

## New World 321

Chapter 321: Expanding an Empire

“You’re dismissed. I’m heading out.”

He rose his brow under his dark mask, “Where exactly are you off to?”

Quintessence suffused my surroundings in an unbridled wave,

“I’m going to go do some hands-on expansion real quick.”

I smiled, “We need some more cities.”

Helios furrowed his brow, “You intend on doing so where, exactly? And what’s the method you’ll use? Perhaps you haven’t considered the law systems each place will need or how to manage the various subcultures of each area. These are important-“

I raised a palm, “Helios, I’m not a diplomat.” Mana seethed over me like a writhing flame, quintessence flooding out in abundance. I stated, “I’m a fighter and a crafter. I’m sticking to that, and I’ll leave the details to other people. Everything will fall in place as I go.”

He could doubt or dismiss my efforts if he liked. In the end, I’d leave that doubt shattered by results. Helios rolled his eyes while I pulled myself up with a gravity well. At a certain height, I generated an intense antigravity well beneath me. It propelled me forward while I opened up my status. An overhead, 2-dimensional map popped up, and I found the extent of Mt. Verner’s domain.

It stretched out for about a dozen miles in every direction. Without a core or official verification from Schema, Springfield lacked the same legitimate plot point. Despite that, the constructor golems already worked towards filling the city out. By the time they finished, my old hometown would be a thriving metropolis.

Schema may deny the town’s return for now, but that wouldn’t last for long. It wouldn’t last elsewhere too. Peering at those different places, the skyline shifted in my view as vast forests passed underneath me. I shot through clouds, the wind off my wake

creating cylinders of mist jutting out in every direction. In a sense, I impaled the clouds I passed.

I traversed another dozen miles outside of Springfield's domain before landing amidst an unclaimed hill. This would be the next city. I pulled out enormous globs of molten dimensional fabric. With quintessence, I flashed them into the components of a golem over the next few minutes. The cipher and charging took up the majority of my time after that. Getting four assault golems ready, I toiled for a while before sending them out to clear the countryside and nearby dungeons. The juggernauts dispersed across the terrain, one honing in on a nearby, mutated wolf.

The super golem grabbed the beast, ripped it in two, and burned its remains and blood splatter. Cleaving the terrain apart, the assaulters shifted from one motion to the next in a rapid succession of hunting. In moments, they stripped the land bare of its infestation. At the same time, I disintegrated all life on the hill with Event Horizon. Covered in bare dirt, I leveled it, flattening the mini-mountain with a gravity panel.

The ground quaked and roared out across the landscape, the splintered crags of earth crushing down. After getting a suitable space, I generated a steel barrier around it, piercing the flattened portion with several steel struts in the mound of splintered soil. With the foundation established, I molded quintessence into a flat, sheening plate of granite.

It gleamed in the sun; the entire hillside changed in minutes. I pooled more of my fabric for another golem, this time a constructor. Finishing it and its details, I generated thousands of rings for it to distribute out as needed.

An average person wearing my rings turned into a bulky behemoth, at least when compared to the usual. My legacy bonuses compounded that difference, revolutionizing the benefits someone gained from joining my guild. Many people operated in Schema's universe as if made of paper mache. My guildmates enjoyed surprising bulk by comparison and extending that only benefited people.

To that end, I spoke to the constructor golem, giving him the command to hold this territory and create livable spaces for people. I handed him the rings, the constructor levitating them in a gravity well over its head. The final piece of my city involved generating cipheric inscriptions in a monolith at the city's center.

As with Springfield, this column established a protective barrier, and I made it with my own dimensional fabric. Imparting a continuous supply of mana and energy to the local populace, the center point offered a grid for power to the people here. I instructed the constructor golem to manage and protect it from being weaponized by would-be warlords as well.

Working on the final details, I sliced sigils across the metal framework surrounding the city. I connected the runes to my monolith, and it sparked to life, generating a buffing field for anyone inside the city's two-kilometer radius. This whole process took two hours, my many minds allowing me to handle several tasks at once.

By the time I finished handling all the minutiae, the assault golems had returned from their forays. Each of them carried over a dozen dungeon cores, most of them simple yellow ones but some gleamed crimson. Instead of using them for attribute points, I put them into my pocket dimension.

Schema lied about primordial mana and my dimensional space. He could be lying about these cores as well. I'd take them out of the system and see if I couldn't get more from them than Schema allowed by normal means. After pocketing the cores, I peered at the space, finding everything in order.

With the assault golems and the constructor golem on standby, I moved on. Gathering a force of people to the stronghold wasted my time. Convincing people took a lot of tenacity, and people would fear me more than they'd actually listen. I'd leave the recruiting efforts to other members of my guild while I left empty cities for them to build an infrastructure off of. Besides, anyone could work as a marketer. Only I could craft the golems and these city-states.

And that's what I did. I built cities.

I spaced them out, about twenty-five miles apart. The distance gave plenty of room for building up and out, and they all stood atop hills. This left them as beacons in the landscape, the mana auras beaming outwards above them like gleaming domes. Light refracted off of these mana pyres, raw quintessence saturating near the monolith's apex.

In a way, the visual splendor offered more than a statement about their efficacy. They reminded me of the first time I saw a Sentinel. The cyan-shaded, armored warriors stood ten feet tall with dimensional slicing spears. At the time, I was a tiny ant

surrounded by mountains and hills. These golems acted the same to anyone finding them.

They left an otherworldly visage. The crimson eyes of the assault golems glowered at everyone, menacing and defiant. Their ruthless natures acted as absolutes, unable to be corrupted. They contrasted the pale eyes of the constructor golems, which calmed and gave a light sense of ease. The builders offered a hub of understanding and compliance by comparison.

They exceeded an average person's limits by enormous bounds, to the point of being outright alien. Five level 14,000 golems could ravage the entire state, let alone their city's limits. The monoliths and archaic runes dispersed across each of the reinforced hills offered further mysticism.

After establishing a dozen of these emptied, runic structures, I flew far over the clouds above them all. The monoliths dispersed dollops of light through the clouds, each a lighthouse in the encroaching forest. Wanting a better view, I revved over twenty elemental furnaces under my skin. Those artifacts generated vast energy outputs into my body, and my skin sheened a bright white from the heat alone.

I hovered over my new domain, a living star both in appearance and output. Spreading my arms, an enormous wave of gravitation molded the clouds from above my cities. For miles, the force collapsed the misty blots in my view. They fell in a spiral, condensing into water that plummeted down below in a light wave. It was a circle of falling water, a biblical feat.

And I did it to get a better view of my cities. With my structures on full display, they reminded me of what I imagined Schema's system would be like after finding my first Sentinel. I smiled at the outposts, knowing this was only the beginning. I continued establishing these domains of control, none of them recognized by Schema.

Whether the AI liked it or not, these cities stood on far firmer ground than anything he made. Blue cores defended well, but that was it. They offered no countermeasures for stopping an attacker, and inevitably, they fell over time. My cities carried dreadnoughts as protectors, the devastating assault golems able and willing to gore enemies to pieces. The constructor golems restored any damaged areas and assisted with energy production in the meantime.

The monoliths still protected the populace, of course, but they offered a buffing aura as well. In the end, combine that with the rings and legacy bonuses, and these places acted like supply depots for city establishing. They far exceeded the utility of Schema's hubs. After getting primordial mana unlocked, I'd connect these places with warping golems. If I had my way, I'd make developed societies like the Empire appear primitive compared to my territories.

If people came in. The granite panels sheened with a glossy finish, only a few golems standing in the circular stones. I held faith that once people understood the benefits here, they'd swarm in by the thousands. In my case, I intended on offering quite a few of these outposts to the skeptiles.

They'd arrive in a vast population, and establishing centers for them eased their transition. I'd split them into the cities by their tribes, letting them know what was going on. I might have Amara hack into Schema's system and let me announce a speech. But then again, a message might be better as they'd have it stored for reference.

After that, I'd dish out managers to the areas based on a meritocracy. I was no politician or city organizer, so problems would arise, no doubt. As they came, we'd fix them. For now, I worked within my limits and knowledge base. It was all I could do.

I kept planting these cities further out from Mt. Verner. The forests stretched out as far as the eye could see in all directions before I found patches of plains. Here, human settlements dotted the horizon. From far above, I used my superior eyesight to inspect these territories and how they managed themselves.

Every sight made me wince, everyone's situation both chaotic and haphazard. People, in general, did a great job with the resources they had. However, that was the issue; they had no resources to work with. That came about because of the culling.

Schema stripped power grids, destroyed Earth's infrastructure, and killed most people in the tutorial. Schema then forced everyone to fight eldritch or die. While I appreciated the levels and all, Schema made no efforts to help people off their feet. The closest approximation of that came from the Force of Iron. The generic, leaderless guild acted as quest hubs.

They didn't establish much beyond understaffed zones with outdated, leftover tech and weapons. It was better than nothing, but not by much, at least in the long-term. Springfield was one of these established zones, which helped against Yawm. Searching

for more of those places, I found nowhere else in over a hundred miles with a Force of Iron camp. This left people scrambling for protection in tight-knit, small villages.

And they suffered for it.

Starvation loomed. Monsters roamed. People dealt with the aftermath of a brutal society built on snowballing level-ups. I did nothing to handle it before now, and I regretted it. When I viewed people sitting there, it weighed on my chest. They wallowed in what amounted to a dystopia.

If I couldn't have done anything to fix it, it wouldn't bother me. That was the crux of the issue – I could solve it quickly. With time under my belt for the first time in years, I did just that. I found one small town under siege below.

Townsfolk crafted an enclosure, using abandoned cars piled up as walls. They put barbed wire and spikes over the vehicles and around them, most of the spiky cords harvested from nearby farms. People within carried a few weapons, any gunned weaponry long having run out of ammunition. They used roughshod swords and spears, a few well-made pieces built into the mix.

One of the townsfolk was a blacksmith, and it showed by their shields, crafted from spare metal parts. People stood behind the cars, stabbing their spears through the shattered windows. Blood congealed onto those empties frames, no citizen having time to clean anything. They hoped rain handled that for them.

Even a cursory glance explained why as the citizens stopped an assault of entrail-covered bears. Four beasts mounted an attack on the village's eastern side, two dozen individuals fighting them off. A few children screamed, none of them fully systemized and unable to fight back yet. Several people scrambled to get them to safety in a concrete shelter built by what looked to be a dooms-day prepper.

The prepper's paranoia paid off for these people now.

The bears stripped row after row of barb wire on the frontlines. Entrails squirmed and coursed through their eyes, ears, and mouths. Misshapen lumps swelled in them, the bear's bodies converting to the parasite within the bellies of each beast. Several fuzzy eyes opened long the stretched entrails, each of them gazing out with teary, infected oculi.

I winced as they flashed green blooms that released spores over the town. Those fragments floated over the townsfolk like strands of a fleshy, green dandelion. Hovering over them, several people panicked in abject terror as the infection rained in. Some screamed out orders, trying to turn chaos into order. Some froze in place, unable to process what happened.

The entire scene flashed in my vision while I flew over it. I wielded Event Horizon as a cleanser that eliminated the spores. Passing over the people right after, I landed with a soft thud beside several other survivors. Beside the systemized humans, I stood as an umbral titan of metal. I dwarfed them and their barrier alike.

Before anything else, I covered them in the Rise of Eden, turning their weakness into strength. Beside me, a farmer with a scarred face gawked in horror. I pulled my helmet off my face, giving him a confident smile. Interrupting my gesture, an infested bear reached its head through a car door, shattering a window between the farmer and me.

The bear flashed its disgusting face at me, having been warped into horror by the eldritch parasite. The farmer stumbled back and down, mud plopping as he met the dirt. With a casual grip, I grabbed the bear's face, my palm dwarfing its head. I jerked the monster through steel, the car's frame bellowing out a loud squeal.

Lifting the bear over me in one palm, the bear fumbled for a grip on its paws, its body contorted at an odd angle. It grunted out, trying to escape my grasp. It met my fingers, each of them guillotines of steel enclosing over its head. Watching me hold the bear like that, the townsfolk stopped screaming.

They ceased moving as well, most even holding their breaths. My display of strength stunned them. From my palm, a swarm of living needles flooded into the bear, its body appearing unharmed. Beneath the skin, I wore the body like a puppet in my palm. I siphoned its life into my own, my being an engulfing monster.

The other bears gawked at me, the three remaining all wary of me. One of the parasites squirmed out of a bear, trying to hide in the dirt. I smiled at the monstrosity, pulling it towards me with a gravity well. It slapped into my raised arm. It squirmed at me, trying to find gaps to drill in and control my body.

It found a desolate wasteland.

It squirmed in horror, trying to escape contact with my skin. I let my arm down as flesh sunk into metal. The hollowed bear corpse flopped to the side before I raised my other arm. Before I did the same to them, the two bears turned on their heels. They ran away before I waved Event Horizon over them in a flash of misty red.

They disintegrated into mana, the energy siphoning into my skin.

The farmer beside me watched the entire massacre, as did the other townsfolk. Peering down, I left an enormous gap in their defensive wall, having destroyed the makeshift barricade in a patch. Breaking the ice, I scratched the back of my head,

“Hah...Sorry about that.”

The scarred farmer pointed at the hole in the wall, “Uhm...Can you fix it? You look stout enough.”

I scoffed, “When I’m done with this place, fixing this wall will be the least of your worries.”

Their faces paled, each of them terrified of what I might do. I spread the Rise of Eden over them once more while raising a fist,

“You’ll never be forced to fight an eldritch again.”

Chapter 322: What It’s For

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The villagers trembled despite the aura's stat raise, some cowering away. I raised my eyebrow at them while opening my dimensional storage. Pulling out several dozen rings, I hovered them over my palm while stating,

"Everyone put these rings on. You know, if you want to."

The citizens backed away, some of them shaking and others getting angry. The scarred farmer pointed at me and murmured with an edge of panic, "You, what are you here for? What do you want from us?"

I peered around, inspecting the scenery, "I'm here to get you guys on your feet, honestly."

I grabbed and tossed him a ring. The farmer caught it, but it dragged his hand down. He almost fell over, the poor guy exhausted from the fighting. He gasped, "What is this made of?"

I raised a palm, "It's a secret. Now, everybody, I'm going to be building you all a fortress, giving you system tips, and getting you guys reasonable weaponry. I'll be leaving protectors as well, so you'll be able to level at your own pace."

A few villagers whispered to each other, which was pointless. Each voice rang out like a blaring alarm to me, and they couldn't disguise what they said, not this close to me anyway. Taking every opinion in at once, the general sentiment came across as a strange intermingling of fear and hope. Most seemed skeptical, and others wondered about conditions or strings attached.

Before their minds spiraled further into paranoia, I tilted my head to the scared farmer, "Yo, put that ring on. You'll be the demonstration of what it does."

The farmer peered at the heavy band of dimensional fabric. He turned back up to me, "I...You're not going to hurt me, are you?"

The guy looked like he enjoyed common sense, so I said, "You saw what I did to the bears, right? Hurting you all could've already happened. I just saved you from a painful death. You all should trust me enough to put a ring on."

The farmer's lips turned into a thin line, "Will...Will this take my mind away?"

I laughed, "What? No, It'll do the opposite."

He blinked, staring at the ring. After taking a few breaths, he put the band onto his middle finger, and after making complete contact, the individual took a few steps back. He pressed himself against one of the piled-up cars, and barbed wire pierced his shirt and gouged his back. One of the other villagers came up, shouting at him,

"Fred, are you ok?"

Fred gasped, his scars fading and a layer of muscle forming within him. From thin and lanky to lean and mean, he pulled himself from the twisted wires. His back healed in seconds, and he gasped, "What is this? I feel...better. Much better."

I pointed at my rings, "These are your tickets out of the rat race and into the big leagues." I spiraled the circles around me, "Anyone else wants one? They're free."

Most people stayed skeptical, but a few opportunists ran up, each of them wanting one. I pointed towards the grassy opening beside us,

"Line up. You'll all be allowed to get one if you choose to take it."

Random villagers put on the rings, their benefits palpable. These villagers sat between levels one and two hundred. For them, these rings offered enormous amounts of health, regeneration, stamina, willpower, endurance, and sizeable pieces of strength and constitution. They dwarfed even rare artifacts from a stat value standpoint, giving each person a tremendous leg up.

More joined in on the ensuing frenzy, a mob forming for the enormous benefits the rings offered. I kept them in order, each person getting one. Despite the tremendous help, a good portion of people chose not to take the bands. They kept their eyes narrowed, each person unwilling to accept the free boost. It was their loss, and I wasn't about to beg them to take it.

After handing out fifty rings, I spread out my hands towards their car wall. I turned my head and shouted, “Everyone, back up.”

By now, people got the picture and listened. I melted down the cars, the steel turning into a glowing bubble. The citizens of this place gawked in slack-jawed wonder while I created a wall of steel around their entire perimeter. I bolstered their poor defenses, making the walls taller, covering it in spikes, adding pillars into the ground, and establishing watch posts at even intervals.

These towers offered vantage points for their defense, making it more efficient. After handling that, I erected a column at the center of their small town, the pillar made of my dimensional fabric. The heat of my molding fabric set nearby grass on fire, people wondering at my creation. Once I etched the cipher in, I moved to the walls.

Handling the enchantments on the outskirts of their barricade, I sat down and charged up. As I did, people walked up. More precisely, children did. They gawked in wonder at me, but I did the same to them. These were some of the only kids I’d seen since Schema’s systemization. Compared to our pre-system era, these children lived isolated, small lives here, each of them stuck in the town’s walls.

Even from casual conversations with Torix, I learned systemization occurred after or near total growth. Experience and whatnot flooded in after that. Unfortunately, humans grew slow, meaning we needed lots of time and investment for maturation. As these kids stepped up, I gathered a lot about them by how they bounced off the ground or moved the wind.

To me, each of them was as soft as the air around them. A brave one took the initiative and spoke first,

“Uhm...Hello.”

Impressed by her courage, I smiled at the young girl, “What’s up?”

She stared, her clothes old and sewn in many places. The patchwork showed a diligent tailor working hard to keep clothes on her back. This six or seven-year-old took one of my rings, the weight of it challenging to bear. She kept it on while murmuring, “So... Are you an alien?”

I pointed at my face, “Nope. I’m a human.”

Her eyes popped open wide. Her lips made an O, “What? For real?”

I gave her a nod, “Absolutely.”

“So you’re like my dad?”

I raised a brow, “Who’s he?”

