

New World 91

Chapter 91: The Final Rift

Hod raised his wings, “But Hod can fly. Harbinger not able to fly, so Hod go faster than Harbinger.”

I charged my runes, getting them ready for travel, “Well, I got this new skill that lets me move fast. It should level the playing field, and I wanted to see just how much a difference it made.”

Hod clasped his hands into three-fingered fists, “Then Hod crush Harbinger under talon foot...Hod not literally crush Harbinger. Hod figuratively crush Harbinger...Hmmm... What Hod meant-”

I raised a palm to him, “I get it Hod. It’s just some friendly competition. There’s nothing wrong with that.”

I opened my mini-map at the corner of my screen. Since the quarantine zone shrunk so much, we didn’t need to take the sewer for as long this time. We could have a reasonable distance for the race instead of just a few feet towards the nearest manhole. A shorter race suited Hod since he had no ramp up time. A longer race suited me since I got faster and faster with time.

So after letting Hod know where we were going, we both set into our starting positions. He ducked down, raising his wings and head up at a forty five degree angle. I set up in a sprinter’ stance.

“Alright Hod, whenever you jump up, I’ll start running too. Whoever gets there first wins.”

Hod nodded before shooting off the ground. I sprinted forwards right after. Once I got a few strides away from Torix’s lair, I shot off the ground. Leaving a quake and deafening boom behind me, I flew through the air. Hod already put some distance between us, though my leap closed that gap by quite a bit.

Once I dived into the earth and jumped again, Hod stopped flying faster than I was leaping. After the third leap, I closed in on him. Three leaps later and I passed by him. As I did, I passed within earshot of him,

“Who’s got wings now?”

Hod looked at me as I passed by him, a look of utter shock spread on his face,

“Hod not know Harbinger fly too. Hod fly longer though. Hod knows the sky, and Hod knows the wind.”

Hod flapped his wings, flying further up into the sky. By burning through his stamina, he raised himself far into the sky. I dived into the ground before making another leap. As I shot back up through the air, Hod glided downwards. He pressed his arms against his sides and built up speed before swooping up.

He shot over the tops of the houses, just above most buildings. With his maneuver, he shot passed me again. Not wanting a loss, I racked my brain for a solution. Over time, I would beat Hod regardless because of how fast he got. The race wasn’t much longer now though. We were almost to the sewer cover Torix set up for us.

With a split second decision, I landed on the ground before swimming through it. This was my final gambit for the race. Instead of flying out at a forty five degree angle, I kept the angle much closer towards the ground. This meant less of the overcharging was shooting me upwards and more was being used on going forward.

I shot out of the ground, drilling through a few tree branches and the walls of a house. They didn’t slow me in the slightest as my speed increased. The ground came back much faster this time since I wasn’t in the air as long as before. I slid into the ground before making another leap.

A bonus I hadn’t expected with this new method was wasting less mana. I could only overcharge my runes so much before they stopped taking mana in. Since my last stat boost, I couldn’t leap enough to disperse my mana in time. That meant some of the mana was wasted.

With more frequent leaps, the endless spring of my mana could be used to its fullest. I shot in and out of the earth. My speed built several times faster than before, ramping up at a rapid pace before a notification appeared on my screen,

Breakthrough Achieved! The coming Tide(lvl 3)→(lvl 28)

It was a nice surprise as I slammed against the side of a skyscraper. The windows of the building shattered as my telekinetic wave wobbled the ten floor building. It wasn't some massive building, but causing it to shift at all was a feat of strength.

Behind the skyscraper, the quarantine barrier went high into the sky. Far off explosions echoed. Bursts of blue and green plasma caused the spreading sounds. Gunfire gave everything a pattern of white noise, almost masking every other normal sound. Beetles drilled through nearby streets, racing off into the heat of battle. Some carried supplies and others were going to kill.

There was a war waging behind me. That knowledge put some fire under my feet. Beneath me was the manhole cover. I jumped off the side of the building, crushing the pavement under my feet like playdough. A minute later, Hod arrived.

He spread his wings wide, the drag on his feathers slowing him down before his feet dragged on the road. He dug two trenches as they tore through the pavement too. Hod turned to me,

"Harbinger fast, faster than Hod. Hod not know Harbinger holding back."

I kicked up the manhole cover, snatching it with a hand,

"Naw, I just got lucky and got a breakthrough in one of my skills."

Hod walked up to the sewer cover, "Ahhh. Hod understand. Hod get those all the time."

He jumped into the sewer before I did the same. As we ran through the tunnels, I asked,

"What kind of breakthroughs are you getting?"

Walking up walls and shooting past concrete and brick, Hod shrugged,

“Harbinger know the easy ones. Hod get Flight skill, Dirk Mastery skill, even the Eldritch Infestation skill. Hod get all kinds of skills since coming to new world.”

I blinked at the sound of the last skill, “What is the Eldritch Infestation skill?”

Hod shook his head, “Hod not really know exact answer. Hod know it as rage. Hod let voices in head take over mind. Voice fight for Hod. Hod take back control after fight over.”

My stomach sank, “Wait a second Hod...you’re letting voices in your head take over your body...then they’re giving you back control?”

Hod nodded, “Hod not think about it like that, but Hod agree with Harbinger.”

I frowned, my brain setting off at the realization. If what Hod said was true, his whole mana poisoning thing hadn’t been mana poisoning. It was the eldritch taking over. If it finished, Hod would become a level 1000+ eldritch running around.

Stopping it wouldn’t be that hard though. Our group already had a resident who was under the constant threat of being consumed by eldritch. Using her as an example, I tore off a strip of my armor as we ran along. I made the strip of armor into a ring, using my flow of mana for added strength as I bent the metal.

After finishing the ring, I pulled out my grimoire from my own spatial ring. I carved a few runic letterings as we ran. Hod badgered me as I did,

“Hod wonder, how is Harbinger writing in book while running?”

I glanced up from the runic lettering, noticing the passing scenery. I glanced at Hod,

“Well, some things you do are very time consuming and difficult. If you can turn those hard things into skills, they don’t take up as much space in your mind. That lets you do more stuff than would be able to do otherwise.”

I stared back down at my grimoire, “In this case, I’m just running with my mythical skill, The Coming Tide. It doesn’t take any thought to make it work. Instead of looking up, I’m using my mini-map as a guide. That lets me write in my grimoire as I run. It saves me some time.”

A burst of white fog emitted from Hod’s eyes,

“Hod not understand how Harbinger so smart. Hod impressed.”

The complement threw me off from my runic carving. I never considered myself as very smart. I could get by with a bit of willpower and some brute strength on most occasions. Outsmarting my foes? That had never been my forte. With the surge in stats, particularly willpower and intelligence, my smarts grew quite a bit.

Interrupting my thoughts, Hod slipped on a vine before smashing into a concrete wall. I dismissed his compliment, remembering who it came from. Hod shook his fist,

“Vine outsmart Hod this time. Next time Hod outsmart vine!”

I doubted the likelihood of that ever happening. I shook my head, homing back in on the runic carvings. Once I finished the basic inscription for a conduit, I channeled a bit of my mana into the grimoire. The letters glided off the page before I imprinted them onto a ring I made for Hod.

Blood of Tribute(lvl requirement: 500) – This ring allows mana to be siphoned off to its creator, The Harbinger of Cataclysm. +5 endurance, willpower, constitution, and strength for one minute with the sacrifice of 100 or more mana. If ambient mana is controlling the wearer of this ring, then the ring cannot be removed.

The ring ended up doing what I wanted a bit more. I put my grimoire into my spatial ring, being careful with the precious artifact. I let Hod catch back up, tossing him the ring,

“Here Hod. Put this on. Whenever you feel like that black aura is choking you, just put the mana through this. My armor will just eat it.”

Hod put the ring on one his right hand, “Hod like shiny things. Hod thank Harbinger.”

Hod put the ringer onto his finger, but his hand lurched backward.

“Hod not understand why Hod’s hand not want ring. Hod stronger than Hod’s hand though.”

He jammed the ring on his finger. Teeth on the rings inner lining jammed into Hod’s finger as he howled,

“Hod’s finger right. Bad ring. Bad Ring!”

I laughed a bit as we raced forward. The ring biting into his finger was unexpected, but it was necessary. If there was some menacing eldritch trying to kill Hod from the inside, then my armor would handle it. Any kind of energy I sent at my armor, it just soaked that shit right up. It was a nice, reliable way of handling this stuff.

The only problem with my armor so far had been the voice in my head. It showed a lot of similarities with Hod and Althea’s voices. I don’t actually think it’s the armor though. I think it’s just some property of my mana. I rationalized it like this. My armor was something weird. Since that was a part of me, I was weird. Therefore, it made sense that my mana was weird as well.

That meant in great quantities, my mana could take on a life of its own. It reminded me of the ambient mana found in dungeons or that made up the eldritch. With my superior control of mana now though, the voice of the mana was nothing now. It meant I could just overpower it with ease.

Hod and Althea didn’t focus on learning magic like I had. Their own manas were still rampant within them, so they depended on someone else for control. Having that control made me appreciate my inflated willpower and intelligence too. Having a well rounded build came with more perks than just being able to punch harder.

Punching harder was something I would need soon though. As we reached deeper into Yawm's domain, gargantuan roots reached into the sewer. Veins of green energy pulsed up through the roots, towards some unseen center. Most of the plants wilted towards these roots like they were being drained. What made it strange was how some plants weren't wilting at all.

Noting that oddity, Hod and I reached our destination. From here, closing in on the rift would require going out of the safety of the sewer. We crawled out as Hod reformed into his stronger, shadow form. He turned to me as we left,

"Hod take lead. Hod quiet."

I nodded as we skulked through the cityscape. High-rises rose up into the gray cloud beside us. The world tree's roots, larger than houses, segmented the city into some kind of labyrinth. The gray cloud covering the world tree was like some ominous wall. The largest buildings were halfway outside it like they were struggling to escape.

The roots crawled through the giant structures, like vines crawling through someone's eyes and skin. They invaded the scenery, pulses of green creating earthquakes each time they pulsed up towards the cloud. Our destination was inside the cloud of gray. Hod shivered,

"This...this is the corruption?"

A wave of fear ran up my spine, "Yes. This is Yawm's world tree. He's really fucking things up right about now."

Hod dashed into the cloud. I followed him. It was the same sensation as entering a rift. The icy needles dashing into my skin, the change in feel, it was all there. As we ran closer, everything lightened. All the roots leading towards the world tree's center were off the ground. The center of it was off the ground.

After going a bit deeper inside, I found a stone floating in the air. It was a rock in the middle of an alleyway. There was no source for it floating, so I assumed one of Yawm's followers found us. With Hod and I on high alert, I analyzed the nearby area with Tactile Cognition. Keeping it on at all times would be an excellent use of my time.

I made a note of that, I reached out with the skill and surveyed nearby. There were other stones floating within the buildings and deeper into Yawm's lair. Once I was satisfied with our security, I let Hod walk up and touch the stone. When he touched it, the stone floated off, like it was weightless.

It pulled back, orbiting some central point before resting back where it remained. It was a surreal scene, even by comparison with some of the crazy shit I've seen.

"Hod amazed. Stone learn to fly too. Hod flying no longer special."

I rolled my eyes as we skulked through alleyways into the masked metropolis. True to what I saw with my skill, other objects floated too. Cars, lights, roots, nothing escaped the grasp of these random fluctuations in space-time. With no idea of what the fuck was going on, we slowed down our pace.

I surveyed everything I could with Tactile Cognition, keeping myself aware as possible. Hod sniffed the air, black drool leaking from his mouth. His unblinking eyes bore into everything around him, like the eyes of a hunting wolf. The deeper we tread, the greater the size of the floating objects.

Without any warning, we passed the wall of gray mist, letting us see ahead. My connection with Schema severed. I hardly even noticed.

Hundreds of feet high, floating islands were kept together by vines and the roots of the world tree. The sky surrounding the islands was red like the other rifts. Each of the islands was covered in lush greenery, tiny jungles forming on each island. Throngs of flying creatures dashed between these islands.

Each of them shifted around, odd and strange, like monsters that crawled out of an abstract painting. They fought amongst themselves, their disfigured forms writhing in flight. Between the islands, the world tree's roots created bridges.

Giant insects and monsters crawled along those bridges, migrating from island to island. Clouds of mist floated like the islands, creatures reaching out and breathing deep breaths of the wet air. Glancing at the red sky, Hod's jaw opened as he stared,

"Hod has never seen a place like this."

I gaped at the sight too,

“Neither have I.”

We walked into the rift. Once the awe of the place faded, Hod turned to me, “Hod going ahead. Harbinger catch up?”

I shook off the shock of the sights, “Yeah, yeah, of course.”

He dashed up, a wave of sound echoing from his feet as he stomped into the ground. There was no message from Torix about the followers, so I charged my runes and leaped up. We reached the first island, our landings causing it to shift off course. The floating island crashed into the one beside it, sending a flurry of birds up and out of their resting spots.

From around us, giant insects crawled out of the earth. The birds swarmed around us, circling us like vultures. Disfigured creatures opened their eyes from within trees. A nearby beetle crawled up to us. It was a vibrant yellow with red eyes. It spread its wings, and as they buzzed, they flashed with light.

As it squirmed around, the monster left after images. Looking at it made me feel drunk, almost throwing me off balance. The two horns on the side of its head grabbed a car covered in forestry. The monster clamped through the steel, the glass windows crumpling before shook its head.

The sides of the car crashed into trees near us.

Adult Solar Beetle(lvl 988) – Thriving on the energy of the sun, these beetles are worthy foes. When found in groups, even veteran sentients should be cautious. Their movements leave after images, creating illusions behind them.

These can cause disorientation, along with a sense of weakness. The shimmering wings act as a second layer to this sensory overload. When utilized in a group, these illusions can become overwhelming. Grown sentients may be brought to their knees by as little as a dozen of these monsters.

Outside of that, their raw power is nothing to scoff at. They lack the same speed of other high level creatures, but the slow approach is made up by their disorientation and raw strength. Once they've grabbed a hold on you, the beetles will hold on like bulldogs. Once they've piled on you, they vibrate their bodies and roast you alive.

Your willpower is plenty high enough to resist this onslaught on your senses. Based on your current skillset, you can cover your eyes and avoid the disruptive powers of the insect regardless. Respect them, but enjoy the experience.

Several of the other solar beetles crawled out of the ground. Above the circling birds closed the gaps around us, created a picture. It was a shifting, abstract painting that messed with the senses like the beetles did. One of the birds left the encirclement, landing beside us.

The head was like two isosceles triangles jammed together at random angles. The entire thing was sharp, angular, and alien. Two eyes pointed in different directions, the amber irises turning towards us. The monster's wings were the only part of it that even made sense.

Strong muscles rippled under the apricot colored skin, feathers of the same color making a sleek, efficient wing. A mouth full of jagged, white teeth lined its face. As the mouth opened, it let out a high pitched roar and a smell like death. The system finally came through.

Abstraction(lvl 1103) – A monster built from hyper condensed fragments of ambient mana. They don't deserve such a high danger rating on their own. It's what they signal and just how dangerous they are In a group.

When you see an abstraction, the very beginnings of a fringe world are forming. A rift has broken open to a point where closing it no longer sends the entire dungeon back. Whatever spot has been tainted will be tainted until an overseer can come in and fix the issue. If too much time passes, this spot can no longer be completely fixed.

That is why these monsters are given danger level ratings above their abilities. It is to attract adventurers into a dangerous rift and close it before it's too late. That is unless they are seen in large swarms. These creatures create ambient mana that can speed up the evolution of other eldritch.

Kill them as quickly as you physically can if they swarm around you. Otherwise, they will rapidly develop the enemies around you into monsters you can no longer slay.

On cue, Hods slashed through the face of the abstraction. Dark orange blood gushed from its face, splashing over Hod and I. The solar beetle nearby grew another pair of wings and legs. The head of the creature split open, writhing mandibles reaching for us. The sickening crack and lurching sound of the beetle was like biting into a rock in your food.

Several other beetles crawled from the trees as Hod turned to me, his eyes red,

“Come, Harbinger. Now is the time for slaughter.”

And so it was.

Chapter 92: Dimensional Cipher

My ascendant mana flared into my armor as I reached out with oppression. My armor grinned with me, The beetle charged towards me, but I pivoted on my feet while dragging a fist from behind me. Volatile Carnage and Boundless Storm synergized, creating a massive impact as my fist collided with the beetle.

