

New World 101

Chapter 101: Breaking Through

I finished my war cry before falling back onto my knees. I glanced around at the destruction. Six blocks were leveled, piles of rubble all that remained of them. Gaping holes littered several stores nearby, and a few houses stood on their last legs.

Of in the distance, Torix's jaw slowly reformed. His fire eyes were glowing, more like coals than flame. Kessiah was covered in the blood of the eldritch. The wounds on her were few. During my fight, I kept my strikes intent on killing the eldritch armor more than her. She wouldn't die like she was. There would be plenty of scars though.

Hod might be dead somewhere off in the distance. I was too tired to stand and find out. He was probably just knocked unconscious. Since the eldritch had been Dakhma, we would all gain a ridiculous amount of experience. Before checking out my attributes and levels though, I opened my notifications. Something I'd been working towards for months finally showed up.

Legendary Skill Unlocked! Combines the three mythical skills, The Coming Tide, Volatile Carnage, and Boundless Storm into the single legendary skill called, Force of Nature. Half of remaining skill points in these three mythical skills are rewarded. Total Bonus tree points from fusion | 1352 | Below is a list of the legendary skills other bonuses.

Enhances skill and technique with all skills that compose the skill. There is no cap for a Legendary skill, meaning your potential with the ability is limitless. Legendary skills cannot assimilate skills. Instead, a legendary skill can be used in the creation of other unique and mythical grade skills. A legendary skill can be used for earning a class. Example Classes: Overseer, Speaker, or Breaker. Some classes are hidden and need quests from Schema to unlock. The difficulty of upgrading Force of Nature does NOT increase or decrease with the level of the skill. Level 1 is just as difficult to increase as level 1,000. For every 100 points in Force of Nature, you gain 5 Strength, 5 Dexterity, 2 Constitution, 2 Intelligence, and 1 perception. These free attributes are determined by the legendary skill's needs. If your legendary skill needs willpower and perception to operate, leveling it will grant willpower and perception. For every 100 points in Force of Nature, 5% increase in range and power of Gravitational, Telekinetic, and Runic abilities. Mana cost is reduced by 1% as well.

It was by far the longest notification for a skill I had ever received. I must have learned the skill when I felt like everything synched up all of a sudden. After reading over the bonuses of the skill, there was a few solid bonuses to exploit. The extra attributes were a pleasant surprise considering no other skill gave them. The classes and titles might come in handy later. I would have to wait for those until after facing off against Yawm. They might help me figure out what I'll be doing after killing the monster.

The extra bonus for magic was an awesome surprise as well. After doing a quick bit of math, I could make molding gravity and telekinesis manaless once I had 10,000 skill points in Force of Nature. Easy peasy. Considering the skill didn't become harder to learn with level, that might be possible.

Curious about what the skill said, I checked it out.

Force of Nature(lvl 7) – You are nature given fury. Enhances all techniques and application of skills within this ability, including: Close Range Combat, Runic abilities, Telekinesis, and gravitational magics.

Bonus Attributes: 5 Strength, 5 Dexterity, 2 Constitution, 2 intelligence, 1 Perception

Ability Bonus: 5%

Mana Cost Reduction: 1%

First up was the person beside me. Kessiah was still breathing, and after checking her pulse, she was stable. Moving wasn't so difficult anymore, so I walked over and inspected Torix. He seemed fine, the dim lights of his eyes growing. I paced over towards the house Hod was lodged in.

Low and behold, Hod was fine. Both his wings were broken, and a crack ran up his metal beak, but he would live too. I walked over, tearing off strips of my armor. Getting the armor off was a struggle, but I managed it. I bent Hod's wings back into shape, using the armor strips as splints. Hod screamed whenever I realigned his bones, but after that he settled down.

I carried him towards Torix, setting them beside each other. Keeping watch of them would be easier with them all beside each other. Since I had some time to think, I poured all my excess mana into the eldritch rune on my arm. It was like agony from way back in BloodHollow all over again.

It made my ridiculous mana generation useful, so I counted my blessings. Once my mana was channeling, I walked over and picked up Kessiah. With telekinesis reinforcing my feet, I carried her over without digging into the ground. I set her beside Torix and Hod before flopping backwards.

I pushed my back off the ground, my legs flat against the ground. I turned to Kessiah, seeing her carbon fiber pouch unharmed. It was a tough damn compound. I grabbed it from her side. I opened it, finding red dungeon cores inside them. I stuck my hand into the pouch, a jolt of lightning radiating up my arm.

I ignored the feeling, absorbing cores as I waved my hand around. I needed these things anyways. Considering I already saved Kessiah's life twice, I figured I deserved a few dungeon cores anyways. I needed the extra skill points for investing into my new legendary skill too.

Up till now, I saved my skill points for whenever I reached 90+ in a normal skill. Since the least 10 levels were ridiculously difficult to get, they acted like an easy way of avoiding that crawl. This new legendary skill gave some really nice bonuses though. Combine that with the uniform leveling difficulty, and there wasn't any reason not to invest the points now.

With that in mind, I checked out the number of skill points I had stored up. I found 919 waiting for me. It was a ridiculous number for any skill to reach. I poured them all into Force of Nature. After hitting finalize, I noticed a difference in strength and my reaction speed. It wasn't an enormous shift by any means, but I appreciated it nonetheless.

I created a gravity vortex over my hand. Unlike the attribute bonuses, the difference in the magic was enormous. I put it over me, channeling a bit mana into the vortex. A moment later, I floated off the ground. I shifted the field of gravity, trying to keep it in front of me. It made me fly around.

One second I was stuck to the ground. The next, I dashed through the air like a bird with no wings. It was like falling in a direction. The sense of levity leaving me, the rush of air on my face, it was exhilarating. I dashed over the pile of rubble for a few minutes, savoring my new ability before settling back down.

I tried the same thing with telekinesis. I grabbed a rock ten feet away and lifted it. It wasn't much heavier than normal, if at all. I stood up and walked beside a car. I bent

down and lifted up, lifting the car up with a telekinetic wave. There wasn't any desperate struggle. The mental link stood strong and steady, not wavering.

I set the car down before running over and sitting down beside the others again. Not going off and testing out my new abilities was hard, but I discipline myself. There would be time for that later. Besides, there was a massive payload of attribute points waiting for me.

I gained a little over 400 hundred levels from killing Dakhma/eldritch abomination. I glanced around, analyzing the other's levels. Torix gained over 400 levels. Kessiah and Hod gained 300 levels. Torix was level 1702. Kessiah was 2521. Hod was level 1703. I grinned at Hod being one level higher than Torix. The undead necromancer just couldn't catch a break.

The boost meant the next follower wouldn't even be half as difficult. I intended on making a team and a mission for handling it anyways. I wasn't about to let our group almost get decimated like that again. Torix was right about him having to handle all the logistics. It wasn't fair to put all that on him.

This influx of attributes would help with all that. Before distributing my attributes, I opened my tree menu. I got an enormous amount of tree points from completing my legendary skill. I could finish Obliterator in one fell swoop. That's what I did.

You're horizons are ever growing. If you make a habit of exceeding your limits, then limits cease to exist. Others will box themselves in. Their limits act as comfort, like the walls of a house. You tear those walls down, and you see the world for what it is.

2,000/2,500 milestone reached! II Obliterator unlocked (Tier 4) +100% of total experience gained for levels and skills. This bonus is multiplicative with previous bonuses, not additive. +8 attributes rewarded for every 5 levels over level 1,000.

A boundless sky and a fruitful earth. It is yours for the taking.

2,500/2,500 milestone reached! II Obliterator unlocked (Tier 5) +100% of total experience gained for levels and skills. This bonus is multiplicative with previous bonuses, not additive. +10 attributes rewarded for every 5 levels over level 1,000. Doubles damage when in rifts.

The bonuses were tremendous, as they should be. Doubling my damage in rifts would help if I ever went back and tried killing Etna. It might be a little bit before I could make that happen. With the Obliterator tree finished, I opened my trees menu and checked those out next.

III Vicious(Kill a monster after fighting for over an hour. They must exceed your level by 1000. You must be over level 1000 to unlock this tree.)(0/250) | Killer of Titans(Kill a monster with over 1,000 times your own mass. Constitution over 1,000. Star Matter perk unlocked.)(0/1,500) | Bounty Hunter(Finish an A tier bounty)(0/500)]

The stat trees were interesting. The best bang for my buck would be Vicious, since it increased overall damage. Considering how cheap the points were for the tree, it was an excellent investment. I selected and finished the tree.

Monsters are real, and they look like people. One of those people happens to be you. III Vicious(Tier 1) Unlocked! +3% damage.

Some would say you are the wolf that wears the sheep's skin. If a being dares to come too close, you tear off your skin and show your fangs. Vicious(Tier 2) Unlocked! +6% damage.

The change occurs in an instant. One moment, you're as amiable as a gentle giant. The next, and you become the wrath of untamed anger. Vicious(Tier 3) Unlocked! +9% damage.

These two faces of yours compose the whole of who you are. You are neither completely passive nor utterly aggressive. You show the side that needs to be shown. Vicious(Tier 4) Unlocked! +12% damage.

And may mercy be given to those who unleash the monster lying just beneath your skin. Vicious(Tier 5) +15% damage. +5% damage when losing health.

The tree was a basic stat booster, like I expected. Schema's system was likely balanced around everyone having it, or at least hard asses getting it. The extra damage while losing health was particularly good on me because I was always losing health. With the other Vicious trees, it added up to a 40% bonus in damage all the time.

It was a rock solid addition, especially considering how few points it took to gain the tree. I looked at it like a bargain. With the tree finished, I looked at the trees left. Bounty Hunter looked interesting, but it probably relied on finishing bounties and getting money. Considering I fought with my fists and my armor was my skin, buying things wasn't going to be the most useful.

With that in mind, I poured all the rest of my points into Titan slayer.

To find a true warrior in the vast cosmos is a rarity. Most prefer tackling a problem from an angle or trying to avoid it altogether. You have chosen to face challenges head on, even when they are larger than life. Killer of Titans(Tier 1) unlocked! +20% to total mass. 2% of total level is given as free constitution.

In the truest sense, you've chosen density and size over all else. This road rewards you with skin like metal and bones unbreakable. You've discovered the secret of being invincible. Killer of Titans(Tier 2) unlocked! +40% to total mass. 4% of total level is given as free constitution.

If your body is invincible, then it becomes the ultimate weapon. You are a walking wall, an immovable object. Whether wielding gravity or fighting with your own hands, you unlocked the might of a titan. Killer of Titans(Tier 3) unlocked! +60% to total mass. +6% of total level is given as free constitution.

And with the might of a titan, you have chosen to stand on the shoulders of giants. Unlike others, they are not giants that you use. They are corpses you created by sheer size alone. Killer of Titans(Tier 4) unlocked! +80% to total mass. +8% of total level is given as free constitution.

After I finished reading all the notifications, I couldn't believe them. Whenever I hit finalize on my screen, I would double in weight. Considering the bonus from my legendary skill too, I would be like a different person.

Anticipation for that moment filled my head as I checked out my status screen. I had a lot of attribute points, over 2500 of them. You heard me right, over 2500. Since I had such a well rounded build, I poured every last single one of them into endurance. This amount of extra stats made me nervous. I was a little scared even. I finished getting the points into endurance before hitting finalize.

There was a massive influx of vitality. It was like I could stay in the vacuum of space and be fine. It was like knowing you could walk on the sun and not burn. My body would sustain me indefinitely. I was an immortal being, something that required apocalyptic damage to even harm. Kessiah's Blood Arts couldn't even scratch me anymore.

Size came next. It was a flood of mass, a colossal increase that made me writhe on the ground. I drug my hands through the dirt, unable to handle the sheer increase. My blood leaked through my armor, my skin bursting against it. It was like a crab stuck in a tiny shell. I shifted my armor a moment later, expanding it by will. As I did, my body filled into the new frame.

I crushed into the ground, digging into the earth. I weighed too much, like the dirt couldn't support me anymore. I sunk into it, the dirt wrapping around me. My senses enhanced, along with a surge in strength and power. I couldn't control my descent during my metamorphosis. That's what it felt like. I was being recreated.

Even though there was no air to breath, I didn't feel out of breath. It was like I didn't need air anymore. Sliding down to the center of the earth wasn't what I intended on doing, however. I extended the reach of telekinesis, giving myself some footing. I pushed myself out of the ground. Once I was finally out, I took a step.

The ground caved around me in a perfect circle. Within ten feet around me, the ground compressed. Whenever I took a step forward, the telekinetic pad caught on a rock. All the weight of the pad crushed it into dust. I needed something better than a solid plate. I needed a sheet of telekinesis, something that would bend over everything around me.

With that in mind, I reached out with my unique skill, Overwhelming Presence. Within the aura of the skill, I tried distributing the pull of my own mass. It created an oppressive feeling, like gravity was enhanced around me. If anything walked within fifty feet, they would feel an unusual pressure, like something was physically pressing them down.

Unique skill Upgraded! Overwhelming Presence is augmented with your legendary skill, Force of Nature. This converts Overwhelming Presence into Overwhelming Pressure. Overwhelming Pressure retains the same skill value as Overwhelming Presence.

Overwhelming Pressure(lvl 46) – You give off an otherworldly aura, like something both terrifying and powerful. Greatly amplifies your persuasion and intimidation.

The new skill already made the legendary skill's utility stand out. It not only fixed my too heavy for dirt problem, but it also gave me a nice benefit too. Amplifying a few other skills with Force of Nature was a good idea. I took a mental note of it. The next step was looking at me status. I did so and observed the beauty.

Level 2018

Strength – 1906 | Constitution – 2719 | Endurance – 8488

Dexterity – 657.9 | Willpower – 4335.6 | Intelligence – 1535

Charisma – 169 | Luck – 484.6 | Perception – 277.4

Health728,848/728,848518,168/min or 8,636/secPhys Dam Reduction –
98.5%Stamina320,359/320,3593,020/secElemental Res – 98.5%Living Dimension0.07
Trillion/4.30 Trillion74.3/per min(conduit)Plasma Res – 98.5%Event Horizon – 20,000
+ 100%hp/minRad Res – 98.5%Phys Dam Bonus – 20,060% | Total Damage Bonus
40%Mental Res – 98.5%

It was something special, like being accepted to Harvard University despite being from a poor family. I soaked in the moment before I opened up the last iteration of my stats that I looked at.

(Iteration held for 0.4 days)Level 1550

Strength – 1384 | Constitution – 1765.9 | Endurance – 4262

Dexterity – 447.2 | Willpower – 2434 | Intelligence – 892.6

Charisma – 121.3 | Luck – 291.8 | Perception – 204.2

Health 277,261/277,261 149,864/min or 2,498/sec Phys Dam Reduction – 98.5% Stamina 128,219/128,219 1,338/sec

Elemental Res – 98.5% Living Dimension 0.00 Trillion/ 4.33 Trillion 74.3/per min (conduit) Plasma Res – 98.5% Event Horizon – (20,000 + 100% of your health)/min Rad Res – 98.5% Phys Dam Bonus – 15,048% | Total Damage Bonus 20% Mental Res – 98.5%

The jump in my stats was astronomical. Every attribute had a meaningful increase, even Charisma. All the leveling perks and extra stats made me feel superhuman, if I could be considered one anymore. My health nearly tripled, and my health regen over tripled. That was a result of investing only in endurance, and all the level 1000 perks for endurance.

Every 1000 points in endurance I gained, I got a solid boost to my health and health regen. Considering the historic leap in Endurance I just got, the jump kind of made sense. It was still mind boggling, but I calmed down and went with it. The stats were so complicated now that I didn't have a solid grasp on them.

I did have a solid grasp on endurance being my bread and butter. With the dimensional cipher and my tripled health regen, I could augment my stats over time with it. That would help my progress by leaps and bounds. The other followers were well within my grasp now.

The only follower that concerned me was Ajax. He was over level 4000, and Yawm's ally since the very beginning. He would no doubt be more than a challenge. Elijah and Etna wouldn't be by comparison. Etna could dish out damage sure, but I was around 6-7 times tankier than our last bout. Bursting my health wasn't really an option for anyone anymore, except maybe Yawm.

With that in mind, I glanced around at the others. Torix's flames were running at full blast, enough that his head snapped back. He pushed against the floor. He shook his head before glancing around. A sense of urgency bolted up his spine as he glanced around,

“Did Yawm awaken? Why is it so heavy?”

I shook my head, “It’s a new skill I got. I’ll explain it later.”

Torix nodded, “What happened? Where is Kessiah?”

I pointed beside him, “Right there. I saved her.”

Torix turned to Kessiah. Her tattered clothes left little to the imagination, but it wasn’t hard suppressing myself. My willpower was just too high for something like that to get to me anymore.

Torix nodded, “My last memory was her fist being slammed into my face. She was taken over by the eldritch I presume?”

I shrugged, “Sort of. It was more like it was using her. I got it out with my armor though.”

Torix stared forward, “So Dakhma is finished?”

I nodded, “Yup. He’s done for.”

Torix raised a hand, causing him to float up and land on his feet. He raised both fists,

“We did it...How did we do it? I can’t remember anything after Malice died...my poor ice dragon.”

He frowned, sulking at the loss. I pointed above him, “Check out your status before you start getting depressed.”

Torix sighed before opening his status. Whenever he saw his level, his jaw dropped. He glanced at me, “What...by Schema...we really did kill him...”

I raised my hands, “We fucking did it man! We kicked his ass!”

He raised his hands, “We did it! We actually killed a follower.”

He spread out his arms, laughing maniacally, “Mwahaha!”

I joined in, “Mwahahaha!”

We laughed for a while before we just ended up laughing at each other’s laugh. It was a post life and death kind of joy. The battle was over, and now we could finally celebrate. We could finally say we succeeded in our first meaningful strike against Yawm. The rest of the assault against him wouldn’t be near as difficult.

We gained many levels and skills. Yawm no longer controlled a huge swath of territory. His troops were dwindling while ours were being enhanced by every death of his troops. With this single move, we laid a decisive blow against him. Even at level 5000 plus, there was no way Yawm would take down an army and us. It just wasn’t going to happen.

That was firm realization for Torix and I. That’s why we could act silly for a second. That’s why I laughed till I cried. It was like all that faith had finally come through. Now it was time to snap Yawm’s empire, one bone breaking blow at a time.

Once Torix and I settled down, Hod and Kessiah woke up. Torix crossed his arms, beaming a devilish grin,

“Looks as though Daniel landed the final blow. It’s hard to imagine you looked at him with disdain once, isn’t it?”

She blinked twice before looking at Hod. Hod raised a wing,

“Everything feels heavy.”

Torix pointed a thumb at me, “It’s him. Don’t mind.”

Hod cupped his chin, “Hod higher level than Dry Man still. Hod prove Hod’s worth.”

Torix gasped, “What? No, that’s impossible. You hardly even participated with killing Dakhma or what he became.”

Hod pointed at his chest, “Hod participate more than Dry Man. Dry Man show up after Hod and get punched in face before Hod. Therefore, Hod get higher level.”

Torix steamed, “A higher level means nothing if you can’t use it.”

Hod shrugged, “Hod not saying higher level mean Hod better and handsomer person than Dry Man, but...”

Torix shook his head, “I don’t have time to bother with you regardless. These status points need attending to.”

Hod nodded, “Hod relate. Hod have more status points to attend to than Dry Man, actually.”

Torix and Hod had their rivalry going strong before I walked over to Kessiah. She stared forward, her expression blank. I leaned over,

“You alright?”

She stared at me and murmured, “I’m done.”

I raised an eyebrow, “Done with what?”

She shook her head, “Everything. I’m not fighting anymore. I’m done.”

Chapter 102: Respite

My head popped back, “Wait... You aren’t going to fight anymore...period?”

She shook her head back and forth, “No. I told you already. I’m done.”

I leaned down, my stomach sinking for a bit. Kessiah's nose and eyebrows creased at me, like she was expecting me to condemn her. I wasn't planning on it. It hurt losing her, I won't lie about that. Kessiah was our highest level member. Killing another follower without her would be a desperate struggle.

The thing is though, we could probably manage now, especially with Althea's help. Torix would lose summons, we would need a plan for sure, but we could manage without Kessiah. She didn't use the experience as well as I or Torix did either. We could make something happen with a 500 level boost.

Kessiah's had a 1000 level boost over all of us, but she somehow managed to pull the least weight. In fights, clearing rifts, gathering intel, or even just managing people, Kessiah wasn't doing much. I couldn't blame Kessiah for wanting to call it quits either.

Nearly being absorbed by an eldritch then having her mind controlled by it...the feeling of violation and shame must be palpable. She was supposed to be our trump card. In the end, she was almost our downfall. I don't think any of us would blame her for what happened, but she probably blamed herself. I know I would blame myself if I was in her shoes.

All these thoughts raced in my head before I reached out. I placed a hand on her shoulder. It was a gentle touch as I spoke with the same tone,

"That's ok. We'll find something else for you to do."

Kessiah looked up at me, her eyes narrowing, "Aren't you going to call me weak?"

There was a cold bite in her words. She had expected us to lash out at her. She reminded me of an abused dog, recoiling from anything that came near it.

I shook my head, "I wouldn't call it weak. That eldritch-" Kessiah shivered at the word, "-was horrific. I don't expect anyone to want to face something like that. Besides," I lifted my hand, a warp of gravity forming over Kessiah.

"I can handle it."

Kessiah floated up, the warp of gravity fluid and controlled. None of the gravity's pull was wasted. It was a level of control I'd never known, a revolution in my finesse with my own abilities. It was a casual display of vast technical skill. All the skill points in Force of Nature made it that simple.

Even Hod gasped at it. Torix shook his head in disbelief at the sudden jolt in control. Kessiah looked on in disbelief as well, her anger fading. She landed on her feet, flabbergasted at me lifting her. I pulled my helmet off, my armor shifting in silence,

"I'll tear them apart, limb from limb. I'll make them regret even thinking of coming here. You're not the one that needs to worry. I can promise you that."

What made my words so convincing was the belief behind them. I was supremely confident. There wasn't any fear that I wouldn't do it. I was facing a monster of mythic legends. In my eyes, that legend would end here on earth. From what I could tell behind me, the others sensed my confidence as well.

Kessiah blinked, "Ah, are you sure? I...I just don't want to fight anymore. Having that monster under my skin...I just can't do it anymore. Please..."

I shrugged, "Yeah, that's ok. I'd much rather you keep fighting with us, and it would really help. The thing is, you shouldn't be forced to."

Kessiah bit her lip, her voice straining, "I...I'm sorry."

I nudged her, "Come on, it's not a big deal."

She looked around, struggling for words, "But, you saved my life again. I'm just making things worse, all the time. I nearly killed Torix and Hod. I tried killing you. Now I'm leaving you to kill more of those things without my help. I just don't get it. Why don't you hate me?"

She pointed at her chest, "Even I hate me. You should hate me too. I know that bag of bones and dumb bird do." She grabbed the sides of her head,

"They should. I fucked everything up. There's so much on the line here, and yet I just... I just want to run away. I'm the strongest here and the most afraid..."

I raised an eyebrow, “I don’t know about the strongest anymore. Besides, you can fight in other ways.”

She looked at me, her face confused. I continued,

“There’s all kinds of projects you could do for the troops here. You could create build layouts for newer recruits. You could plan out courses for unlocking common unique skills. You could make bootcamp for people, disciplining the troops further than just basic skills.”

I grinned, “You don’t have to swing your fists on the front lines to fight a war. You can fight here at home too.”

With an offhand tone and staring in the distance, Torix murmured, “I could help organize the courses...If you need the help.”