She pointed at Fred, the farmer helping everybody get sorted after the battle. I tilted my head up, “Wow, he defends the town. Impressive, I must say... You must be proud of him.”

The little girl stood tall, “Yeah, he’s best. He tells me stories all the time.”

A warmth came over me, and I smiled, “He’s keeping you safe. Make sure you work hard and learn a lot for him, alright?”

The little girl nodded her head with force, “Yes. I will.”

She stood twenty-plus feet away, my body glowing and burning up debris nearby. I paneled a layer of cold between us, preventing her and the camp from incinerating. The girl sat in the cold for a while, the difference in temperature novel to her. She got the other kids playing with her in the field, and I watched them enjoy the bit of magic. It brought an irrepressible grin to my face before I finished the cipheric sigils.

Yeah, this was a good idea.

Standing on my feet, the ground cracked around me. The panel of mana plumed out of the pillar above, giving the place a sizeable protective field. The basics handled, I crafted them each several swords, shields, war hammers, and armor pieces. I made it out of steel, and helmets took priority. I also made gauntlets and footwear as they kept their extremities safe.

After giving the steelwork fundamental Schema enchantments, I prepared to leave. I raised my hands, my height already large enough to see everywhere in the camp. I announced,

“Alright, I’m heading out. I’ll be leaving several golems in the area who will check on you all. If those with rings are found abusing their benefits, don’t expect to keep them. Those rings were earned by staying alive until now. If you choose to use them for devious ends, expect a titan like me to handle it. You’ve been warned.”

The villagers evacuated the concrete shelter already, everyone out and about. By now, they trusted me enough, and the fear from before dissipated some. Most of them watched me fulfill my tasks, wondering where my abilities started and ended. Before heading out, I crafted a sheet of steel over a portion of the city’s central monolith.

I pointed at it, glowing lines etching into steel as I said, “My guild is the Harbinger’s Legion. We accept recruits but prepare to work hard if you join. We’re on the rise, and we’re bringing humanity with us. If you want to join, talk to a super golem or head to Mt. Verner. Do that, and we’ll see if you’re up to snuff.”

I raised a fist, “You’ll be joining something larger than yourself if you enlist. Education on magic and Schema, basic worldly tasks, and all kinds of training will be there for you. You just have to reach out and take it.”

I peered down at the strengthened villagers, “You’ll earn my legacy if you join, and it’s as strong as those rings, maybe even better. And remember, work hard, guys. Don’t set up limits for yourself. Live up to what you can be, not what you are now.”

I hovered myself over the village and shot myself out, several people shouting questions. Not having time to answer them, I got some distance before creating the standard five golem ensemble for the area. Giving the constructor golem some instructions, I mentioned checking on their camp every now and again.

They’d ensure the rings didn’t lead to some horrific sub-society or something. I didn’t want some crazy psychopath getting their hands on that unbridled power. Finishing up those matters, I funneled back into the city building process like before. As I fell into the process, the days blended together, my body going from one step to the next.

Time blurred by, and while it did, I brainstormed different ideas. I referenced Chrona’s conversations and insights on time magic, trying to fully grasp them. By now, Schema

might've locked me from using it out of fear. Instead of letting that discourage me, I put myself ahead of the curve.

Just as I'd done with primordial mana, I gathered my knowledge for when I could use time magic without limit. When I took off Schema's shackles, it would rush into place as it had with primordial mana. I held a firm faith in that, my efforts showing that resolve. To get as much from that as possible, avoiding Schema's control took priority.

So, I also put two minds to understanding the cipher markings Plazia-Ruhl etched down. He made and charged them quickly, and with my mana reserves, I'd do the same. Creating a patch when needed suited me fine for the time being. While I handled those tasks, I stayed connected with the guild.

I kept heading back towards Mt. Verner and getting schooling from Helios and Chrona alike. Helios recited his information towards me like some talking computer, but hey, it worked. I referenced the memorized lectures over and over, drilling them into my head. I did the same with Chrona, preferring her more esoteric and less rigorous take on the subject.

Compounding those benefits, I raided our stockpile of books and kiosks from Elysium. They carried dozens of volumes for many different kinds of magic, and I primarily kept it related to temporal dilation. After getting that, warping and dimensional magic would be my primary study. I hammered away at all these tasks at all times, my willpower oozing.

In fact, my motivation spiked after knowing most of my mental blocks came from Schema, not from me. If anything, knowing he held me back put me in an underdog state of mind. Schema wanted me to stay contained and boxed into his system? Oh, I'd show him what I was capable of. He'd feel the full brunt of what the Harbinger of Cataclysm could do.

My guild's expansion was a part of that message. To keep going, I kept in contact with Torix in the meantime, the lich establishing connections over the various cities. Torix included some undead to help manage the empties places with a few trustworthy guildmates. It put me at a greater sense of ease that no one would abuse what I left behind.

I also put Florence up to the task of getting people into the cities. The chatty albony took his work with great gusto, becoming the politician he always was meant to be. He

demanding a gialgathen fly him in for effect, and I watched him work out one of his recruiting seminars. The guy spoke with words like gilded honey, always playing up my guild's strengths.

And considering we offered free life-changing rings and protection, it was an easy thing to do.

Most of the guild moved as well. Hod and the Eltari expanded outwards, preferring forested lowlands in valleys. They never hated Mt. Verner, but the Eltari evolved for a desert environment. They chose lower, hotter areas. I might get them to check out somewhere further South, maybe near Arizona. In time, perhaps they'd do great in the Sahara.

As for the gialgathens, many of them migrated over the next week. Mt. Verner had crowded to absurdity for them. Most gialgathens preferred some living space and breathing room, so the cramped conditions grated at them. Some couples branched out into other mountainous areas. Many more flocked to Blegara, keeping Helios busy outside of his lectures.

Some people in Mt. Verner joined the mass hiatus of the hollow mountain. These individuals preferred a quieter lifestyle, something my spread-out cities offered in spades. During my own downtime, I chatted with Althea often, usually over calls. I spent evenings with her during Helios's lessons, however.

From our talks, I could tell Althea lost her way a bit with the war ending. Her skills suited assassination, not domestic living. She put everything she had into dismantling Elysium, and that showed in her efficacy at the time. Slicing through skulls and having good aim didn't work so well with establishing homesteads. I tried keeping her spirits up, but she kind of wondered what to do next with her life.

I hoped she'd find out something as awe-inspiring as she was.

Listening to her reminded me of myself in my pre-Schema days. When I thought about graduating from school, I was at a loss. I didn't know what to do or where to go. Without Schema's arrival, I might be working at a fast-food place or struggling with school loans.

At that moment, I crafted a pillar of my flesh and blood, a beacon of mana. It contrasted harshly with that different reality and timeline. I wondered how I ended up in this

position, one with enormous potential. It made me think about other people and what they were capable of in different circumstances.

Perhaps everyone hid on an ocean of potential that they could not see.

I found that both disappointing and heartening at the same time. Even while having these thoughts and building cities, I kept my runes revving full blast. I channeled mana into my endurance inscriptions without ever ceasing. In fact, I held many furnaces on it at all moments.

The reason for that was self-evident. Cutting myself off from Schema was no longer an option; it was an inevitability. I prepared myself for it with each passing moment. I might craft runic inscriptions for my own trees and perks at this rate. A vast improvement on my runic work was required for that.

So, I kept three minds researching cipheric sigils at all times, one for general research and the others on Plazia's sigils. I kept four psyches on the city making, two on warping, and two more dedicated to time magic. Seven channeled my runic markings and furnaces, and one kept everything coordinated. All in all, I amassed nineteen minds that hustled and bustled at all moments. In time, many more would join their ranks.

Knowing my plans progressed, I finished another city. A sunrise peaked over the horizon, orange light shaving the clouds above. The hues of a sunrise crafted a frame for the blue skies, and I spread my arms at it. I just worked through three days of rain, and a bit of sunshine did me good. Before I soaked it in, a message popped up in my status. I peered down at it.

Obolis Novas, the Finder of Secrets | Level 24,492 Cap: 27,000 | Class: Founder | Guild: The Empire – I see that the ahcorous arrived within an absurd scheduling, and they've stayed on the frontlines ever since. Incredible, I must say. I never envisioned a day where you destroyed a galactic horror in less than a day, and yet, it has come to pass.

That elite efficiency worked to our benefit, as we've turned the tides against the Hybrids. I do wish to thank you fully for your gift. My guild organized the skeptiles, and we're now able to send portions of them over towards Earth as needed.



There are 30 million of them, and they enjoy arid environments or flush jungles; it depends on the tribe you're moving to. I understand that your guild may need time to assimilate such a vast number of people, and we're more than willing to give it to you.

And if you have time to chat, I'd genuinely enjoy working out the details of our dealings whenever you are available.

I raised an eyebrow at the message, thinking back on my relationship with the Emperor. He gave me opportunities, but he also pitted me into some poor circumstances. Technically, he gave me an elemental furnace, a planet, and two able subordinates. At the same time, I doubted he could get the furnace working, he couldn't hold the planet anyways, and he couldn't get Florence to do anything productive.

Even Helios's service was gifted to me because Obolis wanted to punish the guy. If anything, I questioned my relationship with Obolis more and more with each passing event. Still, he gave me a lot of information, and he might help me take advantage of my Schema and Overseer meetings. Before confronting Schema, I'd make sure I was ready, however.

Cancelling Schema's limiters, being able to warp, and having some control of time magic, I'd get that all lined up before I confronted the AI. After thinking all that through, I thought up a message.

Daniel Hillside, The Harbinger of Cataclysm | Level 18,767 (Cap: 26,000) | Class: Sovereign | Guild: The Harbinger's Legion – I can talk now, but not for too long. I'm expanding the guild right now. Here are my coordinates if you want to visit...

I sent him the data, Schema uploading it automatically. After a few seconds, a notification popped up.

Obolis Novas, the Finder of Secrets | Level 24,492 Cap: 27,000 | Class: Founder | Guild: The Empire – I'll be there in a moment.

Within a few seconds, a warp appeared beside me. Obolis stepped out from his majestic study. In his graphene armor and with a smile, he spread his arms at me,

"It's good to see you again... You look different."

I smiled back, “Because I am.”

## Chapter 323: What You’re Worth

Obolis closed his warp before peering out at the horizon, the distant clouds drifting. The Emperor gave it a nod, “It would seem your planet is fairing well. It’s quite an attractive place, I must say.”

I stared with him, “It is...What are you here for?”

“As always, you’re down to business as usual, not that I dislike such a thing. I’ve come here to discuss the deal along with a few future offers for you if you’re interested.”

I blinked, “I might not be, but we’ll see.”

Obolis raised a finger, “I assure you that tempting prospects await. As for our deal, an update on our planets’ situations should give you an idea of what to expect moving forward.”

I frowned, “I talked about it with Helios after one of my warping lessons. The ahcorous are excellent Hybrid killers as expected, though losses are still high among natives. Your albony were called off the frontlines, and the subsidiary planets are now fighting with the slimes and natives primarily.”

My frowned devolved into a grimace, “And you’re exploiting a lot of the experience gained. It’s an unpleasant thing to think about, honestly.”

Obolis’s smile dampened, “Hm, that would be...Noteworthy, under different circumstances. Details aside, I can see you’re establishing a network of cities on your homeworld. You’ve done that before doing so on Blegara even. It would seem I’m not the only individual devoid of favoritism, hm?”

I tilted my head down to him, “Yeah, my people are being eaten alive, and I’m stopping it. You’re making other people be eaten instead, and you’re taking as many benefits as you can at the same time. It seems a bit...like leveraging your position.”

Obolis's smile ceased altogether, "It would seem you're no longer in a talkative mood. Perhaps I caught you at the wrong time?"

I shook my head, "I'm busy but not in a mood."

"Then I'd remind you that we're allies on amicable terms."

I raised my brow, "If you say so."

Obolis pinched the bridge of his nose, "Then this shall be the given atmosphere of this meeting. So be it. Our planets are doing very well since the ahcorous have stepped in. Your quick dispatch of Plazia is the reason for that, despite your initial delays. Despite your rudeness, I'm still grateful."

"So, what are you going to give me in return?"

Obolis's grin popped back up, "I'm glad you asked. I'll be adding three additional furnaces. It's quite the haul--"

I raised a palm, "Woah now, I don't want three furnaces."

Obolis leaned back, "Really? Three furnaces would enable a plethora of options for you, given your position."

I smiled, "My position, huh? What is my position, exactly?"

Sensing my challenge, Obolis raised his chin, peering down at me. His tone lowered, "You've recently acquired a planet, you've just ended a war you're still recuperating from, and you have one city on a world you don't even own."

Obolis tilted his head, "From where I'm sitting, you seem to be rather precariously positioned. This sudden burst of confidence, while amusing, isn't going to change any of those realities."

I scoffed, "So that's where I'm at, eh?"

Obolis nodded, "As far as I can tell, yes. It is."

I waved my arms, stepping over towards the monolith at the center of my city, "Guess how many of these cities I've made in the last two weeks?"

Obolis walked around, interlocking his hands behind himself. He peered into the horizon, seeing several other pillars beaming mana from the skyline. the Emperor raised a brow, "Hm, perhaps two dozen?"

"I made one hundred and fifty-two of them."

Obolis froze in place. Despite his usual composure, he stuttered, "O-over a hundred of them?"

I gave him a nod, "Yup. Five hundred-plus golems too. We've already amassed a growing population in some of the earlier centers I established, though there's still time left before people learn what's happening. By now, I've covered Michigan with them. It was my home state before Schema's collapse."

I gestured at the large slab of granite we stood on, "And now it's where I've started the 'conquest' of my home planet."

Obolis pulled his hands back in front of himself, "That...That rate of creation is absurd. You've truly outdone yourself."

I stated, "You want to know how I've done it?"

Obolis squeezed his hands together, "My curiosity is why I'm called the Finder of Secrets, so of course I'd love to know."

I gestured to myself, "I'm using twenty-one furnaces right now. They're hidden under my skin."

Obolis took a step back, the grizzled Emperor struck by verbal lightning. He took a breath, “Over twenty at a time? And your still alive?”

I narrowed my eyes, “That’s right. That’s why I’m not too keen on three furnaces. I helped clear out several of your planets, places you’d lose otherwise. Planets give hundreds of millions of credits yearly. Four of those planets for a single decade is billions in raw credits. For that, you’re giving me three furnaces in return?”

I spit out my words with disgust, “You’re giving me nothing.”

Obolis coughed into a hand before his tone rose, “You must include the skeptiles in that arrangement.”

I sighed before peering off, “You know, you mentioned thirty million people being there, right? I know there are billions of people on each of your planets. If I saved you four of them, then that could amount to a hundred billion people if the worlds were densely populated.”

I raised my brow, “The skeptiles are a sub-race on one of your planets. They’re not even a main race by any stretch of the imagination. I know I agreed to them for saving your planets, but man...That’s a low reward for what I’ve accomplished.”

Obolis raised a hand, “And what of Tera? He gained us a planet on his own.”

I nodded, “He’s the skeptiles’ crown jewel, the absolute pinnacle of their species. From what I’ve researched, he hasn’t accomplished anything like that since. Nothing even close.”

As if caught, Obolis froze for a small, fraction of a second. He caught himself back onto an argument smoothly, “You killed Plazia in less than a day. Three furnaces in that time is surely a massive benefit?”

“That’s not how deals work. I accomplished a lot, and that deserves something of equal value. What can you offer me?”

Obolis sighed, “I...I can grant you credits, cores, even cities.”

I pointed at him, “What about planets? Do you have any undeveloped worlds on the backburner?”

His face gnarled up, “How many? You wish for more than a single world?”

I spread out my hands, “Yeah. I fought with you on Blegara. You cut your losses before I turned the situation around. You’d of lost that planet and several others by now if I hadn’t intervened. I want a fraction of what I helped you keep. They don’t have to be developed worlds. Barren wastelands are fine by me.”

Obolis frowned, “I won’t give you a planet. You couldn’t even manage the world even if I did hand one over.”

I had two minds dedicated to the conversation. Three joined, “Oh, try me. Policing won’t be an issue, and neither will the eldritch. I’ll be able to create cities on a whim wherever I please, and I’m offering powerful legacies to those that join my guild.”

Obolis scoffed, “You’re giving your legacy to anyone that joins your guild?”

I nodded, “Of course. You don’t? Wait, let me guess, it’s only for the albonys?”

Obolis’s eyes turned to slits, “Perhaps.”

“Yeah, I figured as much. Anyways, if you can’t offer territory, what about obelisks?”

Obolis spread his arms, “Well then, I see you’ve suddenly become reasonable. I can trade obelisks. How many do you require?”

“I’ll need one hundred advanced ones, the same models you gave Torix.”

Obolis let his arms slap against his sides, “I rescind what I stated. A hundred of them? You want a hundred advanced, AI-driven obelisks?”

I pressed my fingertips against my temples, “What are you even willing to give me? If it isn’t anything that matters, then why are we even talking anymore?”

Obolis took a breath, “So you’ve suddenly decided that I’m an evil overlord worthy of ire, have you? Is that the reason for this sudden shift in your demeanor and personality?”

I let out a breath, “I don’t think you’re evil, but I know you’re taking advantage of me. I’ve recently gained peace offerings from two different parties, and their rewards dwarf what you’ve given me. It’s not even close. That’s despite me doing next to nothing for these two people.”

Obolis’s nose twitched, “Hm, two parties then? The first is Elysium. That much is obvious. Who would the second be then?”

Obolis’s ancient mind whipped into action. He considered possibilities before his jaw slackened, “You... You made a deal with Plazia to leave Svia, didn’t you?”

I kept my expression muted, but Obolis could tell the truth either way. He gave me a wide grin, “Hah, clever... Very clever. You came intending to wage war, but instead, you did dealings. I intended on getting one over on you, and yet, you’ve done the same to me.”

Obolis’s fangs glinted white, “I must say, Daniel, I’m impressed. Deeply. Is this where this newfound confidence came from? If so, perhaps it’s more earned than I anticipated.”

I spread out my hands, “It wasn’t from the deal, but it did lead to some understandings on my part.”

Obolis gave me a sideways glance, “Hm, your secrets are your own. You’re in a position to keep them as you wish. However, you’ve already obtained quite a few net benefits from this deal. The animosity I’m receiving seems undeserved; at least from my position, it would seem so.”