My fist bounced off the telekinetic pad, shooting a small, dense bullet of kinetic force into the creature. This bullet punched a hole in the monster’s armor, dispersing the force inside it. The monster’s disgusting body exploded. The flashing lights and odd illusions faded away. Before the other beetles joined into a single creature, I covered my eyes and ears with my armor.

Using a sense of smell, I created a map of what was going on around me. The solar beetles swarmed from all sides, like a swarm of scarabs. The abstractions flowed through the air, turning the air dense as the ambient mana pooled. Hod’s scent lessened, as if the shadow was overwhelming him.

A torrent of the mana poured from the ring’s connection with me, verifying my thoughts. Before any more damage could be done, I shot forward into the swarm of beetles. Without my eyes and ears, my precision lacked. My new mythical, The Coming Tide, let me pierce through the trees, roots, and vines with ease though.

I reached a cluster of the solar beetle's scent. A pair of mandibles shot out towards me. I twisted on my heels, driving a fist straight into the monster's attack. A splash of wet blood covered me. Another pocket of beetle scent came closer. I ducked under the smell, stomping on a heel and twisting an uppercut into the scent.

Another splash of liquid poured over me. Fresh and warm, my armor soaked in the wet feeling until I was dry again. I smelled further, picking out the shapes of the monsters. The slight variations in heat made their mark, letting me pick out their shapes. I waved oppression over the blots of heat near me. I felt the vibrations of screaming through my armor.

On my mini-map, Hod was a good distance away, letting use all of my skills. Three of the beetles snapped towards me at once, two from my sides and one from in front of me. I fell into the ground, ducking under their attacks. Using The Coming Tide, I shot out of the ground and grabbed the two beetles at my sides. I clapped them together over my head, using a gravity vortex to smash them together.

A rain of blood pouring over me. From behind me, a much larger beetle came out of the trees. It may have been a warrior variant. It didn't matter. This large beetle and the beetle in front of me pincer towards me. I lifted my legs and kicked off the beetle in front of me using the coming tide. While movement was its main use, the impact was a worthy weapon regardless.

The beetle crumbled under my heels, firing me into the larger beetle behind me. Warmth and wetness covered me from all sides. I swam through its flesh, gliding through just as I glide through the earth. As I burst out of the creature, I landed onto its back. Two beetles flew away from me, their scents waning.

I jumped with The Coming Tide, the large beetle beneath me turning to mush. Firing up, I stiff armed both the beetles. I molded my armor as if I was slicing through the ground. This let me cleaved the beetles in two, their bodies no longer holding their insides. As I fell back down to the ground, I uncovered my eyes and ears.

Breakthrough achieved! Tactile Cognition(lvl 42)→(lvl 67)

A rush of senses came from my eyes and ears. I decimated the beetles in seconds, their corpses spread around us. Hod killed the abstractions one by one, slicing them apart with his shadows. With piercing, sharp cries, the abstractions poured ambient mana into him. As they did, the mana fed from my ring.

If I hadn't of made the ring, Hod would've died many times already. With that tiny bit of foresight, I turned one of Hod's biggest weaknesses into a strength. The extra ambient mana was like a stream of infinite mana, empowering Hod's shadows. I shifted oppression onto the low flying abstractions, joining in on the fun.

They cried in pain like a chorus of breaking glass. I shot off the ground, slamming myself towards them. They dispersed around me, avoiding my attack. They didn't avoid my gravity wells. I pulled a cluster of the abstractions down onto the earth, like two nets full of fish. I landed on the ground, pulling the wells behind me.

Before the abstractions landed, I ended the two gravity well's pulls. The abstractions collided with the earth as I dashed towards the cluster to my right. One of the abstractions lifted itself off the ground. The odd, angular body looked around, its eyes darting around on its head. Once they saw me coming, the monster clamped its mouth towards me.

My fist bounced back off a telekinetic field I placed right on its face. The telekinetic bullet broke the monster's jagged teeth before the monster's skull blew backwards. Other abstractions crawled towards me, snapping at what they thought was a meal. How wrong they were.

I spun on my heels and slid on my feet as my fists beat them to pieces. I weaved between their attacks. I kept within my range of attack, timing my punches with a pristine clarity. I shot int and out of the ground, the entire battlefield my playground. I dragged the monsters into the dirt, choking them in it. I fed the floating island their gunky, apricot colored blood.

They stood no chance, their lean forms unable to withstand the brutal hammer my own body had become. It was a weapon I wielded, and I wielded it with deadly intention. Once they were culled, I leapt up and dragged another group of the monsters down with me. With Hod and I slaughtering them from above and below, we left them no escape.

The beetles kept coming from other nearby islands. Between our massacre of the abstractions, Hod and I crushed the beetles in waves. The numbers were endless. As time passed, I grew worried that the followers would come. Torix kept them busy though, keeping our losses minimal no doubt.

The killing turned routine after a while. Hod gained levels and allocated his points in the middle of the fight, letting him kill more and more. I didn't need the attributes yet, letting me focus entirely on slaying the hordes. Hod overloaded on his mana the entire time we fought, but my ring kept him from turning.

Eventually the bodies turned into nuisances. The piles of corpses were like some maze made of flesh. At the apex of the problem, I changed my killing tactics. If I could, I would drain the enemy with my armor while it was alive. In between the incessant fighting, I cleaned up the corpses, giving me room to fight.

In the end, it didn't matter. My mythical skill let me burrow through the corpses without struggle. After diving into the last body of an abstraction, I burst out of it from the inside. I never imagined using The Coming Tide like that, but the effect was too devastating to miss out on. As the guts of the monster splattered around me, Hod landed beside me.

Black drool dripped from his mouth, and his chest heaved. He seemed fine though as he spoke in a low growl,

"Hod fine. Hod not like flying monsters. Flying monsters make voices scream in Hod's head."

He lifted his hand, the ring biting into his finger. Black blood dripped from his hand, "Hod thank Harbinger for bad ring. Bad ring save Hod."

I devoured the bodies around me with my armor, "I'm glad you talked about it earlier, otherwise I'd have to fight you...Damn that would suck."

Hod shivered, "Yes, Hod not want to fight Harbinger. Harbinger too brutal for Hod."

I soaked up another body of an abstraction, the ambient mana dense as honey. I frowned, "Well damn. I'm not that bad...am I?"

Hod walked with me as I cleaned up the corpses, feeding my armor,

"Well, Hod believe Harbinger precise. Harbinger fight like warrior, just monster warrior, not human warrior."

I shrugged, “Eh, we all fight like that, except Torix of course. Fighting him is like fighting a textbook.”

Hod turned to me, a look of dead seriousness on his face, “Then Hod struggle against Dry Man the most. Books are too hard for Hod.”

I laughed as I finished cleaning up the battlefield. I glimpsed at Hod. He was level 1331, around two hundred levels higher than when he first arrived on earth. He outleveled Torix now. Seeing his spike in levels, I looked at my own. I was level 1500, a nice, clean number for once. I gained a fuckload of levels from fighting these things, the abstractions and enhanced solar beetles paying off in spades.

It almost shocked me how easy gaining levels was right now. I remember struggling just to gain a single level when Schema first arrived. This ease made some sense once I thought about it for a bit.

Abstractions were considered unknowns, and the first tier of Obliterator doubled my experience from them. The quarantine zone doubled experience gained too. To top it all off, my new Obliterator tree nearly doubled my total experience gained. That wasn’t even including my Ancient tree bonus.

I was gaining about five times the experience of a normal individual. If I wasn’t gaining levels fast, than a normal person might as well give up on leveling. Someone like Torix, with his experience penalties might as well laugh at the idea of leveling. Even with all my bonuses, the experience would no doubt slow down from here on out.

Killing lower level enemies simply wasn’t an effective way of gaining levels. By level 1600, I would need to kill a hundred abstractions for a single level. In order to keep gaining levels, I needed stronger enemies to fight.

In this case, the followers would be my next big step. Ready myself for that, I checked out my status and poured all my attribute points into endurance. They clinked into place before I selected finalize.

Every aspect of myself improved. My strength, my mind, the vivid sharpness with which I controlled myself, it all enhanced. Spread throughout every part of my flesh,

the arcane chains ebbed a faint glow. It was a subtle difference in how I looked, but I understood the significance behind it.

Soaking in the changes, I opened my status screens.

Level 1500

Strength – 1353 | Constitution – 1721 | Endurance – 4006

Dexterity – 430 | Willpower – 2319 | Intelligence – 831.2

Charisma – 102.4 | Luck – 273.3 | Perception – 199

Health 248,360/248,360 95,506/min or 1,592/sec

Phys Dam Reduction – 98% Stamina 120,771/120,771 1,319/sec Elemental Res – 98% Harbinger of Cataclysm 21.28 Billion/56.6 Billion 74.3/per min (conduit) Plasma Res – 98% Oppression Damage- 15,000 + 80% hp/min Rad Res – 98% Phys Dam Bonus – 14,639% | Total Damage Bonus 20% Mental Res – 98%

My regeneration stats and health skyrocketed as usual. Since I hit 4000 endurance, my regeneration stats scaled better. That meant my health regen was even higher now. Eager to test it out, I flared my runes.

After ramping them up for a few seconds, they overcharged in a few seconds. Before I realized it, the runes covering my body cracked. No longer able to hold the flow of mana, they shattered. The flood of ascendant mana ebbed from me, lightning arcing in every direction. A deep, dark fury filled my blood and bones in an instant.

I wanted to kill and crush. I wanted to maim and murder. I wanted to rip out guts and drink blood. The roaring voices of my own mana filled my mind, echoing like a storm in my head. The rush of strength that came from channeling the runes dissipated though, leaving me weakened. With a burst of willpower, I silenced the fervor as I died down my mana.

Hod jumped backwards while raising his hands, “Hod wonder why Harbinger so angry? Did Hod walk too funny for Harbinger?”

I shook my head, shaking out the injection of anger, “No Hod, you’re fine. My runes broke I guess. I honestly don’t know.”

I lifted an arm, inspecting a rune. The edges of the runes were marred, the runes caving in. Whenever I tried pouring mana into them, the mana just ebbed outwards. I frowned, wondering if it was my armor. I regenerated my armor, healing the runes into nothing. With a blank slate before me, I carved a basic rune for power into my arm.

A second later, I flared mana into it. The outer lining of the glyphs cracked. The mana flared out. This time I was ready for the anger, so I smashed it with my will while sighing. I opened my spatial ring, pulling out my grimoire. Hod paced up behind me, looking over my shoulder,

“What Harbinger doing?”

I molded my left hand into a pen of sorts, “I’m going to write some more runes. I wouldn’t normally mind, but doing it in the middle of a rift isn’t very convenient.” I glanced around at the other floating islands, “Especially when we’re pressed for time.”

Hod grabbed his beak, “Hod wonder, Hod wonder...Harbinger read Dry Man’s message? Dry Man promise three days. Dry Man reassess assault and use Lady Friend for gathering information.”

I frowned, looking Hod over. With shadows covering his enlarged body and the red sheen on his eyes, he was an intimidating figure. Those were superficial differences though. I took a long, hard look at him. More meaningful differences cropped up. His posture was different, along with how he spoke and how aware he was.

This version of Hod was cunning by comparison, and he stood up straighter. I assumed that was from being stronger, but after hearing him for a bit more, I doubted it. He remembered things a bit too clearly, especially for the normal Hod. I narrowed my eyes,

“I don’t think you’re Hod...Not when that mana’s coursing through you at least.”

Hod didn't react at first. I kept looking at him, my gaze piercing. His left arm twitched before I stepped up to him. I was half a head taller than him now. Hod stumbled back,

"Hod not know what Harbinger mean. Hod still Hod. Hod promise."

His breathing was ragged now, like I was pressing on a nerve. I shook my head glancing off at a floating island, "Yeah, alright. Maybe I'm pressing too hard. I can get paranoid sometimes, especially with how ridiculous everything is."

I looked at him, "It can just be hard to choose who to trust is all."

Hod nodded, staying quiet. His head lowered with his shoulders. It was like a child being caught stealing. I stepped away from him, letting him breathe like normal. The eldritch side of him hadn't betrayed me yet, and I didn't want to give him a reason too. I did want to make it very clear that I knew he wasn't Hod.

If he knew that, he would be less likely to act out any nefarious plots he was planning. Perhaps I was being a bit too cautious, but I didn't want him turning on me at random. With that handled, I went back to carving as we walked.

We walked along the vines of several islands, finding quite a few islands now empty. Our fight attracted many of the denizens on nearby islands. The smaller, less violent life remained after. Several of the flowers had piercing colors. So piercing that they didn't even look real. It's hard to even describe.

It was like my brain was trying to perceive a new color, but it couldn't. Nearby plants and fruits moved towards us as we walked by. A purple monkey with red skin on its face swung from a tree before swallowing one of the fruits coming near us. Blood poured from the monkey's mouth before it fell down. The roots from nearby trees dug into the eyes and mouth of the monkey.

It drained into a dry husk. I sighed before opening up oppression. The aura killed the plant life and weakened creatures on contact. I didn't want normal people near any of this. Hod murmured under his breath,

"And the Harbinger leaves death in his wake."

I rolled my eyes. I preferred the ridiculous, fun Hod rather than the melodramatic, edgelord Hod. This version was the better fighter though, so I dealt with it. After reaching about ten islands deeper into the dungeon, Hod spoke,

“Hod is tired. Hod need rest.”

I bit my lip before turning to him, “Can it wait till after the dungeon?”

He shook his head, “No. Hod can barely stand.”

I tapped my teeth together before sighing. I nodded, “Yeah, yeah, sorry. Go ahead and sleep. I’ll keep guard while you rest.”

Hod nodded before breathing out a plume of black smoke. He fell sideways, sprawled out on the ground. As he snored, I kept oppression on around us. I didn’t want beetles digging into his insides while I was carving my runes.

The red sky dimmed, turning a deeper red before becoming night. With insects chirping around me, I flared the ascendant mana into my helmet. My eye slit bathed the book in a deep red, letting me see in the dark. With some free time on my hands, I would be putting my first real dent into the eldritch runes tonight.

I kept studying them all this time. Of course I devoted most of my time to fighting and other pursuits, but this was a black eye for me. Every other facet I tried at, I excelled. The eldritch runes kicked my ass at least five times now though and for months on end. I wouldn’t let that continue.

Spurring me even further was the limits of my current runes. Torix must have never ran into the limits of the runic language for magic. That’s why he never needed to learn the eldritch runes. I needed them though. They were the next step in my progress.

Unfortunately for me, progressing with normal methods wasn’t working. If I was going to get anywhere, I needed to take some risks and experiment. If that meant I would need to take a limb off or the like, then so be it.

With that resolve planted into my head, I opened a few screens from my obelisk. I ran a few comparisons between the runes found in BloodHollow and the Sandworm desert.

After brushing up on the basics, I carved out a huge rune in the book. The detail required for these runes was infinitely greater than normal runes. Etching large letters gave me the breathing room I needed.

So I carved. On the first letter, I spent nearly an hour of time. My hand cramped from how subtle my movements needed to be. Once I finished with the edges, I focused on filling in the inner lining of the rune. That was an advantage of the grimoire. The book's flat page offered depth in my carving somehow, like the page was six inches deep.

With the ease of carving, the detail of my markings improved. As I etched into the sides of the carving, I concentrated on giving the rune meaning. The carving I was attempting was supposed to be about solidity and strength. I needed the same traits if I wanted to finish this text. I breathed out a deep breath, like I was trying to breath out my own weakness.

I eliminated everything else from my mind as I outlined the details into the rune. This rune was all that mattered. Everything else, the sights, sounds, and sensations fell away. All that mattered was this letter taking up a fourth of a page on this book. Making it perfect was everything at that moment.

Months of failure amounted to this. Months of trying, months of struggle, and months of frustration culminated in a single mark on a single page. It was like the stars were aligning as I continued. The rune took shape, becoming whole. Within it, something shifted around me. I couldn't exactly put my finger on it, but where I was changed.

It was like there was an electricity in the air. A moment later, the rune clicked in my head. It came to me like a rush of comprehension. What the rune was, what it meant, I understood what I was trying to write.

With the obsession of a madman, I marked into the page with flowing streaks of my hand. As I did, a tug at my mana began. This tug turned into a violent pull as my mana streamed into the grimoire. The single letter feasted on my flesh, gorging itself, satiating its hunger. I wrote through the process, my writing growing in speed and confidence.