Hod chimed in, “Hod help Eltari learn about Kessiah. Kessiah help Eltari learn about skills. Eltari fight in Kessiah’s place.”

I spread out my hands, “Yeah, and if you change your mind about kicking some ass, then we’ll be here, ready and waiting.”

Kessiah nodded her head, overwhelmed by the support, “I just need to process all this...I just need some time after that thing got me like that...I’ll get back up...”

Tears pooled in her eyes as she looked down, “Gah, fuck you guys. I never cry.”

She ran up, hugging me. I was half a head taller than her now. Her head fit along the nape of my neck, and I hugged her back. I whispered, “It’s alright. IT’s alright.”

Kessiah cried like that, a soft, restrained kind of cry. She wasn’t sobbing out. It was a heart warming moment instead of a bitter loss. In a weird way, the situation had brought us together, somehow. Kessiah quit crying before she pushed herself off me. She wiped her face,

“Thank you.”

With a sly grin, I ruffled her white hair, “No problem. Now go lay down for a bit. I’m sure you’re exhausted.”

She shoved my hand off her head, a slight smile on her face, “Yeah. I’m out on my feet.” She turned to Torix, “I’ll send you a message when I’m ready for organizing actual courses. See you guys later.”

Hod raised his wing, “Hod tired too. Hod find bedroom. Goodbye, Harbinger and Dry Man.”

Hod spread his wings and shot into the sky. Torix grumbled, “You get called Harbinger and I get called Dry Man...”

I laughed before walking up to Torix, “And you’re called master and I’m a disciple.”

Torix smiled, “And don’t you forget it. There’s still much I can teach you yet.” Torix watched Kessiah walk off, “Now I’ve lost one of my best baits. You’ll have to take her place I suppose.”

I shrugged, “I’m made for it. Even then, two of the followers are out of commission. We just need Elijah to step away from Ajax, then we’ll rip the angel’s wings off and stab them through his chest.”

Torix pointed at me, “Quite a visceral description, but I agree. Once he’s dead, destroying the rest of their infection will be inevitable.” Torix stared at plumes of yellow smoke billowing off the burning forests of Yawm. His lips curled up, the menacing expression full of satisfaction,

“I’ll relish watching the world tree burn.”

I raised my hands, “First things first. We need to kill Elijah next. Without Kessiah’s help, facing off against Ajax isn’t an option. Not yet.”

Torix cupped his chin, “How are we going to handle him exactly though is-”

I raised a hand to Torix, “I’ll make the plan and organize the team for it.”

Torix raised an eyebrow, his fire eyes growing in size and intensity, “Really? You don’t have too. I can handle it.”

I waved my hands, “Nuh uh. I heard what you said about me before we left for Kessiah. You’re right. I need to plan some things out for myself. If I see a damn problem, it’s up to me to fix it.”

Torix frowned, Reaching out a hand, “Those were words spoken in anger. Don’t take them to heart. I meant nothing by them.”

I shook my head, “I’m not mad at you Torix. I’m mad at myself. You were right about you having to handle everything. Your attention should be on managing the push against the quarantine. Putting all that and all our movements was a hell of a strain on you. We were being ridiculous.”

I raised a fist, “I’ll organize the teams and the plan we need against Elijah. I’ll send it to you when I finish them. You review and send it back. I’ll gather the resources from the reserve before heading out with the plan. I’ll need your help, so have the battlefield handled for the few hours the plan lasts.”

Torix gave me a hard look, like he was searching for something. He nodded, slowly at first before he was agreeing with me,

“Excellent. I look forward to what you plan out.”

I grinned at him, “Hell yeah. I’ll see you later. I have work to do.”

With amusement painting his face, Torix rubbed his hands together, “So do I. Good luck, disciple.”

I turned around, dashing up. I slid into the ground without having to dive, like I was walking into the earth. My runes charged in seconds. As I reached my head underneath

the ground, I unleashed the surge of energy. The impact rippled through the ground, sending me firing off towards my tent.

Whenever I burst from the ground, my own velocity amazed me. I dipped in and out of the earth, faster than flight or falling. The downside came with the craters I left behind. They left a trail behind me, making me easy to follow. The sheer size of the craters was tremendous as well. Even if I distributed my weight outwards, I still left a bus sized impression in the ground.

The rush of fluidity and power and speed was worth it, however. It was like being born anew. I was much faster than Hod now. He was limited by how fast he could fall. That's what flight really was, a controlled descent. I could outspeed that since I could launch myself faster than I could fall.

Using this travel, I reached my tent in seconds. I didn't bust into the area. It would make far too much noise. I travelled under the earth instead. As I reached my tent, I sensed a member of the steel legion leaving it. Curious about what he was doing, I walked out of the ground as if the earth wasn't even there.

A look of abject horror spread on his face as he fumbled backwards. He fell onto his back, as I willed my helmet off. The amor flowed down my back as I smiled,

"Now what are you doing here?"

He raised his hands, pulling off his power armor helmet. Under the mask was John Diesel, an engineer who helped me with Althea's rifle. He had a huge crush on her, and everyone called him Diesel because John was such a common name. The whole time he helped me, he tried hiding his obvious infatuation with Althea.

I could understand why he was intimidated by her. That reminded me of Althea's message. Days passed and I still hadn't replied. I murmured,

"Oh shit. Althea's going to kill me."

John's raised an eyebrow, "Daniel? Thank Jesus. I thought I was dead." He sighed, "Please, never sneak up on me like that again."

I frowned, “Oh, sorry Diesel.” I offered him a hand, “You just reminded me that Althea sent me a message a while back. I haven’t replied in days.”

Diesel stood up, patting dirt off his armor, “If she does kill you, serves you right for trying to give a poor soldier a heart attack.” Diesel looked at me, light reflecting off his glasses,

“You look...different.”

I raised my arms, “I’m a bit bigger than last time we saw each other.”

Diesel nodded, “Yeah. Your level is just insane. How did you get it that high?”

I grinned, “I killed Dakhma, one of Yawm’s followers.”

John perked up, “Really? Well I’ll be damned. I always wondered why you were called a harbinger. Now you really do look the part at least.”

He grinned, “You still have a normal guy vibe to you though. Most of the higher level legion members are...I don’t know how to explain it, but they’re weird. It’s like they all forgot where we came from. The system just pulls them in and that’s all they think about.”

I frowned, “Then Schema’s done his job I guess. I can’t say I haven’t been doing the same thing.”

Diesel shook his head, “Who can blame you though? Even older folk are starting to realize that levels are everything now. You’re level is your status now. Ranks are decided by it. Rations, housing, all of it. Who cares if you help someone if your level is over 500? Damn near noone.”

I shrugged, “It’s a tough balance. If you spend too much time helping other people, then you can’t help yourself. At least that’s what I’ve come to learn.”

Diesel nodded, “You’re right, even if it’s a bitter pill to swallow.” Diesel shivered, “Do you feel that?”

“What exactly are you feeling?”

Deisel grimaced, “I don’t know. It’s heavy here and hard to breath. It’s like I’m beside the eye of a giant beast, and it’s looking at me. It makes me nervous, like I’m just a sitting duck out here.”

“That feeling is a skill I have. It’s called Overwhelming Pressure.”

Deisel blinked, “Really? I couldn’t even tell it was from you.”

I pointed at the tent, “I couldn’t tell it was you coming out of my tent either.”

With a bit of guilt, Diesel scratched the side of his cheek, “Yeah, about that. I made a few new blueprints of Althea’s cannon rifle while you were away. I figured a new model would help her out.”

“Really now?” My thoughts clinked into place as I clapped my hands together, “Perfect timing.” I gripped a hand into a fist, “That’s exactly what I needed.”

Diesel put his helmet back on, muffling his voice, “For what?”

I passed Diesel, walking into my tent, my aura preventing me from destroying the fabric under my feet.

“I can make Althea a new cannon. It will help us versus the next follower, and it will make a compelling apology. Who knows, maybe some armor and a helmet would help too.”

Diesel raised a hand, “If you’re making her armor, I have her measurements. I can let you see them if you’d like.”

I nudged Diesel’s side, “Well, well, how did you get a hold of her measurements?”

John blushed a bright shade of red, “I know what you’re thinking. I didn’t do anything wrong. They were from Torix. He wanted us to make Althea and Kessiah combat suits.”

I rolled my eyes, “Oh yeah, sureeeee.”

Diesel spread out his arms, “Oh come on..”

With a mischievous grin, I nodded, “As the mighty and oh so powerful harbinger, I can put in a good word or two towards Althea. If we get lucky, maybe we could all have a round of drinks after all this is over with.”

Diesel shook his head, “It’s been a long time since I’ve just relaxed. It burns a bit, because we would already be up on our feet by now if it wasn’t for Yawm. We wouldn’t need the necromancer’s constant commands. We could focus on rebuilding and setting up a new society around the system.”

I cupped my chin, “Well shit...I’ve never even thought about that. Life after we kill Yawm...rebuilding doesn’t sound so bad.”

John nodded, “It’s something I think about everyday. I’m engineer by trade. I’m thinking of how we can use the new tech from the legion all the time. I’m thinking an external exoskeleton on top of the power armor would be the best option. It would stop humans from being mauled so easily up close.”

I gripped my hand into a fist, “I could show most people a few skills for it. If torix taught people magic and Althea taught them stealth, we could set up an army. Taking a few cities then spreading out might be a good idea too.”

I stared off in the distance, “It would be awesome if we could turn Schema’s system into something positive...in the long run at least.”

Diesel’s face turned solemn, “That all fringes on Yawm. The soldiers tell stories about him. Commanding officers silence the stories when they hear them. Something about demoralizing the war effort. Considering the plague he started, the rumors are downright gruesome...”

Diesel perked up, “But hey, you killed a follower. There’s some hope yet.”

I grinned, “You keep up the fight on your end, and I’ll keep up the fight on mine. We’ll teach Yawm what humans are made of.”

John smiled back, “We’ll give him a lesson he won’t forget.” Diesel turned toward the center of the camp, “Speaking of which, I have to get back to work. Good luck Daniel.”

I waved at him, “Same to you.”

He left before I walked into my almost empty room. It wasn’t familiar or homey either. I didn’t need a bed, chairs, or anything really. There was a pile of scrap armor, a fridge full of rations, and a few rolled up blueprints on the floor. That’s it. I guess it really didn’t matter much anymore at least.

I picked up the blueprints, inspecting them. While there wasn’t anything game changing, the schematics changed a few things around. The main difference was in the shell type. Althea used spears for the piercing effect in most cases. This cannon a hollow slug instead. Notes along the bottom explained Diesel’s thought process in detail.

He was trying to change Althea’s rounds from armor piercing to anti-personnel. He learned from Torix that her armor piercing wasn’t from the shell type. Armed with that knowledge, he hypothesized the new shells would create large impact zones.

The hollow tip of the shell would collapse, spreading outward. This created a mushroom of metal that would puncture out the back of a creature. The flattened metal would disperse much more of its kinetic energy into its unlucky victim. Wherever the bolt shot out of, it would leave a gaping hole behind.

The more I read about his theory, the more I liked it. At the very least, it was worth a shot. With that in mind, I walked out towards the center of the camp. My mind wandered as I walked, brainstorming different runic combinations for the new rifle.

As I walked through the camp, all eyes were on me. From awed gasps to hushed whispers, they spoke about me. I felt like Mike Tyson walking into a boxing gym. Some feared me and some admired me. Regardless of what they thought, no one ignored me. I was an unknown anomaly, and their curiosity sparked questions and interest. Most of their comments were in awe.

“What the fuck...level 2000.”

“What did he do to get there so fast.”

“Thank god we have that monster on our side.”

Some, not so much.

“Did you feel him come closer too? He makes my skin crawl.”

“It’s like he’s become one of the monsters from the dungeons.”

“Is that what the system does to higher level players? He’s not even human anymore.”

My aura caused it. I didn’t really enjoy the attention, but I needed to disperse my weight. Otherwise I would end up sinking into the ground. I didn’t let it bother me as I reached a workbench. Using a mental map of the blueprints, I prepared myself for molding my armor. Visualizing before I made it helped with the process.

I breathed out, a deep sense of calm coming over me. I raised a palm, simple parts of the rifle forming first. They would be my warm up. Once I was done with a few of the smaller pieces, I set out working on the barrel. I remembered it being the hardest part of the process beforehand, so I was ready for a struggle.

The struggle simply wasn’t there. My armor shifted into shape, the act of creation intrinsic and natural to it. It was like the armor was begging to take form and make matter. All the parts of the rifle didn’t even take fifteen minutes in total. Once I finished that, I readied myself for the runes.

I opened the portal into my spatial ring, pulling out my grimoire with gravity magic. It floated into my hands, folding open towards an unused and black page. With a bit a grin, I wrote in the runes for power, strength, and speed onto the first page. Onto the second, I carved the meaning of change, the fury of wrath, and the essence of pain.

I laced poison into the meaning of the words, my hands handling the deft, intricate glyphs with ease. I had already worked with the dimensional cipher, a language infinitely more complex by comparison. If anything, writing with this was even easier than writing in English.

Once I chained those glyphs together, I added phrases around them. Some of the glyphs acted as transitions between the primary glyphs. Others acted as accents, refining the raw meaning of the other words. By the time I finished the passage for the barrel alone, it was almost like a story told in my memory.

As I channeled mana into the grimoire, a profound sense of vulnerability washed over me. The runes were like showing a piece of myself, a view into my mind. I showed them sights and sounds that only I experienced. It was like publishing a slice of my life for others to see.

I dealt with the feeling by justifying the need for the runes. The more vibrant and cutting the memory injected, the more profound its effect would become. I wanted Althea's bolts to cripple her targets with pain and to poison them. My most painful memories were actually my armor transformations, so that's what I etched into the stock.

It took a few hours, but once I finished the full passage, the runes was agony. The invasion of metal into flesh, the waning sense of self, all of that contained itself in the markings. I etched other memories into other parts of the barrel.

Some were moments of triumph, like right after I slayed Baldag-Ruhl or Dakhma. Others were moments of deep frustration, like working with the eldritch runes. Whenever I fully molded the parts and slid them together, this was the best work I'd ever made by far. The bonuses of the item reflected that.

A Dimension's Wake(lvl requirement: 1,500 | Enchantments require Conduit towards Dimension C-138) – This rifle is a finely made cannon created by Dimension C-138. The newer design enhances the stability of older cannons by redistributing the mass of it. Several adjustments were made for shapeshifters, letting them fill out the empty areas of the barrel as they need to.

The newer design even allows for superior grip on the surface of the metallic structure. These lines allow for a thin filament of the shapeshifter's body to cover them. This allows them to hide the weapon just as they hide themselves. These qualities make the

rifle very valued on the galactic market. When combined with another item giving a conduit towards Dimension C-138, the item becomes near priceless.

Dimensional Fabric: +100 End and Will | +25 Stren, Con, and Int | -50 Char |

Dimensional Continuity: Quadruples ammo efficiency, recoil stabilization, and rifle drilling speed

Dimensional Stability: + 30% to all resistances, including dimensional resistance.

The simple bonuses resulted in a massive boon for anyone using the rifle. Considering how much Althea invested into strength, having a few stats rounding out her build was excellent. The resistance bonus was amazing as well, considering Althea hadn't capped hers already. If anything, the rifle was better for defence than offense. Unusual maybe, but it was highly effective.

I picked up the rifle, walking back towards my tent. Now I needed to plan out how to kill Elijah. It would no doubt take a day or two to grind out all the details. I paced through the camp, eyes set on me once more. It amazed me how short everybody was now. I was two heads taller than most.

Whenever I reached my tent, I sensed someone else waiting there for me. It was a woman instead of a man, so I had an idea of who it was already. As I paced up, the tip of my horned helmet peaked up over the tents. Right in front of my tent, I expected a glowing smile and a running hug.

But no, that wasn't the case at all. Althea was there, her purple hair flowing behind her. Covered in a black, carbon fiber skin suit, she frowned at me. I pulled my helmet back, scratching my head,

"Ah, sorry about not sending messages. I've been so busy, and some things just fall between the cracks."

She looked at the rifle, her eyes opening wide. Her frown turned to a grin as I lifted it, letting her inspect the metallic sheen on it.

A mischievous grin popped onto my face, "I did have time for a gift though."

Chapter 103: To Plan

She ran up, grabbing towards the rifle. I lifted it up, grinning at her,

“Come on you gotta try harder than that.”

She morphed her arm, the oversized arm grasping the rifle. The strength of her grasp was tremendous. She leaned towards me, a full grin on her face,

“It’s good to see you too.”

I wrapped my arms around her and picked her up in a single armed hug.

“I missed you too.”

I set her down before she blushed, her blue gray skin turning purple. I released the rifle, letting her inspect it. As she looked at it, I analyzed her, discovering her level. I was worried that she wouldn’t meet the level requirement. It was good to see that worry was unfounded.

At level 1554, it wouldn’t be a problem. I raised an eyebrow,

“So how did you gain so many levels?”

She rubbed her hand across the metal on the rifle, “I haven’t just been getting intel. Torix has me making assassinations all the time.” She looked up, a teasing grin on her face, “What about you? 2000 already?”

I raised a hand, clamping it into a fist, “We killed Dakhma Wike.”

Her eyes opened wide, “What? How?”

I lowered the hand, “By kicking his ass.”

She nodded, "That does sound like how you would do it."

I waved my hand, "Not anymore. We almost all died. I'm planning out the next fight with a follower."

She rolled her eyes, "I'm sure it'll be way different than us just kicking their ass."

I pursed my lips, "Come on, give me some credit. I'm going to come up with something clever. Just you wait and see."

She raised her eyebrows, "Uh-huh. Sure."

I pointed at the rifle, "Well John and I had some other goodies planned out too. If this keeps up though, we might not find the time to make them."

Althea raised a hand, "Wait a minute. I didn't mean that... Wait a second, who's John?"

I pointed at the rifle, "He's an engineer who helps me design those cannons. I'll introduce you some time."

"So you've been taking all the credit this entire time? I was expecting more from you."

I turned around, a teasing tone in my voice, "Oh well, I suppose you're right. I guess I'll just go eat lunch by myself."

Althea shoved my shoulder as she laughed, "Oh come on. You owe me a lunch. I'm so tired of rations."

As Althea shoved me, she pushed herself backwards. She frowned, "What happened to you? You're heavy as a house."

I weighed my hands back and forth, like they were two scales, "More like a tank. A house is the next step up." I pointed at her, "What about you though. You're still stronger than me."

She shrugged, “It’s useful for up close combat. I’ve been working on my knife skills recently.”

“Really? I can make you a knife too.”

Althea gripped her hands together, her chin resting on them, “Really?”

I started walking towards her tent, “Come on. Let’s walk while we talk. I’m starving.”

She slung her new rifle over her shoulder, “That sounds nice...and so am I.”

We paced through the camp, our walk slow and steady. It was like neither of us wanted the calm to end. By the time we reached our camp, she and I gushed over the new parts of our builds.

“Once I got a new unique skill for knives, it let’s me get bonus damage on targets that don’t know I’m there.”

“So it’s kind of like a stealth critical?”

She nodded with vigor, “Exactly! I really prefer firing at people. I’ll kite them back until they close in. I disappear all of a sudden, then I finish them off with a critical strike. It’s worked like a charm so far.”

I shook my head, “It sounds brutal. I’ve been sticking to my guns.”

“Keeping things brutal?”

I shrugged, “I mean, you can say it’s like that.”

She giggled, “I don’t think you can say it any other way.”

We reached her tent as I raised my hands, “I think of it as poetry made into violence. Painters draw out their work. Musicians compose their music. My art is made with violence instead, like a dance of death.”

I scratched my nose, “Eh, I don’t know. It sounds silly when I say it like that though.”

Althea shook her head, a knowing smile on her face, “No, I don’t think so. It sounds a lot like you. I think it’s perfect. You’re one of those people everyone thinks is some brute. Once someone get past that, you’re just a big old teddy bear.”

I raised my eyebrows, walking into her tent, “Sureee.”

She frowned at me, “What? I’m serious.”

I waved her off, “I’m as fluffy and huggable as a metal cactus.”

She crossed her arms, “So why did you make me the rifle then?”

I looked at her, then I glanced away, “I uh, figured that it was a good way of making my new strike team better.” I pointed both my hands forward beside my face,

“You know, offensively speaking.”

She smirked, “Uh huh.”

I nudged her side, “Well then why do you want lunch with me huh? So we can discuss tactics?”

She blushed, “You make good food. That’s it.”

“And you say I’m transparent.”

She shoved me, “Whatever. Go make some food.”

I stumbled towards her fridge, laughing the whole distance, “At your service, madam.”

We chatted away as I prepared us a salad with a sandwich. I always liked my sandwiches with a bit of kick, so I’d put arugula instead of lettuce and some caramelized onions. It took a bit more time to prepare, but it was worth it.

Althea’s glowing grin through the entire meal meant she shared my thoughts. At one point she laughed her ass off because I accidentally smeared mayonnaise over my face. Needless to say, it was a lot of fun.

At the end of the impromptu meeting, I stood up as I said,

“I missed these lunches. They’re always so refreshing. I have to go though.”

Althea deflated a bit, “Can we do this again tomorrow?”

I tapped my chin with my hand for a bit, “Hmmmm, yeah, I think so. I’ll be planning out the assault on Elijah over the next few days. A few breaks sprinkled in their shouldn’t be a problem. It may help me keep my mind clear anyways.”

She clapped her hands together, bouncing on her feet, “Good.” She lowered her hands, looking down towards the ground. Her left hand tapped its fingers without her knowing. She was nervous.

“What’s wrong?”

She looked up at me, “Uhm...what are you going to do after we get rid of Yawm.”

I tilted my head, staring off, “I’ve been asked more than once about that. I don’t know for sure, but I’m thinking of helping people rebuild. I know right after I finished BloodHollow, I kind of just went out on my own. If Torix hadn’t reeled me in, who knows where I’d be.”

I met her eyes with mine, “I sort of lost everything because of that. I never had much anyways, but I could have built something up. You know, made myself a new home or something like that. It’s weird, this place has turned into that for me.”

I shook my head, “But it’s just...it’s not going to last forever. Not unless someone gets everyone together and makes it happen. I could be that person. Not forever, but for a little while. After that, I don’t know...I’ll probably just go out and explore the galaxy for a bit.”

She nodded. She bit her lip before saying, “Would you mind if I helped out?”

I creased my eyebrows, “What? Don’t be ridiculous. Of course you can. I could use a shapeshifting assassin anyday.”

She sighed, all the tension leaving her, “Ok, great. That’s all I needed to know. Good luck with your plans.”

I grinned back, “Good luck kicking ass, though I know you won’t need it.”

I paced away from her, walking back towards the center of the camp. Of course I’d rather plan this all out without other people watching, but I didn’t have a desk in my tent. I reached one of the standing desks before picking it up, papers and all. With it held over my head, I carried it to my tent.

I mean, if Yawm had spies or something like that, I didn’t want it to be that easy to figure out our secrets. With my unique skill, Knowledge Maker, I could hold the information in my head forever. Anytime I needed that information, I could sift through my memories for it. It was kind of like a library in my skull.

With that goal in mind, I reached my tent before getting to work. I needed knowledge first off. Torix sent us progress reports about the activities of each Follower, so I sifted through them for details. It didn’t take too long before I got an idea of how Elijah spent an average day.

He was a fallen seraph, a converted eldritch that worshipped Yawm as a god. He worshipped Yawm before he went to sleep and right after waking. He organized the named ones that Yawm assimilated from his plague.