I sighed, “Obolis, let’s just spell out some facts here. First, at no point did I ever need your help. Remember, I joined into an alliance with you because I was fighting Elysium at the time. You happened to need my help because you were attacked, and I’ve helped

defend you. I chose not to ask for anything in return because I assumed you'd offer me something of equal value."

I grimaced, "I was wrong. You're holding out on me even though I've done what I've done out of goodwill."

Obolis's fur ruffled in the wind, "I gave you a planet and an entire species. You even have two able subordinates because of me, and I've given you an elemental furnace. That's quite the sum already."

I pulled his furnace out of my chest, floating the antique in the air, "This thing, right? I've used quite a few furnaces by now, and I have a 'feel' for them. This one, it's awful. It's choppy, out of date, and poorly made. It's older and worse than all of my other ones. Ancient? Psh, this is a junky furnace. That's what it really is."

I raised my brow, "So you gave me an offhand relic you probably can't even use. You weren't going to hold Blegara either, and if anyone knows that, it's me. Even your subordinates weren't the cream of the crop."

Defiance formed from Obolis's eyes, "Despite that, look at how useful they've been to you. You've made Florence into a true utility, and Helios's warping has been indispensable."

I raised a hand, "Helios was put under me as a punishment. Florence was an offering on top so you could get him out of your hair."

Obolis rolled his eyes, "Look at this, you've caught me. You're correct. I managed my situation so that I wasn't put at a disadvantage. It's the albony way, and yet, despite my positioning, my 'poor' deals have worked wonders for you."

Obolis pointed the finger at me, "You've turned every situation I presented you with into an advantage. Despite that, you're whining to me of unfairness while giving me an attitude. It's childish, and it demeans you as the Harbinger. I expect more from you."

I raised a hand, "See, that's exactly my point. You never put me in a good situation. You took advantage of me, and I turned each and every situation around. I never stomped on you to make it happen, either. No matter the circumstances, you still ended up on top."



Obolis put a hand onto his graphene chest plate, “How am I on top? My planets are besieged by strong forces, and two of my strongest subordinates are under someone else.”

I counted on fingers, “You kept planets you had no right to keep. Blegara’s still a guaranteed resort and source of resources like you wanted, and the albony don’t even have to fight anymore. Florence floundered in the Empire, and the only person you really lost was Helios. And it isn’t like he’s been under me for years or anything like that either.”

Obolis stared at me with disappointment, “I believed that we could’ve arranged a long relationship with many gains for both parties. It seems your intent on severing it.”

I raised a brow, “I never mentioned severing our relationship – I mentioned changing it. This reward is for saving four or more of your planets. It should reflect that. Either give me what I’m worth or just leave. I don’t want to waste my time here.”

Obolis stayed in place, not moving a muscle. He considered what I said before taking a deep breath. He ruffled the fur on his head before groaning.

He pulled his fur back before sighing, “Hah...It would seem my attempts at retaining our previous style of transactions were in vain. Fine. I’ll relent. Your suspicions are correct; I have sold you short on numerous occasions, and it’s done you little in the way of service.”

His expression was like he swallowed rotten milk, “Gah, I’ll grant you better terms moving forward. It would seem you’re no longer a backwater savage, and you’ve decided to gain some perspective.”

I blinked as Obolis acted like a different person. All of a sudden, his personality changed. Instead of being this esteemed royal, a more rugged air came over him. This person carried war on his breath and brutality in his hands. I gave him a smile, “A bit of fairness is good. It’s all I’m asking for.”

Obolis spread out his hands, his previous politeness gone, “I’ll give you thirty furnaces, four billion credits, and another conscripted albony royal. It can be anyone aside from my generals and me. Is that enough?”

I held back my surprise, keeping my expression tame, “Now that’s more like it. That’ll do nicely.”

Obolis opened his status, “Is there anyone, in particular, you’d prefer? I’d rather you not take Alastair or Victoria, but I’ll do it if I must.”

I grabbed my chin, “I’d like...Hm.” I peered up. My eyes widened as the answer came to me, “Yeah, I’ll take Ophelia.”

Obolis scoffed, “Ophelia? You know she wishes to be a tailor more than a magician, don’t you?”

“Eh, she’s a lot like Florence. Undervalued and in the wrong place.”

Obolis opened his status, and he smirked, “If you wish to turn another situation around, then be my guest. Speaking of which, when do you want the skeptiles sent over?”

“In six months.”

Obolis rolled his shoulders, “That’s acceptable. I’ll have it handled forthrightly. Would you like to hear my offers for further work?”

I tilted my head, “You still want me to handle tasks for you?”

Obolis rolled a hand, “Yes. It’s as you’ve said. I took advantage of you, but that doesn’t mean the only deals I want are lopsided. Honest dealings are fine when forced. Since you’ve done so, I’ll still tell you the tasks I require solving.”

Obolis shrugged, “And aside from that, you rid Svía of Plazia in record time. Regardless of your method, the reality came about. If you handled other tasks of such magnitude so quickly, I’d have nothing to complain about. I’d give you awards like this current one.”

I peered at the horizon, Earth seeming small to me, “For now, I’m focused on establishing my planets.”

Obolis scoffed, “As if you’ll gain anything from them. This place will be akin to a wildlife sanctuary by the time you finish muddling it with various races.”

I gave him a thin smile, “Oh, we’ll see about that.”

Obolis’s eyes tightened, “Then do as you wish.” Obolis pulled out a spatial ring, one of many hidden on his person. He frowned while handling a few transferences between them, moving the required furnaces and credits. He sent a few messages while tossing the ring at me, and I caught it. Obolis turned towards the portal.

He murmured, “Well, It’s been a pleasure up till this point. Now it’s more of a necessity, but perhaps it’s better that way long term. Regardless, goodbye, Harbinger. May you be well.”

He stepped out of the warp, the ripple clashing shut. As the Emperor left an immense silence behind him, I raised a fist. I swung it in celebration before doing a little dance. This was the first deal I made on the galactic scene where I wasn’t swindled. It wasn’t exactly the best position to be in, but at least I progressed.

Taking a breath, I let out all the tension from the talk before pulling up the ring. I pulled out the furnaces, marveling at the supreme sigils in each of them. Weeks ago, I owned one of them. Now, I commanded dozens of them. The credits let me hire and train people for my imperial expansion, and Ophelia was pivotal for improving the golems moving forward.

I contemplated other avenues of improvement. I’d have golems continue scouring the trenches of Blegara for the omega strain. Finishing the city establishing might take a while, but it put Earth in an impervious position. Even a Spatial Fortress would struggle taking Earth if cities and golems covered it so densely.

Taking two more furnaces in hand, I fed the hungry incantations with my flesh. They gave me energy in return, and I gazed at my work. For hundreds of miles, rising pillars from my cities shot out and up. I had made excellent progress so far, but it would take years to cover Earth with these cities.

I stared down, wondering at different ways to amplify my efficiency. One method kept shouting out at me – Time magic. That could turn years into months or even weeks. While I parsed through some of Plazia's runes, they still left me confused in different places. However, other avenues of approaching this problem crept up. One of them was Amara, as she worked with Schema's system before.

She may do so again. It was about time I had a talk with our eldritch Builder.

## Chapter 324: In the Grime

I finished my cities for the day, closing in on the border of the Great Lakes. The colossal expanses of water could've been mistaken for oceans, their dominance of the landscape absolute. I flew over them for a while, having an aerial view of the blue expanses. They took my breath away when the sun shone off their calm waters, and I took longer getting back to Mt. Verner than I needed to.

Eh, sometimes a slow drive was worth it.

After our familiar mountain base came into view, the differences my cities made already manifested. Springfield carried a few buildings over its surface, some artsy types getting a hold of the constructor golems. A more sleek, modern appearance came over the new buildings there, various textures used for the housing.

Some carried brick exteriors with polished concrete, and others contrasted glass and steel with geometric patterns to match the hexagonal masses beneath them. Each home boasted silver wiring, the metal conducting mana better than steel. Connected to mana deposits, this power grid lit everything, lamps and mana torches burning across everything.

It was the first functioning electrical grid I had seen since the system started. Outside of Mt. Verner's inner sanctum, of course. In that lit expanse, people established different lifestyles. Signs of advanced civilization came about. People walked pets, some had babies in their arms, and a few even lazed about. It was a privilege at this point.

That ease contrasted my city-building trips like night and day.

Everywhere else, people's living standards plummeted like a bird with broken wings. Instead of working on aesthetics or entertainment, most people struggled with food and sanitation. That and the eldritch, which spread across the terrain and warped most

natural ecosystems by now. Lots of villagers worked within that warping force while we ended up crushing it.

After immersing myself in that struggle of the masses, finding the prestige and success here left me whiplashed. I adjusted before hovering back into Mt. Verner. At this point, Mt. Verner already adapted for systemized living. Most people's levels exceeded 500, and they could leap and move like superhumans.

People leapt across the green treetops, finding their way to dungeons or to loot old settlements. They came from openings that let air into the mountain base. I hovered in from one of these openings, arriving on the second floor. I waved at workers who preferred the subterranean style here. Not everyone left; people still revved machinery like this place was a big engine.

Along the outer edge of the mountain, I stalked up to the eldritch research facility. Within several tunnels, different containment units lined up. Eldritch monstrosities filled these containment units, most of them the child versions of their fully grown selves. I found two supergolems protecting these eldritch specimens.

A few workers stood beside the glass lining, researching and studying the odd creatures. Beside them, Amara walked in the armor I gave her. She never took it off, the armor like the old rags she used to wear everywhere. She even figured out how to channel mana from it, forming quintessence crystals while I walked up.

She put a glowing, white stone in her cheek, quintessence her favorite flavor. The eldritch hacker then hissed out a command to a scientist,

"You fool. Don't sit there and gawk. Test the acid and the mianoc's response."

A scientist gazed past a glass windowpane reinforced with enchantments. I found what he gawked at; a miasma cloud of dark energy writhing about as acid melted it. Amara stepped up and pushed the scientist aside, wrenching his notebook from him. She wrote down several mentions about the mianoc and its physical responses.

I stepped up, the physical sludge contacting an invisible form. I raised a brow, "So... What's this all about?"

Amara snapped, "This scientist, or the torture?"

I raised my brow, “Honestly, both.”

Amara let the notebook slap on her armor’s side, “It’s a necessity. The mianoc are collections of dark thoughts generated from spiritual amalgams. Floating fragments of ambient mana leeches into the minds of many around them. This is normally not dangerous in low quantities, but sometimes, the mana may come to life. Depending on what comes out, it may manifest dark potential.”

Amara’s wire-clad hair dispersed around herself, “The mianoc are pure evil intent turned into a semi-physical body through this process. It’s a shame, as there’s no saving them. This ‘acid’ is a non-hazardous material to most physical creatures, and it may be used as an elixir to eliminate these entities from possessed individuals.”

I grimaced, the mianoc howling in agony, “It sounds pretty effective.”

Amara cringed at the sight, “I hate these methods, but the means are undeniable. A cluster of these entities hoarded in some of the lower embankments of Mt. Verner, and we’re tasked with eliminating them.”

I crossed my arms, “You know, I could get rid of them instantly. We don’t have to go through all of this trouble.”

Amara nodded, “As could I, but the point is not to rid these inhabitants of their problem. The true answer is to arm them with a solution to do it themselves. Only by giving them a measure against these monsters may they be able to combat them permanently.”

Amara peered up to me using a palm, “I would certainly prefer not assisting these weaklings anymore than I am forced to as well. I won’t let a sheep call me whenever they please to solve their problems for them. Isn’t that right, Robert?

“

The ethically sound scientist behind us flushed red before I gave him a nod. I said, “You’re dismissed...And don’t mind her. You’re doing fine.”

He gave me a curt nod, “Uhm, thank, sir, Harbinger, sir.”

As he stepped away, Amara snarled, “He’s weak.”

I shrugged, “You need a balancer like him.”

The mianoc’s intangible form disintegrated into a dark ectoplasm. Amara grimaced, “And he needs a backbone. Tell me, what is it that you want?”

I put my hands on my hips, “So, I’m trying to get a firm grip on where I’ll progress next. I have a lot of options, and I really need to think them through before committing further. To do that, understanding your limitations with system work is necessary.”

Amara tilted her head at me, drool leaking out of her maw, “And what-Slll-must you know?”

I frowned at her slurping her drool line up, “Oh man, that’s disgusting.”

“The same can be said of you. Where you see from, you shove food down your gullet. It’s grotesque, and yet I tolerate it. You should do the same for my idiosyncrasies.”

I raised my brow, “Huh. That’s not the case with me. I never eat anymore.”

Amara froze in place before hissing, “Hm...Fine.”

She crunched up the crystallized quintessence before pointing her hair down the hall, “Come. Let us speak elsewhere with fewer prying ears.”

After getting down the hall, we walked into Amara’s living quarters. She repurposed a utility closet, tearing down the wall between it and the one person bathroom beside it. She left the messy whole and bits of concrete. Combine that with the haphazard mess of cleaning supplies, and the place looked like an irradiated wasteland.

Unable to fit through the doorway, I stayed outside while she rested in the corner of the room. She nestled into a ball before tapping the other corner of the room, “Come. This

is the perfect sitting spot. I sit here often, and I dwell on many things. We shall dwell together.”

I raised a hand, “I...I’m good.”

She gave the corner a firm tap, “You deny me this grace? Are you saying my home isn’t worthy of living in?”

I sighed before squeezing through the door. The doorframe snapped along one of my shoulder pauldrons, and the cheap ceiling dragged against the uppermost spike on my helmet. Wanting to avoid scraping the roof, I pulled the mass of armor off my face, the metal flowing down my back.

The ceiling wrenched off as I did, pulling the cheap tiles down. In a plume of dust, I situated myself in the other corner of the room, further busting the wall down towards the bathroom. Amara peered around after the dust settled, a fine layer of powder over us both. She drew in that white soot with her hair while saying,

“This...I like the adjustment.”

I blinked in disbelief, “Well then...That’s good, I suppose. Anyway, how do you interact with the system and whatnot? I need to understand it.”

Amara drew the figure of a person, but its guts were getting wrenched out, “I interact with the cipheric flows of Schema. They’re evident to me, as they trace outwards from individuals like ripples in a puddle.”

I looked above myself, “Is mine normal?”

“It is.”

I coughed, powder lifting back into the air. In profound discomfort, I murmured, “Can we...Move out of here?”

“No. I like it here. It’s cozy.”



I settled in, “Ah man. Ok.”

Amara took a breath, “It...This reminds me of my home. Everything your kind crafts is too clean and perfect. This messiness, it puts me at ease. I prefer it to the comfort out there. It’s as if people avoid a certain shade of the world, and I feel most alive in that other color. The darker one. The grimier one.”

I peered at the wrecked wall, “You know, I kind of understand the feeling. When I was growing up, I slept on the couch my entire childhood until the system collapsed. When I visited someone else’s house, I couldn’t sleep anywhere besides their couch.”

I scoffed, memories flooding in, “Hah, I had two friends, Michael and Kelsey. I slept over sometimes, and they always wanted me to sleep in the guest bedroom. I always told them the sheets were too clean. It felt...It felt like I didn’t belong there.”

Amara nodded, “You may remove us from the gloom, but we are still shaped by it no matter how far we stray from its source.”

Putting me in a thoughtful mood, I gazed at the door opening to the hallway, “You may be right.”

A silence hung over us before the light flickered over our heads. Amara’s cubbyhole reminded me of a haunted house at this point. She spoke up,

“The cipheric flow isn’t the only issue that may be tampered with. You understand that I’ll assume?”

I scratched my head, “Yeah, but I’m almost certain it’s the answer.”

Amara stretched her palm to me, her expressions still guided by her hands, “And why is that?”

I explained the situation with Plazia and my primordial mana. Amara honed in on my words, her intrigue peaking. With her hair bristled, she hummed as I finished my story.

She murmured, “That’s very strange. The AI has decided you are growing too quickly then?”

I sneered, “Maybe. Either way, he’s limiting me. I’m putting a stop to it, and I need your help to stick it to him.”

Amara’s hair jostled with tiny vibrations, “It acts in self-preservation. You were conscripted by Yawm to enact change onto the AI. Remember that fact. If you can overpower Schema, then you will inevitably change its code.”

I scoffed, “It could be a small change.”

Amara tilted a palm at me, “Would you be fine with someone enacting small neurosurgery on you? One that altered your personality forever?”

“Ok, probably not. But I could just fix one bug and be done with it. Schema putting training wheels on me doesn’t help his situation here.”

“In your eyes, that is the case. To it, you may be a looming threat that has finally broached a dark horizon. Perhaps Schema sees your ascent as a sunrise, one that signals the end of its era and the beginning of your own.”

I peered down at Amara, “You know, you think differently.”

Amara breathed in, “Perhaps. Perhaps not. I did not know you as a human. To me, your meteoric ascent was inevitable from the moment I saw your form...I was terrified, but I’ve learned you are no illogical beast driven by emotion alone. You control your body and your demons, so I will not be food for you. Not yet.”

I blinked, “Is that why you were scared of me when we first met? And still are from the sounds of it.”

Amara seethed, “Yes and no.” Her tone lightened, “You reminded me of Yawm in many ways. He stole me from one prison and placed me in another. Where I was once a lab experiment, I then became a guinea pig for someone else. Someone other.”

She lifted a gauntleted hand, “Now my station is unequaled to any potential I ever hoped for. I deserve none of this, in eldritchian terms.” Her voice hungered, “Even if my kind would judge me, let them. I will seize my place off the dirt and grime below where they wallow.”

She put a hand on the dirty floor, “But this place where I nest...It’s a reminder of my origins, so I may never forget them. I never have. I never will. I’ll stay in the grime and dirt where I spawned from. Where all we eldritch spawn from.”

I grimaced, “You know, Plazia mentioned going into the other dimension and saving you guys before you’re corrupted. That could work in the future.”

“But it doesn’t save those that still linger here. Do you remember the mianoc outside? There is no method of saving that creature. There’s nothing to even purify; its purification results in its death, as it is composed of only filth. I believe we eldritch are the same after having worked with so many since coming here.”

I bit my lip before letting out a breath, “Damn...You know, I don’t think it’s that black and white. You, Hod, and Plazia are examples of the opposite.”

“Are we the opposites? You ground that on assumptions. In reality, I have eaten many. Hod even more so. Plazia...That creature consumed species. Trusting it so easily is akin to suicide.”

I raised a brow, “But trusting you is different?”

“I am not so clever nor so resourceful as that cretin. He...He is unknowable.”

I crossed my arms, “I don’t think so.”