Another hour passed before I finalized the lettering. As I did, the space around me shifted. The pull on my mana was even greater than my own generation of it. It wasn't enough to threaten me now, however. My health pool stopped draining downwards at

the halfway mark. I pulled up the page, into the red light of my slit. There was an eldritch letter.

Unknown skill unlocked! Dimensional Cipher(lvl 1) – Knowledge of this skill is prohibited by Schema. Using this skill is forbidden, and knowing this skill is forbidden. &\$%ERROR

You have broken one of the primary tenants of Schema's system. Sentient rights have been revoked. Leveling and further data uploads are hereby locked. You have been exiled.

Oh fuck.

Chapter 93: Hectic

I sat there, staring at the message. My minimap disappeared, along with my status. None of my strength waned or depleted, but I could feel the difference in potential. The data uploads that Schema made were my way of beating Yawm. Without any more progress, I had no idea for how in the hell I was going to beat Yawm.

The runes weren't supposed to do this. I spent so much time and effort learning them. They were my way of fighting Yawm, a secret weapon for me. All of a sudden the tables turned. The runes stripped me of one of my only advantages against an enemy far stronger than I was. I wish I could say I handled it well.

I didn't. I stood up, slamming my grimoire into the stone floor beneath me. The book cracked the rock, being harder than stone. In frustration I shouted,

"What the fuck am I supposed to do now?"

Hod slept like a corpse beside me, not even stirring as my outburst continued,

"Alright Schema, you tell me I can't leave and I have to kill a warrior king. I go at it, and now you cut me off from the system without even telling me the runes were off limits? Why didn't the overseer or sentinel's tell me? I didn't hide that shit. Why wasn't there some kind of warning?"

I balled up my fists and looked down, “I’m just a fucking kid. I’m not some god. I can’t do the impossible. I can’t kill this thing on my own. I need some help. You’re an omnipotent AI. Why not give me a helping hand?”

I fell backwards, flopping onto my back, “For fucks sake. I have given this brutal, gut wrenching system all that I’m worth, and this is what I get in return? An enormous middle finger. Great. Just fucking great.”

I raised two middle fingers towards the sky, “Go fuck yourself Schema. Go choke on an Old One’s galaxy sized dick.”

After that, I lowered my hands and just stared at the red sky. I was being immature, I know. It was frustrating though. Being exiled wasn’t the problem. The problem was that I wasn’t warned about it. Nowhere in the obelisk databases or in the skill tutorials is a dimensional cipher mentioned. How was I supposed to know it resulted in immediate exile if no one ever told me.

It wasn’t like I was hiding my knowledge of the runes or my attempts at learnign them. It sucked because I always thought Schema was fair. Sure, Schema was demanding and ruthless, but if you did what it said, it would give you what you needed to succeed. This event proved me wrong. I grabbed the edges of helmet.

It reminded me that I didn’t need the system entirely. I still had my armor. If I got a few more evolutions, taking Yawm down wouldn’t be impossible. With a new plan for it my head already, I picked up my grimoire and set to work. If the runes got me in this mess, I might as well utilize them to their fullest. Right as I start carving, the space around me stretched. I froze in place. I couldn’t move. Even my eyes couldn’t move before the oppressive grip ceased.

I gasped a deep breath as I turned around. Hod was stuck in the middle of breathing, unable to move. Beside me, a dragonfly was stuck in the air, in the middle of flapping its wings. I reached out and touched it. Moving the dragonfly was impossible, like pressing my finger against a block of iron. A strong, clear voice spoke beside me,

“So you’re this Harbinger huh?”

I jumped backwards, rolling onto my feet and into a combat stance. In front of me was a nine foot tall humanoid dragon. His scales and eyes radiated a vibrant green. A violet colored electricity rippled over his scaled skin. He wore a fitted, black leather made from some giant, black reptile.

Each scale on his armor was the size of my fist. Straps and belts held an assortment of gear on him, from daggers made of teeth to swords made of cheekbones. At his side was an assortment of three potions. One was a potion that looked like a galaxy, one like lightning trapped in a bottle, and the last was a deep black. The black miasma in the bottle was like the energy between dimensions.

With a toothy grin, he smiled at me,

“My name is Tera. I’m an agent sent by Schema for you.” He looked at me, from head to toe, “So you’re Schema’s new walking corpse? That has to feel awful, but try to make the best of it. It might work out for you in the end.”

I narrowed my eyes, “Who are you?”

He fiddles with his status. A moment later, Tera raised a hand, pointing a finger over his head,

“I’ll let you see my title. It should tell you all you need to know.”

I looked at his titles. My jaw dropped.

Tera, the World Breaker(lvl 8,021)

My hands fell as I sighed, “So now I’m exiled and being killed for writing one fucking rune? Seriously?”

Tera laughed, “No, the opposite. You’re being admitted back into the system. Getting kicked is an automatic response generated by anyone that unlocks the skill. You’ve been given special clearance for it considering your circumstances.”

I blinked in surprise, “What, really?”

Tera nodded, “Yes, really. It wouldn’t make much sense if Schema told you to complete an S tier mission then took away your only tool for completing it. Schema is cruel, but he isn’t unfair. Most of the time.”

I gawked at his level as I spoke, “Well damn...How did you get that high a level, and what are you anyway?”

The giant dragon man messed with his status screen as he spoke, “I’m arguably the strongest member of the skeptiles. Well, very arguable. If you know anything about us, you know this violet aura is my arcane affinity. Abusing it is how I’ve gotten to the level I’m at.”

I nodded, “Yeah, percentage based true damage is broken.”

Tera shook his head and creased his face, “Speaking of broken, how is your health regeneration this high? It’s disgusting for your level...for any level if you’re lacking a class.”

I sighed, “It comes from all kinds of factors. Arcane blood, having ridiculous endurance and willpower, and having a bonus from my armor.”

Tera looked me over, “Ah, so that’s what it is. I’ve seen others try this build, though they always end up dying. This armor let you pull through, huh? I’ve never seen anything quite like it. No wonder Schema giving you clearance for the dimensional cipher. You’re wearing one right now.”

I looked at my hands, “Wait, I’m wearing what?”

Tera raised a horned crest over one of his eyes. They looked like eyebrows, just made of spines.

“You haven’t discovered what your armor is yet?”

I shook my head, “I thought it was just eldritch skin or something. That’s what it was called by Schema’s interface.”

Tera laughed, “Hah, hah, hah! Perhaps that’s its initial form, but that isn’t what it ends up as. You’re wearing the physical manifestation of dimension fabric. Weird, hah.”

My eyes dulled over a little bit, “What the hell does that even mean?”

Tera tapped my chest, “That is a tiny dimension that has fused together with you. It’s a powerful tool, whether you use it as a weapon or as armor.”

I molded my armor, creating ripples across it. I looked up at Tera, “It’s a damn dimension? Really now?”

Tera shook his head, “Believe me when I tell you I’ve seen many things. That dimensional fabric you’re wearing is one of the oddest.”

I lowered my hands, “Do you know anyone else like me?”

Tera shook his large jaw, the muscles in his neck rippling, “No. Keep feeding the dimension energy, just as Schema told you. The dimension will grow in size, enhancing its...abilities. I’m sure you’ll find them useful If you make it that far, that is.”

Tera opened his status and clicked a button.

Schema Initializing...System operational. Welcome Back Daniel Hillside.

The notifications came up once more, along with a new tree and a new a breakthrough in two of my skills.

Tera grinned at me, “Besides, you’ve just learned how to write with the dimensional cipher. As you master the language, you can mold that armor of yours into whatever you want. You should feel honored. It’s a great privilege that Schema’s granted you.”

I shrugged, “Eh, I mean Schema wants me to kill this beast named Yawm. I’m going to need at least this much.”

Tera's eyes opened wide, an inkling of fear creeping into his voice, "Did you say... Yawm? As in Yawm of flesh?"

A chill ran up my spine, "Uh, yeah." I pointed at the world tree, "He's right there."

Tera turned to the world tree, his face scales dimming from a vibrant emerald to a forest green. The violet energy pulsing from his skin dampened. His chest deflated. He turned to me, "He hasn't broken out of his world tree yet, has he?"

Tera was doing a pretty damn good job of masking his panic, but my enhanced senses caught wind of it. I bit my lip before answering, "Yeah, he's still stuck in there."

Tera sighed with relief before his chest inflated again.

"Good."

I tilted my head in amazement, "You're scared of him, aren't you?"

Tera stared at me, silent as a winter's night. When he spoke, his voice was solemn.

"I should be. I'm a Speaker. I don't fight monsters of Yawm's caliber. That's a Breaker's job. A team of Breakers, actually."

I raised an eyebrow, "A Breaker?"

Tera glanced at the world tree, "You've seen an overseer and sentinels no doubt?"

I nodded so he continued, "It works like this. A sentinel is an automaton. It has little to no free will. A Speaker is given complete freedom, but his level is capped at 9,000. A Breaker is given less freedom, but his level is capped at 12,000. An Overseer has a kill switch placed on him at all times, but his level is capped at 20,000."

Tera raised his hands, "That's the highest level thing I've seen Schema allow to exist. Outside of a privileged few. We'll never be getting there, however."

I shook my head, “There’s a level cap?”

Tera nodded, “Few know it even exists and far fewer have reached it. You’re looking at one of the few skeptiles who has gotten close.”

“So you’re impressive, and that’s great and all, but do you have any advice on how to kill Yawm?”

Tera grimaced, “Unfortunately no. Even arcane magic doesn’t work on him. He’s been working with the dimensional cipher for far too long now. I don’t understand why Schema believes you’ll be able to fight something like Yawm and win.”

My shoulders drooped, “Thanks for the support. Real motivating.”

Tera grinned, “That’s what I’m here for.” He opened his status, clicking a few buttons before glimpsing at Hod, “I have about fifteen minutes before I can handle my next assignment. I can answer some questions while I’m here if you’d like. I’m sure Schema and C-137 haven’t given you many answers.”

I shook my head, “Not even one.”

Tera bit his lip, “They prefer a limited knowledge network. It makes keeping information locked away easier. The dimensional cipher is one of the best examples of that.”

I showed him my rune in my grimoire, “Is there anyone who can show me a thing or two about this and how it works?”

Tera scoffed, “Not in a pragmatic sense. You aren’t going to find many beings that know it exists let alone have chosen to learn it. Schema takes a hardline stance against it. No doubt you’ve seen the effects of that, being exiled an all.”

Tera bored holes through Hod with a stare like razors. I walked up to Tera, “Uh, is Hod bothering you?”

Tera shook his head, growling, “No. I’m sorry. He reminds me of things I’d rather forget. Anyways, any other questions?”

I frowned, “Any ideas of how I could gain levels to kill Yawm? Maybe a few trees that are ridiculous?”

Tera shrugged, “From what I saw, you picked up the most important ones and a few extra that synergize with your build well. Your build fits together considering, almost as if you hired a higher level player to plan it out for you.”

I tapped my chest with a fist, “The only plan I need is dumb luck...For real though, thanks for taking the time to talk. A lot of higher level people don’t give me the time of day.”

Tera grinned at me, his sharp teeth white despite the darkness around him, “It’s better to build bridges than to burn them. Remember that.”

Tera’s eyes twitched up and sideways. He gave me a curt salute, “I’m needed elsewhere. Good luck versus Yawm. You’ll need it.”

Before leaving, Tera tossed the tiny black potion on his side at me. I snatched it out of the air as Tera grinned, “That should give you a little head start with your runes no doubt. Hopefully we’ll meet again some other time...Harbinger.”

Tera laughed at my title as violet portal opened for him. He stepped through it. Whatever it was that froze everything in place, it ended the moment the portal closed. The dragonfly darted through the air. Hod’s snoring entered my ears again, along with a dozen other sounds. Tera left as fast as he came.

I learned a lot from our conversation, but one thing stuck out in particular. Schema wanted me to do something. I had no idea what, but just knowing that was a huge help. With that in mind, I checked out my notifications.

Breakthrough Achieved! Overwhelming Presence(lvl 17)→(lvl 42)

Breakthrough Achieved! Words of Strength(lvl 19)→(lvl 44)

Those breakthroughs explained why I handled Tera so well. The fact that anyone out there was willing to give me a hand out for once was nice too. As much as I loved fairness and all that, I sure as hell needed some help now. In most video games, you get some rewards for quests. So far, the only quests I had were absurd and impossible.

I mean honestly, I didn't even really know how powerful items were in the system. Was there armor that was stronger than mine? How powerful did enchantments become? I didn't know because earth was pretty much stuck in the stone age. Well, at least compared with the rest of Schema's universe.

This jar full of black miasma was my first item that may actually be useful for me. With that in mind, I analyzed it.

Miasma Jar(???) – Holds the miasma of countless eldritch. Opening it will unleash the energy within.

It was probably just a bunch of ambient mana. My armor could eat it at some point. As I opened my spatial ring, a crack formed in the tiny bottle. I looked beside me, seeing if something caused. Nothing had. I reached out with Tactile Cognition and my gravity sensing skill.

There was nothing. Another crack formed in the glass. The bottle shook in my hand, a low squeal escaping the inside of it. Before I could throw the thing away, it sunk into the armor of my hand. Within the armor, the bottle leaked the energy of eldritch.

The cold, icy feeling spread through my limbs. A burning cold covered every inch of my skin, digging down into my bones. I fell on my knees, my hands trembling as the cold ignored my pain tolerance.

When I believed it would get no worse, the crack of shattering glass echoed into my ear. Imagine your blood freezing. Now imagine the shards of ice breaking into your bones and causing your skin to snap. That was what happened. Even with my pain tolerance and elemental resistance being high, the sharpness of the cold crippled me.

Once I gained an understanding of what was happening, I gripped my hands into fists. I gritted my teeth and stood upright. My armor writhed on me, harvesting the energy with reckless abandon. Spikes jutted from my armor, piercing into the ground as I

stumbled away from Hod. I pulled in oppression. Controlling it was impossible for now.

I fell onto the ground a hundred feet from Hod. As I sat there wheezing for breath, I remembered why I hated pain so much. It was consuming, like something that ate away at you. The agony steals a part of you until it ends. If the torment proved too excruciating, it becomes blinding. It's like pain is all there is. You become pain.

I have no idea how long that kind of pain lasted. It could have been seconds or hours. It didn't really matter. When it's that bad, seconds become hours anyway.

As the cold faded, so did the pain's grip on me. I returned from the excruciation, my mind and body feeling new and sensitive. My senses almost overwhelmed me as I stared around. Thank Jesus it wasn't bright and sunny. My poor eyes might have fallen out.

That's when I focused in front of me. There was a message waiting for me.

Evolutionary line, Harbinger of Cataclysm completed. Dimensional Cipher unlocked. New evolutionary line unlocked.

Evolution gained. Living Dimension unlocked. Evolve Y/N?

Chapter 94: In the Flesh(1)

I clicked yes. For once, the evolution began with no pain. The area around me stretched outwards, as if it was being forced out of place. Around me, the space rippled along with a fluctuation in gravity. This subtle change grew in magnitude, becoming a shifting field around me.

Everything around me became foreign. It was the same feeling I got in a rift, like I wasn't a part of where I was. I was something else intruding here, an entity that existed elsewhere. The difference made sensing gravity and fluctuations in it much easier.

Experimenting with the difference in feel, I stepped forward. As I did, the rippling field around me shifted too. I moved my hands through the air, noticing a pressure and pull that my limbs exerted. Before I took another step, a fresh, new kind of hell roared up my limbs.

The cold extinguished as a fire stampeded through my flesh and into my head. It consumed me, like falling into a vat of lava. Within seconds, my blood was magma and my bones were molten lead. I pulled back my helmet, gasping for air. I knew there was wind, yet I couldn't feel it. This horrific burning wouldn't let me notice anything else.

My blood thickened. An awareness of it pressed into my mind like a drill. Within the nerves lining my body, metal tendrils crept through them. Wires of my armor dug into the nerves, throwing my entire body into a firestorm of pure agony. It was a flood of frenzy and fire and force. It was like every fiber of my being was being destroyed and recreated.

It was overwhelming. The pain was shouting at me to bend and bow my head. It told me that it was impossible to withstand, and that I would snap as I endured it. I writhed on the ground. My hands shook. My skin shivered. My eyes watered. I dragged my face across the dirt, gasping and heaving for breath.