They had three ranks, seekers, fighters, and researchers. Seekers sought out people hiding in the quarantine. Fighters fought intruders. Researchers experimented with

abundant eldritch. Elijah would give each them sermons before they went about their daily duties. Since most of the named were rather young and inexperienced, this process took time.

While Elijah guarded the untrained recruits, Ajax was the exact opposite. He controlled the veterans that travelled with Yawm from world to world. If Althea, Kade, and Aatrox weren't tearing their ranks apart, then Ajax would have already dismantled the steel legion. We lost Aatrox during the fight with Dakhma, so the pressure was on Althea to bridge that gap now.

That's why Althea was so busy. She stopped most of Yawm's denizens from retaliating against our bombardment. The more I looked at Torix's plan and info, the more impressed I became. No matter how many moving parts there were in the plan, Torix worked it like a well oiled machine. It was a tremendous feat of willpower and intelligence.

My goal was integrating my own plans into his without missing a beat. I found my chance fast. Elijah held a weekly sermon, something like a church gathering, with all the named ones. During this time, Ajax meditated throughout the day, reflecting on the prior week. Ajax seemed strained during these meditations now.

Torix hypothesized it was due to a crisis in his conscious. Ajax's activities were restrained, like he wasn't giving anything his full attention. I figured this would be the perfect time for attacking Elijah. It might seem counterintuitive at first glance, but I justified it with a few facts.

The horde of people would be the least likely time for an assassination. Surprise would be on our side. The horde would act as a living health battery for me too. The highest level named ones were around level 800. That meant Event Horizon could kill them in about five to ten minutes. During that time, I would be invincible.

I would be distracting them while Althea and Hod dived in from above and below towards Elijah. To keep Ajax from coming, Torix and his summons would be burning the world tree close to Yawm. Anytime Torix had done so, Ajax came in and destroyed whoever had been harming the roots of the tree. I would take full advantage of that fact.

It seemed like our best shot. Before grinding out the details in it, our entire team needed as much of a boost as possible. The easiest way would be crafting them gear. I couldn't

spend weeks and weeks doing it, but a few days were worth it. With the bench right here, I didn't need to leave my room.

So I set up shop. I sharpened the point of one of my fingers. With it, I traced out a few of my ideas. My hand etched out the lines onto the wood with a practiced hand, all the carving coming in to play.

Althea's dagger was easy. I would make a jagged knife, more like a monster's jaw than a blade. Althea's power made blunt weapons much more dangerous, so I kept that in mind with the design. The main runes on that blade would be speed and precision, the two qualities most necessary for an assassin.

Once I finished that, I'd focus on Hod's weapon. The easiest addition would be something covering his wings. Considering how frail they were, giving him lightweight armor over the limbs would help keep him fighting. I theorycrafted exoskeletons, each of them extending out over the surface area of each wing. They would come together into three sharpened blades as claws for his shadows to cover.

On the other hand, Torix needed something for channeling his mana. He would cast large, inefficient spells from his grimoire. Awesome as they were to behold, the mana drain was palpable. I set up a staff that he would channel the mana through. It would act as a stabilizer for the intense flows of mana, using runes that would amplify those effects.

Armor would be quite helpful for all of them as well. Althea could have gauntlets, a chestplate, and a helmet since she could extend her stealth. Hod needed a helmet for his head, and he needed something reinforcing the bones of his legs. They kept breaking during his fights. His amazing offense prowess always got cut short because of this.

As for Torix, he needed a helmet and jewelry. I could give him a set of rings, an amulet, and a crown of sorts. Making it thorny and covering it with enchantments would help him with his necromancy. All these bonuses would compound into a sizable advantage in the coming plan.

With all that in mind, I set out on Althea's armor first. With her measurements from John, I created fitted armor. It had openings along the back for her wings, and the forearms and upper arms would remain uncovered. Considering how much she morphed her arms, she needed that liberty of movement.

Once I finished that, I made the helmet. Althea never morphed her face anymore, keeping a conservative approach. With that in mind, I made the helmet with a wide field of view for her eyes and openings for her ears. Dampening her senses would do her no good. The armor acted as a sort of skeleton, keeping her from being crushed by some immense blow.

I worked on Torix's helmet next. The goal was different here. I could reinforce him much more since his senses weren't as important as Althea. With his magic flies as his eyes and ears, he barely needed eyes. His helmet left a slit for his eyes and that was it. There was crown of thorns on top of it, each thorn covered in runes for pain. It was an evil artifact once I finished, something fitting for a wielder of the dead.

I left Hod's armor as the last addition. It was the hardest to make by far. I created adjustable, interlocking segments for his wings. After pressing those together, I made the claws with his shadows in mind. They were curved away from him, letting the claws catch on whatever he swung at. That would increase the contact his shadow claws had with anyone.

After that, I molded a helmet for him. Instead of a solid piece like Torix's, this was a thin exoskeleton. It would coat his face, preventing his head from cracking like an egg at any impact. I connected a series of plates that would run down his spine and neck. That would prevent him from having his legs and arms taken from him during a fight.

I finished the armors and gave them the needed runes. Dominion and control for Torix. Speed and precision for Althea. Savagery and darkness for Hod. I laced the runes with my own mana, circling the runes with my silver blood to hold the energy in. My silver blood even let me overcharge the runes, letting the items act as consumables with permanent enchantments.

I took regular breaks during this process, keeping myself sharp. I ate several times too, taking care of my body. All food was soft now, like mashed potatoes. I bit into a rock during one of those breaks, and it was like chomping into a cracker. Everything was like that.

The world felt so different now. During one of these breaks, I tried accessing my own dimensional storage. I could do so by swallowing things with my armor teeth. It gave me a solid idea. I was always worried about drowning, so I just swallowed a few roomfuls of air into my dimensional storage.

I couldn't do this with my ring's storage because it was limited by my mass and volume. A few lungfuls of air was all it could hold because of that. This other storage could hold an almost unlimited amount of it. Considering this was one of my biggest weaknesses, covering it this easily was a pleasant surprise.

So I finished all the armor, jewelry, and weapons while patching one of my glaring weaknesses. It only took two full days of effort for a huge gain. During that time, I visited Althea once and had dinner. It was a nice respite from all the crafting. I had to admit, making armor and whatnot was a lot of fun though. Shaping nothing into something valuable was oddly satisfying. Why, I can't really say exactly. It simply is.

What I can say is that I put all the armor and weapons into my dimensional storage with ease. The lack of a volume requirement turned it from a meh utility into something ridiculous. Whenever I checked my weight, I was 25,000 kilograms. That's about 54,000 pounds. I could hold anything I wanted within reason.

I planned on abusing it as much as possible soon. First I had to hand off the armor and explain what it was good for. I walked over towards Torix's base, anticipating his surprise at the gift. He knew I was coming hundreds of feet away because of my aura skill.

As I neared the door to the suburban lair, he willed it open with a hand. Inside a room coated with maps, figures, and runes, Torix glanced at me. His blue fire eyes cast a blue tint over his noble robe, golden stitching running down from his shoulders to his feet.

"Well then disciple, what brings you here?"

I made my armor grin, the red aura leaking out. Torix raised an eyebrow as I reached into the mouth. I pulled out his staff then his helmet. I tossed them towards him. Before they crashed into him, I raised a palm. I slowed their descent with a gravity well, laying them into his hands with a gentle touch.

"I made these for you. I think you'll like them."

Torix lifted them towards his eyes. He narrowed his eyes,

“Impressive. This is your armor no doubt, and it’s much harder than steel. It was a pleasant weight as well. That makes it feel valuable. There’s six notches in staff’s top for imprinting gemstones into it. Useful for mana gems or consumables.”

He lifted the helmet up, inspecting it close towards the room’s light, “And this is a helmet with many of the same features. You even made it evil looking for aesthetic purposes. I must say Daniel, I never expected this level of...finesse from you. Especially after seeing your battles with Kessiah and Dakhma.”

I shrugged, “It took a bit of time is all. The runes had some carry over.”

Torix nodded before glancing at my left forearm. On the inner portion was two characters of the dimensional cipher I carved. Torix pointed at it, “Is that...one of the eldritch runes.”

I wanted to tell him it was the dimensional cipher, but the system banned me for learning about it. I got a pass because of my unique situation. Torix might not be so lucky, so I answered, “Basically yeah, except it’s two letters.”

Torix nodded, “They are for strength and speed. I can see it.”

I frowned, “How can you?”

Torix met my eye, a wry grin growing on his face, “They remind me of you, for some peculiar reason. Regardless, I thank you for your gifts. These will help tremendously with storing and channeling my mana. I suppose I can offer payment-”

“Don’t worry about it. Think of it as repayment for all the dungeon cores.”

He pursed his lips, “Are you certain?” After I nodded back, he continued, “Well I suppose I can accept a gift or two from you...how about the plan for killing Elijah. How’s it shaping up?”

I raised both my hands, “It’s shaping up nicely. I should be able to send you a review of it soon. I’m going to hand off some other stuff to Hod and Althea during the meantime.” I turned around, pacing out of the evil lair Torix made out of the average house,

“Practice with both of those before the next weekly meeting with Elijah if you can. Cya Torix.”

He nodded, “Excellent work disciple.”

I reached over towards Hod’s room. He was stationed with the other Eltari in a suburbia. Most of the Eltari talked and spent time on the roofs of their houses. They would fly around, groom their feathers, and play games in the air while they were bored. They did all those things and more as I reached Hod’s house.

He had a colorful sign that said, “Hod’s home. Hod’s friends welcome here!” He had a scribbling of himself beside the sign. It looked like a child had drawn it. In essence, it was perfect for him. I walked inside. Straw, twigs, and feathers littered the scratched floors. He wasn’t taking advantage of the housing, that’s for sure.

I shouted, “Hod, are you here?”

Hod crashed through a door, his taloned feet slipping on the hardwood like a dog’s paws,

“Hod not sleeping. Hod aware and ready for action!”

He fell down, a plank of wood cracking. Hod looked at me then the plank. He bit into the plank,

“Hod break floor on purpose. Hod need extra fiber in diet. Harbinger know how it is.”

I pinched the bridge of my nose, but I couldn’t help but laugh,

“Yeah, I suppose I do. Anyways, here’s a little gift.” I reached into my armor smile and pulled out his exoskeleton armor. He ran up and grabbed it, gushing over the metal,

“Hod not break Hod’s wings now! Hod not like broken twig anymore.”

I shrugged, “That’s the plan. Anyways, I gotta go.” I turned and walked out of the house, “Train with flying in that. If doesn’t fit or doesn’t work out, send me a message letting me know why and I’ll fix it for you.”

Before I closed the door, I looked at Hod. He was still chewing the wood, grimacing as he did.

“Oh yeah, and don’t finish eating that wood. It’s a recipe for an awful few next hours. You know, unless you enjoy painful shits and all.”

Hod spit out the wood, “Harbinger wise. Sometimes, Bathroom is nice. Other times, bathroom is battlefield. Hod prefer nice bathroom.”

I didn’t want to hear anymore, so I closed the door. Hod could do whatever it is that Hod does during his free time. I went back towards Althea’s tent. After having another lunch, I handed off the armor and went back towards planning. I wrote a brief of the plan, sent it to Torix, and got an ok from him after a few adjustments.

Just like that, the next few days passed as I experimented with my new legendary skill. Torix and I grinded out all the details of the plan over a half an hour long meeting. He liked the plan, though he discussed the need for a battalion of the legion to join him. He didn’t want to risk all of his summons for Ajax’s attention. Considering how dangerous he was, I couldn’t blame him.

Just like that, the day of the plan dawned, the skies gray and cloudy. That night, the glowing green aura around Yawm’s world tree seeped into him now. Once it emptied, he would awaken. We didn’t have time for a plan B anymore. The goal was to kill Elijah then regroup. We didn’t think it was even possible to kill Ajax yet.

How we were going to kill Yawm...the dimensional opening seemed more and more likely. We would make a last ditch request for early rewards from the quarantine. We’d create a rupture in dimensions before I shoved him in. If we both fell in, well, I guess I would die.

I shook those thoughts from my head. Killing Ajax after we killed Elijah was a possibility. If we could finish Ajax before Yawm awakened, we had a chance of finishing this.

After clearing my head, Althea and I set out towards Elijah's weekly worship. Elijah would perform it near the lake beneath the world tree. Elijah always stood on a root of the world tree as he spoke, and the named ones stood below him. Hod would use the trees as cover, and Althea would just use her own stealth. I would walk out of the ground and grab his attention before they arrived. They would strike and I would charge.

Torix organized a meeting with the legion before all that though. They needed a moral boost, and I had turned into a symbol for them since killing Dakhma. We would leverage that fact, turning me into someone the army could get behind. We would need whatever advantage we could grasp considering the odds.

They all clustered right outside the new quarantine zone. Yawm hardly controlled a square mile of territory anymore. All that remained was the world tree and the dense metropolis at the center of Springfield.

The floating islands remained, their beauty marred by the monsters that writhed upon them. There were no more yellow forests covering Springfield. There were no more ghosts of people, made of deformed flesh squirming through the city. With a cold, unyielding hand, Torix decimated their entire population over the last month.

Althea and I reached the meeting point. Torix stood on a raised platform of earth. As I shot through the air towards them all, I reached out a hand. I created a gravity vortex, carrying myself towards the pillar where the others stood. Torix grinned at me, a proud look on his face. Kessiah wasn't there. She was off training the newer recruits.

The Eltair were circling through the air. Many of them landed along the edges of buildings and in the empty sills of broken windows. At least a thousand troops were grouped up between four buildings, the massive quarantine shielding us from Yawm.

Althea and I landed with all the members of the legion staring at us. For some reason, I wasn't nervous. It didn't seem like the legion was either. The constant fighting hardened them into veterans. They were averaging level 500, a ridiculous level just a few months ago. Now they were a unified army, united under a single purpose.

We stood there for a moment, the crowds murmuring a roar in our ears. It was awe inspiring sight. This was a horde going off towards war, a war of survival. Torix gestured at me,

“Go rally the troops. They’ll listen to the human that killed a follower.”

Hod nodded, “Hod already told Eltari. Eltari know Harbinger’s prowess in combat. Eltari follow you.”

Althea grinned at me, and I grinned back. I turned towards the crowd, I spread my arms wide. When I spoke, Torix amplified my voice. It echoed off the nearby skyscrapers and into the sky,

“Who here is ready for war?”

The legion roared, raising their rifles into the air.

“That’s good. We’re here to fight one. We’ve pushed back the nightmare. We’ve taken our city back. Springfield was dead, and we brought it back to life. Now the last stronghold lies behind this final barrier.”

The eldritch swarmed behind the barrier, unable to pass the field left by the quarantine zone. Abstractions twitched behind the barrier, hungry and waiting for the coming feast. We would teach them who was feasting on who.

“Do you see them? They’re the monsters we once feared. I remember when the system first started. I was a scared child.” I pounded my chest, the clash of metal on metal resounding through the crowd,

“Just as you all have, I forged myself in the flames of an endless war. We all stood at the brink, hopelessness crawling up our spine like the breath of a monster at our necks. We turned towards that monster, and we smiled and we laughed. We struck fear into that shadow. Today, we make sure the monsters never forget that fear.”

My armor grinned as I raised my hands, “We will teach them fear. We will carve it into their skin. We will bury it so deep that even their children will fear us. We will crush their bones. We will rip apart their skin. They believe that they feast on us. We are the ones that feast on them. We are the coming storm. We are the rising tide. We are the force nature, unleashed in all its fury.”

I clasped my hands into fists,

“Come, my brothers and sisters. Today, we conquer.”

I left one hand raised in a fist as I boomed, “Today, we rise.”

Chapter 104: War

The legion of soldiers thundered out. The roar of approval lasted for a full minute before I turned towards the barrier. Before we marched through it, I needed to finish off my speech with a bang. You see, Torix added a simple adjustment towards my own plan. It was centered around a show of strength. It was a simple set up really.

The monster density had increased over the last few days since the quarantine zone shrunk. By the time we reached them, the monsters begged for freedom. They collected near the outer barriers, so the legion’s progress stalled out. The density of monsters was too high. Many members of the legion were demoralized by the wall of monsters. Who could blame them?

They were running into a massive horde of monsters. They needed a reminder of what humans could do. These hordes of monsters were just fodder compared with what we had to face next. To demonstrate this, Torix and I discussed all kinds of different tactics from nukes to bombs to speeches. The best solution we found was abusing Event Horizon.

It drained health in a massive aoe. That meant I could take on throngs of enemies without suffering the consequences. So we added a speech and this slaughter as means of making the legion fight with all they had, even against Ajax.

With that in mind, Torix raised a hand, his own voice amplified, “Remember that he too was a human, just as many of you still are.” He turned to me, “Show them what we are capable of, Harbinger.”

I nodded, my armor grinning with a set of jagged armor teeth,

“Of course.”

I charged my runes before discharging them. I shot towards the barrier before drilling through it. I reached the other side, a swarm of monsters pouring towards me. I reached

out with Event Horizon, feeding off them. Even as the abstractions clustered around me, it made no difference. I regenerated faster than they could kill me.

On the other side of the barrier, the soldiers stared in silence. They saw a horde of monsters tearing me apart. I would show them something different altogether. As I shot through the air, I dragged a horde of the abstractions with me using gravity wells. I crushed them into the pavement below me. As I landed, crags of pavement and dirt crushed upwards.

I grinned and laughed at the monsters. As they came, I crushed. As they swarmed, I slaughtered. With limitless health, I ripped and roared out. I punched and pulped the creatures. I maimed and murdered them by the dozen. With Force of Nature at full blast, I was a blur of movement among the abstractions and solar beetles.

I weaved between their endless strikes, my technique flawless. No number of them would phase me. I devoured their bodies, feasting on the energy as I crushed them to pulp. It was a bloodbath. Puddles of blood formed under my feet. These puddles turned to streams than rivers. Before I finished, I created an ocean of their blood.

Everything else faded away. It was effortless destruction. I chained my skills and strikes, the usage of the skills pristine, like a symphony of movement. I reached for the apex of my potential, pushing past my own limits. I was a storm of death. I was a monster made of metal. The bodies piled beside me, becoming hills than mountains. They melted within my aura, turning to mush.

Within minutes, I decimated the crowd of monsters that collected along the barrier. I heaved for breath, breathing in a fine mist of orange blood. The coagulating liquid on me soaked into my metal skin as my armor gorged on the corpses. Once the area was clear, I walked out of the quarantine. My steps pounded on the earth, each step quaking the ground.

I leapt back onto the earthen pillar. I landed onto it before standing tall. Torix pointed towards the barrier. From his hands, several portals opened. From them, monsters crawled out. Dragons of fire, treants of light, swarms of hornets, ice elementals, and monsters of all kinds poured out. Torix put on the helmet I made him, the black accentuating the golden trim on his robe.

He opened a portal beside him, pulling out the staff. Mana gems encrusted both the helmet and the staff, extending his mana pool. He pointed it forwards,

“Come, legion. We fight them with their own kind.”

The monsters charged forwards, the soldiers marching behind them. Once they crashed through the barrier, they tore into the world tree’s roots. Fire spread out along with ice, mist forming where they met. I turned towards Hod and Althea,

“You guys ready?”

They nodded. I stepped into the ground, burrowing beneath them. Althea dissipated and Hod leapt up into the air. We needed to hurry. Our plan rested on catching Elijah by surprise. He wasn’t even a mile away, so we reached him in a minute. I burrowed deep beneath them while Hod and Althea closed in.

Once under them, I sensed Elijah and his followers above me. My gravitational sense and Tactile Cognition gave me a picture of the followers. Once there, I took a moment and prepared myself. The plan relied on a fast, hard burst of damage. We would cripple him before he could escape. Once he was downed, I would whittle him down.

During the fight, I would use his followers as free health regen, keeping me alive. Althea and Hod would sneak in attacks on him while I preoccupied him. The plan was solid, one I could follow.

With that resolve forming, I gritted my teeth and clasped my fists as I walked out of the ground. Elijah was preaching his sermon. A congregation of followers piled along the bank of the lake beneath the world tree. They took on all shapes and sizes. Somewhere like lions and tigers with fur made of steel. Others were crustaceans, covered in armored shells.

Most were humanoid though, with dark yellow skin and covered in robes of white or black. Elijah Joan’s voice boomed across the landscape as they stared at him. The world tree’s green glow was dimming, the energy sinking into Yawm. It was like staring at a ticking time bomb. When I looked at Elijah, I gulped at his title.

Elijah Joan, the Fallen Seraph(lvl 3204)

It reminded me why we were rushing in like this. Fighting several of these monsters at once was impossible. This particular monster seemed unconcerned, however.

He preached away even with me showing myself. Elijah's face was hidden under a white hood on his white robe. Everything was cast in a shadow besides his teeth and eyes. Both were open too wide, making him look insane.

His words didn't sound quite so unhinged,

"Yawm will come before the day ends. He gave you life with his plague. We protect him from the residents of this world. We have guarded his resting place. He let us come here after the last world was glassed by Schema. Now someone has stolen the core our lord created. We are no longer protected from the atomic fires that Schema will no doubt rain upon us."

He spread his arms, "It matters not. Yawm will use their own fires against them. He will harness the energy that boils the blood of us mere mortals. He has done so before. He will do so again. We must hold faith in him. He will revive himself, and his might will smite those that kill your brothers and sisters."

I speck of doubt formed in my head. If Schema planned on dropping nuclear bombs over our city, he should tell us that way we could get the fuck out. Even then, Elijah was talking about nuclear holocaust levels of destruction. Even with all my stats, I would be obliterated along with anything else in a mile radius of the explosion.

I didn't have time to dwell on that though. After killing the crowd of monsters, I gained a few levels. I placed all my points into endurance as Elijah noticed me. I finished walking out of the the ground. The white of his eyes turned bloodshot in an instant, "We have a transgressor upon holy ground. Prepare yourselves. Those that die will be sent to an eternal afterlife, but Yawm wishes life for you all."

I opened a palm towards him, shouting so my voice would be heard, "What did you mean by an atomic fire?"

Elijah's eyes narrowed, "I do not trust an agent of Schema. You've been indoctrinated by his dogma. You worship the strength he gives. You are drunk on it. We will not submit to the same tyranny. We will not let him turn us into no more than machines, living tools that must obey him."

I spread out my arms, “We don’t have to obey him.”

Elijah pointed a hand at me, “You are a fool if you believe that. What choice have you had since our lord arrived? Just like with all the other worlds covered in intelligent life, we have been assaulted since we landed here. Brother Dakhma and Sister Etna have both perished to this harsh place. Like so many followers before them, they were killed not by an eldritch, but by sentient life.”

I shouted, “What the fuck are you talking about? You infected our planet with a plague. You turned families into moving piles of meat. Now you’re bitching about us fighting back. What did you expect? For us to kiss your feet while you turned us into puppets.”

Elijah grimaced, “The insects freed them from the shackles of Schema. You have no idea how tight the iron grip of that machine becomes over time. He can turn you into a willing slave given time. In your case, he already has. You’re like a pig being fattened before the slaughter.”

I reached out with Event Horizon, “We’ll see who slaughters whom.”

I walked forward, the named ones backing away from me as I approached. Elijah raised hands towards the sky. His wings burst out from under his robe. One wing was a holy white, an angel’s wing ebbed light. The other wing was one of flesh, the strips of meat forming into a single mass. He spoke out, an orb of light forming over his head.

Before he finished chanting his spell, I dived into the ground. Within a second, I unleashed my overcharged runes, propelling me from the ground. I shot over the mass of named ones, their health charging my runes in seconds. With the runes on my arms bursting with power, I readied myself for an aerial strike.