“And what makes you say that?”

“Plazia’s like you. He’s fighting some hidden, dark half of himself. Yeah, he’s got issues. He’s done a lot of harm, I’m sure, but that doesn’t mean he can’t help people out now.”

Amara rested her head against the grimy concrete wall, “We shall disagree then. I’ll never trust him.”

I waved a hand, “That’s fine by me. Anyways, about the system, is there any way for Schema to inhibit my learning? Could it be like the opposite of forming a skill?”

“That...That is perhaps possible, but unlikely. Based on how Schema’s operated, he isn’t allowed to tamper with sentient personalities. Inhibiting one’s learning is, in part, doing so.”

The light flickered again before shutting off. I formed a quintessence bulb where the light was, the white glow similar to the fluorescent’s shimmer. I peered at it while saying, “Then how is making people learn skills faster not the same?”

Amara hissed, “Schema does nothing of the sort. Schema’s skill system operates mainly through the idea of guided learning. Much of one’s learning experience is spent experimenting with worthless adaptations. One expends effort learning the useless, then they must toss out the useless once more. Schema eliminates that process, creating precise developments that result in the most efficient gain.”

Amara lifted her head off the wall, “This indication is compounded by system augments when one steps closer to perfection. Its idea of perfection. This smooths the process utterly, ensuring a far faster learning speed because of it.”

I blinked, “Wow. So it’s a carefully crafted facade. In a way, at least.”

“Yes. That’s not far from the truth.”

“Ok, so how would Schema even stop me from manifesting primordial mana in the first place then? It sounds like it wouldn’t be allowed.”

Amara tapped her teeth together before murmuring, “I don’t know. From your description, it’s as if it’s vanquishing your mana before it fully forms.”

I rested my chin on my knees, “So it’s like...Anti-mana, or something.”

“Or anti-energy.”

My eyes widened as I straightened up, “Or an energy source that just destroys it entirely.”

Amara scoffed, “Hm. That would work.”

I raised a hand, “I know what it is. I think Schema’s using entropy mana.”

Amara leaned back into the wall, her hair slicing her surroundings. Her voice rose, “That’s must be the source. It isn’t allowed to dismantle your knowledge or abilities. Instead of that, it may be transmitting entropy in careful doses to quell your abilities. It’s a loophole for its programming, but it may be used.”

She snarled, “Schema is a clever wolf, I must say. He exhausts his prey’s endurance instead of fighting to bite its throat. It may have convinced you that your talent was lacking, given time.”

I sighed, “He almost did. The thing is, how are we going to stop entropy? I can’t make the stuff anyway. Probably, at least. I need to experience it before I can fight it, assuming it’s the thing stopping me.”

Amara leaned forward, staring at the dusty floor, “Does Plazia know more about entropy than he let on?”

I wondered aloud, “Huh. I don’t think so. Plazia would probably use it all the time if he could. He doesn’t pull any punches or hide his trump cards.”

Amara tapped her head against the wall, “Then who else would use entropy?”

I tapped the wall with a fist, “You know, based on its description, it sounds like Yawm’s abilities or the Overseers’ gauntlets. They can make things disappear without a trace sometimes. They say it’s antimatter, but antimatter would blow everything up to my knowledge. Well, based on theoretical physics, and ugh, I’m definitely not an expert.”

Amara sighed, “They may wield entropy within themselves and guide it via the technological augments...Perhaps you could stretch your relationship with the Overseer to test our hypothesis?”

I shook my head, “The last thing I want to do is screw that guy over. He’s done right by me. There should be another way.” A moment passed before I remembered the fight Plazia showed me, “Oh, I know an Overseer we could take out without any problems.”

Amara mocked, “Ah, so you know of Overseers aside from our own? Did you find it out in the wild or perhaps somewhere in the containment units?”

I shook my head, standing up, “No, this Overseer was Hybridized and strong, but I think we can get its gear no problem. With Plazia’s help, we should be able to keep it too by hiding it from Schema.”

Amara laughed aloud, more a cackle than a chuckle. She mused, “You would kill a destroyer?”

I smiled down at Amara, “I’d do more than that. I may be able to pull it out of Elysium’s clutches.”

Amara took a moment before muttering, “You... You want to save it?”

My grin turned wicked,

“And I’ll figure out what it knows after I do.”

## Chapter 325: Legacies and Lineage

I walked out of Amara’s hideaway before thinking through a few options. For starters, capturing the Overseer required a few checkmarks on an unseen checklist. Hiding the Overseer and its abduction stood out for starters, as I didn’t want to make an enemy of Elysium again. After detaining the twisted Overseer, finding a place to keep him wasn’t an issue at least. I could just swipe him into my pocket dimension.

Disguising that process required several elements. Understanding Schema’s and Elysium’s systems popped up. If we didn’t understand them, we could forget about

avoiding their reach. Locating the twisted Overseer posed a problem as well. Considering Plazia summoned one by attacking a camp, he could do so again. Pinning the Overseer down required lots of force and explosivity, however.

I tapped my fingers against my side, and I pondered. Elysium established a system. To take the Overseer, ripping it away from Elysium took precedent. That didn't include the mind magic shackles being used on the Overseer either. Taking those out or finding a way around the psionic connection was also an issue.

If I figured out how to construct time in my pocket dimension, isolating the Overseer might be possible. I could talk to it or have someone else interrogate the Hybridized monstrosity. Once again, that required time magic and primordial mana. I peered up, and as I did, a solution popped up.

Plazia could set up a trap for the twisted Overseer. It would be the same setup he used for isolating himself from Schema. He'd have that isolating net summon over a large field. Having Hod cast the Overseer in shadow and Helios warp me beside the Overseer gave me an option to snatch the Overseer before it knew what happened.

My many minds congratulated themselves for a job well done before I settled into making it happen. The first step involved handling my guild expansion. I didn't want to sacrifice Earth's condition for my own gain again. At the same time, getting time manipulation would speed me up enough that putting the city building on the backburner was worth it.

Before moving on to that, I went through a few quick options for helping the guild's expansion. After realizing I wasn't all that involved with the details, I went over to someone who was. I sent Torix a message wondering if he had time for a talk. The lich sent a quick reply with his coordinates.

He handled work in the abandoned tunnel beneath Mt. Verner. Heading down to the lowest floor of our mountain base, I crossed the residential district before reaching the abandoned passage. In Torix's research center, I walked through an endless expanse of concrete. After passing several steel doors, I opened one of them before squeezing through the doorway.

I frowned, annoyed by my size causing issues. Everyone made most objects large for me already, but it wasn't enough lately. After getting through the snug entrance, many

soldiers stared at me. They wore the Omega Strains, each of them having one of my rings for their own protection.

The multicolored gemstones stood with different shapes and sizes, the motley crew both colorful and deadly. It was like staring at the world's most lethal group of hard candies. The crystalline, killing edge of the Omega Strains wasn't forgotten, however. Even while standing there, one soldier had a four-legged extension over him. The claws of that rig stabbed through concrete, digging into it with ease.

Hard candies or not, they carried that dangerous air about them. The soldiers wearing those strains saluted me, everyone falling in line. I raised a hand, "Where's Torix?"

A soldier gave me a firm answer, "Sir, he's in the training center, sir."

I gave them a wave, "At ease, and thanks."

They lowered their hands, but their eyes locked on me still. No one relaxed, everyone holding an unnatural reverence. In a way, it was inevitable. Most of these people participated in the battle on Blegara. Having seen me fight, they looked at me differently afterward.

That awe lingered after I left the room. I stepped past a long hallway, wondering at my own lack of unease. When people looked up to me like that, it usually made my skin crawl. Over time, it no longer left me jittery and uncomfortable. Over the years, I learned that uneasiness came from the pressure that reverence carried. It was a form of respect, and respect had consequences.

One was a reputation. If I failed those people, I robbed them of an ideal. Of course, that 'ideal' was their perception of me, not who I really was. Living up to that ideal defied any expectations I had for myself, so it left me feeling inept and over my head. And it was because, subconsciously, I always believed I would fail.

I didn't anymore, and it made all the difference.

Feeling that sense of freedom, I paced into another one of Torix's lairs. I walked into the room, finding the lich scurrying about in a frenzy. He sent dozens of messages, using telekinetic magic to set up pins across a dozen maps spread on the walls. His eyes



flared in a blaze, singeing the roof of the concrete wall. The habit left the entire ceiling smothered in a dark blue layer of burnt concrete.

I paced up to him, frowning at his fervor, “You look pretty busy.”

Torix turned, his skeletal frame imposing under his caped robe. He waved his hands, “Oh my, I hadn’t noticed you walking into my chambers. You wished to talk, and I sent for you. Bah, I’ve been scatterbrained as of late.”

I peered at the doorway, having scraped it on my way in here. I raised my brow, “Huh...So you didn’t hear me do that?”

“What, that? Bah, there’s nothing wrong there. Just a mere scrape. The powdered stone doesn’t even bother me as I need not breathe, to begin with. Truly, a non-issue.”

I put my hands on my hips, “So...Where’s your advanced obelisk?”

Torix sighed, “It’s managing the recreation of Springfield. I’m working on logistical concerns and issues, criminal activity, and an absurd influx of members.”

I furrowed my brow, “Huh...Do you want me to stop expanding for a while? You seem overwhelmed.”

Torix waved an arm, “Certainly not. You’ve postponed assisting your home planet and race to rid us of our unknown statuses. For that, I and the others are quite grateful. This level of work is to be expected of us to compensate your efforts.”

I sighed, “I don’t know, man, you look worn out.”

Torix leaned back against a wall, dragging on it as he slumped onto the ground. Maps flopped off the wall as Torix mumbled, “You could tell?”

I hovered myself over, pulling myself off the ground and landing in a cross-legged position. I kept my descent gentle and controlled, so I didn’t collapse the building. I leaned onto a hand, “I got a lot of credits recently. We can pay for more of those obelisks.”

Torix tilted his head, “Hm, was it an award from Obolis?”

“It was. You can check out some galactic rates and see what the obelisks sell for. I’m guessing they’re somewhere in the 4-5 million range. We can get a hundred or so of them if you’d like.”

Torix let out a sharp breath, “You gained billions of credits?”

I nodded, “Yeah. I gained some perspective. It helped me with negotiating a deal.”

Torix shook his head, disappointed at himself, “Why do I even allow myself to be surprised by you any longer? Aside from that, don’t you want to buy dungeon cores for yourself? You’re nowhere near peaked in them.”

“I could, but I have to prioritize. We need to establish ourselves, and from the looks of it, you’re suffering some growing pains.”

Torix peered at the walls of paper, his notes scattered to the point of doing more harm than good. The lich sighed, “I’ve long enjoyed the feeling of paper. It’s one of the few sensations and smells I missed from when I was a human. Food? Blegh. Digestion muddled my mind. A cool breeze? I’d rather be lukewarm, personally.”

Torix raised a fist, “But the smell of an old book with weathered pages...Now that I miss. I’ve been trying to keep that sensation around me and in my memory for ages. Look at all this madness around me. Through all our conflicts, I kept everything contained within pages I could grab and touch.”

Torix loosened his grip, “And now...They’re strangling me..”

I tried to listen while I said, “What do you mean?”

“I’m going to have to move over towards electronic means. This simply won’t do any longer. It’s not scalable, as each city carries its own notes, problems, and important persons. Having different sheets for each of those categories is simply overwhelming.”

I gave him a nod, “Ah...You want things to stay the same.”

Torix mused for a moment before snapping out of it. He peered back at me as if suddenly aware. He brushed a layer of dust off of the chainmail cape I made for him. He took a breath, one he didn't need before he said,

“Listen to me complaining about this nonsense. What kind of lich must I be if something this simple can stop me.”

I frowned, “Eh, it's small to some people, but it's a big deal to you. There's nothing wrong with that.”

Torix tilted his head at me before standing taller, “Hm, thank you for saying so...Now-“

He offered me a hand to stand up with him, “What is it that you wish to speak of?”

I grabbed his hand, pulling for a moment. I jerked him back before letting go. I caught us both with gravity wells and hovered us back onto our feet. Torix coughed into a hand, “Bah, you've gained weight recently, haven't you?”

I stared at my shoulder, “Huh...Maybe. Anyways, I'm glad I came over. Here's a billion credits you can have for the expansion efforts. Use it to hire yourself a team of assistants and to manage all the new concerns. You can take a few weeks to iron out a process for managing all the expanded territory.”

I raised a hand, pulling out rings from my dimensional storage, “I'm going to be making millions of these things before handing them off to people. We'll give them to high performers, and I'll leave that up to you. After you get everything ironed out, I'll start expanding again with a tighter line of communication between us.”

I smiled with confidence, “That should make the situation a lot easier when paired with the obelisks.”

Torix put his hands on his hips, “Hm, I would suppose so. Perhaps I can keep the paper around.”

I rolled my eyes, “Hey man, you do you. I think moving to electronic means is a good idea before we move on to multiple planets.”

Thank you for the assistance. Is there anything else you’d need? Perhaps counsel on a matter?”

I thought for a moment before pointing at him, “When you unlocked your archmage class and developed an ‘affinity for higher tier mana types, what did it feel like?”

Torix leaned back, “The sensation you say? Well, I’d compare it to opening a door and walking into an old room in a house. I already knew it was there, but suddenly, I could walk into its aged halls and peruse as if it were always there. It arrived with a strange suddenness as well, without any washing clarity.”

My jaw tightened before I gave him a nod, “Thanks. That’s all I needed to know.”

“What for, might I ask?”

I sighed before saying, “I think that Schema’s putting limiters on people after they reach a certain level of influence.”

Torix tilted his head, “What makes you say that?”

I explained the situation with Plazia, and Torix paced back and forth in the room as I spoke. When I finished, the necromancer swung his hand about, “To think I ever trusted that nefarious intelligence.”

I laughed before turning a palm to him, “We probably would never have gotten this strong without him.” I straightened up, “But to be fair, I’m not excited by limitations either. I’ll be working with Plazia to see what I can do about it. Speaking of which-” I opened my pocket dimension, “I have to go. See you, Torix.”

Torix gave me a curt nod before turning back to his papers. He raised a hand, snapping his metallic fingertips. A blue fire encompassed the walls. It raged about, consuming the hundreds of graphs, notes, and charts. As the paper turned to ash, Torix spread his hands and mouthed,

“And I shall be breaking my limits as well. Goodbye, disciple.”

Stepping out of his chambers, I parsed through my status real quick to inspect my cipheric augments. Before I got there, a mammoth pile of skillpoints stuck out to me. I winced, having forgotten to assign skillpoints to my trees over the last few weeks. With a quick few clicks, I put a pile of 2,000 skillpoints into Creator of Armies. Notifications rained in.

By facing off against many threats, you’ve learned your limitations. An individual extends only so far, but their influence, an unseen force, may stretch further still. By mastering this force, you’ve learned to turn that influence into an extension of yourself.

+25% to effect of Legacies. +4% to experience gain for your guild. +4 % to learning speed of skills within your guild.

In this way, you’ve managed to hone your army into a force of your own will. Others may call it manipulation, but you understand it as insight. By giving others knowledge, you offer them a purpose, one you rally behind. In time, others rally with you.

+50% to effect of Legacies. +8% to experience gain for your guild. +8 % to learning speed of skills within your guild.

And a mass forms behind you and your call to action. You’ve given entire nations and worlds a different history. Without you, they’d be in another place, perhaps better or worse. Regardless of the outcome, that change was decided by you and you alone.

+75% to effect of Legacies. +12% to experience gain for your guild. +12% to learning speed of skills within your guild.

For you listen to their opinions, but they obey your every word. You walk into a room while your presence demands reverence. Your bearing alone instills awe and respect, granting you an undeniable dominance. Others feel it, many hate it, but all are washed away by its glow.

+100% to effect of Legacies. +16% to experience gain for your guild. +16% to learning speed of skills within your guild.

I read and reread the tree a few times, inspecting the various ins and outs of it. While the values weren't enormous, the tree affected more than just me. The effect on legacies compounded with my dimensional modifications, making my guildmates me more potent. The experience gain and learning speed also helped my guildsmen gain some ground.

Casting that net this wide meant my guild benefitted as a whole. Wanting to know what my legacies were, I opened the menu for the first time in who knew how long.

Sovereign | Sovereign Class Legacy | Tier S+ | Grants +100 to all attributes. +10% to base stats. Note – Only available to Followers.

Endless & Undying | Endurance Legacy | Tier S+++++++ | Grants 450 endurance, 350 willpower, 150 intelligence, 125 constitution, and 100 strength to anyone who joins your guild.

Willful | Willpower Legacy | Tier S+++++ | Grants 400 willpower, 350 endurance, 125 intelligence, 100 constitution, and 75 strength.

Meticulous | Intelligence Legacy | Tier S++ | Grants 300 intelligence, 200 willpower, 100 endurance, and 75 constitution.

Orbital | Constitution Legacy | Tier S+ | Grants 150 constitution, 100 strength, and 75 endurance.

Powerful | Strength Legacy | Tier S | Grants 100 Strength, 50 constitution, and 50 endurance.

Aware | Perception Legacy | Tier A+ | Grants 75 Perception, 40 endurance, and 40 willpower.

Fortunate | Luck Legacy | Tier A+ | Grants 75 luck, 40 charisma, and 40 endurance.

Leadership | Charisma Legacy | Tier A+ | Grants 75 charisma, 40 luck, and 40 endurance.

Note – All legacies require at least level 300 to join your guild if you choose to make one. This bonus does not apply to you, only to those that join your guild.

Second Note – Legacy bonuses do not count towards tree or perk unlocks.

I heckled at the number of plus signs beside the endurance legacy. Its bonuses also dwarfed all the other legacies aside from Willful, and to me, that was fitting. Getting that kind of boost at level three hundred ensured a smooth level-up process for anyone involved. The Sovereign tree bonus also kicked into high gear in the later levels, the stat multiplier quite potent overall.

In general, the legacies expanded immensely since I last saw them. Wondering how the furnaces operated on my dimensional notifications, I opened that menu next.

[Modifications – The dimensional fabric composing this structure has been modified with code from the dimensional cipher. The rewards are as follows(Pre-multiplier values):

+7,121 Constitution

+57,414 Endurance

+5,557 Perception

+12,271 Willpower

+1,777 Luck

+72 Strength

+72 Dexterity

+100% to Effects of Legacies

+ 50% Internal Motivation Multiplier

+4,029 Trillion Ambient Mana]

I froze in place, standing in the middle of a Mt. Verner hallway. I leaned back from the modification screen, confused by the numbers. Yeah, the endurance just about doubled since the last time I saw it. That made sense. The willpower stat rose as well, and hey, that was in line with my expectations.