At that point, I remembered myself. I sighed out my weakness. I grinned at my body's misery. It believed it would conquer me. It was wrong. Even as the excruciation grew in magnitude, my confidence exploded. The pain was shouting at me, screaming for me to bow and bend and break. I wouldn't go down without fighting.

Against that deafening misery, I roared. Against the blistering anguish, I thundered. My voice quaked the ground with my defiance. The might of my own words echoed with my resolve. Within me, my voice boomed louder than the pain. It swallowed the outcry of my tortured body. I was the conqueror, not the pain and torment.

I clasped my shaking hands into fists harder than iron. I clenched my chattering teeth into a smile that could bite through steel. I wouldn't let something as simple as pain overwhelm me. I stood on shaking knees, the pain waning as I did. By the time my knees were steady, the pain roared out no longer. I was free from it.

I shifted my hands, everything fresh and new. I bent my neck before rolling my shoulders. As I did, the resistance was greater than I remembered. It was like I was heavier and harder. I looked around, the pervasive and unfamiliar aura pressing all around me. After turning back and walking towards Hod, the unfamiliar aura followed me. I shifted my hands before it came to me.

The alien aura was me. Curious about myself, I tested out my new limits. I flared my mana. The generation of current strengthened the pulling sensation around me. Deep under my skin, the mana coursed better through my armor.

I walked around, and my feet crushed the ground beneath me. My armor was harder, denser, better. The mass and hardness turned my feet into pikes that pierced into the ground. Without telekinetic pads dispersing my weight, I sunk into the soft ground. Thank Jesus I already handled that issue before now. As I created the pads on my feet, the tug on my mana was smooth and fluid.

After stretching my arms, I felt why. Tiny wires of the armor lined my nerves and veins. They acted as conductors for my mana, like wires through a power grid. I reached out with oppression, but it didn't respond. The ability was gone. Curious about what the fuck was going on, I opened my status screens. They explained a lot of what was going on.

You have forgotten Oppression.

Unknown skill unlocked, Event Horizon.

Living Dimension(New Body | Unknown Composition | Class Permissible) – Your body is a dimension. This gives you many unique properties. Listed below are these properties. 0/4.3 Trillion Mana left till next evolution.

Condensed Dimensional Fabric – A reinforcing material composing most of your body. Wires of this material lines your blood vessels, nerves, and organs, absorbing impact and damage.

Solidity of Dimensional Fabric – Increases resistance cap by 3.5% | Current Max: 98.5%
Malleability of Dimensional Fabric – Additional 35% increase to health | Current Bonus: 135%
Stability of Dimensional Fabric – 7.5% of health added towards health regen per minute.

Creator of Cosmos – You've created your own dimension. This enhances creation abilities involving your dimension. Dimensional Comprehension – Reduces mana cost of Dimensional Cipher by 50%
Origin of a Cosmos – Self created objects have enchantments and bonuses increased by 100%
Vast Soul – Halves the mana cost of soul forging. Sovereign Presence – You exist within your own dimensional space and time. Since your own space is condensed and living, you can grow it, and it is resilient to

change. Infinite Mass – Mass is enhanced by total ambient energy absorbed. Current Bonus: 1000 KilosIndependent Space – You can store objects and energy within yourself. Limited by your mass.Undeniable Presence – Gives half of resistance cap as Dimensional and Kinetic Resistance. Event Horizon – Gives unique ability Event Horizon | Current Damage: (20,000 + 100% of your total health/min) within a maximum of 250 ft/76 m radius. Drains 50% of damage dealt as health. If health is full, damage is converted into ambient mana. Counts as physical damage, and is affected by physical resistance. Unfathomable – Differences are often scorned. Subtracts 20% from total Charisma. The bonuses from condensed dimensional fabric were insane. The extra damage resistance, even though it was half a percent, gave me a third more tankiness. That alone was an enormous boost. The extra health and health regeneration were welcome rewards as well. The creator of cosmos bonus was a little harder to understand. Whenever I made the single eldritch rune, it costed a ton of mana, so halving that cost was awesome. The enchantment bonuses didn't affect the steel legion's gear because they weren't made from my armor. It would affect Althea's rifle though, so I could get a lot out of that. I didn't understand the soul forging bonus yet. With time, I'm sure the bonus would manifest itself. The last set of bonuses were a mixed bag. The mass bonus helped amplify my constitution bonuses. As I gained extra mana, my mass would increase. That limitless growth upped my potential heft by plenty. The storage explained were my obelisk went when my armor ate it. The last two bonuses were very powerful though. Dimensional resistance might affect a sentinel's spear or an overseer's dimensional rupturing. Considering I was fighting Yawm who had a sentinel's spear, that resistance was key. The kinetic resistance would help versus giant enemies like the sandworm. The last perk was the most exciting bonus though. I mean it was called event horizon. The name itself just sounded epic in my ears. It worked just like oppression except it drained half the damage it dealt. That meant groups of enemies would desperately struggle to kill me. Having another viable source of getting ambient mana was nice too. Considering I needed four trillion mana for my next evolution, I would need it. The last effect reduced my charisma, but at least the debuff had been reduced. Wondering what Event Horizon felt like to use, I activated the skill. Controlling the field reminded me of gravity magic and oppression if they combined. As I shifted it over a few plants, they died. As they did, tiny sparks shot into my armor. The sensation of consuming an eldritch corpse washed over me, like satiating a deep hunger. After getting a grip on the different feel between the two skills, I walked over towards Hod and my grimoire. I sat down, folding Event Horizon around us like a protective shield. The night has a few hours left in it before it was over. Maximizing my fighting potential was my goal right now. Finishing some basic eldritch runes and putting them on my armor was the first step for that. It was a fact I had to face. My old runes weren't cutting it anymore with the amount of mana I generated. That was before my evolution. With the added health and regen from Living Dimension, I doubted the magic runes would even last seconds. With that in mind, I picked up my grimoire before opening my status screens. I wanted to get an idea of what I was working with now. Level 1500 Strength – 1353 | Constitution – 1721 | Endurance – 4006 Dexterity – 430 | Willpower – 2319 | Intelligence – 831.2 Charisma – 117.1 | Luck – 273.3 | Perception – 199 ***** Health263,411/263,41142,468/min or 2,374/secPhys Dam Reduction –

98.5%Stamina120,771/120,7711,319/secElemental Res – 98.5%Living Dimension0.00 Trillion/ 4.33 Trillion74.3/per min(conduit)Plasma Res – 98.5%Event Horizon – 20,000 + (100% of your health)/minRad Res – 98.5%Phys Dam Bonus – 14,639% | Total Damage Bonus 20%Mental Res – 98.5% By far the biggest improvement was in health regeneration. The scaling of my stats crossed a threshold now. My tankiness was better than Kessiah's by now, and tanking her mythical skill wouldn't be impossible anymore. I might already have been the strongest member of our team. The fact I got there so fast didn't surprise me either. For all the age that Kessiah and Torix had, they hadn't honed their skills much. Torix spent most of his time learning, but he never applied it to the real world. Kessiah was just messing around until very recently. The distinction between us was clear. They grew bored with progress while my life was dominated by it since Schema took over. That's not to say they were inferior or anything like that. Torix's pursuit of knowledge was admirable on its own merits. He could probably get several legendary skills if he wanted them. Kessiah seemed more like a case of rotten talent. She was born powerful, so she never had to earn that power herself. That meant she lacked the ability to learn effectively or the willpower to strengthen herself. I still had a lot to learn from them, but if they wanted to keep up with me now, they'd need to level and train like I did. Torix might keep up, but Kessiah...Well, I doubted it. Maybe it was unfair of me to think that, but I was calling it like I saw it. So far, she lounged around like a cat more than fight like a warrior. Which was fine. Not everyone should have to rip monsters apart just for a decent life. If it wasn't for the circumstances with Yawm, I wouldn't be pushing this hard anymore anyways. In fact, the idea of just enjoying life after Yawm's disappearance was one of my primary motivations. I might even try and get together with Althea. I pushed those thoughts from my mind. I needed a laser focus on these runes, and daydreaming wasn't about to help me out anyways. With about an hour left before sunrise, I crossed my legs as I sat down and carved in my grimoire. The first rune symbolized strength. The next rune would symbolize speed. As I etched my first line into the paper, I voided the distractions around me. I ignored Hod's snoring, the dark around me, and the death of nearby insects. I needed the speed and strength rune so that I could use my runic channeling. A large portion of my combat power was tied to it after all. With that in mind, I etched into the black paper. As I did, writing the rune was simpler than I remembered. Of course the difficulty was still there, but it wasn't as all consuming as before. Despite this, I pushed myself, concentrating as I worked. No matter how simple the rune was, a near flawless execution was necessary for the rune's completion. Otherwise...well I didn't want to know what would happen. With an inkling of fear guiding my focus, I completed the body of the rune. As I etched the inner markings of the letter, I kept visualizing what speed was to me. It was the sensation of acceleration. It was the exhilaration of danger that came with scenery passing by my eyes. It was the freedom of having no limits. I could go anywhere with no inconvenience. The world was at my fingertips. Those thoughts filled my mind as I carved out the single letter. The complexity of it grew with time, becoming an enigma of lines and crevices on the paper. Sweat poured down my forehead as I struggled with the tiniest lines. The entire process devoured my attention, burning through the remaining hours in moments. As the sunless sky brightened, I finished my last marking that completed the rune. Like a lock clicking into place, the space around me warped once more. The rune reached out for my mana like a starving child. I fed it with a

torrent that it greedily gobbled up. As the rune's hunger evolved, my own stream of mana did as well. It was like I was feeding my book a beam of energy. The absorption enhanced until it surpassed my new, ridiculous mana regen. Minutes later, my health reached around half of its maximum before the sapping ended. As I stared at the rune, it was speed. The way I understood the entire concept was embodied on the page. Redoing strength would be necessary considering how much better my speed rune was. On the same sheet of paper that I used for the speed rune, I cut into the paper. With a sharpened hand, I stayed steady as I maintained the same approach. I envisioned strength as I marked on the page. I found my understanding of strength was different than I first imagined. Strength reminded me of boldness. It was taking risks for great rewards, and doing anything to get those rewards. A relentless, overpowering will for success, that was strength to me. It was going on despite hardship. It was overcoming unfair circumstances, and standing up in the face of them instead of crumbling. On the page, the density of the lettering increased. I stretched the limits of my own precision, making subtle slits and lines throughout the rune. With no idea how much time passed, the pull on my mana began. The deluge of energy poured into the rune before I reached halfway through my entire health pool. It took about five minutes of draining before I reached that point. I gasped as the rune completed on the page. This was my masterpiece now, two runes of incredulous complexity on the same page. Each letter took up a quarter of the page like I was writing in size four hundred font. From behind me, the sound of a deep breath and stretching wings let out into the open. I turned around, and Hod stood up, "Hod feel great after long rest." He turned to me, his eyes opening wide, "Are you Harbinger?" I pursed my lips, "Well yeah. I'm still me." Hod shook his head, "Harbinger not Harbinger anymore. Harbinger spoke with words of coming cataclysm. Harbinger spoke with words of a great change. No more speaking with words. Now Harbinger speak with actions. Now Harbinger the coming cataclysm." I pointed at my chest, "Really? Do I look that different." Hod walked up, "No, Harbinger look similar. Though Harbinger may look similar, Harbinger is different. Hod no longer smell other energies or forces infecting Harbinger. Harbinger is Harbinger now. How Hod put it..." He spread out his wings, "You more you than others are themselves." For second, I just gave him a blank stare. I shook my hands, "Nope. Just stick with no pronouns. That made no damn sense." Hod laughed for a bit before shrugging, "Hod not talk Hod's way. Hod can't help Hod's self." He offered me a hand, so I pulled myself up, "I wouldn't have it any other way. Come on, let's kill the rift keeper." Hod pointed at my grimoire on the ground, "Those...Same words Hod's parents use?" I nodded. Hod took a step back, "Hod warn Harbinger. Words dangerous. Words hold knowledge. Words like doors in hallway. Harbinger walking through hallway. Some doors bad to open. Other doors bad to close." The white, ominous glow around Hod's eyes amplified, "Bad doors bad to open, but bad doors not worst. Worst doors are bad doors that once opened, cannot be closed. Words on page are door that cannot be closed." I bent over and picked up the grimoire, staring at the intricacy of my own markings. I placed a palm onto the page, feeding it mana. Like draining a vast ocean, the pull on my mana was incredible. The icy sensation of the white energy of the cores pierced into my arm. It numbed as my blood and body drained into the book. Hod glanced up at me, "Hod wonder what Harbinger doing?" I grimaced as the grimoire sapped my health, "I don't honestly know." The booklet drained from my mana at a

slower pace than completing the runes did. Unlike completing the runes, the process kept up for well over ten minutes. The process proved so lengthy that Hod and I walked deeper into the dungeon during it. We paced for a long time, Hod keeping aware as I probed the area with Tactile Cognition and my gravity sensing. We didn't want an ambush while I was weakened. Still, standing still for so long ate away at both our patiences. Waiting chewed through my patience in particular. By then, I did at least one thing all the time. I wasn't used to sitting around. So we crept deeper into the dungeon as my grimoire sapped my mana. We reached an island floating higher than even the tallest skyscraper in Springfield. Once we reached the edge of the floating island, the view opened up for us, along with distant echoes. The far off sounds of fresh monsters reverberated into our ears. A few abstractions floated off in the distance, their jittery, twitching movements both eerie and unnatural. Off in the distance, the solar beetles covered every inch of the islands. The density of writhing creatures instilled awe and a bit of anticipation. Once I finished these runes, culling the horde would be a joy. Hod tapped his teeth together at the sight of the monsters. He wanted blood as well. Those monsters covered the nearby islands floating near the center of the rift. A gray cloud covered most of the world tree and everything nearby. As sat and stared, the gray cloud floated away, uncovering the tree in parts. The roots wrapped around every surface of the dead city, coming together into a single, colossal mass of wood. It expanded in sight as the cloud uncovered it, like a mountain growing in size as you neared it. As the edges of the trunk appeared, eldritch language blanketed the bark, creating a mural of the forbidden code. The intricate language smothered the surface of roots, nearby buildings, and the trunk itself. Above the trunk, other clouds floated in the sky. The red sky ended where the branches and trunk of the tree began. It was like the leaves where the sky. As we reached closer towards the world tree, we found that was the case. Leaves from it littered the abandoned high rises of Springfield, looking like tiny dots of the sky. On the roads, piles of these leaves created portions of the ground that looked like holes leading to another world. A pile of them were collected nearby, clumped against the edge of the island. Hod walked up, stepping on the leaves. Even though it looked like he should have fallen through, he didn't. The leaves were what this sky was made of. If anything, this rift seemed like it was made of the world tree. For all we knew, maybe it was. the gray cloud kept floating away from the tree, revealing more. Near the center of the trunk, green lines of pulsing energy streaked into a tremendous green blob. These lines condensed, becoming a vibrant green center. Specks of the green energy filed into this green mass, like blood being pumped into the green clump. Once it swelled up till it was close to bursting, the emerald green blob pulsed downwards. The bulging green mass deflated. The energy filled into a speck at the center of the tree. As the blinding emerald sheen dampened, the center of the tree became visible.

There was a minute, tiny ball there. The green veins on its body leaked out into the emerald sea surrounding it. The ball was surrounded by a deep brown, like the color of earth. The ball shivered with violence, if it was containing some unknown force.

Dense, strong, those words failed at describing him. The eldritch runes covered inch of his body, lacing him like brands. The skin of bark rippled as something like muscle shook underneath it. As I peered closer, his hands were colossal, the size of car doors.

His chest heaved as he breathed. It was like sustaining his form required an entire gust of wind. As I stared at his runes, they flowed into a single, immaculate form. It was like staring at infinity, something my mind couldn't fully grasp.

I was staring at something unknowable, a presence that shook time and space. It was a humbling sight.

The overseer had given a sense of absolute order, like a pillar that helped support Schema. This was a different pillar, a darker, chaotic entity. It was the corrupted king of a species. A prodigy, volatile like entropy, he bided his time, waiting to unleash his energy and tear worlds apart.

Nothing would stop him, not gods, not immortals, and certainly nothing as insignificant as man. Here was the killer of the unkillable and the destroyer of worlds. Here was the maker of horrors and aberrations. Here was a presence that oppressed all around him.