Elijah crossed his massive wings in front of him, forming an X shape. I grinned mid flight. Althea materialized right behind Elijah’s right wing. Hod’s dive whistled through the air as he reached towards Elijah’s left wing.

With the dagger I made, Althea slashed down. Her left arm morphed into a mass of muscle mid swing. It connected with the ligaments holding Elijah’s wing out. Hod landed at the same time, his hulking, eldritch form slashing with curved claws. The shadows dug into the flesh wing of Elijah.

Elijah's orb of light dampened before I slammed into his crippled wings. I condensed Event Horizon onto his frame, the aura bending as I commanded it. Elijah fell backwards, crushing into the world tree's root beneath him. I bounced back from the point of impact with his wings. As I landed on the ground, Hod and Althea dashed back towards Elijah.

They stabbed at his wings, feathers and blood flying everywhere. Seconds later, Elijah sliced his wings outward, blowing a tremendous gust of wind in both directions. Hod and Althea were flung backwards. As they flipped through the air, I dug into the world tree's root, burrowing through it like dirt. Elijah tried standing, I grabbed his foot before dragging him down into the root.

He could fly despite his immense mass. That was Elijah's biggest strength. Once up in the air, he could reach Ajax in seconds. We needed to cripple him before he got up. Torix had never seen him dig through the ground, so this was an easy way of slowing him down. I drug him into the dirt before his wing of flesh balled itself up like a fist.

It slammed into the tree, sending a kinetic wave through me. It was like the sandworm on Hod's homeworld, but my body tanked the damage with ease. Without missing a beat, I dragged him deeper into the root. It was like knowing someone couldn't swim, then taking them out into deep water. Like that, Elijah submerged into the root.

Elijah curled up into a ball, his arms and wings moving through the dense wood with ease. The sound of an earthquake ebbed from above. The matter around him condensed, pulling in before he spread his arms outward.

A wave of light magic discharged with destructive might. It rattled through me, like being in a car barreling down a hill. The root around him disintegrated into sawdust, leaving a circular impression in the wood. I flopped onto the ground. I looked up, and Elijah had grown two more wings while he floated.

Just like the others, one was flesh and the other made of white feathers. Before he finished Hod and Althea were upon him. Hod leapt from the top of the root, his body behind his overhead slash. Althea darted down, firing a bolt into the wing before slicing with her dagger. They both impacted Elijah's injured wings.

Hod severed through the one of flesh, and Althea broke the one on her side. I dashed towards the flesh wing, reaching out with event Horizon. I caught it and bit into the

wing, devouring it before it could do more damage. I even reached out with Event Horizon, disintegrating any splatters of blood or falling feathers.

I didn't want him empowering his allies with feathers or his blood. Elijah stayed flying, the two new wings supporting his weight. His hood fell from his face, exposing him. Like his wings, one half of his face was angelic. The other half was monstrous. He had kind, soft features on the unmarred one. His skin was pale, like snow. Red veins crept across the skin like a roadmap, however.

The other side of him wasn't as easy on the eyes. Massive scars crept up his face, the results of many burns. Patches of exposed bone were seen on his jaw and skull. On the bone, the dimensional cipher was carved. He had given himself to Yawm's experimentation.

Elijah spread his working wings out, one of his wings limp against his side. He spread them shooting into the air. Before he even reached thirty feet from me, I grabbed him with telekinesis. As I did, I created a gravity vortex beneath me and him. I condensed Overwhelming Presence back into my frame, making me much heavier.

The pull on my hands was tremendous, but I stopped him from moving. He glanced down, veins popping up over his face,

"You shall not stop me heathen."

He curved his wings together, generating a ball of white energy. It sucked the air in around it before he launched it. A cataclysmic sound ushered as the slow moving ball floated towards me. Hod and Althea dashed towards him again as I released my telekinetic hold on him. I leapt sideways, avoiding the ball of light.

Whenever it struck the ground, the matter near it siphoned into the light. It released a high pitch sound, like screeching metal as the ground around the orb disintegrated. Once it finished eating the ground, it imploded, blipping out of existence.

Althea and Hod dashed towards Elijah again, but he whipped his wings at them, "Begone, insects."

From the ends of his wings, two tornadoes formed. They slinked around Elijah like snakes before reaching Hod and Althea. They were both sucked into the vortexes.

Elijah spun his wings around, the tornadoes slinging with them like whips. After building momentum, he lifted his wings to slam them into the each other.

I shot off the ground. I interrupted him, my fist colliding with his stomach. Elijah keeled over, blood spurting from his stomach. The tornadoes dissipated, slinging Althea and Hod in random directions away from us. Before I fell from Elijah, I wrapped my arms around him and his wings. Like an aerial german suplex, I sent us back towards the earth.

We plunged down, pulverizing the bit of root remaining beneath us. The entire ground splintered, cracks webbing outwards for dozens of feet. An explosion of sound emanating from our impact. A cloud of tossed dirt billowed after, along with a shockwave. Named ones were blown away, some landing in the lake beside us.

The fish snapped at the named ones, gobbling them up as they ran towards us. I pulled myself over, placed my knees around Elijah's stomach. I ground and pounded his face, my strikes creating ripples in the ground. The entire time, I converted each punch into telekinetic bullets. My runes raged with energy.

I raised my fist, overcharging my runes before slamming in against Elijah's exposed skull. The bone cracked before he grabbed my back with a wing. He pulled me up, a pillar of light surrounding us both. He floated up, defying gravity as he reared back a fist. A ball of white light appeared in his palm. He grinned at me,

"Let's see how much it takes to break you."

Chapter 105: Betrayal

Elijah shoved the ball of energy towards my neck. My armor ripped open, a mouth full of teeth biting his hand. The energy ball went into my dimensional storage while I reared back my right leg. With my armor being separate from the face on my skin, I could still speak.

"More than it takes to break you."

I lifted my right leg, kneeling up towards Elijah's stomach. Right before it landed, I created the same telekinetic pads and gravity vortexes that I do for my fists. My knee bounced off the pad, launching a telekinetic bolt into Elijah's stomach. He keeled over, his wing releasing me as blood splattered onto the ground.

I gripped the ground with telekinesis, letting me get my footing even while floating. I stepped forwards, snapping a hook into Elijah's jaw. My fist snapped back just short of his chin, cracking a wave of kinetic force into his face. His head whiplashed, before I stepped forwards with a right hook. The crater beneath us deepened at the impact.

I whipped another hook into his jaw. Spit, teeth, and blood spurted from his mouth, his face shaking back and forth. He reached out towards me, but I took a step backwards. I was just short of his grabbing arms. As he pulled them back, I stepped forwards. I rotated on my heels, launching another hook into his right side with my left hand.

His ribs cracked as my left hand bounced backwards. I pulled the fist back, letting me turn all that momentum into my right hand. A monstrous right hook collided with Elijah's face, the dull pop of breaking bone ebbing out. He was in my domain, fighting with my rules. Like this, he didn't stand a chance.

Learning that after only a few seconds, Elijah snapped his fingers. The light surrounding us waned, making him fall down. Before he landed on the ground, he waved his wings. The gust of wind was overwhelming, like withstanding a tornado's wind.

It pushed me back, my telekinetic footing unstable. I fell towards the ground as he flew up. With my back on the dirt, he passed above me. As he passed the crater we created with our battle, Hod and Althea struck at his wings. Their simultaneous attack made him fumble mid flight. He fumbled in the air before crashing down onto the ground again.

I sunk into the earth, burrowing my way up to where he landed. I shot out of the ground, my fist connecting with the back of his spine. Fissures formed around me as the pressure of my attack pushed into the ground. Giant slabs of hardened dirt cracked upwards, sending Elijah up off the ground.

Before he landed, Althea fired two bolts into his wings. Both shots connected, causing the wing to fall off of him. I stepped forwards, pulling my fist close. As I turned on my feet, I extended my footing with telekinesis. I let my arm hang wide as I dragged my arm over my head.

As the blow closed in on Elijah's gut, I pulled the fist in with all my strength. The overhand right tightened, turning into a compact punch that struck like a cannon. My

arm bounced back, Force of Nature letting me weave in gravity and telekinesis with ease.

Elijah received the full brunt of the strike, his body propelled backwards. He shot into the dirt with an earth-shattering shockwave and sound. From inside the freshly made crater, I turned around, lunging towards his falling wing. I caught it, hugging it against me before the wing landed on the ground.

I landed by rolling on the ground before sinking my teeth into the piece of Elijah. I jumped up, the ground moving under my feet like I was in a car. Elijah stood from the attack already, blood pouring from his wounds. Althea and Hod did another synchronized strike. This time, Elijah was ready.

He ducked down, sacrificing his last remaining feathered wing. Hod and Althea severed it, but Elijah grabbed Hod's face mask. With ease, Elijah pulled him up as I dashed towards him. Elijah stomped the ground, fractures crawling outwards. From these fractures, fire crept out and a portal of lava opened beneath him.

Before I could reach him, Elijah shoved Hod into the portal. I reached out with my gravity magic, creating a vortex that pulled up from where Hod was. The lava floated upwards, like a waterfall of magma. Hod fell up too. Before the red hot liquid touched him, an idea clicked in my head.

When I used gravity, I pulled the fabric of reality in, condensing it over a single point. I would close my hand, closing the force in. Instead of crushing it down, I opened up my hand, stretching the reality around Hod. I held it there before discharging my rune. The effect stamped onto him, lingering.

Skill learned! Anti-Gravity Manipulation – Just as there is a force that pulls all objects together, there exists a force that repulses all matter as well. You have found it. +1% to ease of Anti-Gravity Manipulation. +1% to power of Anti-Gravity Manipulation.

I finished this in a moment. The lava that was falling up towards him now fell away from him, like he was repulsing it with nothing. The notification passed by the corner of my vision, unnoticed.

Elijah overcame the force, holding onto Hod as he pushed him into the pit of lava. Hod submerged. The cracks dissipated over a second, the portal closing in an instant. Elijah grinned,

“One of your friend for one of mine.”

Althea landed after her dash, her feet dragging across the ground. With a dagger in her left hand and a cannon as her right arm, she fired bolts at Elijah. They drilled through the air as I charged towards the fallen seraph. As I reached him, his amputated wing flexed.

As it did, feathers harder than steel shot towards my eyes and neck. I covered my face by crossing my arms before Elijah slammed his fist into my unprotected stomach. The force of the blow dented my armor, keeling me over as he raised a hand. Energy coalesced into his palm before he struck down at my head.

The white energy burned like a wildfire, disintegrating my skull. A moment later, it detonated, a wave of force blowing me backwards. It was like swallowing a grenade. I tumbled through the air, half my vision missing. I flopped against the ground before pushing myself up.

My silver blood gushed from my face, drenching the ground beneath me. The nerves in my head and body fired off, like I was coated in flames. Pins and needles spread out over my entire back and legs. My arms felt weak. A puddle of my blood formed beneath me. Like staring at a mirror, I stared into the puddle, seeing a reflection of myself.

A portion of my head was missing. The upper left part, including the eye socket, was just gone. A portion of my brain was exposed, some of it missing. Tendrils of my armor criss crossed around in the meat of it, reinforcing it from damage. It was disgusting and the sense of violation was palpable.

Deep in my head, the cool breeze around me brushed against it. It was like putting an ice into your nose and holding it there. My hand shook as I touched where my skull should be. When my fingers passed where they would normally stop, it made the injury real.

The bones over the injury regenerated, my silver blood coming together to form skin. I shivered as my injury healed over the next twenty seconds. The entire time, I was paralyzed from my waist down. There was a mental paralyzation too though. Seeing something like that and knowing it's yourself...It's haunting.

Once my head regenerated, my eye did the same. Strands of my armor molded through it, making the organ from something soft into something hard. Feeling returned to my legs and belly. As my helmet regenerated over the skin and hair of my new face, I glanced up.

Elijah had created another tornado, this time with his arm. It already caught Althea, whipping her through the air before slamming her into the ground. A crater formed underneath her as a pillar of blood formed from her mouth. Elijah leapt into the air, stomping towards her.

I stood up, but my legs weren't working right. I watched as he fell towards her. Althea rolled over, leaping away from Elijah. A tectonic explosion of energy radiated out, sending out a shockwave. A cloud of dust billowed out a moment after.

Althea landed onto the ground before Elijah dashed out of the cloud towards her. Althea looked at me while I reached out an arm towards her. Relief spread out over her face before she turned to Elijah. She morphed her arms, sheathing her dagger and placing the rifle along her back.

Elijah reached her as she morphed her arms. They were enormous clubs as Elijah laughed,

"Does the little girl believe she can harm a seraph? I doubt-"

Althea's right fist collided with his face, his bones cracking out with a satisfying pop. Before Elijah was sent flying away, Althea grabbed his leg with her other arm.

"I know."

She slammed him back and forth, tossing him like a ragdoll.

"That I can."

Viens crept up her face as she increased her eyebrows. She flashed her teeth, rage contorting her beautiful face.

“Beat the shit out of you.”

She formed craters as Elijah’s body was pulverized against the ground. She threw him towards an unharmed portion of the world tree’s root. She dashed towards him, slamming her fist into his gut. His blood spurted onto her, but she ignored it entirely. She howled, rearing back her fists and pummeling Elijah’s face.

The bones in her arms broke and the skin on her hands tore. Her assault ceased after a final blow that beat Elijah through the enormous root of the world tree. Elijah dashed back towards her, Althea side stepped his dash. She rolled across the ground. My legs started working again, finally.

I stood up, stumbling forward before I got back my footing. I charged my runes before dashing towards Elijah with an explosive burst. Elijah was laughing at Althea, chasing her as she ran away.

“So the little girl breaks her arms before she can even kill me then? Pathe-”

I dashed into him, slamming him into the ground. We rolled on the ground before he kicked me off of him. I flopped through the air before landing on my feet. I dug my arms and feet into the ground, slowing down my drag backwards. Elijah stood up, sweat falling from his forehead.

Wounds covered him, along with his tattered white robe. Splotches of red soaked it from head to toe. Four stubs gushed blood from his back from his severed wings. He heaved his breaths,

“Neither of you can kill me. I’ve been blessed by his holiness.”

He tore of his robe, revealing eldritch runes littering his body. I reached him, slamming my fist into his gut. He grinned at me, blood leaking from between his teeth,

“It doesn’t matter.”

I slammed a hook into his face. Two of his molars were sent out of his mouth.

“His gifts will save me.”

I slammed three consecutive hooks into his side before whipping another hook up into his jaw, all with the same arm.

“And they will destroy you.”

Just like with Dakhma, the eldritch runes glowed. They didn't shine red. They shined a bright white, like Elijah's light magic. I didn't let him complete the ritual. Legions of the named ones sprinted towards us. During the fight, the shockwaves of our strikes kept blowing them away.

Now that we were finally standing still, they caught up.

Elijah smirked, “They will buy me the time I need.”

I slammed hook after hook into his stomach, turning his bones to mush. My fists punched holes through his robe, waves of kinetic energy bursting out from the back of Elijah. As the named ones fell into range, I extended Event Horizon out. As they ran into the aura, a surge of power flooded my system.

Elijah slammed a fist across my cheek, rupturing the metal of my face. I grinned at him as it healed, the wounds snapping back into place. I laughed at him, my armor grinning and laughing with me. Elijah's smirk turned into a frown as each of my strikes increased in power.

Every hook was empowered by my overcharged runes. I slugged at him, keeping us pinned with an enormous gravitational vortex beneath us. I powered it with the named one's life force. My quick, compact punches turned into a slugging fest as I hit on Elijah like a punching bag.

He attempted fighting back, but I twisted, contorted, and molded my armor, deflecting his strikes. Without him being blown back, he couldn't escape my full onslaught. It was a freeing feeling, like finally being able to use your own trump card. It turned the tides of our battle.

Like with Dakhma, the tendrils of flesh kept forming over him. I converted his body into pulp as quickly as it transformed. With all the excess mana from the named ones, I kept us right beside each other with gravity. I could rear back and slam my fists with unobstructed destruction. He wasn't sent flying backwards anymore.

No, he faced the full force of my fists. As more named ones came in, I gained more mana to play with. I overcharged the runes over me, unleashing them with every strike I used against Elijah. I extended the gravitational warp beneath us, increasing its intensity.

It pulled us both down and the ground up. Pinned on this makeshift arena, Elijah and I struggled just to stand. Any named that came near us was instantly crushed into the ground, unable to approach. Elijah glanced around as I struck him. Horror spread across Elijah's face. His eyes widened as his hands shook in terror.

Malice spread over my face,

"That's right Elijah. They only make me stronger."

Elijah shouted out in between my strikes, "Stop...Run...a...way...you...idiots."

My laughing drowned out his cries, however. They turned into weakened grunts as the flow of mana increased. It was like I was in an ocean of raw energy, drenched in the overwhelming power. It fueled me as I tore Elijah apart.

Seconds dragged on into minutes, his eldritch form unable to complete itself. Elijah suffered the entire time. He gasped in agony as I tore him apart. He choked on his own blood, sharpened pieces of his own bones digging into him each time I hit. It sounds brutal, perhaps even a bit evil, but I couldn't help it.

I hated Yawm, and I hated his followers. For all I knew, Elijah killed Hod in that portal. A part of me wanted him to suffer. A part of me wished he would howl out in agony as I wrenched out his guts. It was a primal part of me, but I couldn't deny it existed. At that moment, it surfaced with all the hate and rage and wrath that came with it.

Elijah recieved all that pent up rage in full. By the time the named ones discovered what was going on, it was over. The bodies pinned down near us melted, revealing

Elijah to them. He was broken, every piece of his shattered beyond recognition. With his face destroyed, he reached out and spoke with a broken jaw,

“Please...help me.”

I lifted a foot and stomped his skull, caving it in. His death notification appeared beside my view. I had learned from the fight with Dakhma. I didn't give Elijah a moment of rest, punishing every moment where he was vulnerable. It cut the fight short, far shorter than with Dakhma.

Just as I let my guard down, cracks ushered from the earth beside me. Fire spread from these cracks, scorching the earth. A pit of lava formed, erupting upwards. I raised my fists, ready for the fight. A moment later, the lava fell off of Hod. Gashes covered his body, his shadow form leaking black blood.

He glanced at me, the red, featureless eyes menacing. He stepped forwards, out of the lava before falling onto the ground. I shifted Event Horizon off him. The portal disappeared a second after. As Hod hit the ground, he opened his mouth and let out the eldritch energy within him. His head raised up as streams of the energy were released.

That makes it sound cool, but it was like he was barfing,

“Bleeeeeeeeeehhh...Bleeeeeeeeeehhh...Oh, Hod going to hurl again...Bleeeeeehhh.”

He finished puking before his face slapped against the ground.

“Hod feel better..”

I sighed out, my fists lowering. I pulled back my helmet before dragging my hands across my face. I turned towards elijah, his mushed corpse resting beside us. I picked it up, dumping it into my armor mouth. My armor assimilated the energy, the metal shivering over my skin in pleasure.

I shook out the fighting jitters, turning towards the assault team of Torix. The plumes of smoke were massive, far larger than I imagined they would be. In the corner of my eye, someone was standing. I turned around, expecting Torix. It wasn't.

It wasn't human. It was porytian, the species Yawm hailed from. Slender, muscled limbs covered in bark skin, it heaved for breath, a green glow webbing outwards from its eyes. Wherever the green traced, the veins and muscles were large and tense. It had large hands with thin fingers, spiking a dormant fear in me.

It lifted a hand, an unmatched grace in the movement. Somehow something as simple as raising a hand was elegant and refined. A mane of leaves trailed down its back, acting as a mane of 'hair'. Above its head, I read its name and level.

Ajax Volan, the Void Eater(lvl 4327)

He leapt up off the tree, sifting through the air with more grace than birds. He landed in front of me. As he did, a few of the outer named ones caught up to us. I lifted my fists and tucked in my chin.

Ajax waved his hand behind him, some unseen wave slicing behind him. Reality split, two halves forming. They slid against each other, separating before snapping back together. The named ones behind him weren't so lucky. They fell apart, all them sliced with laser precision wherever the split in reality had been.

With a deep, pained voice, Ajax raised a hand,

"Come."

Chapter 106: It Comes

I frowned, "What?"

Ajax spoke with a voice like metal,

"We need to escape, before he awakens. You cannot fight him."

I kept my guard up, "I don't trust you."

Ajax stepped forward, “Good. You shouldn’t. Not yet. I can promise you that there are other ways of handling Yawm besides fighting him. I can show you those ways, for something in turn.”

Althea skulked up, her form invisible and without sound. Ajax turned towards her, “I can see you, hunter. Understand that I’m not in a position where I fear either of you.”

He finished speaking and disappeared. It was a complete and utter erasure of his existence. Nothing remained, not his scent, the heat off his breath, not even his effect on gravity. A second later, he appeared beside Althea. He grabbed her skull, lifting her with a single hand,

“I could squash your head like crushing a ripe fruit.” He set her down, “But I’m not. That alone should warrant some kind of discussion.” He turned to me, “Should it not?”

Althea stepped back, fear written over her face. She touched her face with her hands, making sure she was still alive. Ajax laughed, “Come now, I already know you revive after death. There’s no need to act in front of me.”

Althea’s fear disappeared, a grimace replacing it. Ajax turned to me, “I can hide in places neither of you can see. I am the eyes and ears of Yawm, and I have watched you since your time in BloodHollow.”

I whispered, “There’s no way.”

Ajax raised a hand, “There are things that exist that you know nothing of. There are places that you are blind too. I can share them with you. I can open your closed eyes, and give you what you need to fight Yawm, but I need something first.”

I narrowed my eyes at him, “Like what? Our souls?”

Ajax laughed, “Hah hah, No. I need my soul back instead.”

Confusion leaked onto our faces before Ajax continued,

“Yawm has experimented with all of us followers. I am the most sane of us, but I still carry scars.”

Ajax took his hand and plunged his fingertips into his own chest. They broke through the bark as Althea grimaced. Ajax pulled, opening up his chest. Within him, there were bloodshot eyes, grinning mouths, and whispering voices. Ajax lowered his hand, letting his chest heal.

“This is what has been done to me. I ask you to cure it, just as you cured Kessiah.”

I frowned, “Cure that? I didn’t cure anything...wait...You mean after Dakhma infected her?”

Ajax nodded, “Precisely. Heal me of my affliction and I will give you what you need to know against Yawm. Otherwise, every person here will die in moments.”

Above us, Yawm stirred within his shining green prison. As he moved, the ground quaked beneath us. Ajax raised his hands,

“Trust me when I tell you this. You do not have time to hesitate. You have two options. Help me and I will help you, or Yawm obliterates you both. That is-”

Ajax rolled his shoulders, “Unless I kill you first. What is your decision, Harbinger?”

I raised a hand towards him, “You have to explain everything before I help you.”

Ajax leaned back and laughed, “And tell me why you’re in the position to make demands?”

I pointed up at Yawm, “Because I can tell him that you let three of his followers be killed.”

Ajax lowered his right hand, “I’ll kill you before you can.”

I banged my fists together, “I told you what I would accept. Good luck finishing me off that fast.”

Mana charged into my runes, the red aura of energy radiating out,

“I’m very, very hard to kill.”

Ajax raised his right hand and clasped it. The fluid movement split reality at my neck. It was an odd sensation, like he was cleaving the fabric of dimensions apart around me. It didn’t cleave me apart, however. IT felt like I wasn’t the dimension he was slicing.

It confused Ajax more than it confused me even. Ajax’s eyes were glowing, green orbs, and one opened wide while another narrowed. It was like he was raising an eyebrow at us,

“You’re not of this plane...You’re somewhere else, while being here...What are you?”