However, the ambient mana...was thousands of times higher. I rubbed my face, making sure I wasn't making a mistake. After a few double checks, I was sure of it. It rose by over 4,000 trillion over the last few weeks. Aside from the fact that number defied my comprehension, it also meant most of my rune's energy overflowed.

I peered down at my ciphelic markings, my wrists glowing a bright white on my dark armor. These little guys couldn't handle the increase in mana, and it ended up pouring into the runic markings on my back. In a sense, I outgrew my ability to assimilate mana. Taking a moment, I peered up at the roof.

Torix wasn't the only one struggling with growing pains.

It was a good problem to have, but a problem nonetheless. The ambient mana overflow gave me extra mass, and that's why I grew recently. My Titanic tree generated physical power from that weight as well, so my synergies still held firm, even if I didn't gain endurance solely. Wanting to see the exact difference, I opened my stat menu.

My jaw dropped.

The Living Multiverse | Level 18,767 (Cap: 26,000) | Current Influence: The Rise of Eden | Class: Sovereign

Strength – 117,609 | Constitution – 149,294 | Endurance – 326,125

Dexterity – 60,821 | Willpower – 279,691 | Intelligence – 169,093



Charisma – 61,209 | Luck – 92,124 | Perception – 44,366 | Awe – 5,201

Health: 1.77 Billion/1.77 Billion | Health Regen: 87.4 Billion/min or 1.4 Billion/sec

Stamina: Infinite | Ambient Mana 5.402 Trillion

Mass: 532.1 Million Pounds(241.8 Million Kilos~)

Height: 26'11 | 8.2 meters | Actual: 16'5(Mass Manipulation)

Damage Res – 99.46% | Dimensional Res – 100%

Phys Dam Bonus – 3.5 Billion% | Damage Bonus – 40%

The Rise of Eden – enhances base stats by 30%, increased to 40% to allies within aura's radius.

Mana Conversion(Elemental Furnace Count: 23) – 158.4 Billion mana/min siphoned into runes and armor.

I expected a change, but these numbers defied any of my expectations. I stared down at my palm, closing it to a fist. Was I really over ten times more physically powerful than just a few weeks ago? It seemed impossible. My weight jumped up over tenfold as well, with the usual bumps in my endurance and regen becoming an afterthought by comparison.

As I contemplated the meteoric rise in stats, something clicked at that moment. Schema limited me because of this. At this rate, I'd overwhelm a spatial fortress with ease. I'd live for centuries, and by then, I'd achieve an utter, critical mass. Schema wouldn't have a say in anything I did. Hell, fighting Old Ones and making new universes all popped up as new possibilities for me. If I mastered the cipher, anything was possible.

And over millennia, I'd become my namesake – a true multiverse.

A surge of panic spiked in my chest, but I controlled it. I leaned my head back against the wall, taking a few deep breaths. Something terrified me about gaining this much strength. After settling down over the next few seconds, I figured out what it was.

I hadn't felt the change as it happened.

Just knowing that calmed me down a lot. I probably glossed over the shift in mass because I was so caught up in the city building. This also explained why even a ring of my armor weighed someone down. In fact, quite a few signs showed themselves recently. I just busied myself until I hadn't noticed.

It was the same with investing in my trees. Either way, I refocused on getting my position established. Yes, I could misuse my power and mess a situation up. I could also make a lot of difference across the cosmos. Instead of fearing the former, I leaned into the latter. Getting ready for that, I went up towards an outer portion of Mt. Verner.

Near the mountain's peak, I got ready to focus on some runic work. As I did, an insect crawled over towards me. I peered down at it, and the creature cackled at me,

"I'm ready, Harbinger."

I jumped back before I recognized Plazia's voice. I raised my brow at it, "Man, please don't talk through beetle like that again...So what are you ready for?"

Many beetles crawled out of the ground into the long form of a snake, "I'm ready to begin our work. It's time to connect the planes and establish a new era for my lost kin."

A mouth formed with a viper's teeth,

"We shall offer them a new genesis here, in a garden of Eden."

## Chapter 326: A Primordial Playground

I smiled, "Let's say it'll be less a garden and more a home. Eldritch tend to have a nasty reputation, so calling it a garden comes with some unsettling insinuations. Like you're going raid our planet or something."

Plazia beetles hissed, “Wording aside, the point is still the same. Where shall I settle myself in your domain? Anywhere will be suitable for me.”

I raised a hand, “Actually, you’ll be rooming beside someone I think you should meet.”

Before heading to the abandoned tunnel beneath Mt. Verner, I swooped the mass of bugs into my pocket dimension. I walked back up to Torix’s research lair as no one recognized what I brought in. After crossing a few doors, we reached past the settled territory of the tunnel. I pulled Plazia out of my dimension, and the patch of insects seethed,

“Where am I? What is this place?”

I pointed at a patch of an unused concrete wall, “This will be your room.”

Plazia’s slithering ceased, and he reattuned to the new reality. Plazia murmured, “That stasis is true and utter. Having my environment change as such...It is unsettling.”

I smiled, “It’ll be like that for everyone coming from you know where.”

A warmth came over Plazia, and his tone rose, “Hm...It shall be, won’t it? They’ll cross the veil while separated from time. In one moment, their dimension is collapsing around them. In another, they live without fear.”

His patch of insects hopped around, “It will be a sight worthy of etching down to memory. Let’s begin.”

Plazia’s bugs shifted into primordial mana, the forms ethereal and haunting. They mushed into the concrete, melting through solid stone and generating enormous heat. Like an infection, they spread outwards and created more of their own kind. Within a minute, an empty space ample for a two-story house existed. I stepped into it, glad a doorway actually fit me for once.

Once I stepped inside, Plazia’s magma insects carved out their runic configurations. Through a psionic tether, he transferred mana to charge it, but at a slowed pace. Giving him a hand, I placed a palm onto the runes.

They flashed into a charged state, the instantaneous flood of mana almost shattering the cipheric markings.

Plazia pulled himself away from the energy flow, and Plazia hissed, “I see you’ve assimilated many of those furnaces already.”

I gave him a nod, “I have.” I lifted a hand, primordial mana spawning as my system inputs died out. I gave it a nod, “Yeah, it’s back again. You can go ahead and come over.”

Plazia simmered his words like burning coals, “Are you certain of my arrival? I’ll be nested beside your loved ones, able to kill them at any point. Perhaps giving me that leverage is giving me too much trust?”

I kept my gaze on him, “You’ve been able to get into this place for a long time already, but you never took us out. Hell, your insect approached me without me knowing.”

I swirled primordial mana around me like a dense cloud, “If you wanted to harm us, you would’ve already done so. It’s less I’m putting you in our midst and more like I’m just fully aware of it now. Besides that, Schema exiling me from his system might be a boon more than a bane at this point. We’ll have to see, in all honesty.”

Plazia cackled before mouthing, “And many believe you’re a fool.”

I sat down, “I am. I’m just trying to be less of one.” I opened my status, sending Torix a message to come over, “I want you and Torix to meet real quick. I think you two will get along.”

I peered up, “Well, either that or you’ll hate each other. Honestly, I can’t tell.”

Plazia’s insect manifestation swirled about, “It depends on whether he’s fine with a mind well beyond his own.”

I raised my brow, “Ooh, those are big words. We’ll have to see how they play out.”

“Oh, we shall.”

I leaned forward, “Most certainly so.”

“Indeed.”

“Yes.”

A silence passed over us before Plazia chimed, “Hm.”

I raised my brow, “Don’t think I’m going to let you get the last word in.”

Plazia threatened, “I’ll put a portion of my consciousness to the task, and you’ll grow bored. This is a war you’ll lose...Harbinger.”

I narrowed my eyes, “Hoh, you think I can’t do the same thing? I got nearly twenty minds working full throttle right now. Continuing a grunt fest like this? It’s child’s play.”

“Then let the playing of children begin.”

“Hur.”

“Humph.”

“Hgh.”

“Hurgh.”

Torix walked into our room, his hands interlocked behind himself. He peered at the pile of insects and me having a grunting contest. Torix’s fiery eyes flared, “Was there a falling out between your message and my arrival?”

Plazia let go, giving me an official victory over the hivemind, “No. He’s merely childish.”

I leaned back, “What? I’m just having fun.” I smirked, “And winning might I add.”

Torix stepped up to Plazia’s bugs. The lich coughed into a hand, “Ahem...I see your form isn’t precisely imposing, but one’s physical self doesn’t judge the might of their mind, so to speak.”

Plazia laughed, his voice echoing in the empty, concrete room. The hivemind scoffed, “You will find I am more than this.”

A cleave through dimensions popped up, and Plazia wrenched it further apart. The hollowed Sentinel stepped out, and the hivemind came in while oozing primordial mana,

“I am Plazia-Ruhl, of Many Faces.”

I got deja vu.

Torix gave him a curt nod, “And I am Torix Worm, the Harbinger’s Erudition.”

As the dimensional rupture clashed shut, Plazia peered around. He sat back, falling onto a basalt throne. Mirroring Plazia’s attitude, Torix sat down into his own umbral cloud of mana. They both stared at each other for a moment, sizing the other mastermind up.

Torix leaned forward, steepling his fingers, “I can see you’re a Ruhl. Legend has it that each member of your kind is a supposed Genius.”

Plazia peered down at Torix, “We are.”

Torix gestured to me, “Ah, so you’re just like the Ruhl that Daniel killed and usurped the plot of? Without experience...Or previous knowledge.” Torix’s fire eyes narrowed, “Just making sure.”

A tense silence passed over them before Plazia leaned onto a hand. The hivemind said, “You smell of pulped paper. Did you leave an ancient library, perhaps?”

Torix’s fire eyes flickered, “It was my study.”

Plazia turned a palm to the lich, “Ah, so you dabble in ancient, archaic technologies as a past time. It seems you’re rather frivolous. I hadn’t anticipated such from a necromantic lich. I’ll adjust my expectations.”

Another silence passed over them before Plazia leaned up. The hivemind tilted his head, “What is that presence?”

Torix lifted an arm, and a primordial blob oozed out of the ceiling. A psionic construct, shaped like a phoenix, landed on Torix’s forearm. Torix peered up at it, and the lich chimed, “I saw Obolis use living magic during our stay on Blegara. I wished to use one, and I’ve practiced the magic since.”

Plazia leaned towards the azure, diaphanous Pheonix. The hivemind gave a nod of approval, “Impressive, I must say. It rivals my insects, though more nuanced towards the psionic aspects rather than the physical. Are you attempting to possess individuals?”

Torix lowered his arm, the phoenix perching on his shoulder, “Hm, less that and more so I prefer having these entities go between various summons of mine. It gives me a much more hands-on approach with each city Daniel’s established.”

Not having time to listen more, I pulled out my grimoire and got to work. I carved out different test runes while awash in my primordial aura. The results showed promise already; my precision improved along with my fine-tuning. It all came together nicely, overall. Plazia peered at my etching.

The hivemind leaned back, “That sigil slicing...It carries the touch of Etorhma, along with a larger edge of someone else. Hmm, interesting.” Plazia turned to Torix, and the hivemind said,

“Torix. I have a question for you about mind magic.”

Torix peered down at Plazia and scoffed, “And the all mighty hivemind wishes to ask me a question?”

“Of course. Your mind magic is spoken of across the cosmos and on many star systems. While I am versed, I am no expert. I wish to draw from the experience of one.”

The flattery destroyed Torix’s defensive posturing, and the lich’s eyes flared bright, “I do suppose my reputation proceeds me. I may answer a few questions.”

Their animosity melting at the mention of magic, their tense talk turning into excited chatter. As they talked away, I willed myself to work. The confidence and coordination of the primordial aura assisted my carving more than I expected it to. Quintessence helped with creative skills and their general power, but this aura eased me into finesse-based tasks.

In general, nothing exceeded the minutia involved with cipher work, so that gave me a leg up. And I needed it too. When I finished the endurance outlines, I leaned back and gave them a cursory glance. The designs operated better than my finished work before, and yet...I wasn’t satisfied.

They needed more oomph. A lot more oomph. Taking a more grand approach to my design, I extended my diagrams across several of my grimoire’s pages. After finishing it, I tapped my fingers while inspecting the product. Garbage. It carried imperfections across the front, back, and side portions. Therefore, its entirety.

I marked down everything like a drunken sailor in the middle of a storm. The markings flowed together like swallowing broken glass and sizzling acid. Even the book itself bothered me, being a cheap imitation of my current self. On a whim, I grabbed the pages, ripping the entirety of it in half.

The metal squealed, drawing the attention of Plazia and Torix. I raised a hand, “Don’t worry. I’m just done using this book.”

Torix tilted his head, “Daniel. You seem...Odd.”

I raised a palm, “Don’t worry about it. It’s the primordial aura, and it’s good for making runes.”



Torix turned back to Plazia, and the lich mumbled, “If...If you say so. I shall let this slide, but perhaps keep that aura on yourself. It gives you an uncomfortable edge.”

Ignoring him and moving on, I went back to work. He wasn’t wrong about the aura. It left me sharper than usual. On the one hand, I enjoyed the edge. I felt smarter like I caught onto more details. At the same time, it may not be the best friend-making mana mode. Keeping that in mind, I stepped over towards an empty portion of the room.

I immersed myself in a bubble of my dimensional fabric. Once within it, I envisioned the grimoire ritual from before. I let out a dismissive sigh, disturbed by it. It was well made for Torix specifically, but it didn’t suit me at all. I waved my hand, starting fresh once more.

I had several minds operating on the task at this point, seven different Daniels, all tweaking different aspects of the runic ritual. I improved my cipheric conversions, getting a more accurate translation from Schema’s watered-down text. With that unbutchered vision before me, I went about ripping pieces out and replacing them.

I finished in minutes, having a frankenstein copy of the new grimoire ritual. Using it as a reference, I reiterated it in my own tone of voice, shifting the style of the words to my own. I kept a motive of perseverance, and an enduring nature spread throughout it. At the same time, I interspersed memories of my past that defined me. The translation suffused an emotive edge, becoming less a shabby rework and more a new incarnation.

These simple adjustments turned the grimoire ritual into a different beast. It required trillions of mana at this point, dozens of times more than my previous iterations. Already, the reality of this ritual came into question. I’d create a nuclear meltdown of Mt. Verner if I finalized it here. Everything for ten miles would wash away in the fury of unleashed mana.

I found a solution. Instead of using the ritual out here, I opened my pocket dimension. Taking the fabric already present in the pocket dimension, I worked in the abstract area. Getting out an enormous sheet of the stuff, I sliced in markings using the heated telekinetic points as usual.

The forces operated as I hoped they would, and I finished the runic sheet over half an hour. After getting it thoroughly worked out, I charged the grimoire’s ritual over the next half an hour. I used quintessence in place of primordial mana to create more potent

objects in general. Upon reaching the ritual's peak, it stalled. It would never finish within that place.

Without time moving it forward, it stalled at this process just before its creation. Unwilling to risk Mt. Verner and perhaps this portion of Michigan, I got out of my dimensional bubble. Ripping a molten section apart, I lifted my head out and peered at Torix and Plazia, both still talking.

Plazia turned a palm to Torix, "So you believe the use of a lich is overplayed then?"

Torix swung a hand, "Precisely my point. Decoy strategies are employed using lich's all the time. They make for excellent pawns after you've located their phylacteries, and risking their lives is a moot point, meaning they are more than willing to throw themselves into the line of fire, so to speak."

Plazia gave Torix a slow nod. Plazia mouthed, "The misdirection may be uncovered via plotting out the density of lich outbreaks. Even across planets, the outbreaks could be charted back to me being the source."

Torix spread out his hands, "It is exactly so. I believe that other decoy methods operate far better. Might I suggest possession using--"

I raised my hand, "Sorry to interrupt. Plazia, can you giving me a warp to somewhere that you don't mind being destroyed? And make it unpopulated. Like, really unpopulated."

Plazia turned, "What would you need to disperse?"

I motioned both my hands, "A huge explosion compressed into a thin line."

Plazia flicked his hand, a portal appearing beside me. It showed a different skyline, one with two moons above along an orange desert. I opened my portal, allowing the mana from my dimension to disperse out. It siphoned out in a thin line, a cataclysmic wave ushering out. It reached far into space, the needle of explosive compression rippling clouds and tearing horizons. The force would've flooded the room, but I stood in the way of the portal. My body stopped the kinetic energy from blowing back into the room.

My skin melted and ruptured across a few points, but Plazia's portal held before becoming unstable. I closed my warp, spending the next few minutes letting portions of the energy drip out at a time. At one point, I tested it on a distant mountain, the desert landscape empty and devoid of life.

The thin line of energy sliced the mountain apart before blowing it up. It left patches of glass across the scenery. It singed dry brushes kilometers in the distance. The sheer absurdity of the energy source blew me away, but I also remembered what it may do if I aimed it at someone. Even from far away, allies could be devastated.

I shivered. Even an ecosystem or region may be disrupted at this point. Torix and Plazia ooh-ed and aah-ed with me at first, but they got bored after I began dripping the energy out over time. Torix silenced my disruptions using his magic even, giving me a measure of quiet. After getting the power out, I returned to my bubble.

I might make dozens of grimoires and laser people down in the future, but for now, I wanted to see what I just made. In the bubble lit by the primordial glow of my runes, I pulled out the grimoire. It was changed, a duality of the two mana types used to compose it.

On the one hand, the coal-colored tome radiated the power of quintessence. In its pages, it promised a bright future, one where growth came unbounded. If I gave it my all, it would do the same in turn, and I liked that. It gave me a general warmth that carried the same energy as quintessence.

After opening the grimoire, the primordial edge came out. I turned the pages, each of them like thick sheets of silver. They wiggled, each of them alive. On the same note, I no longer etched into the pages. Instead, I created a telepathic connection with the book. I envisioned a change, and the living silver molded into whatever I desired.

It worked as an extension of my mind, like downloading an app on a phone but in my head. It coordinated the runic markings, giving me an absurd nuance. It auto-regulated errors in the cipher, automatically editing in real-time. It even carried mental imprints for storing sigils if I wanted to reuse them.

If anything, this reminded me of using an obelisk or computer, but with a neural augment attached. I blinked, kind of stunned that it carried this potential. With it in hand, I recreated my endurance rune off of memory. It arrived, errors and all intact. The

sigils smudged with imperfections, and the translation marred. It didn't even reflect my thoughts about endurance properly.