At the center of the world tree, there was Yawm of Flesh.

Chapter 94: In the Flesh(2)

Surrounding the behemoth, plants flourished near the roots of the world tree. Nearby trees, bushes, flowers, grass, sprouts, vines, and even weeds leaned towards him, as if worshipping a god. They wilted in the face of him, but none of the plants died. They endured.

Waterfalls fell from curves in the enormous trunk, giving the plants nearby nourishment. Those waterfalls poured downwards into elegant trails of fine mist. This mist collected on the surface of plants, creating a display of light. Literal rainbows arched near these waterfalls, the beams of light reflecting off the mist.

This water pooled into an enormous lake underneath the world tree's trunk. The green glow from Yawm's energy reflected off the top of the lake, turning the water seafoam blue. Black forms swam under the lake's surface. Insects crawled across the water, fish splashing up out of the water for a quick meal.

At the center of the lake, there was an island. At the center of the island, a set of stone stairs led downwards. These stairs circled a pillar beaming light into the world tree. It was the same white energy that sustained the other rifts, except it fed into the world tree instead. The greater the distance from this lake and white beam of light, the more feeble and fragile the plant life was.

I tried analyzing Yawm, but the system couldn't affect him for some reason. I guessed it was the world tree and the green aura.

Interrupting my trance, Hod whispered, "Hod thought world tree suck up life like...like Dry Man want to suck up water."

I turned to him, almost falling over at what he said all of a sudden.

Hod continued, "Hod not know why Dry Man not drink. Dry Man not be dry if Dry Man drink to not be dry." Hod shook his head, "That's what Hod think at least."

I chuckled, the tension of seeing Yawm fading, "I needed that. Thanks."

Hod puffed out his chest, putting his hands on his hips, "Hod glad Hod help Harbinger."

The feeling of dread dwindled as I glanced down on my hand. The grimoire's ironclad lock on my palm finally released. The eldritch rune floated off the page, an almost miracle of ingenuity. At least to me it was.

I lifted my left arm, watching the glowing rune fall onto my forearm. It landed in the perfect center of the outer edge of my forearm. The other runes carved out and left smoothed metal behind. This rune worked differently. It glowed with the same color as my ascendant mana. A gentle hum radiated from it, and the rune created an invisible shift around me.

The sensation almost threw me off balance before I planted my feet. I rolled my shoulders before lifting the hand in front of me. This was the time for finally getting the rune working. All the hours were either wasted now, or they would pay off in spades. With no idea how the runes would work, I put a drop of mana into the rune.

The rune hardly responded. I raised an eyebrow before pouring more mana into the rune. It swallowed the mana, eating even more of the energy. It amazed me how mana hungry these runes were. Even with all the setup time, they required more and more and more. The demand was hard to maintain even for me, and my mana generation was second to none.

Still, the rune wanted more so I relented. I ramped up how much mana I was giving until it matched my own health regen. What amazed me was how the rune didn't even hesitate at the amount. The other rune cracked well before my current max. The eldritch rune didn't show any signs of reaching its potential.

After a few minutes of waiting, I sighed with a bitter disappointment. There was no rush, no surge of power. I expected a godlike increase in my potential. I expected something ridiculous. Schema outlawed these runes, and despite the rune showing signs of completion, it hadn't done jack shit. It was like spending months working day and night for the reward of a shit sandwich.

I shook off the resentment, keeping the torrent of mana flowing into the rune. At some point it might payoff later, just not now. I didn't need immediate pay off anyways. I needed the other runes instead. The eldritch runes didn't seem like they were meant for conflict. With that in mind, I pat Hod on the shoulder,

"Let's go."

Hod nodded, "Harbinger still walking?"

I frowned, remembering the impotence of the eldritch runes, "Unfortunately, yes. I have to finish the other runes for my armor." I raised the eldritch rune, the rune's red hue darkening over time, "This piece of shit isn't going to give me the oomph I need."

We walked down from the top of the high island. As we stepped down the vine, I admired the view once more. The gray cloud covering the tree was gone now, exposing it in its entirety. With that unveiling, Hod and I discovered the complexity of Yawm's base of operations. It wasn't just some tree. There was so much more.

The most obvious anomaly were the effects of the floating islands. They only increased in intensity as we went on towards the rift's core. This explained the four largest islands orbiting the world tree.

On the island closest to us, the crimson edges of a volcano spewed black smoke. There was a lack of life there, though a few of the stone eater's scrambled on its surface. It looked like the rift I locked Etna in. The magma even has rats and crystalline fish in it if I looked closer.

On the island farthest from us, it was the polar opposite. That particular island was like a planet floating in space, oceans shimmering on its surface. Giant slugs and a few kraken sized squids swam under the waters. The gravity defying lakes hid their black, shifting forms, but they were the same as Krakow-Wahl. They were just giant squid monsters.

On the leftmost island was a vast desert surrounded by high mountains. Even from so far away, Hod and I glimpsed at vultures and snakes slithering on its surface. Dunes formed on the biome, like a tiny slice of the Sahara. Giant worms slithered on the surface of the island as well, snapping towards any creature that neared the sand.

On the right most side of the four islands, the entire landscape was a bustling metropolis. The futuristic city floated with the island, the buildings covered in glass and metal. Insulated bridges hung between this island and the world tree, pinning it there. Several smooth hunks of metal floated over these bridges.

They were like space ships in a sci-fi movie. With everything made of sleek, edgeless designs, the island was aerodynamic and seamless. What it lacked in character it made up for in practicality.

Three of these islands looked like they were made as tiny ecosystems for eldritch. The metropolis one looked like a research center, somewhere for noncombatants to dabble. What they did there was more than likely abominable, like what the scientists did to Althea. It made my blood boil.

My hands clasped into fists without me realizing it before Hod nudged me,

"Hod understand Harbinger frustration. Hod think Harbinger focus on book rather than giant tree. Harbinger need markings on armor. Otherwise Harbinger weak. Not Hod or Harbinger can afford weakness."

I sighed, relaxing my hands before shaking my head, “Yeah...yeah, you’re right... Thanks for keeping me focused.”

Hod nodded, “Hod glad Hod help Harbinger like Harbinger help Hod.”

It took me a second to put his words through my Hod language translator, but I nodded back before we trekked deeper into the rift. Hod kept a lookout as I etched out my runes onto another black page. By now, creating the runic carvings on my armor was simple as breathing. I maxed out the skill for it a while back, and I had carved almost everyday for months since.

So using those skills I honed, I wrote in my grimoire as we walked towards the rift’s center. The faraway screeching of abstractions heightened in tone and pitch as we came closer. Before we reached them, I wrapped up my runes on the page. It took about fifteen minutes for the whole thing.

As I channeled mana into the grimoire, I contemplated the differences in eldritch and magic runes. The magic runes were more like etching out memories into words now. Airy, light, and spacious, they were like the fogginess that surrounded a memory. Of course they still held power, but they weren’t in the same league as the eldritch runes.

If magic incantations were pages, then eldritch runes were books. No, not books but dictionaries. It was like I had to argue them into existence, justifying every aspect of it. The meticulous detail was exhausting, like running a marathon. The razor thin margin of error and exact structure required for each glyph made them as fun as stomping on a rusty nail.

Combine that with the eldritch runes not amounting to much, and it was downright depressing. I had hope for them though. Yawm was covered in them, and he was one strong guy. If they were good enough for someone who killed a sentinel, they were good enough for me.

With that in mind, I added runic lettering onto my upper arms, shins, chest, and back. They were similar with my previous runes, but a tad more precise. The grimoire let them come through better than marking them on my own.

Once I completed them, I turned towards Hod,

“You ready to get going?”

Hod spread his wings, “Hod ready. Hod been ready for long time.”

I charged my magic runes, limiting the flow of my mana. I overcharged the runes until they were about to burst. Instead of letting them crack, I siphoned all the excess mana into the eldritch rune on my left arm. Even if it didn’t do anything, it could act like a mana sink for me, preventing me from rupturing the other runes.

As I filled the runes with my mana, the familiar sensation of strength and control surged. I cracked my neck, relishing in the renewal. Without the runes, I was bare, like I was unclothed. Considering I could feel with my armor like it was skin, maybe I was naked.

I pushed the thought from my head before jumping upwards. The ground crumbled under my feet, a gust of dusty wind rippling over the island I was on. I fired towards another island as Hod flew behind me. I grinned as the ground closed in on me. I reformed my armor, gliding into the ground, more at home in the dirt than the sky.

The mana cost involved with The Coming Tide wasn’t a burden anymore. As I leveled the skill, my efficiency with the movements increased. I wriggled through the earth before firing off the top of a different island. I shot over the skyscrapers littering springfield before smashing into one. I drilled through the concrete and drywall, shifting through the buildings floors with ease.

Reaching through it, I burst out the other side of the skyscraper. The quake of my leap crushed the glass around me, making the sharp pieces fall through the air. I turned back, observing the damage I dealt. The skyscraper wiggled, dispersing the weight as a wave traveled through it. Across the side I leapt from, broken glass fell like a glimmering rain. Hell yeah.

I turned forward, gliding through the islands as I leapt between them. Hod tried keeping up, but this terrain was perfect for me. Bouncing from island to island, I was ready for a fight from an anime at this point.

The manic grin on my face grew before I reached an island near the world tree. On its surface, hundred of the Solar beetles crawled. Their after images formed as I neared them, their shapes shifting. It was like I just chugged a fifth of vodka, leaving me unable to see or stand up straight.

I closed my eyes and covered my ears. This time I felt outwards with my sense of gravity. These tiny creatures released ripples in the space around them. Using that as my new sight, I molded my armor for landing.

Just like that, I flew towards the island like a nuke dropping onto an unsuspecting city. I slammed straight into a beetle, crushing it into a wet splat. I reached out with Tactile Cognition, getting a more concrete view of my surroundings. Without eyes, my armor grinned with jagged teeth.

I unleashed Event Horizon. As the aura reached out, the damage covered the cost of my runes without me even trying. As it reached over hundreds of insects, the surge of mana from it exceeded my own production. It raised in volume, becoming a torrent running into the eldritch rune.

It was an amount of mana I hadn't handled since making the grimoire. I suppressed the growing hunger the mana caused as I dashed forward. A solar beetle snapped its jaws towards me. I side stepped to its right side, countering the blow with a right hook. My heels rotated on the ground as my fist pulverized the mandibles of the insect.

The sound rumbled through my armor like a far off bomb. The warmth of the beetles blood covered me, soaking into my armor as it fed on the monster. Before it could escape, I stepped forward, gyrating another blow into the monster.

My fist collided with a telekinetic pad, disintegrating the remains of the monster. Another beetles snapped towards my right leg. I turned towards it, lifting my leg. The jaws snapped beneath me, so I stomped the beetle's jagged mandibles. They crumbled before I reached out a hand towards it.

The impact of my foot landing on the ground sent out a shockwave, knocking the beetle back. I grabbed it, digging my fingers through its hardened shell. Harder than steel, the shell cracked like dry wood as I clasped it. My armor dug into the monster, sapping its strength before another beetle reached towards me.

I roared at the monster, giving it pause. During the monster's hesitation, I dashed forwards and slammed my held beetle into it. The beetle in my hand cracked in half, the insides rupturing. The beetle beneath it had its exoskeleton crushed inwards. A beetle snapped from behind me. I dashed forwards, stomping the head of the grounded beetle.

With the remaining half of a beetle in my hand, I spun around. Dragging my arm behind me, I mauled the beetle with the other half. The insect pulped before I turned on my heels, arcing a fist over my head. It spun over me before crushing the beetle into the island. The mush splattered against my armor as I unleashed my overcharged runes.

Firing forward, I drilled through three beetles before converting another one into paste. An abstraction dived towards me. I grabbed its deformed face with both my hands, pulling it downwards. I raised my knee, squashing the abstraction's head against it. Another abstraction dove from behind.

I turned around, creating a gravity warp in front of me. The abstraction wobbled before losing control of its flight. It spun towards the gravity warp before I torqued a fist into it. The monster evaporated, and a thin, light sheen of humidity ran into my skin.

It was a mild sensation, like walking into a cloud. My attack had left a fine, orange mist in place of the abstraction before. My armor stretched out needles towards the blobs of flesh around me, draining them as I passed.

I smashed my fists together, walking into an oncoming horde. Each of my strikes killed the monster's making them fall apart. I kept killing, ripping the wings from abstractions and tearing the legs from beetles. Hordes came. Hordes died. It was a massacre. Even if a monster attacked me, they did little to no damage. The condensed dimensional fabric was too dense.

Their teeth cracked against my skin. Their bones crumbled against my fists. Their shells shattered against my murderous intent. With each strike, I took at least one life from a monster. I kept each strike sharp and malicious, crippling and killing like a plague. Each moment, I fell into the motions of my strikes.

Everything molded together, becoming a dance of sorts. I shifted my momentum, following a flow of battle. With each blow, I gave destruction. With each second, I took life. My aura sustained me, giving me an unstoppable endurance. My mana was limitless, fueling the carnage and decimation.

I sunk into the earth, dodging attacks and unleashing The Coming Tide. I shot forth rippling attacks that disintegrated the monsters. I pulled them close with gravity and telekinesis, preventing their escape. Time disappeared during my bloodlust, the onslaught all there was. Everything faded away but the blood.

My shifting form was death. It was a malignant force unleashed on the unsuspecting souls. Battle was my haven, a refuge from everything. There was no future or past, only that moment. A fight consumes you, freeing you from everything else. It offers a chaos, forcing a resolution. It was simple, something I savored.

But like all things, the battle ended in time. Whenever I finished the last abstraction, I glanced around. This was no longer a field of battle. It was a field of corpses. It was a canvas painted with the red and orange blood of the monsters, grinded into nothing but pulp. Nothing remained near me that was living, no plant life, birds, or chirping insects.

No, only a dreadful silence remained from where I passed. That, and the steady drip of leaking blood. I walked around, cleaning the corpses with Event Horizon and my armor. Event Horizon disintegrated them over time while my armor was a sponge. The needles drained any corpse in seconds.

Once the island was devoid of life, I turned Event Horizon off. I glanced around, looking for Hod. He flew above the island, so I shouted, "You can come down now."

"Hod wonder if Harbinger sure?"

I waved my arm, "Yeah, it's fine."

He dived downwards before spreading his wings, slowing his descent. He landed on the ground, his feet thumping against the ground. He turned towards me, "Hod told Harbinger. Harbinger the cataclysm now."

I waved him off, "I'm just fighting. It's easy to destroy anyways. It's building that's actually difficult."

Hod shrugged, "Hod not know." He pointed towards the rift's core. "We go now?"

I clasped a fist, "Of course." I turned towards Yawm, "I wish we could just kill him."

Hod shook his head, "Yawm awaken. Yawm strong, so Yawm kill us. Dry Man lose time for assault. Followers and Yawm impossible to kill. Yawm alone, maybe."

I sighed, “Yeah, I know.” I shook off the bit of the desire to just run in and punch Yawm. I ran forward, firing off the island. Hod followed behind, darting through the air. We passed the islands, my teeth clenching as we passed the city covered one. Hod and I could try and kill the people there, but we might end up doing more harm than good.

It reminded me of my outing with Bloodbull and the Freedom Fighters. I ended up killing everyone. No matter how I justified it to myself, that’s what I did. I gritted my teeth, fearing the same outcome here. I didn’t want to kill a crowd of normal people. The thought of doing so made me sick to my stomach.

I remembered the man I strangled with telekinesis. His eyes were full of fear, bloodshot as he wallowed in his own filth. It was an awful way of dying. There was no mercy. As I dashed through the air, I stared at my hand. It was the one that clasped his throat, taking his life away.

I clasped it into a fist. This wasn’t the time nor place for brooding about what I’d done. This was the time for taking a dungeon core. It was time for killing. Even if these hands were covered in blood, they were the hands I needed. If I was going to live through this, that was the only way out.

With that resolve, I drilled through another island before jumping towards the ground. I dove into the ground, firing off of it before reaching the lake underneath the world tree. I shot myself onto a branch before climbing up the edges of the tree.

The bark minced in my hands, soft and pliable. Over the next ten minutes, I reached over the lake’s center island. I dropped from the top of the roots covering the lake. Landing beside the stone stairs, I created a rippling wave across the lake around me. The forms under the water stayed there, not coming at me like some ravenous horde.