I charged at him, “Something that will kick your ass.”

Ajax raised a palm to me as he shouted, “Stop. I’ll do as you ask.”

I stomped my foot into the ground, extending my footing with telekinesis. The ground caved in around us. I stood up, my hands lowering, “You will?”

Ajax nodded, “Yes. I can’t dispatch of you quickly because of your...I don’t know exactly. You will live long enough to tell Yawm of what I’ve done. I’ll do as you ask and tell you all I know. We must leave now, however. Yawm’s wrath will level this entire city once he’s awakened. That army of yours is dead already.”

I gripped my hands into fists, “Fuck. Really? It’s that bad?”

Ajax leaned his head, giving me a Kubrick stare, “I will not reiterate my words again. He is death incarnate. We must run.”

I turned away from him, pacing behind Althea. I shouted at Hod, “Hey, come over here.”

Hod walked up to us as I opened my status screen, writing out a message to Torix and Kessiah.

Dimension C-138(01/04/2 11:42 P.M.) – Abort mission. Get out with the legion. Elijah’s dead. Ajax is with us. It’s complicated. He may help us. Don’t count on it.

Althea guarded me the entire time as I wrote out the message. Once I finished, I turned towards Ajax,

“Alright. We’re running right now. If you can actually help us, then this is good. We could use a dimension slicing alien on our side.”

Before I finished closing my status, I poured all my points into endurance. Better to get the points in now then later. Before I finished doing so, a perk came up.

The Endless One(Endurance over 10,000, Genesis of Potential tree unlocked, Obliterator tree unlocked, Devotion to the Enduring perk unlocked) – Unlocks the Endless legacy. Only one legacy can be active at any time.

I didn’t really know what a legacy did. I didn’t have time to stand still and figure out either. I turned towards the others, “Let’s go.”

I sprinted away from the world tree, The rest of the group followed not far behind. I ran up beside Althea,

“Can you guard me while I handle my status points? I’ll guard you right after.”

She nodded at me before going back to staring at Ajax. The porytian alien kept pace with ease, his movements lithe and calculated. He didn’t feel or look hostile. Instead his shoulders loosened up in relief. He even sighed as we gained some distance from Yawm.

His relaxation only made me more nervous. He knew what we were up against. It didn't look good. I glanced back at my status, trying to squeeze any advantage out that I could.

So I observed the endurance perk closer for details. I couldn't find anything that hinted at what it was either. I remember it being mentioned whenever I unlocked a perk a long time ago. I figured it wouldn't come up for a while. It was time to figure out.

Even without knowing what it was, I invested a perk point into it. One attribute was a drop in an ocean of stats for me now. Even if the perk wasn't overwhelming, it would certainly be better than one more point endurance.

Once I selected the perk, I invested all the rest of my attribute points into endurance. With that in mind, I opened up my tree menu and put all my points into my current tree, the Killer of Titans. I had enough points to complete it.

Your own mass is something to fear. The ground quakes under footsteps. Enemies will know your coming. They will hear a titan that leaves destruction in its wake. They will hear the might of a giant that crushes cities under its feet.

They will hear you.

Killer of Titans(Tier 5) unlocked! +130% to total mass. +10% of total level added to constitution. 10% more damage against foes with higher mass.

The tree was a surprising boon. Constitution was one of my best stats with my dimensional storage. With a few extra points left, my tree menu opened. There was some interesting options.

Bounty Hunter(Finish an A tier bounty)(0/500) | Immense(have over 50,000,000 effective health, have a mass of over 100,000 pounds (45,360~Kilograms))(0/2,500) | Legendary(Gain a legendary skill)(0/2,500)

I had two tough choices. Bounty hunter wasn't one of those. It didn't synergize with my build like Immense or Legendary did. I didn't have an enormous amount of time for deliberation, so I chose Immense. It seemed like something that would increase my health. I could convert that into more health regen, which let me make more stats.

It was like a cycle that fed into itself. I was already in the habit of feeding the eldritch rune all my excess mana. In fact, I hadn't checked out the bonuses in a while. I opened up my armor menu and glanced at the last bonus.

[Modifications – The dimensional fabric composing this structure has been modified with code from the dimensional cipher. The bonuses are as follows.

+68 Strength

+68 Dexterity]

The bonuses were amounting to something now. With all that handled, I selected finalize on my status screen. My mana generation surged, along with my strength and size. My armor tore once more. I grew several inches in height in an instant. It was an intoxicating rush.

With how many extra stats I gained from spamming endurance, my stat layout was well rounded. Combine that with the per level bonuses from my leveling perks, and each level improved almost everything. Leveling was like evolving into a better version of myself each time. One level was hard to notice by now. Several hundred though? That made a big difference.

Considering that each follower was a massive leap, this rush was palpable. Clearer sight, thoughts, and movement followed an increase in vitality. I was a mana factory at this point, generating massive flows of energy. With how the eldritch runes worked on my forearm, I could convert that mana into raw stats.

It meant endurance was and always would be king for my build. Before I could analyze my status, a notification was in front of me, blocking my screen.

Legacy unlocked! Endless(Tier C)! Legacies allow for the creation of guilds and give stat bonuses to those that join your guild. The grade of your Legacy determines the increase. These bonuses are meager at the lowest tier, tier F. They are very strong for higher tier legacies, like tier A or S.

Endless(Tier C) – Grants 50 endurance and 25 willpower for anyone who joins your guild. Requires at least level 300 to join your guild if you choose to make one. This bonus does not apply to you, only those that join your guild.

It was an interesting prospect. It made me wonder what the bonus was for the legion, if they had one. The legion seemed more like a guild regulated and controlled by Schema, not by a person. It offered technology and training rather than raw stats. The stats didn't amount to some massive amount for anyone, but it was a nice bonus.

The real use of it came with offering it to someone. I could have people do odd jobs for me, collect information, gather artifacts, etcetera. In exchange, I let them join my guild and gain free stats. I would have to speak with Torix about it first.

If I could make a powerful guild, then that would be something worth exploring. I didn't want to ruin that before it even got off the ground. With all that finished, I opened my status screen and checked out the changes. They were epic.

Level 2,406

Strength – 2,226 | Constitution – 3,246 | Endurance – 11,031

Dexterity – 810 | Willpower – 5,453 | Intelligence – 1,902

Charisma – 194 | Luck – 595 | Perception – 323

Health: 863,485/863,485 | Health Regen: 728,291/min or 14,391/sec

Stamina: 483,817/483,817 | Stamina Regen: 4,452/sec

Living Dimension: 0.14 Trillion/4.30 Trillion

Mass: 102,261 pounds(46,384 kilos)

Damage Res – 98.5% | Dimensional Res – 49.25%

Phys Dam Bonus – 26,350% | Damage Bonus – 40%

Event Horizon – 20,000 + (100% of your total health)/min

My health regeneration was increasing faster than my health was. My status changed a bit from previous versions as well. All the damage resistances fused into one, besides for dimensional res. That was probably because it was a different value.

Overall, several of my stats were inflated from my perks and trees. My endurance was higher than it should be by far. My willpower was as well. I imagined my constitution and strength were what a warrior's build normally was. My intelligence was hyper inflated for a fighter in general. My luck and perception were likely higher than a normal fighter too.

Charisma was a stat that lagged behind because my armor reduced it. Besides for that though, I was a stat stick from hell. I could out attribute anybody that was near my level, giving me an edge if raw power. After a few more months of using the dimensional cipher, I would edge out anyone in raw stats.

Working on that was on the top of my priority list now, but I needed time. That was something none of us had. Ajax, Althea, and I all ran away from Yawm with all we had at that moment. I turned behind me, and something like sweat was pouring off of Ajax. I shouted,

“Are you alright, Ajax?”

He shook his head, “No...He's come.”

Right after he spoke, I glanced up at the world tree. We were half a mile away by then. I was flying through the air, giving me an aerial view of the city. The green glow of the world tree had dimmed. Yawm stirred within his prison. With each movement, waves shot through the ground around the world tree.

With my enhanced vision, I saw him with pristine detail. His eyes cracked open. As they did, the green lines traced across his skin. The intensity of the light enhanced until

he shined like a star on earth. The light dimmed down before the runes across his skin began glowing.

As the runes over an arm glowed green, he moved it from his fetal position. Another arm cracked off, then a leg, then his other leg. Yawm struggled against some unseen force before stretching out his arms.

The unseen shackles around him snapped. A hellish shockwave rippled through the city, radiating from him. The wave was vast and powerful. Trees uprooted. Windows shattered. Buildings collapsed. All of the floating islands within the rift crashed down onto the ground as the wave passed them.

The wave of force shot through the rest of the city after. A gust of wind followed in its wake. This gust collapsed buildings and flipped cars. Miles above yawm, clouds were sent outward. A circular opening appeared in the gray, cloudy sky, letting light beam down onto where Yawm stood.

It was like watching a nuclear bomb drop onto a city. The shockwave reached us. In mid flight, even I was sent tumbling by the unbelievable energy.

I rolled through the air before crashing into the ground. Pavement rushed past my face, wind howling in my ears. Dirt, dust, and rocks were sent past me in the shockwave. Boulders rolled by me. Every piece of untempered glass was broken apart. By the time I oriented myself once more, I found myself on the top of a hill.

I jumped onto the top of a building, getting a better view of Yawm. He had raised his hand towards the legion's battle. Facing the black plumes of smoke, Yawm coalesced a blue light into his palm. He launched it towards the legion. As it passed over the city, grass and trees burst into flames. The world burned as the ball of light passed over it.

Before the light collided with the steel legion, I looked above Yawm to check his status. When I saw it, I fell to my knees, the concrete beneath me cracking. I grabbed the sides of my face, my stomach sinking.

A hollow, sickening sensation crept through my body, leaving me numb. There was a reason Schema hadn't sent Overseer's to fight him. There was a reason that Schema hadn't sent a some higher level person either.

He was simply too strong.

Yawm of Flesh(lvl 14,337)

Chapter 107: Ajax Volan

I watched the ball of light float over the city and reach the legion's battle. Whenever the light hit the ground, I lost my vision. My vision returned a moment later. The light singed my eyesight. It was brighter than the sun.

A plume of dust rose above the point of contact. Another wave rippled across the city as the clouds above the impact zone expanded outwards in a circle. Another shockwave hit me, though this time it wasn't nearly as powerful as before. Above the energy ball's impact, a mushroom cloud gushed into the air.

It rose high, higher than the clouds above Springfield. I heaved a breath before someone placed their hand on my shoulder. I turned around, finding Ajax staring at me,

"Stand and run. To run is a victory."

His words snapped me back into reality. I reared back my own fist before punching myself in the face. I growled before shaking off my jelly legs and standing. I turned and sprinted away from Yawm. Ajax and I caught back up with Althea and Hod before reaching the outskirts of the city.

Once we were a reasonable distance, we reached a cluster of woods with a cabin inside it. The walls were dusty and unused. The air was dry, the smell of wood and dirt thick in the air. I checked my status, hoping for a message from Torix or Kessiah. I found one.

Torix Worm, of Darkhill(4:03 P.M. 01/04/01) – We escaped. Regroup a day from now at quarry at 4:00 P.M. New plan needed.

Dimension C-138(4:04 P.M. 01/04/01) – Althea, Hod, and I are fine. We'll brief you on what we know. See you then.

I closed my status screen and turned towards Ajax, Althea, and Hod. Before I spoke, I glanced back at my messages. I was considered dimension C-138. It was an odd feeling. It made the whole being a dimension real. I wasn't human anymore, that was certain.

It made me wonder what Baldag-Ruhl had intended with his original carapace. Why the fuck would he want to be a dimension? If I could figure out why, maybe I could discover the motives for the eldritch in general. I mean, if Baldag-Ruhl created a dimension, why couldn't I at some point?

There wasn't a reason against it. It might be a good long term solution for the eldritch. Instead of killing them or destroying where they came from, we could funnel them into a different place. They could start fresh, and we would never clash with them.

I silenced that wishful thinking as I focused on the here and now. Ajax was inspecting the inside of a cabinet. Althea had her hands behind her as she glanced around. She tried looking busy, but it was obvious that she felt awkward and bored. Hod just stared at a spider,

"Hod wonder if creature talks as Hod does."

The spider turned it's walk, reaching into the shade of a corner,

"Creature likes shadow as Hod does."

Ajax murmured in his metallic voice,

"Your world is odd."

A bit of irritation bled into my words I raised my hands, "We won't have a fucking world with that thing running around. What the fuck are we even supposed to do against that?"

Ajax turned towards me, letting the cabinet close, "I can tell you how to finish him."

I spread out my arms, "I'm open to ideas."

Ajax tapped his chest, "Cleanse me first."

I shook my head, "That wasn't the deal. Tell me everything then I will."

Ajax's eyes narrowed, "Understandable...Then I will start at the beginning."

I sat down, creating a gravity warp that suspended my weight. I did the same under Ajax. He glanced down then back at me before sitting down on the gravity flux.

"Deft handling. I'm surprised. You're world isn't as primitive as Yawm had us believe."

I shook my head, "No, we're pretty primitive. I know that Yawm's using something nuclear, however."

Ajax nodded, "Indeed he is."

Althea sat down in a chair beside us. She put up an attempt at hiding her obvious anger at Ajax, but she just seethed,

"He needs to die."

Ajax laughed, "Other beings that are far beyond your own means have tried. They have all failed. Killing Yawm isn't an option. Ask your Harbinger."

I shook my head, "It's a no go. He's over level 14,000. We don't stand a fucking chance."

Althea's anger drained as she paled, "What?"

Ajax nodded, "Ah, levels. It's been a long time since I've had access to Schema's system. I don't need to know Yawm's level to know you both are no match for him."

He leaned towards us, propping his chin on his arms and his arms on his knees.

“I listened to your lich’s plan of throwing Yawm into a different dimension. I believe that is the best course of action.”

Althea frowned, “I don’t really see how we’re going to get him anywhere near a rip in dimensions.”

I lifted a hand towards Ajax, “Besides, doesn’t he have a sentinel’s spear? He can just cleave his way out.”

Ajax shook his head, “I am Yawm’s spear.”

Althea and I leaned back. Ajax raised an elongated, wooden finger, “He fused it with me during our experimentation. He understands the dim-”

I cut him off, “Just call that, uh, language the eldritch runes. For Althea.”

Ajax shrugged, “So be it. The eldritch runes as you call them, Yawm understands them. Quite well in fact. The spear uses that same language for slicing through dimensions. All that the machine does is powered by that language.”

Ajax tapped two fingers together, “He is reconstructing the fabric of your dimension for his own means. Yawm wants to do the same thing, but in his own vision.”

My thoughts clicked into place. That’s why he outlawed other people knowing about it. That’s why the dimensional cipher increased my stats. Schema was doing the same thing with the cipher as I was. How he got the stats to people exactly, I didn’t really know still.

Ajax looked up at the roof, “And he has been battling that AI since his own exile from the system. We can use his own goals against him.”

Ajax looked down at us,

“I am how Yawm escapes his planets. Without his attention to my own experiments, the eldritch within me will spread and kill me. I do his bidding now for this reason. I am a bartering chip now, however.”

He pointed a finger at me,

“You can say that you have captured me and placed me within a dimensional rift. We will lure Yawm into the rift before we force him into a dimensional opening I create. Once over the dimensional line, Yawm will live out his immortality with the monsters he so wishes to call brothers.”

I frowned, “How in the hell are we going to shove him into a portal?”

Ajax shrugged, “I’m the one slicing dimensions. Surely you can shove him into it?”

Althea spread out her arms, “How are we even supposed to get near him? The guy blows cities up for Schema’s sake.”

Ajax raised himself off of his arms, “With a deal.”

I raised an eyebrow, “What kind?”

Ajax’s eyes narrowed, “One that involves me being used at collateral.”

Althea and I leaned back in our seats. Ajax back and forth between us,

“I am the spear that lets him leave worlds. Without my talents, he’ll be stranded here. Once the overseer discovers that, turn the surface of this world to glass. Even Yawm lacks the abilities to survive that.”

I nodded, “So we’ll use you as a bargaining chip for something that he has.”

Althea murmured, “Then we lure him somewhere and shove him into portal.”

Ajax raised a hand, “That is my plan. Yawm cannot see the levels of individuals as you both can. He will assume your strength is a reflection of your aura and energy output.”

He pointed his raised hand at me, “That means you will be able to falsify your own strength. Your mana generation is unparalleled, and your aura is powerful. You’ve even discovered a few of the eldritch runes. That can be our primary deal maker.”

Hod whispered from the side of the room, “Harbinger learn evil from evil...Hod not like this plan.”

I frowned, “You mean I’ll walk up and ask him to teach me about the eldritch runes in exchange for freeing you?”

Ajax nodded, “That is correct. If you don’t ask for anything, Yawm won’t trust you. You need to have something compelling to ask for. The eldritch runes are the perfect catalyst for this arrangement.”

Ajax stretched his neck as he continued, “You will speak with him directly. Yawm is a sentient. He thinks and can be reasoned with. If anything, he will try and convert you over towards his side.”

I grimaced, “Ugh, that sounds awful.”

“It will be. Yawm disguises the truth of his words with honeyed lies. He plants seeds of doubt that will flourish in your mind. Once their ripe, he’ll take everything from you. I am the perfect example. Be wary of him.”

Althea leaned towards me, “I never met him, but I heard what he’s like. If you’re doing this, don’t talk to him about anything but the runes. Ever.”

I raised my eyebrows, “What if Yawm just blows me up before I can?”

Ajax rolled his head like he was rolling his eyes, “Then you all die, after your death, obviously.”

Althea shivered, “That’s not very comforting.”

Ajax turned towards her, "It's not meant to be. Yawm isn't patient. He will be wondering where his other followers are and what happened to his army. Since that lich of yours decimated it, Yawm will be wary of making his first move."

He turned towards me, "But once he does know, he'll strike hard and fast."

I leaned towards him, "Is he going to unleash the plague again?"

Ajax shook his head, "No. That's for protecting the intail world tree from hostile life on a new world. It's unfortunate that it wasn't necessary for your world yet still happened. I had no say in it."

I seethed, "It's a bit more than unfortunate."

Ajax nodded before turning away, "I agree. It was a casual genocide. I'm sorry."

Althea rolled her eyes, "You sound so sincere."

Hod nodded, "Hod know he is."

Ajax turned towards us, steepling his elongated fingers. He sat still for a few seconds before continuing,

"The abomination is right. There's more to apologizing than sincerity in words. I'm offering you all a way of ending Yawm. My offer stands as the sincerity of my apology. What is your reply to it?"

I raised a hand, "Can you give us a few minutes to think about it?"

Ajax shrugged as he stood from the gravitational warp, "Remember that they are precious minutes that you need."

He walked out of the room before Althea turned towards me,

“I don’t like his plan. It feels like a trap.”

I frowned, “I can’t tell. He’s an alien. I can’t tell if he’s lying or not by the tone in his voice. He sounds more like a businessman than anything else.”

Hod turned towards us, “Tree Man speaks the truth.”

Althea spread out her arms, “How do you know?”

Hod shrugged, “Hod not know how Hod know. Hod only know that Hod know.”

I bit my lip. Learning the eldritch runes from a master like Yawm was tempting. This seemed like our best gambit for escaping the situation as well. If I could get Yawm caught up in teaching me, it could buy us some much needed time too. It seemed solid the more I thought about the plan.

Hod’s intuition had never been wrong since I met him either. He leveled perception, letting him get a grasp on situations like this really well. Listening to him was a better idea than Althea and I, who were all about combat.

“I think we should join Ajax. It’s our best bet.”

Hod raised his wings, “Harbinger trust Hod?”

“Well, more than I trust myself when it comes to this stuff.”

Althea sighed, “We’re going to trust the bird that slams into a wall every other time he flies.”

“Hod getting better. Hod slam into wall more like every three times Hod flies now.”

A reluctant smile crept up Althea’s lips, “Heh, that’s a start.”

I nodded, “Just like this is a start against Yawm. As we need to, we’ll change the plan. Until then, let’s organize this and make it happen.” I raised a hand and clasped it into a fist,

“We’ll learn everything there is to know about him. Once we’ve gotten what we can, we’ll send him to hell and highwater.”

Hod nodded, “Hod think if Super Tree Man like monsters so much, Super Tree Man should live with the monsters.”

Althea grinned, a malicious note infecting her voice, “I like the idea of him suffering for a long, long time.”

“Then we agree.” I shouted, “We’re done ajax.”

Ajax opened the door before pacing in, “What’s your answer?”

I rolled my eyes, “Yeah, based on your history I’m sure you weren’t listening from the start.”

“Hah, I might have told you more about myself than I should have.”

I shook my head, “I think it was just enough. We’ll work with you in the plan.”

Ajax raised his hands into fists, “It’s a rare sight to see reason. Now heal me.”

I shook my head, “Not until after we’ve completed the plan.”

Ajax’s eyes narrowed, “I told you everything. Heal me and I will help you further.”

I raised my eyebrows, “Do you take me for a fool? The moment I take out that eldritch from within you, you can teleport away forever.”

Ajax puffed out his chest, “I would never abandon my word.”

I turned to Hod, “Is he lying?”

“Hod know Tree Man lies. Tree Man leave us after cleansing. Hod sure of it.”

I turned back to Ajax, “There you go.”

Ajax clamped his hands into fists, “This isn’t a part of the deal.”

I spread out my hands, “Look, I’ll clear out all the eldritch after we finish all of this.”

Ajax slammed his hand into a table. It burst through the wood with a loud crash,

“Then what? I’ll be used just as I have been by that insane worshipper of the void?”

I shook my head, “Worst case scenario, you end up having to do my bidding instead. Let’s face it, my track records a hell of a lot better than Yawm’s.”

Ajax growled, “I just want to be free. I just want to be able to wander and do as I want to. Why is that such an overwhelming demand?”

I frowned, my voice turning cold, “Because you decided to follow someone who was insane. You told us about redemption? This is the closest thing to chance you’re going to get.”

Ajax grabbed the sides of his head, the scratch of wood on wood ebbing,

“I don’t have time to do that. I will be consumed-”

A portion of Ajax’s neck bulged out under his bark skin. Ajax shook his head, the deformity dying down,

“I don’t have time to wait until after we’ve banished Yawm. I need cleansing now.”

I stood up from my gravity warp, “Then I can reduce the infestation. Does that sound fairer?”

Ajax’s eyes narrowed, “What? Reduce it?”

I nodded, “Yeah, I’ll take most of it out, but I’ll leave little left as collateral. It isn’t like you have to be at the brink of death during the entire mission. We just need to make sure you won’t teleport away.”

Ajax shook his head, his eyes widening, “You can control how much you cleanse?”

I spread out my arms, “Yeah, of course I can. Hell, I can offer you other stuff as the plan goes further along.”

Ajax’s face tilted sideways, “Really then...that sounds...better. I can deal with that.”

“Exactly. Come on, let’s get that shit out. You look like you’re in agony.”

I walked up to Ajax, but he took a step back.

His eyes narrowed, “I’ve seen you suck the life from monsters...Why should I trust you?”

“I can’t do anything worse than what Yawm’s done to you, can I?”

Ajax glanced down, “Fine. Get on with it.”

I grinned, “This is going to hurt.”

“I’ve dealt with pain before.”

I shrugged, “We’ll see.”

I walked up and placed a hand onto his shoulder. My armor dug into his skin. I controlled what it soaked up though, going for the collections of ambient mana in him. It was like removing dozens of growing tumors. Ajax kept the extent of his condition unknown to those around him. Underneath his skin, the condition was rampant.