I took a breath, soaking in the primordial energy. I smiled at it, and crystals of the mana grew around me in my hidden sphere. I condensed the primordial aura around me and cracked my knuckles.

It was time to see what I could do.

### Chapter 327: Expansion of Will

Taking my first step into using my new grimoire, I tested out a few of the page's molding abilities. They mirrored how my armor moved but with a greater focus on precision instead of power. While I could mold my armor with immense force, getting it to hold details was beyond me.

Testing that for a bit, I managed to mold Schema's runes onto a clean patch of my armor. While imperfect, they'd work well enough. Attempting to get the cipher out of that shaping was a pipe dream, by comparison. No amount of control over my armor allowed for that degree of finesse. The silver pages carried that control and then some.

They acted as visualizers, shifting into place as I envisioned different images. I could have a sheening page mirror a sunset in one moment, and a second later, it would turn into a desert full of dunes. The precision carried a lifelike level of detail, my memory the limiting factor rather than the page's fidelity.

That improvement didn't even include the references I could use. I moved back and forth between different editions and edits, a history of changes compiled in the grimoire. Comparing earlier versions and cross-referencing changes all arrived in real-time. It was like chopping a tree with a chainsaw instead of a wooden ax.

In fact, I fumbled even thinking about how I managed without the grimoire before now. I found my answer in moments.

I handled it poorly.

Taking a moment, I inspected my previous iterations based on memory. I snapped my fingers, realizing the sheer audacity of them. I attempted fixing them, but no matter the

number of edits I implemented, they carried fundamental errors. It was like trying to make a building out of air. No matter the approach, it wasn't as effective as using concrete or stone.

That's when I panned back and approached the issue from a different angle. Taking a moment, I moved back to some of my earliest runic iterations and compared them to later versions. The detail of my newer work shined through, but it also carried a muddiness to it. My more recent runes lacked the raw, emotive energy I boasted before.

Peering close, I found the cause – Etorhma and Eonoth. The two Old Ones 'gave' me knowledge on the cipher, which helped me at the time. However, it held me back from taking the next step forward in my runic progression. The root cause came from how the cipher worked.

It relied on perspective. By having a unifying, singular idea, the sigil's ability to work magic exponentially increased. In a way, the runes fused the rigor of science and the emotion of art into a singular experience. It required a lot of energy, time, and effort for someone to hold those two lines of thought in unison.

But not me. Not anymore, at least. I had three minds hold onto different emotionally charged veins of thought. At the same time, three other psyches siphoned that raw, moving energy into a focused, highly methodical stream of runes. This turned one mind's struggle into many minds' triumphs.

At the same time, I eradicated the influence of the Old Ones. It took quite a few edits before I regained my old style, not wanting to use their specific techniques and 'flow.' They hampered the unity of my work, and by keeping it within my own minds, I retained a more focused identity. It shined through in the sigils themselves, my test moldings potent and effective.

Being able to test runes like this without carving saved me so much time as well. I turned those savings into iterating my process over and over and over. I lost track of my surroundings and time as I kept honing different angles and approaches to the runic markings. I created different versions of each rune, comparing them to take the best parts from each imperfect whole.

After having many configurations come together, I did the same thing many times. My new process reminded me of a team of researchers experimenting, and like a fervent scientist, I toiled over the runes. I put my heart soul into them, and they gave back to

me in turn. After a while, I alternated my mana type to quintessence or ascendant manas to hold different emotions better.

From the brutality of my battles to the joy of building my first cities, I held onto each logic strain like a precious memory. Once locked into the zone, I changed back into my primordial mana type and shifted the silver pages before losing that emotional connection. The perpetual changes in my dimensional wake left me exhausted after a while, but the result paid off.

I stared at a rune that stretched long enough to wrap around my arm several times. Before, it spoke of endurance and what it meant to me. Now, it carried a story of my journey with each principle, my feats like bright beacons in the runic markings.

They showed my plight in BloodHollow, the despair of Yawm, and the dread of Elysium. The runic markings held onto my fears and adversities as well, becoming more than the sum of their parts. Like the runic marking across my back, this sigil carried a depth my other etchings lacked. Before I patted my own back too much, I took a moment, inspecting my work for flaws. They still existed, but fixing them was beyond me. I tolerated this version for now. Putting my hands onto my booklet, I changed to the Rise of Eden since quintessence generated the most potent objects.

Wielding it, I put all of my minds to the task of using furnaces. I created many layers of dimensional bubbles to prevent a mana fallout, isolating me from my surroundings. After a while, I put my grimoire into my pocket dimension and channeled from there. It contained the forces without any issue, and I resolved to use this method in the future.

As it finished, the runic markings couldn't finish in the absence of time. With the mana fully realized, I pulled my tome out. Surrounded by my dimensional bubbles, the radiating energy deflected back into my capsule. The runed finalized the charging in a flash, but it paled in comparison to the grimoire's creation.

Instead of finding glowing symbols, I peered at umbral markings. They acted as the opposite of my previous runes. Where they once glowed, they now dimmed their surroundings, a blot of black drifting from the pages. The hungry runic markings crawled back towards me.

They squirmed into place like a writhing insect hungry to suck my blood. Furthering that comparison, the marking drained mana of its own accord. I peered down at it, the siphon growing by the second. After a few minutes, it exceeded my previous rune's

limit. After an hour, it carried a killer edge, requiring over a hundred billion mana just to stabilize. Scary as the drain was, it worked in my favor.

I once honed in on generating mana, converting it, then putting it into the runic markings. This new rune gobbled up any mana source I gave it, the markings dimming everything around it without my input. Without needing to stabilize the mana or feed it in a specific direction, the marking allowed me to focus purely on mana generation without the conversions.

Requiring a full eleven minds at all times, I meditated for a while to adapt to the strain. Staying more in tune with my body, I noticed the increasing endurance, willpower, and mass. The rune still added pounds as before, though not as quickly as my previous sigils. With everything put into place, I took a deep breath and wiped imaginary sweat off my brow.

It was a job well done.

Getting out of my dimensional bubble, hours passed while I sat in there. Plazia and Torix left, both of them gone. I reached out, tapping the concrete floor. The vibrations paired with Plazia's gravitational fluctuations told me he rested in another isolated area beside me. It mirrored the dimensions of this room.

The guy made a new room, and based on how long I stayed here, I couldn't blame him. Before leaving my new primordial playground, I rubbed my hands together and considered other boosts I could handle right off the bat. My armor outright evolved since I updated everybody's gear, for instance, so I went about recreating everyone's various armors, trinkets, and accessories.

I began with Althea's cannon, the project being one of my favorites to work on. The design from before wasn't bad, and a gun not being the most complex creation either way. Making one requires serious technology due to the precision requirements, but my methods of molding armor eased me through that bottleneck. Using Diesel's designs, I kept to their iterations, knowing I understood little about engineering as a whole.

I improved on certain parts of the design for Althea's polymorphing abilities. For instance, I created a latched opening leading to the scope. Althea could mold an eye into it if she wanted, letting her hold multiple perspectives at once. Another utility involved a set of cipheric augments on the stock of the rifle.

A simple telekinetic enchantment dispersed the recoil into the nearby air. This prevented the rifle from causing issues for Althea while firing. It required much less mana than gravity wells did. I finished it off with a brand new set of cipher runes, eliminating any traces of Schema's weakened language or the Old One's influence.

Finishing her set-up, I created another wire mesh suit of armor for her. This time, I took a long, hard look at the gravity well's adjustments. I weighed ten times more than before, meaning armor made out of me utterly smothered people wearing it. At this point, the armors would need to mirror motorized exoskeletons more than just metal plates.

Rubbing my temples, a lightning strike of inspiration struck me. I took my neural augment approach with my grimoire, and I came up with a way of using it on the armor. It required using my insights of converting mana into mental processing power. This essentially did the same thing, using my fabric's innate mana production to do so.

I kept the mental processing it produced related to movement-specific functions. I then tied that to a mind with only the capacity to move, giving it very narrow limitations. I prevented it from overloading the person wielding it by containing these features in the exoskeleton's mind.

At the same time, I put a telepathic tethering on the armor. With a simple thought, a person could link up to it through a golem core stored in its back. The movement-based mind acted like a set of controls for the armor, essentially.

Scratching my head at the creation, this mirrored a runic-based set of power armor. After finishing the first production, I peered at it from a few angles. It hovered in place via its own gravity wells, and when I stepped close, the plates and wire mesh moved to open and close around me. I rubbed the back of my head, wondering how powerful this thing made an average human.

They'd be a super soldier if I had to guesstimate.

I iterated these improvements across several sets of armors, and each specialized for different team members. I made Althea two different versions, one for war and one for stealth. I did the same for Hod, making sure our shadowy Eltari could always hide and warp through the shadows if need be.



Other members of the team didn't require two sets. For Krog and Chrona, I kept the armor geared towards waging war. In particular, Chrona's plating thickened the most. Her temporal magic made her a mobile fortress, and the thick plates played to that advantage. For Kessiah, I kept the mana streams and available defenses high as well.

Amara's suit came out about the same as before but with more strength augments. The most challenging person to handle was actually Torix. His entire body was essentially an old, outdated version of my current armor. The transition to a new body required a lot of life force, and it needed blood sacrifices. Possible to do, no doubt, but it was a hassle. More pressing of an issue, the mana production might overwhelm the guy.

It was one of the most perplexing issues about mana. After a certain point, it gained thoughts and a life of its own. Quelling that growing consciousness required discipline and experience. Otherwise, a person became possessed by their mana, in a phrase, mana devolution. It happened to Alfred Worm, Torix's son. It almost happened to me early on while dealing with my armor.

With my current mana production, I held on because my willpower expanded to otherworldly heights. Torix's would no doubt be impressive as well, but he may be overwhelmed in the end. Instead of pressing forward, I took the road of caution here, not wanting my master to be turned into a mindless abomination.

Instead, I'd wait until I created mental constraints for these armors. Peering at the massive pile of gear, I wondered how people would respond to them. These armor sets were implanted into individuals and synced with their minds, much like the Omega Strains. Unlike those viruses, these armor sets gave way to absurdity. They could easily overwhelm their wearers.

I intended on handing them off, one by one, and I'd ease people into the process of using them. I wouldn't leave Torix empty-handed, however. Before moving out of there, I brainstormed a gift to take the edge off. After a minute, I face-palmed. Of course.

I could make him a new grimoire.

Keeping the ball rolling, I settled into another installment of crafting. Using a previous outline for my own grimoire, I found a less emotive version. This acted as a generic template in the production process for comparisons. Taking an hour, I honed in on a few adjustments for Torix, so it meshed well with his own grimoire ritual.

After channeling the mana for a while, I cusped on its creation in my pocket dimension. A quick knock on Plazia's door, and I found the hivemind sitting cross-legged. He meditated or at least looked like he did. As I stepped up, his voice radiated from all around, "What is it you wish for? This room as well?"

I raised my brow, "I need another portal to disperse a grimoire's energy again. I made one for Torix."

Plazia sighed before swirling his dimensional slicer. He cleaved time and space apart before sitting back down. After Plazia cast a bit of silencing magic on me, I finished dispersing the energy for Torix's grimoire. It was the first of many. I ended up creating grimoires for Kessiah, Althea, Hod, Krog, and Chrona.

I made minimal adjustments for most of them. These grimoires wouldn't be used for massive incantations, only for easing everyday magical procedures. After finishing the process, I walked out of Plazia's meditation center, the room identical to my own. Plazia seethed,

"Please, learn to warp, so I don't have to focus beside you while you go about dumping excess energy."

I gave him a thumbs-up, "No promises, but I'll try."

Pacing back into my room, I created rings for everyone using an updated, more robust version of the previous runes. Handling another tune-up, I adapted the sigil strata for the golems. It was a brush-up, not a full remodel, which irked me while in my primordial mode. Outside the aura, I was just fine with it.

Getting everything stashed away in my pocket dimension, I took a breath, readying myself for reactions. Several days passed while I crafted, each component requiring a long time to finish. I lost myself in the process, kind of in my own world of crafting and whatnot. Snapping me out of that walking dream, a special notification pinged out in my mind.

It stood out because it mirrored a trumpet's ringing rather than the usual, satisfying bing sound. I opened the message, and I furrowed my brow.

It looked like Schema was on the move.

Hello Sovereign, you've been selected as a part of the 7,821st galactic council! As a new Sovereign, you shall be allowed to make an introduction to other ruling members and be allowed to speak with several Overseers and Schema free of charge!

| Note | Length of talk varies. You shall be meeting with other ruler sub-class members, each of you representing the might and prowess of your guilds.

You'll also be expected to create alliances with other guilds and form a tight-knit, galactic community! That's the Schema way! Due to the war with the rebels, donations will be mandatory, but Schema's not going to hold an event like this without the chance for an award. A lottery will be held with a special mystery prize!

Who will win it? It's time to find out!

| Note | Non-participation is considered a declaration of war against Schema. Noncompliance will not be tolerated.

Time till meeting: Galactic standard time – 4 hours. Earth time – 3.5 hours.

#### Chapter 328: Gratitude

Hello Sovereign, you've been selected as a part of the 7,821st galactic council! As a new Sovereign, you shall be allowed to make an introduction to other ruling members and be allowed to speak with several Overseers and Schema free of charge!

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Noncompliance will not be tolerated.

Time till meeting: Galactic standard time – 4 hours. Earth time – 3.5 hours.

I read the message and reread it, my stomach sinking at the prospect of being under Schema's thumb. Another message popped upright as my mind started racing.

Don't worry rulers, Schema's thought of everything. We understand that mobility, locations, and even circumstances might be trying considering this is the shortest period between an announcement and the meeting ever recorded! Personal Sentinels will be put into place to escort each member of the council. This ensures you will each make it on time.

No, you will not need a warping specialist. No, you will not be allowed a warping specialist either. Do not ask for permission to bring one. Standard galactic warping will be rescinded with the galactic meeting space to prevent incursions or other issues. Thank you all for your gracious compliance.

After arrival, all weapons and items within dimensional storages will be confiscated, along with other supplies. Several Overseers and many Sentinels will act as guardians during your stay here. Be aware of this, and plan accordingly.

Have an excellent stay on the Schema-owned cruiser and good luck with the lottery.

I grimaced as dread pooling into my stomach. After rubbing my temples for a while, I got my thoughts together. I sent messages to everyone, asking them to have an impromptu emergency meeting at Chrona's home. The open vantage point gave us plenty of room, and it let people fly here from afar.

While everyone gathered, I considered my options. The most worrying part of this process was being warped onto some far-off space shuttle. It could be a nearly infinite distance from home, and I may never get back home if Schema stranded me out into the dark recesses of space. Inevitably, I'd reach inhabited space wherever Schema sent me over decades, centuries, or millennia. With my runes firing at all times, I'd be a destroyer that'd wipe Schema off the face of the galaxy. However, Yawm's contract ensured I may die before I reached Schema or could reach him. The idea of being trapped like that made me nervous.

Maybe finding some loophole in Yawm's contract was possible. I could also survive whatever backlash occurred from it, or I may reverse engineer the cipher. Pulling myself away from these worst-case scenarios, I got myself out of the tunnel and back towards Mt. Verner's peak.

On arrival, I found most of our members already there. Chrona, Krog, Helios, Kessiah, Torix, Althea, and Amara gathered in Chrona's home. Only Hod and Florence lagged behind. Seeing Chrona's less humble abode brought a smile to my face; Helios erected void ice architecture for her.

Like a luxurious version of her home in Rivaria, the permanent ice wafted a dense fog onto the ground at certain spots. Void ice operated strangely. It was essentially ice at absolute zero combined with magic shenanigans, which apparently changed its makeup. Even from a cursory talk with Helios, the process involved loads of complex computations and intricate mathematics. However, it gave way to an abundant, flexible material.

In this case, Helios molded a specialized, insulating glass over the entire expanse. This stopped the void ice from peeling people's skin off when they stepped on it. Flying into an open courtyard at the ice palace's center, my guildmates waited for me in the court. The violet ice architecture left plenty of room for a gialgathen, meaning I didn't scrape my head on the ceilings here.

It also made a chunk of Mt. Verner's peak change into the new material. I kept myself light on the icy glass, not wanting to destroy the beautiful lines and details. I found Chrona resting on an elevated platform, the others around her. Stepping up, I smiled at everyone,

"It's been a while since we all met like this, hasn't it? How is everybody?"

Althea hopped over and gave me a hug, and she tried lifting me. Before she shattered the glass or her bones, I pulled us up with a gravity well. I rested my forehead on hers,

"We have to start thinking about our surroundings. I've gotten heavier lately, so that might not be the best idea."

She rolled her eyes, “If you say so...Hm, you have seemed taller lately now that I think about it.”

I held back the size increase with my mass manipulation, but at this point, I stretched that skill's limits. I smiled at Althea, “How's your search going?”

Althea frowned, peering away, “It's...It's been slow. I've been working with Florence to help out settlements here. In particular, I've been working on trying and helping children acclimatized to the system. Torix doesn't work as well with them, and I think I can do a lot of good there.”

I hugged her, “That's amazing. What do you mean things have been ‘slow?’ That's incredible, and I think you're doing great.”

She blushed, “Heh...I'm doing my best.”

I set us down onto the void ice, and I peered around, “Speaking of Florence, is he with Hod?”

As I said that, Hod flew through the air, holding Florence in his talons. Even from far off, Florence's words rang in my ears,

“Hod, do this like we planned. We must nail the landing. It will be glorious.”

Hod lifted his long beak, “Pshh, Hod born for landing. Hod only land well.”

I blinked, well aware of Hod's many crashes. As they both swooped over the courtyard, Helios facepalmed at the sight of his brother. The ice mage simmered, “Ah, perfect. Two idiots pairing together. It's a match destined since the dawn of time.”

As if on cue, Hod and Florence smashed into one of the voice ice pillars. They both flopped down, each of them plopping into the icy ground. Helios fixed the cracks wherever they landed. Florence lifted his face, his black mask cracked, “Ah, Hod, my man, that was horrible. Like, not even close to being correct.”

Hod rolled on the ground before snapping back onto his feet. He spread his wings and lifted a leg, mirroring a yoga pose. He cawed, “Hod trick you. Florence fool and Hod initiate special landing.”