Hod landed beside me. I could have used Event Horizon for drawing in agro before killing the monsters in the lake. We didn’t have the time. Before stepping down the stairs, I checked out my status for how many levels I gained.

I gained fifty. Before putting in my attribute points though, I scrolled down my notifications. Two were very odd, both of them red. It was outlined with white, like an overseer’s status screen. It read,

Dimensional Cipher completed. Changes assimilated into Living Dimension.

+4 Strength and Dexterity.

Dimensional Cipher completed. Changes assimilated into Living Dimension.

+4 Strength and Dexterity.

Chapter 95: Atlas Dropped the Sky

I frowned, leaning against the pillar behind me. With the hum of the core's energy beaming, I checked out my Living Dimension armor. Well, it was considered a body by the system, but I still checked out the status. After reading through the bonuses, the last one intrigued me.

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

+8 Strength

+8 Dexterity]

I raised an eyebrow, thinking about the alteration. These stat bonuses were permanent, meaning I wouldn't need Schema for enhancements. Once Yawm was gone, fighting eldritch wasn't a thing I had to do. I might do it anyways, but pushing the limits for growth wouldn't be necessary.

I didn't have much time before Yawm ripped out of his shackles though. I needed leveling and whatever the eldritch runes gave me and fast. With in mind, I sighed before opening my status screens and viewing my attribute points.

From all the fighting, I gained 160 attribute points and cleared the dungeon of most of the monsters. Hod helped of course, likely killing quite a few abstractions. Without them enhancing the beetles, leveling slowed down by a fair margin though.

Considering my levels gained so far, I wasn't complaining. Especially after my first handout from Tera. That helped me gain a bit more strength than I imagined I would when facing a follower. These levels were the same way. I welcomed them.

With a great abandon, I put all the points into Endurance once again. These eldritch runes required ridiculous amounts of mana. Endurance helped with gaining mana, so the attribute had yet another reason investing into it. The extra damage resistance didn't hurt either. With that in mind, I hit finalize.

The rush wasn't there this time. There was a bit of a buzz, but nothing crazy. Without any significant jump in stats, I wouldn't be feeling any serious oomph anytime soon. It would require something enormous, like an armor evolution or killing a follower. Knowing the stat bonuses wouldn't be huge, I checked them out.

Level 1550

Strength – 1384 | Constitution – 1765.9 | Endurance – 4262

Dexterity – 447.2 | Willpower – 2434 | Intelligence – 892.6

Charisma – 121.3 | Luck – 291.8 | Perception – 204.2

Health 277,261/277,261 149,864/min or 2,498/sec Phys Dam Reduction – 98.5%

Stamina 128,219/128,219 1,338/sec Elemental Res – 98.5% Living Dimension 0.00
Trillion/ 4.33 Trillion 74.3/per min (conduit) Plasma Res – 98.5% Event Horizon –
(20,000 + 100% of your health)/min Rad Res – 98.5% Phys Dam Bonus – 15,048% |
Total Damage Bonus 20% Mental Res – 98.5%

My health and health regen increased at a steady pace, along with my other stats. The upgrades went through too, increasing my strength and dexterity by a miniscule amount. At this point, increasing my stats required grinding high level monsters for extended periods of time. Checking my status screen after fifty levels was a waste of time.

Until I felt a serious boost, I would allocate my attribute points then move on. I glanced up, closing my status screens. The white energy of the core melted into the tree, dissipating like misty breath in cold weather. Hod glanced up from his status screen,

“Hod ready. Hod put points into luck.”

I shrugged, “Eh, what works for you works for you. I always go for endurance.”

With a snippet of understanding, I pumped my excess mana into my eldritch rune. The stat bonuses weren’t much for now, but they might collect over time. Once I gained some free time, I would remake the rune to enhance my endurance. As I gained more endurance, I could gain more mana, giving me more endurance from the eldritch rune. Rinse and repeat.

The attribute gain would likely slow down over time, but even a hundred extra in my attributes was welcome. It made my armor better too. Considering I couldn’t remove it, knowing it helped me more than other armors was nice. It was like a consolation prize.

So after handling all the status stuff, I jumped up onto the stone stairs. Hod followed. We walked down the steps into a dungeon. Once there, we reached a stone doorway covered in magic runes. I took a step back, viewing the doorway from top to bottom. After reading the markings, I understood the message.

Whenever I did, a status screen popped up in front of me,

This is the rift of Ioneas. Ioneas is a high level, fast eldritch designed for agility. With nimble movements, Ioneas can pose great trouble for builds reliant on aiming. Slower builds can be dismantled as well, leaving few viable options for facing this beast. It is recommended that a group of sentients to attack the monster in unison, pinning down its movements.

Advised average level: 1300-1600

Recommended members: 3-5

Difficulty: C+

The runes gave good information, letting me know what was coming. Considering how random most eldritch encounters were, having some foresight was priceless. In this

case, Hod and I would crush the dungeon boss without any real trouble. At least I assumed it.

So we walked down the steps, the both of us laying low. After a while, I turned to Hod,

“Alright, I’m tired of walking. Fuck this.”

I jumped down, diving through the steps. Hod leapt down the hole I made. We passed through in seconds before I crashed against something. I couldn’t burrow through it, so it was kind of like diving into concrete for normal person. I opened my eyes, a dent in the armor of my head. It healed, the armor popping back into place.

I lodged myself into a clear panel. I shoved myself off of it, glancing around. Beside me, my armor crushed the panel to powder, making it look like salt piled around me. I stood up, looking upwards.

I left a hole above me, a spiral staircase going all the way up above the lake’s depths. The same crystal panel layered above me, forming a gargantuan aquarium. The jagged, clear panel lined the bottom of the lake, letting us see up.

Fish of all kinds swam overhead, many of them glowing or letting off light. A few larger species were lit by a few passing phosphorescent ones, showing mammoth creatures. Eyes, teeth, claws, spines, and scales, the giant monsters floated by, lazy as sloths. If something swam by their mouth, they breathed it in, swallowing a second later.

Above the water, the pulsing green of the world tree created beams of light. They exposed a few of the corals, anemones, seaweeds, urchins, and algae. The dense clusters of life feasted upon one another. Every fish fought amongst each other, too much life in too small a cage.

I glanced down. The same crystal lined under my foot. Cracks from my landing radiated outwards in all directions. Pillars of the clear material supported the entire lake’s bottom. A bit water dripped from a few cracks above. Beneath the crystal, a white glow ebbed. Squirming moss grew underneath the crystal, lighting the cavern.

The light traveled up the pillars, creating light that the plants in the lake lived off of. A drop of water plopped beside me from the cracked crystal above me. It made me nervous. Hod landed beside me. He looked around,

“Hod must say...Hod impressed. Hod never seen so much water in one place. Yawm horde it.”

I shook my head, “Not quite. Water’s all over the place on Earth. It’s not too hard to find in most places.”

Hod turned around, “Hod think Harbinger...”

Hod perked his head up, looking around like a worried chicken, “Harbinger hear that?” He breathed in, his eyes glazing over with red and shadows covering his form, “Hod hear it.”

I raised an eyebrow, nothing coming up in Tactile Cognition or my gravitational sense. Out of respect for Hod’s senses, I braced myself. I channeled my mana into my runes as Hod leaned over,

“It comes, Harbinger.”

A portal in space-time ripped open beside me. Something impaled my chest in six different places from a blindingly bright source. The light dimmed, revealing a glowing, white set of antlers. I crashed into a crystalline pillar, the snapping cracks webbing outwards above and below me. I grabbed the antlers, the heaving of frantic breath racing into my ears.

A white elk with purple lines running down its chest looked at me. Noble and magnificent, its chest was puffed outward with pride. Its eyes contrasted the white fur on its body. They stared at me, unblinking and uncaring.

The pupils were like a goats, surrounded by an amber iris. Black surrounded the iris, with geometric lines of blue running through its eyes. The elk stomped its foot, digging the horns into my chest, the same blue lines running through the hooved feet.

I latched my hands onto the antlers, shooting my armor out in sharpened spikes. Before the armored spines pierced it, the majestic elk flicked its muscled neck. Like a ragdoll, the horns left my chest before I crashed against the ceiling.

My stomach sank as a sharp crack ebbed from above me. As I fell towards the bottom plate below, water dripped onto my back from above. The elk stared at me before stomping its hooved foot and snorted. It was taunting me.

I shook my head before pushing myself off the ground. The elk charged towards me, so I readied myself for catching its antlers. Before I could, it slipped out of existence. Antlers appeared from my chest once more, this time my back impaled. The elk shook me from its grasp once more, slamming me into the crystal plate above.

More water dripped from a new crack above me. I glanced up, a long split in the crystal reaching from one cracked area to another. A few more of those, and the entire lake may come crashing down. I stood up, my chest healing before looked at Hod. His head turned in all directions, glancing at some invisible foe.

I narrowed my eyes, focusing on Hod's point of view. He saw this elk before I could, making him the only reference for where it was. If I wanted to understand where it was, Hod was all I had for knowing where it was.

Hod's eyes set onto me, so I radiated out with Event Horizon. I created a dense cloud of it around me, thick as molasses. From my left side, diving upwards, the elk came. Its antlers stabbed me, the ten foot monster slamming me against the crystalline plate above. Before it flung me away, I curled tendrils of my armor around its antlers.

Whenever it tried flicking me off its antlers, I didn't flop off. Whenever the monster tried pulling its head back, it couldn't. The elk lost firm footing, its four legs spreading in every direction. The elk scrambled for a better grip as I landed on my side. It's hooves tapped against the ground as I condensed Event Horizon onto it.

The elk bellowed out in frustration before Hod dashed beside it. Using his shadow claws, he pinned the monster into a confined area. The shadow marks kept the elk from dashing away while my armor dug under its skin and into its flesh. I clamped my own hands into the crystal beneath me, preventing the elk from running.

I howled, "Don't let it escape. I need time."

Hod nodded as the elk bellowed louder. It dashed in every direction, vying for escape. Hod would jump around it, slashing in whichever direction it tried dashing. The elk's eyes grew bloodshot as Hod pinned it in again. Seeing no other escape, the monster reared back its head. It rammed its antlers against Hod's lines of shadow.

They clanged against one another, like slamming two lead pipes against each other. A sharp ringing deafened my hearing before the antler rammed its head into the shadow spikes once more. Hod struggled dragged backwards many feet at the point of impact. With the next headbutt, Hod smashed into a crystal pillar.

With the third headbutt, black blood sprayed out of Hod's mouth. His shadow streaks snapped, letting the elk run free. It didn't matter. Hod gave me enough time. The elk dashed forwards before cords of my armor tensed. Like a rope around its neck, the elk's head whipped backwards, sending the monster off its feet. Its hooves pattered against the floor as I stood up.

Lines of my armor dug into the plate beneath me, slowly drilling deeper. This pinned me down, letting me throw the monster off its feet. I yanked it, heaving the weight of the deer like a sack of bricks. The monster barreled through the air before slamming into a crystal pillar. After a sound like the sharp pop of breaking ice, I leaned back, tugging the creature towards me.

It flung through the air as I unlatched my feet from the crystal plate beneath me. I turned on my feet, augmenting my fist with Volatile Carnage. Boundless Storm let me time my overhead strike perfectly. I dug my feet two inches into the ground with The Coming Tide, grounding my strike. With my runes overcharged, I unleashed a burst of energy whenever my fist collided against the side of the elk.

My fist bounced back from recoil, like unloading a cannon. A cataclysmic boom echoed out, loud enough to burst eardrums. The elk tumbled against the translucent floor like a landslide. It crashed through a crystal pillar before lodging itself into another. I dashed towards the monster, my heels pounding against the ground.

The monster shook itself from the pillar, an enormous welp forming on its side. Blood dripped from its mouth and nose as I reached closer towards it. It lifted its head, the antlers flashing. From below, the white light dimmed in an instant. It was like someone cut off the lights. The beaming brilliance of the antlers was undeniable, however.

The elk whipped its head towards me, blasting a radiant plume of energy my way. I crashed into the stream of light, lifting both my arms over my face. Like a mist made of plasma and acid, the energy burned against my armor. Heat built within me, hotter than the lava of Etna's rift. My blood didn't boil.

As the energy beam peeled the armor from my arms and face, streams of my blood poured. I looked down, seeing it plop against the crystal floor. It reflected light, like liquid silver. As my health regenerated against the onslaught, I molded Event Horizon over the elk. A wave of relief poured over me as the aura feasted on the massive health of the monster.

I condensed the aura over the monster, collapsing it until it molded over the creature's skin. I stepped towards the monster, cutting through the pulsing energy. The elk condensed its own stream of energy. The shining light pushed me back, like a stream of boiling water. Sidestepping would just send me tumbling backwards. I didn't need to run. I needed to close the distance.

I took another step, my feet shaking against the elk's wrath. With each stomp, I came closer towards the elk. It enhanced the intensity of the energy beam, raising the damage over time. My health dropped, but with the mountain of hit points I had, I tanked it without worry.

Over a minute, I stepped closer and closer towards the elk. Event Horizon melted the creature from the inside, blood pouring from the elk's eyes. Its breaths grew ragged and its knees buckled. It shivered as if stuck in an arctic ice storm. The effects of mana exhaustion sunk their teeth in, ruining the mind of the creature.

I grinned as it struggled with the beam of energy, the power waning. As the last bit of the energy trickled out. I crashed into the monster, lifting the creature from the ground. With all my might, I slammed the creature against the crystalline plate. Cracks ebbed out in all directions as the spine of the monster broke.

The antlers on its head no longer glowed. It looked at me, fear creeping into its eyes. I lifted my fist into the air, a smile brandishing my armor. With my fist coming down like the blade of a guillotine, my punch sent out another ripple of cracks through the crystal. Blood exploded from the creature's mouth, organs splashing out from rips in its skin.

The head of the monster looked around, the legs squirming in odd directions. It convulsed before the antlers clapped against the crystal below me. It died, and the white

glow beneath us returned. With new sight of the scenery, I stabbed my arm into the monster, sapping its strength and lifting it up. I dashed towards Hod, my feet clapping against the crystal beneath me.

Hod looked up, blood trailing out of his mouth. He coughed up a the black gunk before breathing deep. He pushed himself off the crystal pillar. He raised a wing at me,

“Hod fine. Health going up faster than dropping. Hod just need time.”

The corpse of the elk hollowed out into a dry husk, so I tossed it aside. Hod shook off the shock of the impact before turning towards the crystalline lake’s center. Around us, streams of water flowed onto the ground, creating pools. All of the cracks from our fight with the elk streaked out around us.

With each passing second, the cracks expanded in all directions. As a fracture crawled over our head, Hod pointed deeper under the lake,

“Hod and Harbinger need core. Trip pointless without core.”

“Fuck...Can you run?”

Hod nodded before dashing towards the core. I followed behind him. As we sprinted, we kept up with the growing crack above us. Crystal pillars snapped around us, the crystal layer we were in caving. With each passing second, the sound of rushing water grew in our ears. Not looking back, I pounded my feet into crystal plate with abandon.

Hod did the same. He weaved around pillars, screaming, “Hod not want to die. Hod want to live. Hod want to live!”

I agreed with him. If the crystal plate collapsed above us, we would be trapped under an entire ocean of water. The plate would pin us down, drowning us. After we died, tiny crustaceans would crawl under our skin. Worms would crawl into our eyes and slugs would feast on our skin. Our flesh would soften until it was like molded cheese.

I shook the haunting thoughts from my head, doubling my sprinting efforts. I would use The Coming Tide, but the impacts would no doubt speed up the breaking down of the cavern. This race required good, old fashioned running.

With that single thought centering my thoughts, we reached the pulsing white radiance of the dungeon core. The energy of the core refracted off the light of a dozen pillars before reaching the staircase I drilled through. It wasn't a wonder why I had no idea where the core was.

Hod did, however. We reached beside it before I stuck my hand into the stream of energy. I grabbed the core, yanking it out with my hand going numb. We didn't even look at the core before dashing forward.

The sound of feet clapping against a glass floor filled my ears, along with the fracturing above. Waterfalls of liquid poured in from above as crystal pillars crushed under the weight. The crystal plate above us rumbled, the creatures from above looking down at the commotion. Giant creatures lit by phosphorescent eyed us with hunger.

As tiny jellyfish flew by them, they lit the massive monsters. Eyes covered them, looking at us as as mouths across the creatures snapped at us. Massive tendrils, feelers, and tongues struggled towards Hod and I as we ran.