It was disgusting. As my armor dug deeper, Ajax's eyes creased,

"What are you doing?"

"I'm finding the tumors and killing them."

The needles of armor sapped at the eldritch tumors, destroying them. Several minutes after the process started, Ajax fell to his knees. His hands shook as he seethed,

"It's worse than I imagined it was. When your armor reformed, was it like this?"

"I imagine it was the same."

I cleared out the infestation from his head first, several tumors pressing against his eyes and brain. After that, I cleared it out of his organs and muscles. His blood was next. The only portion of eldritch I left was stored inside his bones. It would take a few weeks for it to seep out. That would give Ajax plenty of time to heal his injuries.

Like with the other followers, I found the eldritch runes carved into his bones. It was a way of keeping them hidden from plain sight. It also let him carve the runes on a sturdier surface than someone's skin. That's why Yawm did it like this.

By the time I finished the process, a sheen of sweat poured from Ajax's forehead. Once I finished the process, I took my palm off his shoulder,

"There's still a little left. Once we kill Yawm, we'll finish the process."

Ajax grunted, "Good...I need some time to heal."

Althea crossed her arms, “How long will that take?”

Ajax murmured, “A few hours in sunlight. I’ll function at full strength by tomorrow morning. Until then, I’ll be crippled.”

Hod nodded, “Hod tired too, so Hod rest.”

Althea yawned, “I’ll take a nap too.”

I nodded, “Alright then. I’ll have a voice chat with Torix and see if I can’t get a grip on what’s going on. We’ll talk in the morning.”

I waved Althea and Hod off. Ajax walked outside before sitting beneath a tree. I followed him. The glow that ebbed from his skin dissipated as rested. His back and legs dug into the dirt as his eyes closed. Moments later, he looked like a deformity on the surface of the tree.

It was a quick, effective means of hiding himself while resting. I walked back inside before walking into Hod and Althea’s room. We all understood that I would be guarding them while they slept. It would stop Ajax from grabbing either of them and teleporting them to Yawm. That’s why Yawm came here in the first place anyways.

It was to get back Althea. I wouldn’t let that happen unless it was over my dead body. To really drive that point home, I widened my awareness with Tactile Cognition. It let me get a grasp on Ajax’s position. If he decided to disappear, I would run off with Hod and Althea in that instant.

Once in the room upstairs with the others, I raised a palm. My obelisk melted up and out of my armor. I opened it, a sphere of white surrounding me. Once the screen loaded, a green forest with a chattering creek surrounded me.

With the sounds of crickets in my ears, I said aloud, “Call Torix.”

The obelisk obeyed, calling him while I waited. Seconds later, a portion of the screen opened. Torix’s dry face and fiery blue eyes stared at me. He raised an eyebrow,

“Level 2,406? So you did slay Elijah. Excellent.”

I nodded, “That’s nothing compared with Yawm.”

Torix frowned, “Indeed it isn’t. He destroyed Moloth and a few other of my pets with his attack. The Steel Legion and I escaped, Kessiah as well.”

I raised my eyebrows, “How did you get out of there?”

Torix moved his hands together, “I forced the army into the space where I store my summons. It wasn’t a fun time for them, but they are alive. Using one of my imbued flies, I showed them the wreckage Yawm left behind. That silenced any complaints about sleeping with my monsters.”

“I imagine so. We met with Ajax. I don’t know what he’s been doing, but the Ajax you’re following isn’t the real him?”

Torix cupped his chin, “Really now? Odd...It must be a doppelganger. It was my mistake in intelligence.”

I raised a palm to Torix, “I wouldn’t go that far. Ajax has been spying on us since we were in BloodHollow. I can’t stress how much he’s seen of us. I couldn’t even sense a gravitational flux in his mass. I’m guessing he slips in and out of our dimension or something like that.”

Torix frowned, “Well...that’s difficult to even imagine.”

I spread out my arms,

“It’s real, real as the air we’re breathing...well, that I’m breathing. Regardless, he wants to help us kill Yawm. Apparently he’s the sentinel’s spear that Yawm owns. How? I have no idea. Here’s the thing.”

I raised my hands in front of me, “He’s infused with eldritch, and Yawm sustains him. That’s why Ajax does his bidding. Ajax has become angry, and he saw me cleanse Kessiah of the eldritch. I’ve already cleared some of the eldritch from him-”

Torix's eyes narrowed as he snapped, "You didn't cleanse him entirely, did you?"

I shook my head, "Hell no. I'm not that naive."

"Excellent. As expected of my apostle."

I shrugged, "More like of someone who's dealt with people like this before. Anyways, we'll be laying low for a few days on the...Northern side of town. We'll rendezvous once Ajax and the others have slept. Does that sound good?"

Torix raised an eyebrow, "You mentioned killing Yawm...How?"

I weighed my hands back and forth, "Not really killing him. Ajax will rip open dimensions, then we'll shove Yawm in there. It's like our plan, except way more mobile since Ajax can teleport and go unnoticed."

Torix frowned, "How is anyone supposed to shove Yawm exactly?"

I pointed a finger up, "By bartering with Ajax's life, even Althea's if we have too, though I'd rather not. After that, I'll learn some eldritch runes from Yawm before pulling him into a trap. I just need help with talking to Yawm...yenno, without dying."

Torix glanced off in the distance, "Well, it looks like we've hit an impasse...I think we could send a messenger before your arrival. One of us could approach him and warn him of your coming. I have many summons that could do the job. Once he knows, you can walk up and speak with him."

I nodded, "I'm thinking of playing myself off as someone like Yawm. Ajax recommended that approach."

Torix frowned, "I wouldn't trust everything that Ajax said."

"I don't. I trust him like I trust an eldritch."

“That’s the correct approach. You mentioned him being infested with them. They could have planted themselves into his mind. Considering how malignant the eldritch are, I wouldn’t put anything past him. Be ready and waiting for chaos.”

I raised a fist, “I am. Good luck torix.”

Torix nodded, “Good luck Harbinger. We’ll discuss the rest of the details after each of us has some time to dwell on the matters at hand.”

Torix snickered at the term while I rolled my eyes at his sarcasm. I closed my obelisk before glancing at the eldritch runes on my left forearm. It had been a long time since I could work on the runes. After seeing a few of Yawm’s creations, I gained a better understanding of what they did.

They didn’t influence reality. They changed it. With it, I could create anything. With how my current rune setup worked, I transferred my mana into extra stats over the long term. My mana generation would increase over time, so why stop there?

Schema created all my trees, stats, hell he created everything with the dimensional cipher. He created the sentinels and spears that could cleave through time and dimensions. Extra stats were child’s play compared with that. Schema was recreating the fabric of reality with the dimensional cipher. I could as well. I wasn’t changing the fabric of space-time.

I was changing me.

Chapter 108: New Hope

With that in mind, I kept my experiments tame. I wasn’t about to try and fuse to different existences together like Yawm was. My goals were simple: get stronger, faster, and better. Considering I could generate stats, that wouldn’t be too difficult.

The primary problem with my current strategy was time. Based on how long I’d had the rune on my left arm running, I gained about 8 strength and dex a day. That was an enormous amount over the long run, but it isn’t enough to kill Yawm. I needed a better conversion from mana to stats for that to work.

Considering the stats hadn't resulted in any side effects, I stuck within my sphere of competence. Until I mastered this part of the cipher, I wasn't about to jump into splicing dimensions.

With that in mind, I pulled out my grimoire from my dimensional storage. I opened the leather bound book, flipping to a black page. I reformed the armor over my finger, giving me an effective stencil for my work. Before beginning my next rune, I planned out what I would make.

The first priority was increasing different stats other than strength and dexterity. They were nice, but they didn't help me with my dimensional cipher. Endurance was an obvious candidate since I received a 60% bonus to the attribute. All my stat multipliers from my perks and trees applied to the cipher's raw stats too.

That wasn't the only reason to invest in endurance though. As the cipher increased my endurance, I would generate more mana. That mana regen would help me make more endurance with the cipher. The process would repeat, speeding up faster and faster over time.

The ramp up time for that strategy would take a while, so starting early was a good idea. After that, I would try making the runic glyphs for all the attributes. It seemed like a good place to start with the runic glyphs.

With that in mind, I carved into the page. Endurance was a familiar concept for me, so turning it into a glyph wasn't hard. Endurance wasn't bearing great hardship. It was choosing to bear great hardship. It was knowing you could stop at any moment, but continuing despite exhaustion, fear, and pain.

For me, that was the best way I would quantify the concept. As I marked the runic glyph onto the page, it came with greater ease than before. Force of Nature gave me a technical proficiency as I wrote, making the process simple. My hand moved in complex patterns with little focus on my part. Instead, I directed my mind at the words meaning.

Each line was flowing, forming the foundation of the letter. Once I etched the basic lines, I engraved the jagged, sharp lines around them. From all sides, the symbols were markings of difficulty, exhaustion, and terror. I injected the meaning of hatred and spite and horror into these outer lines.

These lines cast an oppressive shape around the basic character. Within the basic character, I etched out straight engravings. This gave the basic letter a stability, providing a foundation for the rest of it. This created a contrasting dynamic for the glyph.

It was like glancing at a story. At the surface, the letter's shape looked as if the outer lines would consume it, tearing it apart. However, upon closer inspection, the letter expressed a deep assurance.

There was no doubt in its ability to withstand the external torment. As I finished the character, the letter's confidence bloomed further. This was a certainty born and tested through time. The glyph showed suffering, but the glyph showed the rise in spite of that suffering.

Once finished, just looking at the runic glyph imbued a sense of calm. It was like staring at the eye of a storm. As the world ruptured around it, this carving would remain unshaken. As I finished the rune, I pressed my palm into the page of the cipher. I transferred the mana in silence, not wanting to wake up Althea or Hod.

The mana transferred straight from my palm into the text. Minutes passed before the rune finished channelling. It floated from the page, casting a red glow in the room. I turned my right forearm up, letting the glyph float down onto it. The lines of the rune glowed red before dissipating.

I raised both my forearms, comparing the characters on each arm. Compared with my new rune, the strength and precision rune wasn't as clear or pristine. It was well made, at least in my eyes, but it lacked the same vibrance that the endurance rune carried.

When glancing at the strength rune, power ebbed from it. When I did the same to the endurance rune, there was a crisp sharpness. Endurance didn't ebb, it poured from the rune. The idea was absolute, as certain in itself as a researcher is in science. To me, it was superior to the other rune.

Without hesitating, I poured more of my mana into another copy of the endurance. After many minutes passed, another copy of the endurance glyph floated into the air. I turned my left forearm up, letting the endurance rune float onto the rune for strength. The new rune engulfed the previous one.

Once it finished the carving, I poured my mana into each of them out of habit. It was something I did without thinking by now. It reminded me of Agony way back in BloodHollow. Learning to siphon the extra health was like falling into an old habit, being both simple and easy.

After finishing those runes, I set in to carving other attributes. I started with constitution, but the concept was far harder to nail down. After a few attempts at it, I swapped over towards willpower instead. Willpower was a much more natural concept. It only took about two hours before I carved and recarved out my second highest attribute.

By the time I took a gander at constitution once more, the sun was rising overhead. I stood up before stretching out my arms and legs. I walked outside, seeing Ajax still fused with a tree outside. As I approached, his eyes opened. He glanced at me, his glowing eyes turning to slits.

He glanced back down at himself, then back to me. It was like he forgot about yesterday. He pulled himself from the tree, his skin forming from the tree's bark. He stretched his arms out wide, shining streaks snapping onto his chest. He shook his head, the horns on his head whistling in the air like branches.

He looked at one of his hands, "It has been many years since I slept so soundly."

I glanced above him. His title had changed.

Ajax Volan, the Void Eater(lvl 5693)

I raised an eyebrow at him, "How did your level increase so much?"

Ajax raised his hand, "As you may imagine, the infection beneath my skin crippled me. After healing myself, I'm now I'm much closer to my original strength."

He pointed at my forearm, "I see that your intention is on gaining power as well."

I peered at the dimensional cipher on my forearms, "Well, I have to gain whatever advantages that I can." I glanced back at Ajax, "What I want to know is how you healed exactly?"

Ajax pointed at the world tree off in the distance. The top of the tree's branches were visible over the house behind us.

"The same way that Yawm did. We can ask for the help of nature, often times molding with it. In my case, I asked this tree for shelter and any spare energy it carried. It was a generous soul, giving helping me heal in exchange for conversation."

I tilted my head, "Wait a second...you aren't stealing from the life force of the planet or anything like that?"

Ajax opened one eye and narrowed the other, as if he was raising an eyebrow at me, "What? Of course not. Would you walk up and steal food from another's home? Of course you wouldn't."

Ajax walked back, pressing a palm against the tree, "You see this structure, it's more than the container for this plant's soul. It's a home, built through countless cold winters and many warm summers. Through rain and drought, this being took its stand against the elements around it. It shared many of the long days it spent here with me."

Ajax pressed his forehead against the tree, "Thank you."

With a surprising gravity in his movements, he held himself there for a few seconds. It was like watching a preacher pray at an altar. After Ajax finished, he turned back to me,

"Yawm, as corrupt as he is, still knows where he came from. He remembers his past. He would never, no matter how little of his mind was left, steal from this bountiful earth."

I glanced at the world tree, "Are you telling me that Yawm's world tree is just him asking plants for energy? Seriously?"

Ajax nodded, "Yes. Over time, he persuaded more of our brethren towards our cause. He aided them in their growth, trading nutrients for their raw energy. Overtime, he strengthens himself within his domain. With that and the cipher on his skin, Yawm empowered himself beyond the limitations of Schema's system."

Ajax stared at the world tree with me, “As much as I hate Yawm, I can say he’s no fool. He threatens god like entities like Schema with good reason.”

I frowned. If what Ajax said was true, the overseer lied to us about Yawm. I was told that Yawm devoured a planets life force with the damn world tree. I glanced around, noticing that the wildlife around Springfield was alive and well, at least for winter. There wasn’t any leaves on the trees, but they weren’t dead either.

Ajax pointed at the room Althea and Hod slept in, “Will we wait for them to rise? Time isn’t on our side, as you may have noticed.”

I sighed, “That’s true. I’ll go get them up.”

Ajax turned back towards the tree before sitting beside it. He placed a hand on it,

“I will warn you now. Yawm will ally himself with the life on this planet.”

He turned his head towards me, “You would be surprised what Yawm may discover within the whispers of the wind and in the voices of trees.”

I grimaced as I jogged towards Althea and Hod. Ajax’s warning was like an omen. They could listen to trees, grass, pretty much any living plants. If that was the case, we were surrounded by spies at all times. It was a humbling thought as I reached up the stairs.

The whole time, I bent and ducked under doorways and low ceilings. At this point, I sort of just walked through any parts of the house that wouldn’t let me fit. Without my unique skill, Overwhelming Pressure, walking on wood and other soft materials wouldn’t be possible.

It felt kind of like being in the middle of an ocean, but being able to walk on water. I silenced those thoughts as I reached upstairs. Hod was stretched out over a twin sized bed, his beak open as he snored. Althea slept on her side, her long hair spread over the sheets like a deep, purple silk.

I walked over and nudged her. She turned towards me, her eyes cracking open.

“Good morning sunshine.”

She turned away from me before pulling the sheets over her head. They muffled her voice,

“Can I just lay in bed for a while longer...Please?”

I rolled my eyes and lifted a hand up. A gravity well formed above her, floating her off the bed with the sheets in tow. She glanced at me,

“Oh come on. How is this fair?”

I shrugged, “All’s fair in love and war.”

She grinned, “Really, is this love then?”

I lowered my hand, the gravity warp ending. She flopped against the bed before I leaned over her,

“Nope. It’s war.”

She swiped towards me, the motion playful as she giggled, “Way to shut me down.”

I ducked and dodged her hands,

“Wait till after we handle Yawm before you start professing your undying love to me.”

It was Althea’s turn to roll her eyes. After a short laugh, she frowned.

“What if there isn’t an after though?”

I frowned, “You mean we die? That’s not happening.”

She sat up on the bed, pressing her hands against her thighs, “You saw his level. I’m not saying we can’t do this, but I am saying it’s not that likely anymore. I wouldn’t want to leave things unfinished...you know, between us.”

I glanced away, thinking about what she said. I turned my gaze towards her, meeting her eye,

“Here’s the thing. If we try rushing everything before we kill Yawm, we’ll be fighting him while expecting to die. It’s like a self fulfilling prophecy. I’d rather put stuff like that until after we’ve killed Yawm.”

I leaned towards her, “That way we fight that much harder to live instead of making it easier to die.”

She pursed her lips, “You sure?”

With a knowing grin, I brushed her hair over her face,

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure.”

She blew the hair off of her before jumping up off the bed. The grace of her movement was like watching a scene from a movie.

“If you say so.”

I turned towards Hod. I lifted a hand, pulling him up off the bed with gravity. I shook him back and forth with telekinesis,

“Come on Hod, wake up.”

His head whipped back and forth as drool poured from the corner of his mouth. Hod opened his wings and legs but his eyes stayed closed. Hod motioned his wings like he was swimming.

“Hod fly in sky. Hod feel wind on Hod’s face.”

Althea burst into laughter before Hod's eyes snapped open. Hod glanced around,

"Is Hod sleep-flying again? Sleep-flying even worse than sleep walking."

"No. I pulled you up with a bit of magic. We're about to leave and meet up with Torix."

I dropped him from the well, Hod landing on his feet. He stood up straight. A moment later, he turned toward Ajax,

"Tree Man better now?"

I nodded. Hod continued,

"Hod glad. Hod not like Tree Man before Harbinger took the monsters out. Tree Man desperate then. Hod know a desperate person is a dangerous person."

Althea and I let Hod's words sink in. Hod was one of those people where 99% of what he said was just fodder. The other 1% was absolute gold, so you had to listen to everything he said. Otherwise you'd miss the valuable parts surrounded by, well, less valuable parts.

Interrupting my thoughts, a message appeared in my notifications,

Torix Worm, of Darkhill(6:01 A.M. 01/05/01) – We'll meet at the Lola Mine near the town's outskirts at 9:00 A.M. I forwarded the location to you.

I checked the time using my interface. It was 8:16 am, so I pointed my hands at Althea and Hod, "You guys ready to leave?"

"Sure."

"Hod ready."

I walked out of the room, “Let’s go then. Torix is expecting us soon.”

I paced outside the house, ducking under the parts of the house I chipped while walking in earlier. I reached outside,

“We’re ready.”

Ajax stood, turning his head towards us, “Then let’s be gone. I will follow you, though I recommend we stay stealthy. I’d rather not be obliterated with all of you in a burning fire.”

Ajax slipped away, his existence disappearing entirely. Hod murmured, “Tree Man spoke the truth.”

I forwarded the mine’s location to Hod and Althea, “Thanks for letting us know. It’s always unnerving when Ajax just disintegrates like that.”

They both fiddled with their status screens, looking at the notifications.

“That’s where we’re headed. Let’s try being quiet.”

I shot forward into a sprint, leaving the two of them behind. They shot forward after I left, catching up quickly. We each stayed on the ground, running on the ground instead of flying or hopping around. It would make too much noise and be too easy to see, so we took a the long way there.

As we traveled, I noticed a few changes in the cityscape. The roots streaking across the city were wilting. The further out they went from the world tree, the more dead the tree was. Wherever the world tree died, plants blossomed. Flowers of all colors, bushes of all sizes, even full grown trees sprouted up around the rotting husk.

It was like the forest around Springfield was creeping inwards. We kept away from these new slices of forest. Ajax’s warning about trees listening to us spooked us pretty badly, so we kept away from them. In all honesty, that makes us sound crazy as hell.

Maybe we were, but there wasn't really a need in taking any unnecessary risks. We reached the Lola mine about half an hour later. The entrance was a set of train tracks leading into the side of a mountain. Tall trees towered everywhere around it, an overgrown dirt road leading to it.

The place was too far from town for anyone to tag the place. It was a place almost overtaken by nature. Torches lit the inside along with lights from the steel legion. All along the tracks and tunnels, the legion holed up inside. As we walked inside, the first soldiers we saw up close looked broken.

Their shoulders drooped over and the fight in them was gone. We reached them, and they looked up at us. The tallest soldier, sporting a brown beard and a scar down his cheek gasped as I walked up. The other soldiers glanced up at me as I walked within range of my aura.

The broken look on their faces faded as they looked at me. I was the war hero coming home victorious. With Hod and Althea tailing behind me, we were sight to be seen. I walked into the camp, other soldiers peering out of their makeshift rooms to see me. Whenever I reached the center of the camp, hundreds of eyes looked at me.

I stopped walking. I turned around, looking at the eyes of the soldiers looking at me. I raised an open hand, my voice booming with the sound of victory and strength,

"The followers are dead." I clamped my hand into a fist harder than iron, the sound of clapping metal echoing through the mine.

"And Yawm is the next skull I crack under my heel."

The legion burst into a roar of approval as I turned towards Torix's room and walked. As I paced by, hands covered in power armor slapped my shoulder and pat my back. It was an invigorating feeling. It was like as long as I lived, so did their fighting spirit. The weight of responsibility pressed on my shoulders at the same time, however.

It wasn't that unpleasant a weight to bear though. I was never the smoothest talker or the most likable guy. I was rough around the edges, more of an acquired taste. That changed with the system. I went from a social outcast to some sort of weird, war hero. In my eyes, it was a step up.

The legion agreed. Some howled with approval as I walked towards Torix's checkpoint. I passed them, reaching deeper into the mine's depths. We reached a staircase leading down into the mountain, lit by white fired torches. We entered a circular room full of diagrams and assorted

Once out of earshot from the legion members, I gasped out a breath as I leaned against a wall,

"Fuck man...doing that kind of thing on the spot...I didn't think I had it in me."

Althea laughed before Ajax walked onto our plane of existence. He turned towards me,

"So someone like you is the symbol of your people?"

I weighed my hands back and forth, "I mean, I guess you could call it that. I think of it more like I'm some glorified con man."

Hod walked over, placing a wing on my shoulder, "Harbinger not just symbol for humans. Harbinger symbol for Eltari as well." Hod walked up to Ajax,

"Hod ask Tree Man to wait. One day, Harbinger will be symbol for eldritch too. Bad symbol though, not good symbol."

They were both lean and thin for their frames. Hod was a head shorter than Ajax though, so Ajax looked down on Hod as he spoke,

"Your aura reminds me of us followers. It's as if you're on the brink of being consumed at any moment. How are keeping the eldritch at bay?"

Hod shrugged, "Harbinger do it, not Hod."

A portal of shadow appeared beside us. From it, Torix paced out. Torix connected his hands together behind him, peering at each of us. His fire eyes lingered on Ajax. Torix introduced himself with a quick bow,

“So this Ajax...It’s good to have your acquaintance.”

Ajax returned the gesture, “Likewise. Your handling of your troops is masterful. Perhaps you may show me your methods some time.”

Torix grinned, “And I’ll ask how you cut through the fabric of dimensions as well.” Torix turned to us all, “It’s good to see that our mission wasn’t in vain. All of us escaped unscathed for the most part. I was even able to escape with most of the legion, though of course we lost a few members.”

Torix met my eye, “I won’t let their bodies go to waste.”

I frowned, “I wouldn’t let anyone see that you’re using the bodies of allies. It would cripple moral completely.”

Torix unhooked his hands from behind him, waving off my concern, “Of course, of course. I’ll utilize them in other ways, I assure you.” He raised one of his hands, “In fact, I already have. One such way involved being messengers.”

Ajax tilted his head, “You’ve already spoken with Yawm?”

Torix nodded, “I’ve also informed the overseer of our plan. He believed it was our best chance of victory.”