He jutted his beak out while hopping in a circle. Mirroring a sprinkler, he let out a few caws and Hodisms before Florence smacked his hand onto the ground. The chatty albony gasped, “Agh, he’s outdone me yet again. Making me the joker while he’s prepared for this landing...A true genius worthy of fear.”

Florence played into the situation without missing a beat, and I blinked at them both. Kessiah burst into laughter, pointing at them both. Our remnant healer guffawed, “Gagh, you both look so dumb. It’s been so long since I’ve seen either of you, and that’s how you introduce yourselves?” She gave them an ok gesture with her hand, “Really, you nailed it. Just perfect.”

Hod puffed out his thin chest, “Hod know. Hod once thought Hod make mistake once. Hod mistake was Hod thinking Hod make mistake. Hod wrong about Hod being wrong.”

Hod tapped the side of his head as if he was saying something profound, “Hod think too much sometimes.”

Althea laughed, and she let her hands unwrap from around my neck. I set her back down onto the ground, having held her by her hip up till now. Our sizes were quite different at this point, and I mentally thanked her for her transformative abilities.

No, I’m not diving into more detail about that.

Anyways, with everyone gathered, I raised my hands, “Everyone, I have two announcements. Both needed to be in person.”

Krog raised a brow, and he spoke in his gruff voice, “Does it involve reinforcements for Blegara? The eldritch formed a rebellion against our cause, and it’s been difficult to pacify the Vagni’s support for that faction.”

Florence pushed himself up, “Ooh, could it be organizing the new guildsmen with an initiation? Most of the village heads wonder what you’re like in person, and I tell them you’re larger than life.” Florence walked up, raising a hand to the top of my head and

barely making it, “Which is even more true now. You’re getting swole, Daniel. Slow down and leave some gains for the rest of us.”

I frowned, “It’s the furnaces. Anyways, no, it’s not about either of those issues, though they’re important, no doubt, especially the eldritch rebels. What I’m talking about is a set of gifts for all of you.”

Amara hissed, “What does it entail? More of your flesh and blood?”

I raised my brow, “Well, yeah.”

Amara drooled while rubbing her hands together, “Then all is well.”

Chrona pointed her tail at me, “Let him speak. We must listen as this is urgent. He mentioned two announcements, and he wouldn’t call us here in an emergency message for just this.”

My pocket dimension spawned over me, and I pulled out all the specialized gear I crafted, “For the most part, you’re right. I think this might be worth calling you all here by itself, but I’m gathering everyone for the second announcement. I’m getting this out of the way while you’re all here.”

I dispensed with the grimoires, the new armors, and the rings. I gave Florence and Helios two rings as well, and as I did, I murmured, “You can take these to the Emperor if you’d like. Just know that by the time he analyzes what this is, it’ll be out of date. You won’t get anything else after this if you do that too.”

Helios peered down at the ring, “Hm...Noted.”

Florence snatched the band from my hand. The chatty albony lifted it up, “Ooh, this looks fancy.” He put the ring on before taking a step back, “But it feels even fancier. Hah, this is well made. It makes me feel more Daniel-ey. Physically speaking, that is.”

Unlike his brother, Helios suppressed his excitement. The ice mage peered back and forth between the ring and Florence. Helios gazed off while sliding the ring onto a clawed hand, “I suppose...I’ll accept the gift.” His pale blue eyes widened under his



mask as the band took effect. He murmured, “That’s...This is a developed enchantment. It’s potent.”

I smiled, “It’s the tip of the iceberg.”

Behind me, Amara lifted her new grimoire, studying the book and its intricacies. She sat down and opened it before gripping it from both sides. She spoke with surprising emotion,

“This...It will make operating with cipher much simpler than before. It dwarfs anything I’ve ever been given. Thank you, Harbinger.”

Torix gawked at his grimoire while scoffing, “It’s as if you’d devoted yourself to ceasing my technological renaissance. Why, if every magical device carried these conveniences, obelisks would become obsolete.”

Althea stared down at hers, “Uhh...Why did you make one for me?”

I shrugged, “You can use my armors and the books themselves to fuel simple magical spells. I know you don’t like using your blood magic, but this should give you a lot of utilities if you take advantage of it.”

She pursed her lips, “Thanks. This is really cool.”

I smiled, “That’s my intention. You got a new set of armor as well.”

Althea walked up to her mobile exoskeleton, “Yeah, it’s definitely a step up from what you gave us before. It’s kind of...I don’t know, a huge leap. It looks like power armor, just using your fabric’s innate abilities rather than hydraulics.”

I frowned, “Yeah, it is.”

Althea leaned over it, “It’s really neat...And it looks like it would require a pilot or skill to use. Heh, I hope I can get it up and running on my own, but who knows. It could be tougher than it looks.”

I cupped my chin, “You know, I thought the same thing. I think it’ll be fine for the most part. Don’t get in it until I get back, though.”

Althea tilted her head, “Back from what?”

I sighed before opening my status. I turned it to everyone, “Schema’s called the first galactic council since I obtained my Sovereign class. I’m set to introduce myself, my guild, etc. I wanted each of you to know where I intend to go with the guild and what kind of plans I have for the future. If there’s something you don’t like, now will be the time to say it.”

I turned a hand to everyone, “Everyone, I know I’ve been disengaged from the day-to-day affairs of the guild lately, and I haven’t been discussing my future plans with any of you. By knowing my intentions, you’ll all get a better idea of what we’ll be working towards in the future.”

I spread the Rise of Eden over everyone, “You all know about this aura. I also have Event Horizon, and most of you’ve experienced that as well. However, I’ve discovered recently that Schema and I have come to a crossroads regarding my auras and mana. I don’t hate the AI, but at the same time, he’s put us me one bad spot after the other.”

I sighed, “The best example...It’s Yawm. That was before most of you arrived, but those that experienced it will know what I mean. We were trapped on Earth and pitted against Yawm of Flesh. He was over 10,000 levels above us with Etorhma’s cipheric augments. This gave him ridiculous powers, and it was a miracle we survived.”

I let my hands flop against my sides, “That was a death sentence. No quests or additional support during the war with Elysium was a cakewalk compared to that. The gialgathens also suffered cruel fates where they were allowed to be killed by Schema since they weren’t in the system.”

I grimaced, “And Schema didn’t get rid of our unknown statuses...He also left Hod’s species to die. I mean, in all honesty, the system and our circumstances have been tugging us around for a while. So far, survival has dictated what we’ll do next.”

I waved a hand, “I’ll ensure that won’t be an issue any longer. I’m going to establish Earth as a primary fortress for our guild. I’ll be making thousands of cities over the

planet, enough that a Spatial Fortress or two will have to think twice before landing here. They'll face a horde and me at full force."

I pointed into the sky, "There are planets in our solar system that are terraformable as well, like mars, venus, maybe even the moon. We're in a unique situation where we can pull those planets from the brink. I'll talk with specialists to see how feasible each location is. I'll be finding fringe worlds to colonize as well as my golems are Fringe Walkers. Each and every one of them."

I let my hand down, "And last but not least, I've also allied with a non-Schema entity. It's a dangerous gamble I'm making, but at the same time, I know this entity is a huge opportunity for us. We'll be able to expand our guild's options exponentially moving into the future by associating with this person. I'll elaborate more later."

I looked at everyone from above, "Is there anything anyone wants to add that I should mention to the galactic council? Maybe something someone disagrees with."

Florence stepped up, squeezing a hand where he wore his new ring. He stared at his hand before giving it a nod. He smiled at me under his cracked mask before reaching up and placing a palm on my shoulder. He said, "May I speak?"

I stepped aside while generating a pillar of stone for Florence. I lunged to one knee, making me stick out less. Florence spread out his hands, "So, you all know I'm a member of the Empire and an albony royal. I've been a member of this privileged class since birth, and I've done well under that system."

Florence put his hands on his hips, "But I've disagreed with it. I've disagreed with how we've handled natives, other populaces, and even how we manage planets from the ground up. Working with each of you has been a breath of fresh air. It's amazing that such a group of talented individuals from so many different species have come together under one cause. I know you're all used to it, but I can tell you from an outsider's perspective; it's extraordinary."

Florence peered at me, "You all know the cause, but it deserves to be spoken aloud. You're the reason for this, Daniel. You gave each of us a new home to call our own, and we all couldn't be more grateful for it. Please, stand."

I looked up at him in surprise, but I stood up. Chrona and Krog called out in unison, other gialgathens in the distance joining them. Hod spread out his wings and bowed.

The others, even Amara, lunged to one knee and gave me a bow as well. Only Helios stayed standing, but he lowered his head regardless. Florence hopped off his platform before lunging with them.

He bowed, and as he did, he removed his dark, wooden mask. A joyful, jovial smile of his stared at the ground. He said,

“I, for one, have gained so much since coming here, and I can’t imagine going back to the Empire.”

Florence tossed his covering aside, and Helios gawked as the wooden mask tumbled on the ground. Florence put a hand over his chest, “If you’re willing, please, I’d be honored to join your guild.”

Florence made the most of the slight gesture, showing a willingness to throw it away. Without a second thought, I opened my status, sending him an invite. Florence accepted, and his bow and tone of voice deepened,

“Thank you, Harbinger. You’ve given all of us a home, and whatever you want to do, we’re all for it. Really, you don’t have to ask for my input. I’m all in, and I think everyone else is as well.”

No one disagreed, and I stared at the group. They stayed in place for a while, and Florence’s speech almost brought tears to my eyes. I hadn’t expected it, and it really caught me off guard in a good way.

I stammered, “T-thank you guys. This really isn’t necessary. I’m just doing what I can.”

Florence peered up with clear blue eyes, “Come now, you deserve some recognition. I think everyone can agree with that?”

Krog and Chrona growled out in the back, other gialgathens joining the cry. Hod’s form flared out with umbral fire. Althea whisper-shouted, “Go, Daniel. Wooh.”

Kessiah shook her head, “You saved my ass, that’s for sure.”

Torix's fire eyes flared green, "Whatever you decide to do from here, I shall support it however I can. You've done a fine job, all things considered."

I swallowed back a wave of emotion before lifting my hands, "Ok, that's enough, guys. I can't take anymore."

Althea ran up and gave me a hug. Hod joined, and Florence walked up and put a hand on my shoulder. Torix joined, along with Krog and Chrona, who put their tails on me. I gave everyone a small smile, "Thanks. We'll be doing big things from here. I promise you all that much."

They all let me go and backed up. With the cheesy but warm moment over, Chrona gave me a grin while spreading her wings, "You took us from a doomed planet and extinction to several new ones with clean waters and open fields. I shall always miss what Giess was, but I know that this will be a fine home in the future. Whatever your guild does, the gialgathens will serve under it. For now, and for all time."

Krog smacked his chest with his tail, "We stand by you."

I soaked in the unexpected congratulations, feeling good about what I'd done for once. I took a breath, peering at the time. The meeting would take place in an hour, but the Sentinel would arrive in a minute to get me situated. I closed my eyes, "Then I won't let you guys down."

I released my Mass Manipulation skill. As I did, I cracked my neck and rolled my shoulders. I waved out the stiffness from the magic while spinning my arms. The others gawked at me, even the gialgathens staring up by the time I finished my full expansion.

I peered behind me, "When the Sentinel arrives, I'll be expecting each of you to test out the new gear. Well, everything aside from the armors. When I get back, I'll show you how to use them."

Helios gawked up at me, "A-Are you expanding yourself?"

Behind me, a tear in dimensions popped into existence. I turned to Helios, "Actually, I've been shrinking myself this entire time."

Our old friend, Spear, walked out from the cleaved space-time behind me. He was my Sentinel chauffeur. It looked like Schema had a sense of humor.

I smiled at the Sentinel, “Hey, long time no see. It’s been a few weeks.”

Chapter 329: Rulers

Spear peered up before tilting his head, “I...I see you’ve grown in size. However, I doubt that goes for the will or direction of your mind.”

I stepped up to his tear in dimensions, ripping it further to my size. As I stepped through, I raised my brow, “We’ll see.”

Pulling my helmet over my face, I readied myself to see a piece of the galaxy’s might. I stepped onto a panel of graphene, mirroring an Overseer’s plating. Spear followed behind me, letting the dimensional rip close shut behind us. As it did, Spear seethed,

“We know something is amiss. Your guild carries unsystematized territory. There’s one reason for that; you’re performing illegal activities. Know that we will uncover exactly what it is after this war with Elysium is over.”

I frowned, “You know, that might take a while since I’m not there to speed things along.”

Spear sheathed his dimensional slicer along his back, the magnet keeping the lance against him. He simmered, “Your confidence has broadened into arrogance. When you see the others under Schema’s wing, you will tremble. All have. All will.”

Keeping what he said in mind, I looked around. His portal opened into a smooth hallway without any plating. Only glowing lines of plasma offered light, their impressions faint. As I stepped in, I lightened. Keeping one of my hands through the dimensional opening, I peered around. I murmured, “Where do we go from here, exactly? This place looks empty.”

Spear hopped over the veil, and I watched him walk off. Where he landed, bright blue plasma crisscrossed outwards with geometric lines spreading over every surface. It pulsed beneath the smooth plating, bringing the dead expanse to life. The writhing plasma threatened to crack out of the tunnel’s walls at any moment, but it stayed contained.

Spear's casual walk demonstrated how reliable this gray plating was. The Sentinel lifted his hand, several starry portals opening in the hallway. Spear raised his arms to them, "The system recognizes you as a dimension, but these are true microcosms, and Schema holds them within this vessel for his many purposes. The council's meeting place is within one of these spaces."

I stepped out into the vast hallway, letting the warp snap shut behind me. I let my foot tap the floor, sensing the mana within. This place fluctuated with an unbounded quantity of energy. The portals exposed a dozen different worlds, not warps, but disconnected spaces made for and by Schema. Why the AI isolated those spaces, I didn't know.

What I did know was this whole place exuded a futuristic simplicity that exhibited wealth and power. It wasn't power in the usual sense, either. Instead of showing rare resources or outright luxury, Schema displayed strange technologies. This shuttle housed no doors, no sense of up or down within its walls. It carried no gravity either, being a blank canvas.

Despite that, an undeniable awareness spread over me. This place carried a wealth of secrets underneath its surface. Wanting to explore, I stopped using my gravity wells, allowing my mass to float in the shuttle. After experiencing the loss of levity, I hovered myself along, Spear walking with his boots keeping him grounded.

This gray expanse rose far into the distance, large as a mountain in all directions. Blank. Nothingness. Without the warps, this would be a warehouse in space. Somehow, an ambient light kept everything well seen despite the lack of lamps, torches, or any lighting really. It was another mystery.

Everywhere Spear touched, the listless gray sprung to life, the architecture responding to him. The Sentinel turned towards a wall. A starry portal opening further, and he walked into it. A bit nervous, I followed while keeping a section of my hand out in case it was a trap. Stepping into an identical hallway, the pulsing energy below offered light above like before.

Unlike the previous space, Spear pointed towards a doorway with two mana pits beside it. This new shuttle used crystallized mana for lighting, a demonstration of power. It reminded me of our guild's aesthetic, actually. The Sentinel to my side waved his hand in frustration, "Come. Walk."

Sensing no danger, I hopped through the new dimensional opening. Pacing into the tiny dimension, I stretched out with the Rise of Eden, wondering if it placed a different strain on this place. It did. My dimensional wake incited a whirling, aching tremble from the tiny pocket dimension.

Spear noticed nothing, the disruption purely metaphysical. Maybe because I was a dimension, it stood out to me. Regardless of the reason, the sensation strengthened when I stretched out Event Horizon to its greatest extent. By then, the dimension wailed. I pulled the aura back, unsettled by how alive the space felt to me.

We reached the crystallized mana lamps, and as we did, another warp opened nearby. From it, a purple, hulking beast made of miasma stepped out. Its eyes widened, the only expressions on its otherwise sharpened point of a face. Those pale oculi turned to me, and it stared through me.

My pulse heightened, a bit of nervousness shooting up my spine. The entity linked with my mind, and it ebbed through like a distant echo, "I...You are the Harbinger...You fought the golden one...Impressive."

I raised a hand, "Thanks. Since you already know who I am, could you tell me your name?"

"I am...Shalahora."

I gave it a wave, "Good to meet you."

"You...As well."

Its voice pierced its surroundings, like talking to a walking sonic grenade. Somehow howling and quiet at the same time, it walked with its own Sentinel guard. It reached beside me, mirroring my own height. I checked its title, and that explained everything.

Shalahora, the Sun Swallower and Star Eater | Level 60,027 | Guild: The Celestials |  
Class: Sovereign



This thing could literally end Elysium by itself. Why it hadn't or didn't was beyond me. In front of us, a seamless doorway opened from the wall, the material bleeding away. Peering close, I recognized the material and murmured,

"Nanomachines, huh?"

Spear snickered before turning to me, "This is only the beginning."

We stepped into an elevator of glass or what appeared to be glass, at least. Once inside, Shalahora tilted its head to me. Another telepathic conversation began,

"If my communication bothers you...Tell me...Many species are driven mad by it... Others are hateful to it."

I waved my hands, "Oh, don't worry about it. I've talked with a species called the gialgathens for a while now. I can tell the difference between a conversational link and a militant one. You're doing a good job signaling your intent during that process."

I moved my hands around more than necessary out of nervousness, "It's like, you're probably just meeting species that are new to telepathy. If that's the case, one tactic I've seen is sending an anonymous chat log to the person. They'll know it's you, and it doesn't require any intrusion to someone's mind."

I coughed into a hand, "Ah, not that you need the advice."

"I did not know...Am grateful."

It stared forward, a comfortable silence forming in the room. I peered around, kind of surprised by that. Shifting us with a sudden jerk, the elevator shot upward, launching via magnetism. Several G's worths of force waved over everyone here, our systemized bodies well adapted for the stress.

We whirled past a glass viewpoint of space, several hundred other elevators leading towards the same area over us. The light source of this place rested over the ending point of our elevators, and when I looked up, it mirrored an eclipse. Turning my gaze elsewhere, other ruler class members shot upwards with the two of us.

We all headed towards the same place overhead. Beaming up, we siphoned into the space without worry. Other rulers looked around like I did, though I was the only one with my hands planted on the windowpane. Even if it showed my naivete, I couldn't help it. This was impressive.

Looking at all the ridiculous levels, I found Obolis staring into the starry abyss. He interlocked his hands behind himself, not speaking with his other elevator member. He turned and met my eye, his own widening. He raised a hand, and I did the same. I even got a nice slice of humble pie after peering at a few of the other rulers' titles.