Hod kept sidestepping around pillars, howling, "Hod hate pillars. Pillars get in Hod's way. Hod want to fly, but pillars get in Hod's way." He sidestepped another pillar, "Hod hate pillars like Hod hate flying through thunderstorms."

A tiny grin ran up my lips at Hod's ridiculousness. The grin faltered the pillars cracking outpaced our running speed now. The angle of our running raised, like we were running up a steep hill. That meant the edge of the lake was nearby now.

It was just in time too. Like a bomb going off, the crystal shell holding the lake collapsed behind us. I turned around, and a tidal wave of murky water full of monsters flowed towards us. The panel above us fell downwards by a foot before desperation kicked in.

I reached out with Event Horizon, covering the area of curious creatures above us. Mana built into my runes, over charging in seconds before I discharged my mana through my feet. I shot through the air, my speed blistering before snatched Hod. His head dragged backwards, drool leaking from his mouth like a dog with its face out the window of a moving car.

Hod screamed, “Blagagagaga,” as we shot through the air. I leaned a shoulder in front of me, letting me tackle through the crystal pillars in front of us. I hit the ground again, discharging the energy once more dashing up through a waterfall. In the edge of my vision, the green glow of the world tree beamed in through a crevice. It was our way out.

As my feet landed onto the crystal beneath me, the roof over us caved in. Before it pinned us down, I jolted us forward with one last burst of energy. The green light grew in my vision. As if living in slow motion, the crystal plate fell at a steady pace as the green light expanded in my sight.

Right as the crystal fell on my legs, the green light shined onto my face. I threw Hod into the green light as the weight crushed my legs. Hod crashed into a the wall of dirt, embedded into the earth. With his voice muffled, Hod grumbled,

“Hod...Hod tank Arbinger.”

I kept my upper body up with my arms, looking at him. Hod pulled his face from the wall before spitting out a mouthful of dirt. He flopped himself off the wall before he face planted the ground. In typical Hod fashion, he hugged the dirt,

“Hod never think Hod want dirt so much, but Hod grateful for dirt being here and not water.”

I laid myself against the dirt beneath me. Behind me, two crystal plates pinned my feet in like toothless jaws. I laughed out loud, flopping against the soft ground beneath my face.

“Jesus Christ, we made it.”

Hod flipped over, staring at the world tree, “Dry Man should be here...Dry Man drink up water in lake. Hod and Harbinger not worry about drowning then.”

I laughed before resting against the ground. After all that, I didn’t need a rest, but I wanted one. So I closed my eyes and rested for a second, enjoying the peace.

It didn’t last long.

Chapter 96: The Dash

The rest didn't last mostly because I didn't want to sit there forever. I pushed myself up with my arms before dragging my legs from between the crystal plates. Once on my feet, I looked around for the dungeon core. I couldn't find it. Before I panicked, the orb lifted from the palm of one of my hands. It sent ripples through my armor like it was lifting out of black water.

I clasped it, lifting it over my head with a bit of celebration. I turned towards Hod, walking over. He pulled himself off the ground before shaking the dirt of his face. He looked up at the world tree,

“Hod think Yawm come from tree soon now. Tree Man no longer hidden in Tree. Hod and Harbinger leave?”

I nodded. We hopped out of the crevice at the side of the lake. On one side, the crystal plate was exposed. A giant root blocked the opening from sight, wrapping around the entire crevice. There wasn't any gaps left for viewing from the outside. The only way someone could see this opening was from an aerial view.

Hod and I landed on those roots before glancing around. The blue squares rippled through the rift, just like a normal dungeon. The blue squares couldn't affect the floating islands or the world tree, however. The only substantial change was in the horizon. Before the blue squares passed, a gray mist covered everything. Now Springfield was open for our viewing.

Besides for bombs detonating in the sky, we couldn't see past the skyscrapers blocking our view. The sudden burst of wind and the blue sky was the largest change. Before Hod and I could leave the rift, a ripple in space time formed. A crack appeared from it, and our overseer walked out.

He glanced at us, “You again.” He looked at the world tree. The overseer clenched a hand into an enormous fist before letting it go. He turned towards me, “If you are able, make his death painful.”

After a deep breath, I rolled my shoulders, “I'll give it my best shot, but uh, why you aren't gunning for him right now? I get that rifts stop you and Schema from doing anything, but the rifts gone.”

The overseer lifted his hand. He pressed his fingertips together and spread them apart. From the tips of his fingers, a ripple formed in gravity. This expanded into a tunnel that traveled through the air and towards the world tree. A tiny, infinitely dense point of gravity formed beside the world tree.

It was a tiny black hole. It sucked in the air around it, vaporizing the matter around it. The overseer spread his fingers, the orb of gravity reversing. An explosive force shot outward from the dense point, reversing the pull of energy. The destructive attack didn't even leave a scratch on the surface of the world tree.

The overseer turned towards me, "Yawm has learned of ways to meddle with an overseers tools. It was one of the secrets he stole from Schema before leaving the system. His own mastery of the dimensional cipher makes him almost immune to our interference when in this form. Once he is out of the tree, he is a warrior we fear."

The overseer's voice filled with a deep, seething hatred, "That is why I cannot harm him. The strength I have is Schema's. Yawm owns his own strength, and it exists outside the system's limitations. That is one of the reasons that he is so dangerous."

I turned a hand to the overseer, "Well damn...Sounds like a tough situation."

The overseer sighed, "Indeed it is. Having someone who led the species that enslaved you so close, yet being unable to harm him...it is profoundly humbling." A bomb exploded in the distance, gaining all of our attentions.

"It seems as though your planet has decided to finally fight." The overseer turned towards Hod, "The...what were they called...Ah yes, the Eltari. They seem to be helpful." He glanced around, a few squadrons of flying eltari bombing nearby clusters of Yawm's spawns. "Very helpful. It is good you decided to keep them alive."

The overseer opened his status screen, pressing different buttons on it, "That is yet another rift cleared then? You could be a candidate for a Fringe Walker at this rate. You have the tenacity for it."

I raised an eyebrow, "What's a Fringe Walker?"

The blue squares eliminated the last remnants of the gray haze. A crystal plate formed over the lake, leaving the lone island at its center uncovered. It acted as the entrance for the dungeon. The overseer closed his status screens,

“It’s a fighter used for eliminating fringe worlds. You see, Schema expands outwards. As he expands, Schema prefers all the planets within his domain to be free of eldritch, or at least handled to some extent.”

The overseer raised his massive hands, “As you may imagine, this isn’t always the case. Some worlds deeps within Schema’s grid falter then fail. They become breeding grounds for the eldritch. Once fully converted, certain higher level species of Eldritch can be spread through interplanetary launching. They will spread their demonic spawns offworld.”

The overseer smacked a fist into a palm, “And if one of those spawns lands on an uninfected planet, that world is almost certainly doomed.” The overseer lowered his hands, “Schema is fortunate that Earth isn’t positioned like that. It’s a border world, meaning it lies on the outskirts of Schema’s grid.”

The overseer pointed towards me, “Take full advantage of that fact. Yawm assumed your world had no strong fighters. Strike strong and heavy before he awakens, else you and your species will die. Either that, or you will become the flesh that Yawm molds for his own ends.”

A shiver ran down my spine as I frowned, “Damn. I’ll keep that in mind...” I raised a hand, “Ah yeah, I almost forgot. I met a guy called Tera. He was a Speaker for Schema. He mentioned a level cap. If I was a Fringe Walker, what would my level cap be, and would that get rid of my unknown statu?”

The overseer leaned his chin against his right fist,

“Well, well, Tera told you more than I expected he would. You will learn about the inner workings of Schema eventually anyway. You will receive a heightened level cap of 15,000. That is, if you continue your progression. You may be staring too far ahead.”

The overseer shook his head, “By Schema, I pray you don’t stagnate like the necromancer or remnant. They stalled before coming to full fruition. Let us hope you are different in that regard.”

I shrugged, "I just want Yawm killed and my unknown status revoked. After that, I'll figure out something to do. Maybe that will mean fighting all time, maybe not. We'll see."

The overseer glanced at the rune on my arm. With a nigh reverent tone in his voice, he spoke,

"Interesting...It's true then...You actually learned the Dimensional Cipher already."

I inspected the dual eldritch rune on my left arm as I spoke, "Well uh, not really. I know two letters, that's it."

The overseer laughed, his deep, artificial voice both commanding and dominant.

"That is all you need to know. With the obscene mana generation from that integrated dimension, you'll reap many benefits from the cipher. That separates you and Yawm in many ways. While he had time on his side, you have tools he never had. Use them well."

I pointed a finger at the overseer, "What do you mean candidate?"

The overseer boomed another laugh, "You will learn in due time. Be ready for it when Schema comes calling."

The overseer opened a portal in space-time, walking through it and disappearing. I raised my hands in frustration, "Why would he do that? Why not just tell me instead of leaving me hanging?"

Hod walked up and placed a hand on my shoulder, "Because Harbinger not where Harbinger needs to be to know what Harbinger needs to know. Harbinger learn in time. Harbinger and Hod need to go back to Dry Man, not learn what Hod and Harbinger not ready to learn."

I shook my head, shaking out my irritation, "Yeah, you're right...Let's go."

Leaving the lake, Hod and I shot off towards the sewer indicated by our minimaps. I dived through the metal plate on top of it, drilling into the sewer. Leaving Hod behind, I shot through the walls of the sewer and the ground. With The Coming Tide, traveling through this terrain was nothing.

Within minutes, I reached Torix's base. I shot out of the ground, landing on my feet before jogging inside the building. I ducked under the doorway, turning sideways so my shoulders didn't catch on the doorframe. It was something I got used to as my height increased. I paced up towards Torix as he frantically interacted with his status screen.

Whenever I reached him, he turned towards me. His head tilted sideways. I frowned,

"What's wrong?"

Torix pursed his lips, "You seem different. You are exerting a...I can't quite put a finger on it...pull is the best word for it, I suppose."

I shrugged, "I got an evolution in my armor. It involved becoming a living dimension this time. Crazy, I know."

Torix shook his head, "Well, there is no reason for your unreasonable progression to cease. Where is Hod?"

Torix raised his hand, a giddy grin forming on his face, "Tell me, did he not make it?"

I rolled my eyes, "He's alive. I travel through the sewers faster than he does is all."

Torix's hands flopped against his sides as he glanced at the dusty floorboards, "Oh...really...Perhaps he will die at a later date. One can hope."

Hod stumbled inside, feathers falling off everywhere, "Hod back!"

Torix let out a deep, disappointed sigh, "We see that."

Hod stood up, grabbing his chin. If it was anyone else, he would be mocking Torix.

“But...but Hod thought Dry Man not able to see. Dry Man have blue fires where eyes are supposed to be.”

Torix slapped the sides of his face, “I can see with these fires, you idiot.”

As if discovering something profound, Hod stared at the ground, “Hod ask Dry Man...” He glanced back up, “Does that mean all fire see like Dry Man?”

Torix dragged his bony hands across the wrinkled, dry skin on his face, “The fire I use is an enchantment. It comes with being a lich. I maintain it since it enhances a few of my senses. Unlike my eyes, most fires are simply inanimate byproducts of combustion. They are not alive like I am.”

Hod nodded his head, “Hod thank Dry Man for explanation. Fire confusing to Hod.”

Torix pursed his lips and lowered his hands, “Well then...you’re welcome.” Torix narrowed his eyes, staring at Hod, “You...you’re a higher level than me now as well. That explains why you don’t seem quite as...infantile.”

I looked over Hod’s face. He was sitting at level 1401. I forgot to check out my own level and put points into my stats. With that in mind, I opened the status screen. I was level 1594. I put all my extra points into endurance. There was no rush in power. It was a steady crawl as I expected.

I closed my status screen, seeing Hod do the same. Putting points into my attributes reminded him about his own stats. After finishing that process, a cockroach crawled along a wall nearby. As organized as Torix was, cleanliness wasn’t on the top of his priorities. I reached out with Event Horizon, disintegrating the cockroach instantly.

Torix’s head whipped up towards me, “What was that?”

I raised an eyebrow, “What do you mean? I used oppression.” I shook my head, “No, wait a second, it’s called Event Horizon now.”

Torix grimaced, his voice solemn, “That aura...it feels like an Old One.”

I bit my lip, “Really?” I blinked, “That’s unnerving. You’re supposed to be the Old One here, not me.”

Torix’s lips curled up into a slight grin, “Hah, that’s true I suppose. You’re still Daniel, though a bit more menacing now.”

He opened his status screen, sending two messages over the next few seconds. Hod slammed his fist into his outstretched palm,

“Ah, Hod get it. Dry Man old, so Harbinger say Dry Man supposed to be the old person, not Harbinger. Of course.”

I rolled my eyes, “Yes, Hod. Exactly.”

Hod wiped at his nose with a smug satisfaction, “Hod pretty smart, Hod have to admit.”

Torix took a step back, his blue fireball eyes growing in size. He turned his head, reading a message. After he finished, his hands shook. He turned towards us and shouted,

“Silence.”

He created two messages before sending them towards us.

He stared holes at us, the fires looking like wide eyes as he yelled, “Follow those routes immediately.”

I raised an eyebrow, “What is it?”

Torix raised his hands, panic leaking into his voice, “A follower has found the training center of the Steel Legion. Kessiah is fighting as we speak.”

Chapter 97: Cataclysm Comes

I raised both my hands, “Wait a second. Calm down, and let’s talk about this for a minute. Where are your guards?”

Torix raised an eyebrow, “What guards?”

I snapped my fingers a few times, finding my words, “Uh, uhm...Aatrox and Kade.”

Torix leaned against his hands, “They are acting as leaders of two battalions right now. Otherwise the followers would have decimated them.”

I spread out my arms, “What about that gaint monster you used once...Moloth right?”

Torix shook his head, “I can send him, but time is of the essence. Moloth is a very slow, fumbling giant.”

I grabbed the sides of my head, “Fuck. What about Althea?”

“The same situation as the guards. She throws the followers off as they travel around.”

I shook my hands, “Why did you send all our fighters off on missions like this? Wasn’t the goal to fight the followers and kill them?”

Torix shouted, “Why haven’t you organized any missions and presented them to me? You have a head between your shoulders. Do I have to command your every move?”

Hod clapped his wings together, “Harbinger and Dry Man. Stop shouting. We need to save Lady Friend number two.”

I sighed, “Dammit...you’re right.” I turned to Torix, “I’m sorry.”

“Likewise. Go and help her.”

Without needing another word, I turned and sprinted out of the house. Hod followed me, stumbling out before flying upwards. Torix howled with his voice unsteady,

“Prepare yourselves. I will stop by once I’ve positioned the troops.”

I stomped my heels into the ground before diving into the ground. I unleashed overcharged energy from my runes, blasting me up into the air. After a few quick dips in the ground, I raced towards the point on my minimap. After a minute of travel, distant, booming echoes radiated from near the steel legion’s training camp.

It was an empty warehouse surrounded by a few tool and car shops. It was convenient since parts could be gathered from nearby. The open areas inside the building were perfect for firing ranges. The enclosure kept most of the noise from firing inside the building. While it wasn’t the same as an underground bunker, it served its purpose well.

Well, for the most part. A follower found the building. That wasn’t what everyone was hoping for. Gunshots ebbed from the building explained why it was found. A giant hole in the side of the building showed where Kessiah and the follower went. I dashed up from the ground, landing beside the hole. Whenever I peered inside the building, horror met my eyes.

Blood drenched every part of the building. Deformed thralls of Yawm feasted on corpses. The squishing of fresh intestines being chewed made my stomach sink. Streaks of warm blood painted the walls and floors. Several dozen summons of Yawm were hunched over corpses, the crunching of bone grating the air.

They chewed on fingers and ribs. Eyes were plastered over their bodies. Blood clotted around wherever their mouth was, whether it was on their face or elsewhere. The thick, pungent scent of organs filled the entire building, wafting out of the hole on the wall. Dozens of soldiers were screaming as their organs were sucked out by abominations of flesh.

Hod dashed into the room,

“Hod save soldiers. Harbinger save Crow.”

I clenched a fist, wanting to dash in there and turn the spawns into pulp. I swallowed that desire before turning towards several other holes in buildings. Several hundred meters away, the booming sound of combat was evident. Kessiah needed me.