Hod walked up to Torix, “Hod think there something very important for Hod and Dry Man to discuss.”

Torix sighed, “What is it that you want to waste my time with now?”

Hod placed his left wing over Torix’s shoulder, “Hod promise, this time it worth Dry Man’s time.”

With his right wing, Hod pointed out like he was trying to envision something grand,

“Hod want Dry Man to think about a place. This is a wet place, a place with much water.”

Torix groaned, but Hod continued, “Hod think Hod found wet place for Dry Man. Dry Man drink water, and Dry Man no longer dry.”

Hod pressed his wing into a fist, “But Hod need Dry Man to be with Hod on this one. Hod can take Dry Man to place with water, but Dry Man has to want it. What does Dry Man say, is Dry Man willing to follow Hod to lake? Is Dry Man willing to become not dry?”

Torix leaned down while pinching the bridge of his nose. Ajax pointed at them,

“Are they serious?”

I walked over towards Ajax. With a look solemn as a grave on my face, I spoke,

“Oh, you mean Torix over there...Well, let’s just say he’s dead serious.”

Chapter 109: Calm Before the Storm

Ajax looked at me then back at Hod. He cupped his chin,

“Are...” He spread out his arms, “Wait, is this a human custom?”

Althea bust out laughing before I shook my hands back and forth, “Don’t worry. It was just a terrible joke is all.”

Torix massaged his temples with his bony fingers, “Hopelessly terrible jokes aside, I’ve already received the meeting date for you and Yawm meeting each other.”

Ajax crossed his arms, “Already?” He leaned against the rock wall, “When exactly are they to meet?”

Torix snapped his fingers, a white panel forming beside him. He pushed Hod off of him. Using a finger coated in mana, he wrote out the key points of his words. It was like black ink on white paper.

“What I’ve devised is a meeting three days from now. Daniel will walk with two other messengers of my choosing. The best approach I concocted for handling the conversations with Yawm involved three key concepts.”

Torix pointed at a portion of the white field, words popping up,

“The first is mystery. Daniel should keep his past and the vast majority of who he is hidden. Approaching the situation as if he’s only trying to gain Yawm’s knowledge will net the best results. The less he knows about us, the better. Outside of that, creating a web of lies will be nigh impossible to maintain.”

Torix spread out his hands, “The second pillar of my strategy is curtness. You must be rude to Yawm. Do not entertain his requests for conversation outside of learning the eldritch runes. His words are like medicine. Too little, and you gain nothing. Too much, and you succumb to the potency of them.”

Torix shrugged, “And the third implementation is to not die. Do try and avoid it.”

Ajax glanced at me, “Do you believe you can do all this?”

I squinted at the white field with Torix’s writing on it, “For the most part, yeah. It doesn’t sound crazy hard. What are you guys going to do while I’m away?”

Torix raised a hand, “Quite an excellent question. Allow me to answer.”

Torix pointed at Althea, “Althea will be hiding here. If Yawm unleashes minions that are stronger and can restrain her, this will all be for nothing. Therefore, she should stay near the group.”

Torix pointed at Hod, “Daniel will be representing the human race, meaning all other species can do as they wish. If the legion attacks, Yawm will assume Daniel has a hand in it. If other species do, Yawm will be far less quick to assume this. Armed with that knowledge, we may attack the sentries without provoking his wrath.”

Torix pointed towards Ajax, "If I may make a suggestion of how you spend your time, I would suggest spying on Daniel and Yawm. If Yawm captures Daniel and uses him for experimentation, you will be able to get him out. This decreases the risk of the mission dramatically."

Ajax nodded, "I can do that." Ajax pushed himself from the wall, "If I save you from Yawm, you clear out the rest of my infection. I agreed to sealing Yawm elsewhere. I didn't agree to fighting head on against him."

I scratched the side of my face, "Yeah, I can do that. Let's hope it doesn't come down to that."

Ajax's eyes narrowed, "Good. I'll leave you all to your own company."

Ajax walked onto another plane, his existence disappearing.

Torix stared at where Ajax was, "Unnerving how he does that, isn't it?"

Hod nodded, "Hod not like Tree Man."

Torix grinned, "At least I'm not the only one with a ridiculous nickname."

Hod shook his head, "Hod not think of Hod's names as nicknames. Hod's names more true to person. Hod think Torix Worm ridiculous name. Hod know Dry Man a dry man, so why Hod not call Dry Man by Dry Man's dryness?"

Althea and I laughed while Torix grimaced, "Following your internal logic is like following a maze with no end. It's meaningless dribble."

Hod nodded, "Hod relate. Hod think the same thing when Dry Man speak."

Torix sighed, "Despite what this bird with a atrophied brain may think, how does the plan I devised sound to you two?"

I turned a palm to Torix, “I think it sounds pretty good. Giving me a few days notice is nice too. Helps with getting ready for the big meeting.”

Althea frowned, “It sounds like we’re doing nothing while Daniel’s risking his life.”

Torix pointed towards his white field, “Ah, but you see, this plan involves the least risk towards all the members of our party as a whole. It also gives us the opportunity to gain resources from Yawm instead of only losing them.”

Althea shook her head, “I’m not saying it’s not the smart plan. It’s more like...It’s more like it’s unfair, I guess.”

Torix raised an eyebrow, “How so?”

Althea spread out her arms, her long, purple hair shifting behind her,

“If you think about it, Daniel is the only person to go out during these kinds of missions. He was the guinea pig for you and Kessiah’s tearing of dimensions when you first arrived. He and I are the ones who cleared out the first rift and all the other ones. Daniel is the one that found and fought the freedom fighters.”

Althea raised her arms, “If you think about it, all the plans just boil down to Daniel handling everything. He’s had to do all of the suicide missions. It isn’t fair.”

Torix peered off, looking away, “We each have our own set of skills. Daniel’s are very conducive to going into dangerous situations.”

Althea bit her lip, “When does that stop being a reason and start becoming an excuse? You have the experience. I’m sure you have an acting skill. Why don’t you walk up and be the person that talks face to face with Yawm?”

Torix waved his hands as he spoke, “You see, I’m the strategic leader of the operation. While in theory I could speak with Yawm, it really isn’t tailored to my skill set. Daniel has his aura’s, tremendous mana generation, and other qualities that make him appear even more powerful than he is.”

Torix tapped his temple, “All of my power is locked away here, in my mind. It’s a kind of power you can’t show people. It lacks the same effect that a more physically imposing fighter like Daniel has.”

Torix walked up, placing a hand on Althea’s shoulder, “I understand that you care for Daniel. I do as well, but there are times where we must silence our emotions. If we don’t use the tools we have, then we will die here. That is the cold and harsh reality we face.”

I walked up, “Besides, he’s not even taking advantage of me anyways. The way I see it, this is the best chance I’ve got at living. Schema trapped us here, so there’s no escape. Even if there was, I don’t know if I’m comfortable letting someone else completely destroy earth.”

My eyebrows creased, “If anything, I’m glad I get the chance to show Yawm a taste of his own medicine. The man likes turning planets into hell? I’ll send him to a different hell before he gets the chance.”

Althea viewed the ground, “I...yeah, ok. I’ll deal with it.”

Torix lowered his hands, “Good. If you can offer a safer plan that does what we need, any of us are more than willing to listen.” Torix opened a shadow portal, “I need to update the positions of Yawm and inspect what he’s doing. The situation in general has become more...volatile.”

Torix paced into his portal, teleporting away. Althea looked up at me, “Can we just, I don’t know, have lunch or something?”

I grinned, “Yeah, sure.”

Althea carved us a table out of stone. We sat on chairs made the same way. She had gained a spatial ring after reaching level 1000 just like I did. Within it, she carried food with her, keeping it cold and fresh. She wore a skin tight, black suit. It was made of carbon fiber no doubt. I didn’t really notice that though. I noticed her curves.

Once we finished the food, Althea leaned over her strawberry covered yogurt and vented. Althea was a ball of frustration at this point. Most of it was from not having

someone to talk too. Some of it was legitimate irritation too though. She called Kessiah, Torix, and Ajax cowards. She hissed about Torix avoiding real conflict.

She seethed about having no free time. Most of what she griped about didn't bother me. Some of it was venomous, however.

"Kessiah acted like she was a fighter and we weren't this whole time. She's been all cocky and confident, even when you were obviously gaining ground on her. Now after one real fight, Kessiah's pretending like she's some damsel in distress. Where's the tough girl act now, huh?"

I grimaced, "Yeah, it was a real one eighty. Some people can't handle that kind of stress though. If anything, I think she understood that about herself, deep down. She was strong physically, but from what Torix told us, she was born that way."

I placed a finger onto my forehead, "She didn't have the toughness in mind. I think the whole 'tough' persona was more of a cover for it. It's not the worst thing in the world though."

Althea leaned against her hand, "I think it's infuriating. When we talk now, she still treats me like I'm a kid." Althea pressed a hand against her chest, "Can you believe that? I've died at least seven times to you alone. After one close call and she's done, yet she still has the gall to talk to me like I'm a child."

I laughed, "It reminds me of a lot my teachers and my parents. I can't even tell you how many times I was told, 'You have to listen because I'm the adult and you're the child!' The moment things turned sour, they'd let that mask come off."

I spread out my hands, "They would scream, yell, and shout. Sometimes my dad would throw a tantrum like a spoiled brat that wasn't getting his way. After doing all that, he would expect me to treat him like he was the adult and I was still the child. Everything was just supposed to reset like nothing ever happened."

I crossed my arms, leaning back into my chair, "Fuck that whole point of view. It's like expecting respect without any kind of responsibility."

Althea leaned towards me, “And that’s what bothers me with Kessiah. She wants to throw jabs at me all through our conversations together. It’s not near as bad when we’re in a group, but when we’re alone, it’s bad.”

She spread out her arms in exasperation, “I don’t want to make it into a fight, but it becomes frustrating after a while.”

I raised a hand, “Well, you could try calling her out on it.”

“Calling her out?”

“Yeah. When she says something like that, mention that it’s bothering you.”

Althea spread out her arms, “Yeah, but then she just says she’s playing around or that it’s not a big deal. Either that or she tells me to quit being so sensitive.”

“What’s something she’d say?”

Althea waved her arm, grasping for an example, “Uhm, let me think...One time she said that you were racist against aliens, and that you wouldn’t ever date an alien because of it.”

I raised an eyebrow, “I wonder how that got brought up? Where you talking about me dating aliens?”

Althea flushed before swiping at me, “It was girl talk.” Althea frowned, “Kessiah laughed like it was a funny joke, but it was just...awkward. Like, painfully awkward. It was a couple of weeks ago after we got back from Hod’s rift.”

I shrugged, “Yeesh, she’s salty. Anyways, tell her that it’s a big deal to you when she says shit like that.”

Althea leaned toward me, “She’ll just tell me to man up and quit being a baby.”

I uncrossed my arms, sitting up, “Then just leave.”

Althea frowned, "Leave? You mean, like, leave the conversation?"

"Yeah. That's what I'd do at least. Yenno, if I could. Sometimes you just have to bite the bullet. If it's only when you two are talking alone, then you don't have to hang out with her."

Althea sighed, "Yeah, then I'll be lonely." Althea laid her chin onto the table, "I need more friends."

I rolled my eyes with a mischievous grin on my face, "Tell me about it. I have this alien chick who won't quit asking me for homemade lunches. It takes up sooo much time."

Althea pursed her lips, "Oh whatever...cut me some slack."

I stood up, "If I cut you more slack, then you'll hang yourself." I sighed, "For real though, I have to go. There's a few things I really need to sort out before seeing Yawm."

Althea reached out for me, "Before you leave, make sure to stop by my room. I want to have one last lunch before you leave. In case things don't work out with Yawm."

I grinned, "I'll be fine. I always am."

Althea gave me a grin, but it was a false smile. It was one of those smiles you wear when you're trying to look happy for someone else, but deep down, you're hurting inside.

I nudged her shoulder. I pointed my index finger at her while raising a thumb. It looked like I was pretending my hand was a gun.

"If you don't cheer up, this will be the last grin you ever smile."

Althea raised her eyebrows, "Is that supposed to be a gun or something?"

I shook my head, “Oh no, this isn’t supposed to be a gun. This is a gun. Now put your hands up!”

She raised both her hands as she laughed, “Uh, ok. There’s something I need to tell you first.”

I narrowed my eyes and raised my my eyebrows, “What is it, missy?”

She pointed one of her fingers like a gun too. She pointed at my gun and made a pew sound. The imaginary bullet streaked through the air before dislodging my imaginary gun from my hand. I opened my gun hand, grabbing my wrist as if she had shot the gun from it. I glanced at my palm, then back at the pretend gun in hers.

“How did you hide that imaginary gun?”

“That’s none of your business. Now put your hands in the air!”

I raised both my hands. She stepped closer. Without an imaginary gun in my own hand, I couldn’t fight back. She walked up and raised her hand. She placed her fingertip against the bottom of my chin. With one squeeze, I would die, even if it was just pretend.

She whispered, “Lean over.”

I did as the gunwoman commanded. She continued in a hushed tone,

“A little more.”

I bent over until I was almost eye level with her. She kept her finger tip against my chin,

“Now stand still, or else I’ll fire.”

She raised up onto her toes before pressing her lips against mine. My first reaction wasn't shock at her kissing me, but a shock at just how soft her lips were. They always looked soft, but I never imagined they would be like velvet.

She reached her other arm around my neck, the kiss growing longer. It was warm and delicate. The taste on her lips was sweet, a bit of the strawberry lingering from her meal. She pressed her body against mine. Even though it was against my armor, I felt her as if I was touching her with my bare skin.

I breathed deeper. I wrapped my arm around her waist without thinking, pulling her to me. I laid a hand onto her cheek. As I did, my armor molded away from my hand. For the first time in months, my fingertips touched something. It was something soft and smooth.

I leaned into the kiss. We wrapped around each other, exploring the other's body with excitement and pleasure. It was a release of tension. We both wanted each other for so long. Althea took the first step, and now I was struggling not to just fall into deep water with her.

We grew passionate. My hands wandered across her. Her own hands went over my own body. As she touched me, my armor flowed around her. It let her touch my bare skin, the electrifying sensations like fireworks. We both yearned for each other. We both wanted each other like a starving wolf wants meat.

Before I knew it, we were moving towards her room. She had made her own cavern by slicing through the stone. Within it, there a cozy bed and the warm light of an old lamp. It smelled of earth and stone. We walked into the room, our bodies tangled together.

She fell onto the bed, her voluptuous body bouncing in all the right places. I fell onto her, my armor molding away from her, letting us touch. My skin pressed against hers, Althea's warmth seeping through where we felt one another. Without my armor, I felt exposed. Everytime Althea touched the fresh skin, goosebumps raised over me.

It was like pulling off a bandaid and touching the new, healed skin. It was sensitive and new. I expected intense discomfort from removing the armor. As Althea took off her own clothes and pressed her body against mine, another sensation took control.

It was like I was starving, and an enormous buffet was laying in front of me. My armor peeled off me, covering the entire bed. It even wrapped around Althea, as if we were in our own little world.

Like that, we stared at each other for a minute. She stared at me, her cheeks flushing,

“That was...wow.”

I grinned, a cocky look on my face, “Eh, constitution has its perks.” I looked at Althea, her body’s curves like a painting. I pressed against her, and she shivered,

“Besides, you don’t look too bad either.”

She swatted at me, her fingertips grazing my skin with a gentle touch. I kissed her lips, the sensations like lightning. I felt her body, the soft, seductive places pulling me in. I grabbed her wrist, pushing it down as she whispered in a shaky voice,

“Please slow down. It’s my first time.”

I kissed along her cheek, then down her neck, then I reached her chest. She shivered again as I kissed her. I whispered back, my voice more careful than I imagined it could be,

“I’ll be gentle.”

My body fell into hers. Her warmth surrounded me, softer than silk. She shook as I tasted her, her excitement overflowing. As sex absorbed us, the carnal sides of us both took over. Althea moaned, her nails scratching along my back. Her breath, hot and heavy, brushed against my ears with the sound of her pleasure.

I enjoyed myself too. I kept my touch firm but not forceful. I kept control, but I let her move and shift as she needed too. I pushed into her, keeping a steady rhythm. She wriggled back and forth as I kept myself controlled. Her body tightened as I continued, each a pulse pleasing us both.

She grabbed my back, wrapping her legs around me. She moaned and shook her hips with mine. Her back arched as she pressed herself against me, her body tightening on me. She gasped, overwhelmed as her legs pulled me against me. The jolt of bliss flooded me too.

I finished before laying against her. We both heaved for air, more from the excitement than the actual exertion. I laid my hand against hers, and our fingers intertwined. She nuzzled her cheek into the nape of my neck, a euphoric smile plastered on her face.

She whispered into my ear, “That was heaven.”

I grinned, “Tell me about it. That was amazing.”

She giggled before we laid with each other for a few minutes. After the comfortable, warm silence, Althea whispered,

“I love you.”

Hearing the words melted my iron heart. In the moment, I whispered back, “I...” The words caught in my throat before I finished them, but when I said them, I meant it.

“I love you too.”

Chapter 110: Yawm of Flesh

It was a weird feeling when the words left my lips. I didn’t expect them, but they fit what was going through my head. Maybe it was the hormones talking too. At that point, it was hard to tell. A more surprising emotion was anxiety. All of the sudden, when I thought of my meeting with Yawm, it made me nervous. As I laid there with Althea, I reasoned through the sudden spike in dread. No matter how much I thought about it, it boiled down to one thing.

I had something to lose now. Up till this point, I didn’t have anymore family, friends, or anything really. Over time I built friendships, but friendships won’t stop someone from being reckless. All of a sudden I wanted to keep something. I wanted to protect something. My life wasn’t just some ploy for survival.

I owned a joy that I wasn't about to let go. Althea loved me, and she was one of the few people who ever had. That meant I wasn't about to let someone fuck up her future or my future with her. The more I dwelled on that, the more I wanted to get up and move. Whenever Althea drifted off to sleep, that's exactly what I did.

I lifted myself off the bed. As I left Althea, my armor folded back onto me. As it did, the armor dug spines that connected back into my bones. The armor hadn't disconnected from my bones or nerves, just my skin. The moment I left Althea, the armor refused to unlatch once more.

I could get my armor off my skin if I focus, but it didn't want too. It would snap back the moment I stopped focusing on it. It was like how the armor let me eat and use the bathroom. When I needed to eat, my armor molded out of the way of my mouth. When I needed to shit, it molded out of the way.

It understood that I had needs. In this case, the armor bent out of the way and even protected Althea and I while we did it. I worried about that for ages during my free time. It turned out that my armor would block off everything to make sure the sex would happen. And to think, here I thought it would cock block me forever.

Refreshed and motivated, I left a note on Althea's desk before leaving her room. It explained where I was going and what I was doing. It also let her know that I thoroughly enjoyed it, and that she better not cheat on me with someone else. I figured it was a clever way of saying we were dating.

I passed out of the room, reaching deeper into the mountain. Torix sent a map of the mountain base to me. Within the outline, it showed my own personal room. Wanting the quiet and calm, I reached my room before sitting down.

I focused my thoughts with a few deep breaths. A moment later, I pulled out my grimoire and set to work. Before I started, I opened my status screen and glanced at my armor's stats. At the bottom were the upgrades from the dimensional cipher. I looked at them.

[Modifications – The dimensional fabric composing this structure has been modified with code from

the dimensional cipher. The bonuses are as follows.

+72 Strength

+72 Dexterity

+20 Endurance]

They were solid bonuses now, with the strength and dexterity bonuses being higher. The difference was that I had had them for over a week to get the bonuses they gave. On the other hand, the endurance had only been on for less than one day. That meant I would be getting double the attributes.

It left a bitter taste in my mouth. Given time, I could stop Yawm with zero risk. That wasn't an option anymore though. If the overseer discovered Yawm couldn't escape, earth would be glassed. If Yawm had months of time to do whatever, he could have already destroyed earth.

Hell, Ajax didn't seem like the most patient guy either. Letting Yawm continue without any kind of resistance was asking for death. It's kind of like how the old saying goes, keep your friends close and your enemies closer.

First things first, we needed a bit more man power. I sent Torix a message.

(Dimension C-138, 9:46 P.M. 1/12/01) – Can you send me a list of the current steel legion members under our command? I'll need to send them all a message about joining my new guild.

Torix replied in seconds.

(Torix Worm, of Darkhill, 9:46 P.M. 1/12/01) – You can create a guild? If so, I'd like to discuss the details of it. Regardless, I'll forward the list. To shorten the process, simply go towards your messages and use the

reply to all function. It will send a message to all of the list of names.

Make sure you send me a message as well. Knowing you and your build, your legacy gives endurance. It's a stat I could use more of.

I grinned at the message, the idea of empowering our force more than just attractive.

(Dimension C-138, 9:47 P.M. 1/12/01) – Thanks for the tip. I'll send the message right away.

I received a message outlining all the steel legion names used by Schema. Now I needed to make the actual guild. After a quick groan, I opened my legacy menu. Whenever I did, a message popped up.

You may unlock a guild. Do you wish to create a new guild? Y/N?

I pressed the yes button.

What is the name of your new guild? _____?

After a minute or two of thought, I named the guild The Harbinger's Legion. It wasn't a complicated name, but it got across what I wanted. With that finished, I selected the finalize button.

Your guild, The Harbinger's Legion, was successfully created. You may send invites to your guilds, set up quests and bounties, and claim ownership of a city. It is recommended that you only give out your legacy bonus

after the completion of an entry level quest. Otherwise the potency of your guild, along with its reputation, will spiral downwards.

In the case of most guilds, quality trumps quantity. Good luck with your new guild aspiring sentient.

Considering how impotent the steel legion had been at handling Yawm and the plague, I agreed with the message's tip. With my guild finished, I sent a simple message to all surviving members of the legion.

(Dimension C-138, 9:47 P.M. 1/12/01) – This is the Harbinger of Cataclysm. We have slayed the four followers and now we must unite against Yawm. Before we go into battle, I offer each of you a reward. This invitation to my guild will reward you with survivability and strength. Each of you has earned it.

Enjoy the downtime as we prepare for the final confrontation. After we've recovered, we will make our final push. We will go and slay the destroyer of our homes and the killer of our families. We will go and tear Yawm

apart. Rest well, warriors.

I sent the message, not dwelling on it too much. I figured giving it a larger than life tone would help the soldiers. If I was going to be a symbol, I needed to act the part. That included making my messages sound epic, at least in my mind.

With that finished, there was one last task at hand. I needed more mastery of the cipher. Everything else was out of the way, so I dug down into my work. That started by glancing at the rune for endurance.

It was a masterful character, the lines etched with certainty. It lacked any doubt in what it was, and I enjoyed seeing that in my own work. With that in mind, I worked on other runes using the same method.

First, I would think about whatever the concept was. Willpower, strength, it didn't matter as long as it represented what I thought about the concept. After that, I sketched a few outlines of the character. I would compare these sketches with images of other eldritch runes, Baldag-Ruhl's runes in particular.

He created the biggest incantation I'd ever seen by far, and it worked without a hitch. Yawm's runes completely fucked the other followers up by comparison. With that in mind, I scoured the ritual that Baldag-Ruhl used, finding the runes fascinating. It used to look like gibberish, but with time, I realized the magnum opus that it really was.

From start to finish, the runes chained together a vast understanding of the universe. It was like staring at the Sistine Chapel. Finding a flaw was a hopeless endeavor. All I could do was marvel. Marvel and study.

So study I did. I jotted notes on the rock ground of my room, drawing lines and figures of how the runes connected. Each symbol related with the next, like a flowing river of knowledge. If I wanted the kind of power Baldag-Ruhl had in his runes, chaining my runes together was a must.