Gorjah, the Alethic Constant | Level 28,901 | Guild: The Erudite Path | Class: Founder...

Mala-Jaysah, the Horizon Shatterer | Level 42,153 | Guild: World Cleansers | Class: Destroyer...

Blacknok, All Bringer | Level 34,238 | Guild: Way of Enlightenment | Class: Cultivator...

Shalahora's status dwarfed theirs, but they still owning imposing titles with no less impressive backings. Spear found me gawking, and he gestured to the starry abyss,

"You may think of yourself as a dimension, but this is what a pocket dimension can truly be. Schema crafted it using the same technology as his rings. It lacks the same restraints, and this is that might displayed in full."

I smiled at the distant galaxies, none of them real, "It is impressive, but this place lacks the size and scope of an actual dimension. This place is small, almost confining even."

Shalahora misted up to the glass. It radiated out, "And you know this...How, exactly?"

I shrugged, "I'm a dimension."

Shalahora murmured, "It says...You are a multiverse."

I raised my palms to the entity, “Woah now, I do not recognize that title just yet. I’m just starting to get into the whole Harbinger of Cataclysm thing. A Multiverse? I’m not quite there yet.”

“Then I will call you...As such.”

Another quiet came as quickly as it shattered. Turning to the other elevators, I gazed at the shadowy figures in the distance. The metal trusses whirled by, blocking my view in a blur. My eyes adjusted, and I got another batch of statuses.

Even from just the titles over their heads, the levels alone averaged at absurd heights. The average range sat somewhere between 25 and 50 thousand. At least from a cursory glance, the highest leveled one was the purple blot of miasma beside me. The ephemeral creature took up the majority of its elevator despite its misty form.

It gazed out with pale blue eyes, its gaze carrying an empty coldness. It sighed before linking with me once more, “Have you felt it?”

I shook my head, “What is there to feel exactly?”

It peered up, and its voice cleared up some in my mind, “This meeting...It’s purpose. It will be...Drudgery. A nightmare. I despise these gatherings. Do you?”

I put my hands on my hips, trying to talk to the kind of horrifying thing.

“Yeah, I get that. I’m kind of trying to keep myself busy too. I mean, this was a real wrench in my plans.”

I sounded weird even to myself. Shalahora seethed, “It is the war. Elysium. They’ve gained new planets.”

My eyes widened. They already conquered more territory. That meant our guild stopped them from expanding more than I imagined. In the end, I expected as much. Elysium used a giant nanomachine artifact from an alien world, reverse engineered an Old One, and created an eldritch Hybrid. Taking over a few planets acted like an un-noteworthy end to their killer resume when compared to that.

At the same time, being called here for Elysium sent warning bells off in my head. If Schema tried drafting our guild back into the war, I might be forced into service. That being said, it might be better to be cut off from Schema than forced to fight Elysium. The sheer number of possibilities for those two decisions burst in my mind like a mental volcano.

Shalahora cackled before thinking over, “Fate will decide the outcome. Your belief that you may change it is simply an illusion.”

I raised a brow, “I don’t know. I think believing choice is an illusion is just a cop-out. I’m not exactly a philosopher, though, so take what I say with a grain of salt.”

The connection dimmed, and it turned away once more. It carried no emotion, an almost possessed creature. It stayed still as the elevator locked into the upper platform above us, the whirling, buzzing sound of raw mana flooding into our area. We hovered up slowly before closing into a position.

The energy within the area dimmed before the walls disintegrated away. They formed into the floor, revealing the other ruler classes around us both. Quite a few stared our way, many of them accustomed to this process. Shalahora was one of them. The miasma cloud peered up, and I followed suit.

Above us, an Overseer oversaw the area. Plated in dark armor, it showed a different model than the ordinarily bright blue of before. It pulsed red energy, reminding me of the Hybridized Overseer Elysium controlled. If I guessed right, this model used ascendant mana as the base, making it more of a war machine.

It spoke with blood in its voice, confirming my thoughts, “You are all here. Good. Remain calm before Schema’s arrival.”

In all directions, uplighting exposed venerable stonework. The cipher smothered it all, ancient and elegant writing used for all of it. An earthy scent floated off the rock, molding with the smell of stagnant air. It siphoned into the Overseer’s palm as it echoed out,

“You have been called here for the 7,821st galactic council. 500 random ruling class members were called here. During this time, convey your concerns to Schema. Our

savior will do what it can to rectify your complaints. However, understand time constraints and resource demands.”

Shalahora let out a haunting laugh before murmuring, “That means it will do nothing.”

I crossed my arms, “I figured as much.”

The Overseer whipped its arm that held the condensed air. It blew into the roof of the well-maintained ruins, and dirt scraped off every surface. Flaying the debris off the inscriptions, the Overseer’s magic cleaned every inch of the entire expanse. By the time it finished, beams of red light had trickled into this domain. Seconds after, the cipher runes glowed on every surface, a primordial, dark blue mana coursing in.

It kept channeling for a few seconds before a strange precision crossed over the entire expanse. I looked around, feeling dissected, prodded, and peered through. It reminded me of Plazia’s description of my primordial aura, but this originated from elsewhere. Booming from all directions, the source announced itself.

“I am Schema. This is the beginning of the 7,821st galactic council meeting. Now, for the first order of business.”

Schema radiated out from every direction,

“It’s time for introductions. New ruling class members first.”

Chapter 330: Introductions

I peered back and forth, looking around at the other rulers nearby. No one moved to any specific place, so I created a telepathic link with Shalahora. I murmured, “This probably isn’t your first meeting if I had to guess, so are there any pointers you have on where to go?”

Shalahora radiated, “This is my first meeting as well.”

My eyes widened, “Woah, really?”

“I’ve lived a long life...But it was not spent ruling over others. I isolated myself, and only recently have I decided to enact my will onto another species...This is a trial for me, in many ways.”

A wave of awareness crashed over me, and I nodded, “Ah...So you’re as lost as I am then?”

“We walk in the dark in this.”

Schema’s voice ushered from the stone nearby, “Five new ruler class members formed since the last meeting. They shall traverse to the panel below and introduce themselves.”

The ascendant Overseer lifted an arm, generating a panel of mana. The red guardian manifested energy, forming a crimson disc that crackled out lightning and a dense miasma. I frowned at it. It was enough energy to cause side effects in weaker-willed people. Standing on that platform could cause hallucinations, mana saturation, or worst of all, mana devolution.

Schema tested the new members, and it didn’t fall outside my notice.

The Overseer pointed his finger at Shalahora, and the Sovereign beside me shifted out of the Overseer’s shadow. Shalahora held two locations simultaneously, one half beside me and the other resting on the mana plate. Shalahora linked to everyone present in a single instance, the chain solid and firm.

I held down a laugh, the poor guy starting off with a poor impression. He mentioned people being put off by his demeanor, and this explained why. The guy wrestled into a person’s mind like slamming open a front door. Hell, Shalahora even did so with the Overseer, bypassing the restraints Schema planted with ease.

The ascendant mana was no different. It trickled into Shalahora’s body, but the Sovereign battled back with pure, unadulterated dominion mana. The density and thickness of the mana defied reason, like a black blizzard. A contrasting panel of dark dominion crystals formed under Shalahora as it murmured,

“I am Shalahora, the Sun Swallower. I no longer know my age, as I existed in the void for many years...My home planet was destroyed centuries ago...And I have treaded the stars, killing the eldritch...I battle with telepathy and mind magic...”

Its form rippled, “And I aim to create lasting friendships here...To those that serve others aside from themselves. Should you fight me...” Shalahora stared through the crowd, “It will not be a battle. It will be a one-sided slaughter...But I hope it doesn’t come to that. It would be a shame.”

Schema announced, furthering the information, “Shalahora is a Sovereign who was previously a Fringe Walker. He moved from that class to the Sovereign for personal reasons. He’s cleared over 300 planets, wiping them clean. Treat him with respect, as he has killed other sentients many times before.”

The weight in Schema’s voice pressed from all angles, and I realized the reason for its depth. It didn’t come from any source; it manifested in my mind. Like the status screens staying open even with my eyes closed, I could plug my ears and still hear Schema’s voice. He skipped the sensory step, relaying information directly into our heads like he did with the system.

That unnerved me, kind of like how the mythical compendiums took our minds away to some far-off place. Shalahora could’ve been accentuating that disparity with his own strength. The behemoth shifted back towards me, leaving his umbral platform of dark crystals behind. He stayed silent beside me, and he gave off no hostility despite his warning.

The entity came across as casual and composed, not one-sided or menacing. Seconds later, the Overseer pointed towards the individual beside Obolis. A heavily muscled cyclops jumped from beside the Emperor. The cyclops left cracks in the ground, Obolis having to generate a platform, so he wasn’t sent stumbling.

The coal-black cyclops landed on the ascendant platform, the energy radiating through him. His eye turned bloodshot, the beast only wearing a loincloth of leather. He wielded a club composed of eldritch parts fused with acid or alchemical potions. As the mana flooded him, the cyclops took a breath.

Cipheric tattoos over his skin flashed with quintessence mana, several spirits coming to life within the cyclops. A single union of many tribes spoke through the cyclops,

“We are the Kalat. We live for the gifts that Baldowah granted us, giving our species an absolute union. Now we serve his will, the urge to battle and...”

The ascendant mana oozed into the cyclop’s body. The Kalat murmured, “And...And we are grateful to Baldowah and its grace.”

Schema added once more, “The Kalat serve Baldowah’s will, having killed several powerful (S-) bounties. Being the union of many millions of souls, the mental strength of the Kalat is incredible. When fully focused. They switched from the Breaker class to the Founder class to assist with another unity project from Baldowah.”

Schema spoke with a wry note in its voice, “The Kalat have done well, though they would do better serving under me entirely.”

The Kalat bowed, “It is not that we serve either more than the other. We simply enact the will of both our masters at once, in unison. We do this in all things.”

The Kalat leaped off, and I inspected their title.

The Kalat, an Ancestral Union | Level 38,827 | Guild: The Kalat | Class: Founder...

Shalahora murmured beside me, “Their life is strange.”

I raised a brow, “How so?”

Shalahora rippled, “By considering the whole, none of them truly live...They are a fusion of all...And yet, they represent no one that actually exists. All those lives amount to that...I would never do the same.”

My many minds jumped into a defense mode. I crossed my arms, “I’d bet they’d be difficult to work mind magic on.”

Shalahora cackled and turned to me, “The opposite is true. A union is simple to destroy...You must create clashing conflicts within them, and the division splinters the whole...It falls like a tower of sand thereafter.”



I noted that detail, making sure I didn't forget it. It could work in the future if I faced Lehesion or someone else in mental warfare. As I mentally jotted that down, the next member warped in instead of jumping.

A curvaceous woman with a seductive smile stared at everyone. She wore flashy clothing that accentuated her figure, retaining some class from the quality of the materials. Wings wrapped around her, coming out of her shoulders and hips, the lower limbs smaller than the upper ones. A light, green tint shone off of her metallic skin, and she spread out her wings while beaming light.

With confidence, she put her hands on her hips and beamed, "I am Iona Joan. I am a consulate of Schema. I represent his viewpoints in various economic capacities along with organizing newer worlds during the culling process. Over the last two hundred years, I've saved over thirty worlds from falling into fringe status, getting species back on their feet after rocky beginnings. I did all for a moderate price with a lenient interest rate."

Iona smiled at Shalahora and me. She put a hand on her sternum, "I'm not quite as prolific as that Sovereign over there, but I know a thing or two about how to manage an organization. If any of you need help with expanding or getting Speakers under your guild, I'm here to help."

She gave everyone a charming smile, "Just send me a friend request, and we'll keep in contact."

She radiated out with charismatic energy, and I wanted to talk to her for no reason. I silenced those thoughts, knowing she invested heavily into charisma and the related skills to emphasize that route. To my surprise, several other rulers fell victim to her. They opened their statuses, and Iona giggled while smiling, "Thanks for the friend requests, everyone. I won't let you down."

I tilted my head, "Hm, she did a good job advertising, at least. She handled the mana with ease too."

Shalahora peered through her. The miasma cloud murmured, "She 'advertises' because she needs what others offer...To exchange admits weakness and need...I prefer my merits to be my own, not from others."

I raised my brow, thinking about what Shalahora said. On the one hand, I agreed that having your own worth was vital. If a person's value derived entirely from how they worked with others, that individual became the sum of what others did.

At the same time, one person couldn't do what many could. Seeing Torix struggle with the guild's management was a prime example of that. Like with a lot of things, erring to the side of balance worked best. Either way, I checked out Iona's title to see her level.

Iona Joan, Schema's Ambassador | Level 23,102 | Class: Administrator | Guild: The Alliance of Speaker Associates for Schema Centered Goals...

The guild name was a mouthful. Before the next ruler stepped up, I considered talking with her to help out Torix. I sided against it since Torix hadn't exercised his full abilities yet. Our lich needed time to use the credits I handed him. If a few months passed and the guy still struggled with it all, I'd commission him some help. For now, I kept my faith in our lich. He helped us kill Yawm, and he'd kill at managing cities too.

The fourth new ruler walked up. As if writhing in pain, a condensed ball of eyes and teeth walked out. Twitching in pain or discomfort, the monstrous eldritch coursed out of the crowd. It drooled from several orifices, its body making my skin crawl and itch. It was like staring at a fleshy honeycomb.

It moved in a flash, the stony ruins under the beast smashing apart. It landed on the ascendant mana plate, and the beast went berserk. A restrained berserk, but berserk nonetheless. It frothed at the mouth and hissed out in rage and anger. Something within its body controlled the monster.

With its ironclad grip, it extended a telepathic pool out to everyone here. Unlike with Shalahora, this served as an invitation. Shalahora murmured,

"Ah...This is how it's done. To extend such a gentle hand is difficult."

I smiled, "Eh, you struggle because it's so easy to just rush over people. Everyone's so different in what they can handle, mind magic wise."

Shalahora considered himself, "Perhaps, but perhaps not. I believe the golemmites were made to be symbiotic, and that gentles their mind magic. My species...Where not made to be so kind."

A bit of pain lingered in Shalahora's last words, but I didn't ask for more details despite my curiosity. The Sovereign would say more if he wanted to. Instead of prying, I linked up to the telepathic construct, and a neutral voice spoke out,

"Hello. I am M-901. I am a golemite Seeker who has recently transitioned to the Founder class after finding a species without any true guidance. I am offering them an upheaval in exchange for small amounts of mental space in gifted individuals of their species."

I frowned. It sounded like he took advantage of some desperate race far off in the cosmos. The golemite rattled off, "And they are such a gifted people! The golemites, being as generous as we are, see their potential. In fact, I'm currently eradicating the mind of this eldritch-infested member."

The eldritch devolved under the ascendant plate. The mana ruined its mind, its nervous system, and its body. The beast bubbled and frothed, melting at the seams while the golemite spoke in a casual, unconcerned voice,

"And to my surprise, this Overseer has given me such a great opportunity here to dismiss this useless thing. Just look at this! This eldritch doesn't stand a chance. Truly, Schema is mighty and deserving of recognition."

A chill ran up my spine, the golemite talking like an advertisement. The golemite pulled itself out of the eldritch mass, the monster letting out exhausted groans in a heaping slop. The golemite, on the other hand, manifested as an ethereal blot of mana condensed into a series of glowing, compact cubes.

These squares moved about and shifted like someone solving a Rubik's cube. It ebbed out, "Anyone willing to partner up with a golemite is a friend, so please, talk with me after if you wish to share your mind with us. You may one-day host multiple golemites and rise to the status of an abyssal if you do. You'll never know if you don't try."

A murmur rang out through the crowd of rulers. I leaned towards Shalahora, "What's an abyssal?"

The misty mass beside me writhed while it said, “The golemites extend a person’s mana pool and mind by hosting their form in a person’s body. They...Are exceptionally strong-willed and determined...Eerily so.”

Shalahora shivered, fear racing through the Sovereign, “The golemites are an odd group of sentients...The Abyssals they speak of are legendary, rivaling Avatars in power... Many open themselves to the golemites in pursuit of that status.”

Shalahora’s pale blue eyes bore on the golemite. Shalahora murmured, “But the golemites...They are like a dogma given life. They exist to pursue a strange religion that is incomprehensible...I have seen many fall to their cause...Few have risen, yet they are spoken of throughout the cosmos.”

I raised a brow, “Ah, so the golemites are like Elysium and Lehesion then.”

Shalahora tilted his head at me, “How are they similar?”

I peered off, “The Adairs used a...A colossal telepathic tether to control Lehesion. They also imbued Lehesion with some kind of psionic fluid, probably based on the Old ones. I think that because the fluid is resilient stuff. Even after being disintegrated multiple times, that tether’s lock never even so much as waned.”

I blinked, “That being said, Lehesion leaned into the remnants as a new identity.” I frowned, remembering Lehesion’s eclipse attack. I simmered, “If you ask me, Lehesion was escaping all the mistakes he made in his second and first lives. He ended up killing his previous lover and committing many atrocities. He wasted his opportunity. I aim not to do the same.”

Shalahora condensed and dispersed, his body turning more real or intangible as he did. It murmured, “A lesson, surely...You’re next to announce yourself...Luck be given to you.”

I smiled, “Eh, I’ll try.”

Schema spoke up through the crowd, “All of you know the golemites and their powers, so there’s no need to elaborate further. The final and newest ruler class may step up.”

The Overseer pointed at me. Unlike the other rulers, the ascendant Overseer snapped its fingers, sending over some kind of dimensional ripple. A chunk of the ruins and the air around me appeared on the ascendant plate of mana. I raised an eyebrow, remaining unaffected by Schema trying to jerk me around.

The other ruler class members whispered.

I hovered myself over to the ascendant plate of mana. As my feet made contact, the ascendant mana flooded into my body. It overflowed with the umbral crystal that Shalahora left behind. Through my feet, the energy flowed into my body. It left my skin glowing from its radiance, about three cipher's worth of power here.

My armor grinned as the energy writhed inside my blood and bones. The ascendant mana shouted out with madness, wishing for death and destruction. I tilted my head at the noise before quashing the lunacy of the tiny mana blot. I raised a hand, the ascendant mana flooding into my palm. I smashed it in my hand, arcs of lightning streaking out.

I took a breath, mana flooding into my body. I pulled my helmet off my face, breathing out the red mist. I smiled at everyone, a glint in my eye,

"I'm Daniel Hillside, the Harbinger of Cataclysm, but you can all just call me Daniel for short."