be that it didn’t matter? Then, it suddenly hit him.

“The whole fight was an awakening trial,” he said.

“Close, but no. It was the world’s awakening realm, our realm. The Moonstone emblem was just a key for people to reach us, people that some of us thought had the potential of turning into the Architect. How many times did you visit awakening altars for a chat, or ask for us to appear in your dreams? The emblem would have let you do that.”

“Simon lied.” Dallion almost found it funny. “He knew what the outcome would be, so he told all world conquerors that it’s the only chance they had at conquering the world and becoming a Moon.”

“There were others before him, but yes.”

“None of those who challenged you were killed. They were placed in one of these worlds.” He looked about.

“Sort of, though the reasoning is correct. It’s all part of the world’s rules.”

“What about my grandmother? Can I bring her back as well?”

“You can bring back anyone that’s banished. From anywhere. You can pluck any guardian from its item. You can sculpt the world, rearrange the continents, fill it with magic creatures.” Galatea waved his hand. “All of your knowledge and experience will also bleed in.”

“What about their memories? Can I bring back those as well?”

This time, the response wasn’t immediate. The Purple Moon looked at the globe.

“No.” He looked back at Dallion. “Not quite. The people of the world will only have the memories of the world. Whatever you change the world into will always have been. The current age will be nothing more than a myth that everyone sort

of knows. However, that doesn't apply to otherworlders. They will keep their memories."

That wasn't the answer Dallion was hoping for. It meant that none of his family—his awakened world family—would remember him. All his friends and acquaintances would have no idea who he was or remember any of the things they went through. On the other hand, he'd still have Euryale.

"What about Jeremy, Simon, and the others? Will they remember?"

"There's nothing you could do about that. The only thing you could do is cast them out back to their worlds. The same goes for your wife, but if you do, she won't be able to return. Awakened only get to pass through the first gate once."

It could be argued that there were exceptions to the rule. Adzorg had almost created a device to connect worlds, although with what the consequences were, no one would be willing to make a second attempt.

The narrative has been illicitly obtained; should you discover it on Amazon, report the violation.

"Alright, how do we do this?" Dallion asked.

"Just place your hand on the globe and think what you want the world to turn into. The rectangles will tell you if you try the impossible."

"Just like improving an item," Dallion said, although he knew it wasn't. "Any chance I can get rid of you?"

For the first time, Galatea curved his lips in a display of genuine amusement.

Floating up to the world. Dallion placed his hand on it and concentrated.

AWAKENING WORLD Level increased.

The WORLD has leveled up to Level 4.

A bright white glow surrounded the globe, purging any and all void matter within it. For a while at least, everything would be perfect—nothing would break or crack, the wilderness would be deprived of void monsters, there'd be no void tendrils corrupting people. Of course, that was only going to last for a while. The void would seep in, bringing what comes with it. The awakened would try to counter it, partially succeeding until millennia from now, another Architect would be needed to repeat the process. Thankfully, that wouldn't be Dallion.

I want for the world to be as beautiful as it originally was, Dallion thought. Including the wilderness.

WORLD restored.

Do you want there to be magic creatures?

A yellow rectangle emerged.

"Sure," Dallion replied. "And I want all the banished to return."

The SEVEN RACES are part of the new age.

Do you want the ancient races to return?

“Them too,” Dallion said to the yellow rectangle.

The ANCIENT RACES are part of the new age.

“I want Eury to be back, but none of the others.” Some Dallion wouldn’t risk leaving in the world. Others, he thought, deserved to return to their worlds. Hopefully, they would agree with his decision.

Otherworlder EURYALE is part of the new age.

Otherworlder SIMON has been returned to his world.

Otherworlder AKLAFF has been returned to his world.

Otherworlder TIALLIA has been returned to her world.

Otherworlder LYULAK has been returned to his world.

Otherworlder JEREMY has been returned to his world.

“I want Nox back as well.”

IMPOSSIBLE REQUEST

NOX is a void creature and cannot be part of the new age.

“What?”

Galatea hadn’t said that. Quite the contrary. He had specifically stated that it was impossible to prevent the void from seeping in. As such, would a single crackling matter?

“He’s part of my realm and I want him to stay!”

IMPOSSIBLE REQUEST

NOX is a void creature and cannot be part of the new age.

“He’s my familiar, which by your rules makes him part of me. So, either he stays or you break your rule that cracklings can’t be part of the new age.”

IMPOSSIBLE REQUEST

The ARCHITECT cannot be part of the new age.

Dallion glared at the Purple Moon. It would have been easy to say that he had been ticked, but it was also he who had done it to himself. After improving a world or sphere item, one was ejected out of the realm. Since Dallion had improved the world itself, there was only one place he could be ejected to.

“I’d say I was sorry, but I never particularly liked you,” The Purple Moon said as purple particles ate into everything Dallion could see. “Don’t worry, though. Your emotions will stay behind as well.”

Everything had turned into a mass of purple pixels. Dallion tried to split into instances, but there was no difference. He was in an endlessness of nothing, and in each of his instances, the pixels on the edges were fading out fast.

You bastard! I’ll get you for this, if it’s the last thing—

An invisible force grabbed hold of Dallion yanking him up.

“Dal?” a distant voice said. “You okay, man?”

Okay? What sort of stupid question was that? Dallion tried to answer, but the wave of pain that swept through his body quickly made him stop. His head was thumping like crazy, as were his left hand and ass.

“He’s moving!” someone else said.

A sharp smell of tobacco, alcohol, and sweetish sweat drilled into his nostrils, forcing his eyes open.

“What the heck?” he mumbled, seeing half a dozen people grouped above him, looking down in concern.

All of them were young, with expressions of guilt and concern, and not remotely familiar.

“He’s fine,” a blond, freckled boy said in relief. For some reason, he seemed marginally more familiar than the rest. “Just a slip up.”

Dallion tried to stand up. From what he could make out, he was on the floor of a rather dirty place. He could see a few tables about, and five times as many people. One would be tempted to call the place a run-down inn, if it wasn’t for the metal cans and plastic bottles scattered about.

“What happened?” Gravity felt heavier than usual.

Instinctively, Dallion tried to cast a spell to move off the filthy ground. His fingers made the motions without fail, yet nothing happened—no spell circles, no symbols, not even a single magic thread.

“You fell off the table, dude,” the freckled replied, moving in to support Dallion’s weight. Now that the initial fright had worn off, he seemed to find the entire thing funny. “The way you went down, I thought you cracked something.”

“I’m fine.” Dallion pulled away. “Where am I?”

“Dude.” A bit of alarm returned to the other’s glance. “You really slammed your head hard. We’re just off campus. It’s the traditional welcome party for the first day of college.”