Making that happen was a different story altogether. Considering the runes responded well to my endurance, I used that rune as the base. I attempted carving an extra character to enhance endurance. This rune was about time. The way I saw it, staying power was a key part of having good endurance.

It was discipline, keeping to the difficult parts of life even if they dragged on. Pushing past those sticking points was essential for success. It was one of the most necessary aspects of enduring. If anything, that whole idea could be taken to an extreme. If someone was unstoppable and immortal, then they were something like gravity.

They would become a force of nature, something that others moved around. The idea of a perpetual existence reminded me of the Old Ones. I only knew two by name, Etorhma and Baldowah, but both of them left ripples around them. People spoke about them like black holes. They were things best left avoided and un-angered.

They were both perennial forces. In my mind, it was the perfect representation of endurance. Even after the earth was consumed by the sun, they would remain, unaffected and uncaring. There was something both majestic and frightening about that.

As I carved out the rune, these ideas took shape. With each line, they formed a firmer foundation of the letter. With each indentation, I filled out the concept, making it tangible. By the time I finished the rune, beads of sweat poured down my forehead as I grinned.

Working with the language was a challenge, but it was rewarding at the same time. I glanced at the time. It was nearly morning already. One day already passed since my meeting with Torix. Two remained. It was odd how time flew whenever I focused on a project like this.

It was like getting lost in a good book. With the rune finished, I channeled my mana into the endurance rune and the rune for time. I stood up and walked over towards Althea's room. Since I couldn't need quiet to focus on this, I might as well be there when she wakes up.

By the time I reached Althea's room, I charged one set of the runes. I placed it over the endurance rune on the inside of my forearm. It consumed the lesser rune beneath it. I walked into Althea's room, finding her

still laying in the white sheets of her bed.

Her chest slowly rose and lowered, her breathing steady. A tiny bit of drool leaked out of her mouth. It rose and fell with each of her breaths. I couldn't help but snicker a little at it before walking over. I sat beside her bed, listening to her as I channeled my mana. After I finished the second rune, I placed it onto my other forearm.

With both of the dimensional characters finished, I channeled my mana into them. Just like the other runes, they gobbled up my mana like starving hyenas. With the runes completed, two arms wrapped around my neck. They pulled me against the side of the bed.

A pair of lips whispered into my ear, "That was amazing."

A second later, Althea rested her chin on top of my face. My helmet peeled off, letting her rest on my tousled hair. Althea rubbed her chin in it, "I never thought your hair would be soft either."

I looked up at her, a grin plastered onto my lips, "What did you expect, metal cords?"

She lifted herself up, tugging on my hair with a gentle pull, "Not exactly...Let's see...I thought your hair would feel like monster teeth or barbed wire."

I rolled my eyes, "Really now?"

She grabbed the sides of my face, kissing me. Her soft, luscious lips were intoxicating. With her face upside down to mine, she smirked, "Yes. I did think it would be like that."

I stood up, turning around towards her, "Well I thought sex with you would be hellish."

Althea frowned before I leaned close to her. I pressed her chin up to me,

“I’m glad to see I was wrong though.”

She went for another kiss, but I pulled back, making her work for it. I dodged two or three other attempts before she jumped out of the bed. She wrapped her arms around my neck and her legs around my chest. With her voluptuous body pressed against mine, she kissed me again.

She pulled her lips away, “Want me to prove you wrong again.”

I shook my head, “I’d love to, but I’ve got about two more days before meeting the legend himself. I have a few more preparations left.”

Althea frowned, “Ah, really?”

I raised my eyebrows, “Yes, really.” I lifted her up before setting her onto the ground. As I did, her body bounced in the right places. I glanced away,

“Put on some clothes too. You’re distracting me.”

Althea raised an eyebrow, “What, really?”

I flushed, “Yeah, of course you are.”

She giggled, flushing back at me. After she got her clothes on, an awkward silence passed. I broke it,

“Hey.”

Althea grabbed her hands in front of her,

“What is it?”

I wrapped an arm around her, looking away while I spoke,

“I don’t do this kind of stuff with just anyone...and I uh, I just wanted you to know that this means we’re dating...right?”

Althea beamed, “What? Really? Wait, I didn’t meant that. I meant of course we are. Duh.”

I grinned back, “Good.”

I let her go before walking out of the room, “I’ll be in my room studying the runes. I didn’t want you waking up alone and get some misconceptions about anything.”

She looked up at me, “We’ll have lunch?”

With a glowing grin, I raised a fist, “Always. I’ll see you then.”

“I’ll see you too. I...I love you.”

A spark of lightning shot up my spine. After that passed, I replied, “I, uh, I love you too.”

Althea giggled as I stumbled out of the room. I walked away from my room, a bit of euphoria overcoming me. I glanced around, making sure I was alone. After I knew I was, I shouted,

“Hell yeah.”

Althea was a sexy and fun woman. Getting someone like that as a girlfriend was epic, at least in my eyes. I was too far away from Althea to tell, but she might just be celebrating too. Even outside of the sexy part, it was nice having someone I could share my problems with.

Considering Althea wasn't a normal person either, it meant we had a lot in common. Knowing there was someone I could spend my time with felt good. If I hadn't succeeded in my fights or studying, Torix wouldn't have been my friend or teacher for long. Our friendship was conditional. Althea and I were different though.

We didn't get together for strength or for some alliance between parties. We got together because we liked each other. There was something deeply comforting about that, at least to me.

So by the time I reached my room, I was on cloud nine. Having sex for the first time in over a year was a plus too. Since I wasn't focusing on my runes or studying, I noticed more of the mountain base this time around too.

The hallways were all jagged, like they were cut out in sections. It looked like Althea had sliced through the stone before Torix had minions carry the stone out. This meant any corners were razor sharp, enough to cut an unarmored person. I passed a few of the steel legion. The cuts on their shoulders verified my thoughts.

The fluorescent lights covered everything in a pale light. Since all the caverns were lit with bulbs on tripods, people and objects cast long shadows. The air was warm and smelled old. The walls of stone were almost all granite, the rock looking like splashes of salt and pepper.

As I reached my room, I forgot about my surroundings. I sat down on the floor, pushing those thoughts out of my head. I needed focus. With that in mind, I intended on adding other additions to the runes. For however long, I sat and studied and carved.

As time dragged on, the work weighed on me. There's the kind of work you can do all day. This wasn't that kind of task. My mind was numb after just a few hours. I took a break, having a pleasant lunch with Althea, but then I got back on the grind. It wasn't like all progress came in bursts.

Sometimes it was the slow, relentless labor that got the most done. This was one of those times. With that in mind, I kept at it until dinner. Another break with Althea left me refreshed, but I went right back to my room and drilled. The minutes faded into hours. I fell into the runes, studying every part of them.

The runes were like a brick wall, but my mind was like a hammer. Eventually, cracks formed in the barrier. I mean, it wasn't too bad. I would compare it with trying to break a brick with a flacid penis. Yenno, not too bad.

Just like that, the second day passed before I even realized it. As the third day dawned, the pressure of the situation hit its peak. I dug deep into the runic glyphs like they were my passion in life. In a sense, I put my back against the wall and thought of the situation as life and death.

In a way, it was. They day passed along with the night without any success. On the morning I would meet Yawm, I finally succeeded. I created a rune that summed up another facet of endurance. This was an odd one, but it was the idea of faith.

Whenever anyone tries to do anything, there will be people that doubt them. Doubt will infect their mind and paralyze them. In order to continue the endeavor, a certain level of faith was necessary. There had to be a belief in one's self or one's actions. Otherwise that doubt will come in and crush the motivation to continue.

Adding this aspect of endurance was more abstract than longevity and unconditional persistence. Combining it with the other runes proved difficult, and it took many tries. I finally did it though. The dimensional rune was made of three different characters, every piece of it ornately crafted. It flowed together without any imperfection.

As I fed mana into my grimoire, an hour passed before a single copy of the rune generated. As I finished the second one, a guard of Torix knocked on my door. I let the glowing runes fall onto my forearms. They wrapped around my forearms, covering them in a complex spiral.

The incantation was well over double the length of the previous markings. As I stood up, I observed them over my arm. It surprised me that Schema let me do this. Schema was tight lipped about the cipher, and he ruined entire worlds over the secrecy of it. Prancing around with on me should be a capital offense.

After thinking of Yawm again, I remembered why Schema was taking a risk on me. There wasn't much of a chance that we'd escape earth. Before leaving, I checked out the upgrades my armor gave me. They were growing.

[Modifications – The dimensional fabric composing this structure has been modified with code from the dimensional cipher. The bonuses are as follows.

+72 Strength

+72 Dexterity

+60 Endurance

+4% to effect of legacies]

The extra bonuses paired well with the creation of my new guild. It made me think about the others. Even though it wasn't a massive boost of stats, my legacy would help some. Understanding that, I opened my status

screen. I sent Torix, Althea, Kessiah, and Hod invitations to my guild.

They didn't have to accept, but giving them the option was a good idea. With everything finished, I took a deep breath. I did all that I could think to do. I opened the door, a dried out corpse looking at me. Black fire was in place of normal eyes, giving his face a sunken in, eerie look. It was a classic Torix kind of look for a minion.

I pointed a finger at him, "So uh, Skelly I guess...What's up?"

Skelly pointed towards Torix's room, so I followed. We paced past a few hallways in the mountain before entering Torix's base. As normal, maps, utensils, and runes covered the wall. It was like every surface was the page of a dense notebook. It was a sort of chaos that only Torix understood.

After walking into the room, the entire troop was here. Althea, Kessiah, Ajax, Hod, and Torix were standing in a group. They glanced at me as I walked in through an old, wooden doorway.

The scent of old paper and earth wafted as I paced up. I grinned at Althea and she grinned back. Ajax pointed at my runes, interrupting us, "You've advanced the runes already?"

I nodded, holding up a forearm so they could see it, “Yeah, it’s a work in progress.”

Torix spread out his arms, “Everything always is. Now, are you ready to go see Yawm?”

I sighed, clasping my hands into fists, “Of course.”

Torix grinned, “Perfect. Now, during your stay with the evil overlord, Althea and Kessiah will be focusing on rebuilding. We’ve eliminated as many of Yawm’s forces as possible. His remaining force is about 3% of its previous power. Unfortunately, Yawm can eliminate our entire army by himself. Therefore-

Torix snapped his finger. A map made of white energy appeared at the center of the room. It was a three-dimensional structure of the mountain. Torix pointed at it,

“We will build this mountain into a new city.”

Torix pointed at me, “In fact, it will be considered your city.”

I pointed at my chest, “My city? Why?”

Torix pointed over his head. His titles appeared.

Torix Worm, of Darkhill(lvl 1702, The Harbinger’s Legion)

Torix raised both his hands, “Even I am a member of your guild. Unlike the rest of us, you can claim an area as your own, even by galactic law. That is not an opportunity we will waste.”

Torix spun around the 3-d map of the mountain, “We will build a fortress city. After that, we will create a new empire of sorts.”

I raised an eyebrow, “What the fuck...really?”

Torix grinned, “Yes, really. Your legacy and ability to create quality items gives us the ability to organize a country. The bonuses you’ve given are compelling. Not only have you given enchanted armors, but you’ve given raw stats as well.”

Torix looked around, gesturing at the entire mountain with a hand, “This is, without a doubt, the single most powerful fighting force on Earth. Every place on earth is relegated to dungeons of a much lower level. They don’t have access to the same high-level enemies that these members of the legion have.”

Torix raised his hands right in front of his face, “Therefore we can ensure humanity’s future after we’ve slain Yawm.”

I frowned, “What do you mean humanity’s future?”

Kessiah leaned her weight onto one hip, “Newer races have a really tough time in Schema’s system. It’s actually one of the remnants calling cards for why Schema’s evil.”

Torix nodded,

“Indeed it is. As you’re well aware of, Schema doesn’t offer a pleasant and smooth transitions for newer planets. Planets that develop slowly are overrun by guilds coming in, like the steel legion. In extreme cases, the guilds will fight one another and destroy a planet’s resources in the process.”

Kessiah grimaced, “Think about it like a bunch of scavengers fighting over a carcass. It’s not a pretty sight.”

I frowned, “Did the remnants ever do that?”

Kessiah gave me a look like I was ridiculous, “What? Hell no.”

“Why not? Considering how strong remnants are, why didn’t you guys just take some place over?”

Kessiah sighed, “Because we’ve tried. Anytime we get grounded somewhere, higher level sentients come in and start killing us. We’re all unknowns, meaning we all have bounties. That means we’re like a giant pack of high level eldritch that give extra rewards when you kill us.”

Kessiah’s gaze turned dark, “There’s even information brokers that sell information about where different remnants are. If we ever make a home on a planet, we turn into a hunting safari. They find us then hunt us down like animals. That’s why we’re always on the move, wandering around with no home.”

Hod replied, “Hod think that not fair. Lady Friend #2 deserves home.”

Kessiah looked up at Hod. At first, she looked like she was going to hit him, but then Kessiah sighed, “Thanks Hod.”

Torix nodded, “It’s a painful reality.” He pointed towards me, “However, since you can create a city and guild, you can grant a certain level of protection. If someone were to harm Althea, you may simply create a bounty for the killer’s head. That’s the case with anyone who’s been given your legacy.”

Ajax narrowed his eyes, “Bounty hunters are relentless. They won’t stop at something as simple as that.”

Torix pointed at Ajax, “Perhaps that might be true if the owner of the guild isn’t that powerful. The protection of an S tier guild can counteract S tier bounties, however. By itself, that’s an enormous utility. In our situation, we’re being granted the protection of a C tier legacy. While not enormous, it’s a world of difference when compared with no defense at all.”

Althea chimed in, “What would an S tier guild look like?”

Torix pointed a finger up, “A simple example would be the Overseers. They’re technically a guild with a ridiculous up-front requirement and an enormous legacy reward.”

Ajax crossed his arms, “This planet could be glassed or turned into a fringe world soon. Why would you spend all that time building a city you don’t even know you’ll be able to live in?”

Torix raised an eyebrow, “I just outlined the reasons. I could assume that Yawm will kill Daniel and that we all die, but that doesn’t do us very much good, now does it?”

Ajax tapped a finger against his forearm, “It seems like a poor way to spend your final days of life.”

I shrugged, “Eh, it’s a hell of a lot better than knowing you’re going to die. Besides, let’s not give up on me so soon. Wait till I’m dead first.”

Ajax spoke with a sinister tone, “What exactly are you going to say to him? Please teach me these runes? You’re going to need some kind of plan for facing off against him. Yawm is very...enigmatic.”

I tapped the side of my head, “Oh don’t worry about me. I’ve already calculated all kinds of scenarios and planned out responses. Besides, thinking too much about it isn’t going to help. It’s like thinking too much about a job interview. I’ll end up looking nervous. If anything, I just need to relax and look at ease.”

Ajax laughed, “Hah, you have the confidence at least.” He uncrossed his arms, standing up, “I’ll give you that.”

Torix turned towards me, “Then I suppose there’s no more reason to wait, is there?”

I nodded, “Alright, just as a recap, here’s the plan. I go in and warn Yawm that I have Ajax as a hostage. He gives me information on the eldritch runes, and I tell him that I’ll free Ajax from his grasp. Once I’ve learned what I can, I lure him into a trap that allows us to push him into another dimension.”

Torix frowned, “That is the core of it.”

I nodded, “Alright. Let’s go.”

Torix walked up to me, “We’ll travel together. I will be one of your advisors as you approach.”

Althea walked up, "Wait, why are you going with him? I thought you said you were planning on taking the route with the least risk?"

Torix turned towards her, "I thought about what you said. I believe my presence will enhance Daniel's chances for success. Outside of that-" A sly grin crept onto Torix's face,

"I no longer want to use Daniel's build as an excuse to avoid danger. I'm not looking for a plan with the least risk anymore. I'm looking for a plan with the greatest chance for success."

Althea ran up and wrapped her arms around Torix's waist. Torix laid his hand on her head, "Thank you. If we don't return, then don't let Yawm find you. Do whatever you must to escape."

Torix hugged her back, "It would do my memory a disservice if your caught, so keep yourself safe." Torix looked up at Hod, "You on the other hand, do fly into the sun. I'm sure you'd be more useful as grilled chicken then as you are."

Hod shook his head, "But then Hod be dry like Dry Man. No one like dry chicken."

Althea giggled as Torix released her and sighed, "I want you to know Hod, I hate you. If I die, I will haunt you until your untimely death."

Hod scratched the side his beak with a three taloned finger, "Hod confused. If Dry Man hate Hod, why Dry Man stay with Hod even after death? Hod think that a sign of undying love."

Hod raised his hand, "Ah, Hod understand! Dry Man feelings confused." Hod grabbed his chin as he admired himself, "Hod understand. Hod have that effect on people."

Torix dragged his hands across his face, "Let's just leave."

I neared Althea, "Wait a second." I hugged Althea, lifting her off the ground. I whispered into her ear, "I'll be back. I promise."

She flushed, her blue gray skin taking on a hint of purple on her cheeks. She whispered back, “You better.”

I set her down with a smile before waving at the others, “See you guys later.”

We finished our goodbyes before Torix and I walked off. We reached outside the mountain, and we raced towards Springfield. Torix floated beside me as I shot in and out of the ground. If I went full speed, I outpaced him to my surprise. I kept my pace slow, letting Torix and I arrive at the time.

Once we arrived at Springfield, the city had changed. The gray mist returned where the world tree had been. The roots of the world tree already melted back into the ground. Lush forests sprouted up near these decayed roots. It was like painted streaks of a different world invaded our own.

Above these forests, Abstractions floated through the skies. Their reach was broad, covering more than just the city. Off in the distant skyline, abstractions were being sent. They would be opening up rifts elsewhere. Even if we killed Yawm, cleaning up his mess would take a long time.

Torix groaned, “There will be so many rifts to close when you’re finished with Yawm.”

I shot out of the ground, discharging my runes, “We’ll have to wait and see. I’m focusing on killing Yawm first.”

I shot through the air, Torix keeping pace.

“Are you nervous?”

I shook my head. I landed onto the ground, sliding through the earth before firing back up.

“No. It’s kind of like how a soldier gets used to killing someone during war. It becomes normal.”

We dashed across the suburbia. As we did, I erased all my doubts. There was no point in worrying. I did all I could do. This was it. It was now or never. I needed to be fearless. I needed to be unstoppable. There was no option to run or fail.

So I steeled myself as we reached the gray cloud of mist at the center of Springfield. Torix covered himself in a protective shield of mana as we passed through the mist. Once onto the other side, we entered a different world.

The yellow, sickly junglers covered the ground. The sky was a bloody crimson, bright and brooding. Beneath us, deformed monsters crawled around. No two abharitions were the same. Each of them were unique, a different nightmare given life. At the center of the rift, the lake from before remained.

Torix and I landed beside it. We walked up to it. Within it, there was a crystalline compound. Clear and opaque panels composed the structure, as if it was a building made of ice. One of the abstractions flew down, landing beside us. On the back of the abstraction, a named one rested.

It's face was geometric, as if it was created from the abstractions. A permanent, eerie grin carved across its face. Its eyes were holes in its head, and its ears were massive like a bats. Covered in a gray skin, it's thin, lithe figure looked creepy. It spread out its arms, its mouth opening. A dry, crackling voice spoke to us,

"I can tell by the might of your presence. You must be his visitors. Follow me."

The abstraction beneath the named one crumpled up, like a ball of paper folding in on itself. It turned into a tiny ball beneath the named one. It picked up the ball before the named one walked to the water.

As it entered the lake, the water spread away from it. Torix and I followed him into the depths of the lake. The water dropped behind us, forming a bubble of air as we moved. The water solidified into ice beneath the named one's steps, giving us a stairway to walk down.

We neared the crystalline structure beneath the lake. As we walked towards it, I recognized it all as ice. The named one walked through one of the walls, the ice melting. Steam poured up into our bubble and the room. The named one bowed towards us, placing a hand on his chest,

“You may come into his domain.”

Before we walked in, I identified the named one.

Keeja, the Corrupted Abstraction(lvl 1,500) – Yawm has taken ambient mana, coalesced enough to form a soul, then tamed the deformed spirit. This results in a creature that lacks the will to make its own decisions. It’s strength in magic allows it to be a threat despite this lack of reasoning.

It acts as the servant of Yawm, handling the miscellaneous tasks he needs done. You shouldn’t have any problems destroying it, if you choose to do so.

I kept my chest and head high, walking into the building. As we walked, I observed the building. The hallways were made of ice, some of it opaque and some clear. The clear sections showed the surrounding lake. As we paced inside, the animals outside shifted to life.

Creatures of the deep swam nearby, some of them odd and alien. Others were elegant and beautiful, awash in the phosphorescent light their body’s produced. Some of these glowing, undersea animals stayed near the clear sections of the walls. These sections acted like windows, shedding light into the room.

Since most of them were orange and yellow, it gave an almost sunny interior. They would brighten as we neared them then dim as we walked away. It made us a traveling ball of light in the ice structure. These lights would catch on smooth embroidering on the walls, shaping the light.

It was beautiful as anything I’d ever seen. It was hard not to be overwhelmed by it, but I kept my expression unimpressed. We reached the middle of a hallway. Within it, a door of pure white was present. It smelled like nothing, as if it was sterile. This entire time, there was no twisted experiments or lab victims.

If anything, it felt like Yawm had turned the eldritch into his playthings.

With its creepy grin, Keeja gave us another bow, “My maker is on the other side. May you enjoy the meeting.”

I glanced at Torix. He looked back at me. He frowned, as did I. We stared at each other for a second, an obvious tension. I turned toward the door, holding in the sight I wanted to let loose.

I pushed open the door, no sound ebbing from the hinges. As I did, the sight of books opened up to me. There were thousands of them lining shelves. Most of them were old, rare looking tomes. The ancient, yellowed look of the pages only made them that much more impressive.

Furs covered the floor, coating it in all kinds of animal skins. Some would have been vicious in life. Nearer towards the end of the room, a square table surrounded an old chair. The legs and panels of the chair where a dull white, contrasting the darker colors of the furs.

Pages were spread all across the desk. Littered on these pages were characters of the dimensional cipher. Hunched over this desk and writing with the runes was a giant. Covered in bark skin, its muscles rippled as it marked with a pen made of bone. The red ink covering the pen came from a bowl at his side.

It was the upper half of a skull full of blood. All along its shoulders, the eldritch runes were carved. They were like scars, each of them proof of a history and sweeping knowledge. As if utterly absorbed in his task, his hulking figure shook for a moment.

He lifted his head, a mane of green crawling across his back. As it turned to us, the green, vibrant glow of it reached towards us. There was a density to him, like he made of moving metal. It was as if he shouldn't even be able to move, yet he did. And effortlessly so.

Unlike Ajax, this porytians hands and fingers were thick. Each would be like the branch of a tree. As his eyes set on me, a wave of fear crawled along my back. They were the eyes of a surgeon. They didn't peer at me like I was a person. I was simply a set of muscle, bone, and skin waiting to be used.

I wanted to hold my breath. I wanted to scream. I wanted to cower and bow before this entity. It was so much more than I imagined. It was like looking at a god or an old one. An overseer was strong, but it didn't have a will of its own. It wasn't a self made monster.

This thing was. It didn't even need Schema. It chose to defy convention, no matter the cost. That resolve saturated its frame. It opened its hand towards us, muscle under its skin rippling. It's voice was ancient and mighty and immovable.

"I am Yawm. I've been looking forward to meeting you, Harbinger."