I flared my runes and charged towards the fray. I leaped over buildings with torn walls, some flattened down to their foundation. I reached the point of combat a few seconds later. There was the follower.

Dakhma Wike, Blood of Bane(lvl 3,314)

In a city square, Kessiah battled against Dakhma Wike. Four blocks were covered in rubble from collapsed buildings. Several craters littered the ground. Telephone poles and city lights stabbed through buildings or laid mangled on the ground.

With his living cape and hunched back, Dakhma kept low on the ground. Blood leaked from his enlarged right arm. He held his old sword with a firm resolve, however. From under his hood, a malicious grin had spread. The gray armor covering him still shined. He was almost unharmed. Kessiah wasn't so lucky.

Kessiah limped on a leg punctured by his sword. The sword had stabbed through her shin bone, splintering it apart. The fact Kessiah still walked on it amazed me. Part of her hair had been sliced off, like a new, short haircut. Six stab wounds showed across her chest. Blood squirted from the wounds, but she channeled it into her Blood Arts as she fought.

The black veins spread under her skin, keeping her fighting. I neared them both as Dakhma Taunted in his old voice,

“You remnants have a bit of fight in you after all. It's amazing what a difference a single talent makes. You won't fight for long though. Not if you keep relying on Baldowah for your strength.”

Kessiah lifted her hands, spitting blood out from her mouth, “Fuck off.”

Dakhma laughed, his voice like grit, “With it comes a tremendous ability for destruction, but you are undisciplined. You cannot wield it.”

Kessiah shook her head, “Didn't you want to fight?”

He dashed towards her, his voice bristling across the open square,

“With pleasure.”

Before he reached her, I landed ten meters away. Using telekinesis, I redirected the force of my landing above Dakhma. A telekinetic wave slammed against him, causing his charge to stumble. Capitalizing on my disruption, Kessiah dashed forward and slammed a fist into his face. It looked like a shadow of my own punching but sloppy and wild.

What she lacked in technique, she made up for in power. The speed of her strike was blistering, like a bolt of lightning. After ushering a monstrous echo from the contact, Dakhma shot backwards. His body dug through the ground and pavement. A trench formed before he shot through the wall of a brick building. Slamming into the other side of the small tool store, the entire structure collapsed.

A wave of red dust billowed from it. I ran in front of Kessiah. She gasped, “Ah...fuck, I thought I got him...Thanks.”

I opened the pocket dimension in my ring, pulling out a blue crystal. Torix had given us a guard just in case we needed it. Althea’s had been Aatrox and mine was Kade. Now was that time to use them.

With that in mind, I channeled mana into it. From the crystal, a wave of energy exploded outwards with a cloud of crystalline powder. Kade, a tall guard with two giant cannons positioned on his sides, walked out from the cloud. He looked around, confused and covered in blood that wasn’t his own.

It looked like I plopped him right out of combat. The steel legion would have to make due without him. I tightened my fists and flared my runes. I slammed my fists together, the telekinetic augments forming without thought, “Let’s rip this guy’s guts out.”

I stomped my foot, exuding Overwhelming Presence and Words of Strength as I roared,

“Come on Dakhma. You wanted a fight, didn’t you?”

A titanic explosion swelled the dust from the brick building in front of us, pieces of brick and debris slamming into nearby buildings. Dakhma stood tall on the ground, his silver armor dented on his face, chest, and right arm. The stunted left arm was nigh useless, but his red cape molded into an even larger limb than his right one.

He leaned over, a gray beard falling onto his chest plate. Menacing and conniving, his eyes and face were hidden beneath the darkness his hood cast. He pointed his sword at me,

“Are you the fighter I spared so long ago?”

I slammed my fist into my chest, the clash of metal overpowering his words, “I didn’t ask for questions.” I thundered, “I asked for a fight. Come on.”

Dakhma leaned back for a moment, along with Kessiah. Somehow my words held no fear. It didn’t even seem like my own voice. It sounded like a bloodthirsty warrior challenging another warrior in combat. In the end, I guess that’s what it was.

Dakhma laughed, “Hah, hah, hah! Finally, an eager opponent.” He leaned over, “I accept your challenge. Prepare yourself.”

I reached out towards him with Event Horizon. He bolted forwards, fast as a speeding bullet. I condensed the aura over the trajectory of his charge. As he entered the aura, his grin turned into a grimace.

He reached me in an instant. It was fast enough that I called it teleportation. As he popped up in front of me, he reared his sword back, trying to knock me aside with his crimson, tattered cape. Like the palm of a giant, it swiped towards my right side. I grinned at the sight.

I stomped my heels into the ground, extending my footing with telekinesis and gravitational magic. Using Volatile Carnage, a gravity warp formed over my left fist, along with telekinetic augments. Boundless Storm let me guide my movements with a pristine grace and deadly intention. Whenever my fist landed, The Coming Tide let me discharge my loaded runes.

The resulting impact was like holding an earthquake in my hands. The point of contact resulted in a hole being punctured through the cape. Dakhma’s jaw gaped in

surprise as he charged into me. The sword stabbed through my stomach, piercing out of my back. I still clasped my hands against his shoulders, gripping as I condensed Event Horizon around him.

Dakhma grimaced before I leaned down. From behind me, Kessiah stepped forward and lobbed her fist at his face. Before it landed, I covered my ears with my armor. Even with the thick plate of metal protecting my hearing, the shockwave of the strike left my ears ringing. I lifted my head after the strike, observing the destruction.

Dakhma crashed through a nearby house, piercing into another one before collapsing the building once more. His attack hardly even scratched the massive pool of health I developed, so I turned to Kessiah,

“Can you go on?”

As if hit by whiplash, she stared at me in disbelief, “How did you block him?”

I clapped my hands, making Kessiah take a step backwards,

“Kessiah. Focus. If Dakhma escapes, we’ll be fighting three followers instead of one. Now’s our chance. To kill him. Can you go on?”

She blinked before nodding, “Of course. Let’s rip him apart.”

I clasped my fist in confidence before charging towards Dakhma, my health regen reconstituting my wounds. Inside the suburban home, Dakhma crashed out of the wall of the building. With blood dripping from his mouth, he howled,

“You meant it when you wanted a fight. I’ll return your intention in kind.”

He dashed towards me, shooting through the air with a burst of speed. As Kessiah’s vanguard, I met his charge. He slashed downwards with his sword from his right hand. I stepped towards his left. His cape moved towards me, the fabric curled into a colossal fist. Before it struck me aside, I used The Coming Tide.

I leaned downwards while sliding two feet deep into the ground. The difficulty of it, like molding the armor on my foot and gravity magic, were eased with The Coming Tide. It made my duck smooth and fluid.

With my feet planted, Dakhma's cape hit my upper shoulder. As it made contact, I shrugged my shoulder and molded my armor, guiding the strike over my head. Sparks flew off my armor as I unleashed my overcharged runes. My fist struck, and I expanded my footing with telekinetic augments.

My fist slammed into Dakhma's stomach, creating another dent in his armor. He lifted off the ground a few feet as wind burst outward with a wave of sound. Before he landed on the ground, I stepped forward. My feet lifted out of the ground, smooth and controlled. I feinted another right straight at his stomach.

Dakhma reacted in time, bending his stomach backwards. It was a sublime dodge, perfect for dodging a right straight. Unfortunately for him, that wasn't the real punch. I shifted on my feet, transferring force from my feet upwards. I dragged my fist into his face, whalloping him with a left uppercut.

Volatile Carnage transferred the force of my punch into a telekinetic bullet. This strike collided into his chin, bouncing my fist backwards. The blow disintegrated his beard and whipped his head backwards. Dakhma flipped through the air before Kessiah charged past me. Dakhma landed on his feet as Kessiah reared back her right fist.

It was an amateurish attack. Sure it held enormous speed and power, but it was predictable. Rearing back a fist during a fight is an easy way of getting countered. Knowing this, Dakhma slipped under the enormously fast strike and impaled Kessiah's stomach. He lifted her into the air before his cape grabbed her.

It pulled her from the blade before shoving her down into it again. Before it landed, Torix's guard, Kade, fired of several rounds at Dakhma. Dodging like a dancer, he shifted between the bullets while maintaining his hold on Kessiah. Unlike me or Kessiah, his footsteps never crushed the ground. They were light and effortless.

It was like he was weightless as he spun and swayed between Kade's bullets. He removed the sword from Kessiah's chest. His cape pulled her back down into the blade. Dakhma planned on finishing Kessiah off before we comboed him again. As invincible as he was, even a follower couldn't tank Kessiah's strikes for free.

Before he could execute on his plan, I stomped my heel and slammed a fist into a telekinetic pad. It transferred the force of the strike onto Dakhma's sword. The sword drifted sideways, making the cape slam Kessiah into Dakhma. They fumbled backwards as Dakhma's footsteps kept them afloat. Otherwise they would sink into the ground from their combined weight.

I dashed forwards with The Coming Tide, diving into the ground. I unburrowed with a burst of energy from my overcharged runes. I pelted past him, grabbing his cape as I dashed past him. With my runes flaring at full force, I pulled Dakhma away from Kessiah by holding onto his cape.

I landed on the ground, lifting him and Kessiah through the air. Dakhma lost his grip on Kessiah, her body flopping through the air. She tackled into the ground, the earth rippling under her mammoth weight.

Dakhma wasn't so lucky. He slung through the air, like I was swinging a flail over my head. He clashed against a pile of brick rubble, cracks webbing outward. During the entire struggle, I kept Event Horizon on him. He tried standing after the slam. I dashed into him.

We rolled on the ground before I ended up on top of him. I stabbed my feet into the ground, reaching out with tendrils of my armor. Dakhma struggled, his strength tremendous but my hold secure. I lifted a fist into the air. It was like an executioner's axe.

I slammed it into his face. I lifted my other fist, and I smashed his face once more. Strike after strike, I pummeled him. The crater beneath him expanded after each impact of my fists. The old, wrinkled skin on his face ripped open, fresh wounds forming. His blood coated my hands, smearing across the ground and his armor. With a vicious, animalistic brutality, I beat him with my hands.

Seconds of this onslaught passed before his cape grabbed me from behind. It pulled me backwards before his legs wrapped around my neck. They clamped down, blocking any air from entering my lungs.

The metallic roots I used for planting myself down now held me arched backwards. Dakhma leveraged his legs, bending my spine backwards. My armor stretched before snapping, the pop of bursting armor loud as a bomb in my ears. My spine cracked. My

bones broke under his might He lifted his sword impaling my spine, severing the nerves.

My legs went limp before Dakhma spoke, “You have an admirable tolerance for punishment. I’m sure most eldritch couldn’t even harm you.”

He lifted his sword from my stomach, stabbing it through my neck. My arms and chest went limp.

“If an enemy understands how to harm you, your confidence will get you killed. You would be a better warrior if you were under my tutelage.”

He leveraged my back, the sound of tearing skin and breaking bones ringing in my ears,

“I can extend that offer again, if you join Yawm.”

Though my body was numb, the armor over my body wasn’t. I shot out several spines into Dakhma, the tendrils of armor digging through him. Despite the damage he dealt, Event Horizon combined with my insane health regen meant I was recovering. Feeling in my arms came back, so I grabbed onto Dakhma. The tips of my fingers clawed into him.

I opened my mouth, my armor opening with jagged jaws. They clamped into the leg of Dakhma as he howled out. A moment later, he lifted his sword and slammed it towards my head. I spike of my armor grew out, guiding the blade sideways. It stabbed into the ground before Dakhma released his leg’s grip on my neck.

As he did, he pushed himself back, pulling the tendrils of my armor out from under his skin. With blood dripping from his wounds, he grimaced, “You’re not worth of my tutelage. You’re no warrior. You’re a monster and you fight like one, like some demon without honor in battle.”

I pulled myself from the ground, my body regenerating, “This isn’t battle. It’s bloodshed, and there is no honor in bloodshed. You’re just in denial about what you’re doing.”

Dakhma lifted his old sword again, deflecting several of the bullets from Kade's rifles. He jumped into the air, mana harmonizing onto his blade. The air around us reddened before this red sucked into spear. I jumped up towards him, but he propelled towards Kessiah and Kade. In a flash of light, he passed through Kade.

The guard's upper and lower halves severed, blood squirting from both sides. The slice of his sword sent out a shockwave a second after he landed. A gust of wind shot up, along with a wave of dust and sound. It was like he went faster than sound, creating a sonic boom.

Dakhma heaved out his breaths, struggling for air as he landed. That kind of burst took a toll on him. Kessiah dashed towards him, putting him on defense. Her strikes pummeled against his cape and sword, fierce and fast. I dashed towards them both before Dakhma deflected a hook from Kessiah with his cape.

In a burst of movement, he pierced her chest again. I reached him, but he released the sword with Kessiah stumbling backwards. As she spit out her own blood, Dakhma spun towards me. He swung with his cape first, but I dived over the giant hand of morphed fabric. I landed on his upper chest, biting into his neck.

Before he slung me away, a tiny rupture in his armor formed. I slammed my fist into the hole with Volatile Carnage activating. It created a hole in his skin. My armor infested his flesh, digging into the wound as he pushed me away.

The tendrils of armor ripped out of his body. From the force of his shove, he broke the ground around us. Fissures crawled outwards as I flopped on the ground. Kessiah pulled out the sword from her chest before swinging it at Dakhma. Dakhma blocked with his cape, the fabric shearing as he stomped forward. Like a chinese monk, he struck into her stomach with his feet grounded.

A crater formed under the feet of Dakhma, the power of his strike undeniable. After flopping through the air, Kessiah hobbled up next to me. She grinned,

"He's tough, but he's about out of juice. Look at the bastard shiver."

She was right. The fist that struck Kessiah shook with several broken fingers on it. The cape was split in two with holes all throughout it. Gashes and cuts covered holes in his armor, and his knees buckled now. He couldn't stand up straight anymore, and his mana

looked depleted. Since the last time we fought, Kessiah was using her Blood Arts and I gained over 1000 levels.

He couldn't keep this up forever, especially not with Event Horizon chipping away at his health. After killing Kade, his mana was depleted as well. Knowing his fate, Dakhma murmured,

"You know, two of the followers chose to accept Yawm's gifts and two chose not too. Ajax and I, we wanted to support our master without abusing his gifts. I wanted to help him with my own strength. I wanted him to know that I could and would earn a place at his side."

He lifted his sword, runes forming over it,

"There exists a greater resolve in my stained soul, however selfish it may be."

Eldritch runes spread outwards from his armor and cape, covering his body in a dark red light. I dashed towards him. He lifted himself up off the ground, standing his full height. His wounds healed. Red lightning coalesced around his broken sword, creating a sword of crimson. As it finished, a shockwave blew me backwards.

Dakhma lifted his right hand, the distortion within it disappearing. The swollen joints became normal. I dashed towards him again, but he shoved the crimson sword into the ground again.

The red lightning bolted into my armor, paralyzing me and shoving me backwards. I landed on my back, unable to move or do anything. I looked on as Dakhma's ragged fingernails rejuvenated under the healing light of the runes. Dakhma's odd proportions became normal. His left arm grew in size, bursting from the armor. He lifted his sword, a bolt of white energy coming down onto it.

The crimson melted away, turning his cape and sword turned to a pristine, noble white. It was no longer tattered and ruined. His items and body were rejuvenated over a few seconds. Feeling came back into my body, so I stood up. I dashed towards him, but a bolt of white thunder arced from the sword, stopping me. The flash of lightning pierced through my chest, burning my insides.

Dakhma laughed, his voice no longer old, “Why have I waited so long for his healing light?” He stared at his hands and shining armor, “I am made new once more.” Dakhma pulled back his hood, showing a full beard regrown onto his chin. Dignity spread over his face, a look of confidence beaming out.

He grinned, his teeth no longer yellow and crooked. My chest reformed as I stood there, my confidence in our victory dying out. A new Dakhma would tear us apart with how worn down Kessiah was. As if affirming my thoughts, Dakhma swiped his now white blade of energy.

A wave of light flowed over me, burning my skin like acid. Kessiah ran backwards, hiding behind a car. The metal and glass melted, a sterile scent leaking from the hissing materials. Dakhma raised his sword,

“I am the bringer of Yawm’s light. I will purify the remnant stain hiding from me. With...”

From under his gleaming armor, Dakhma’s chest pulsed outwards. It was a large shift, unnatural and grotesque. Dakhma took a step backwards, struggling out his words, “I... I will conquer these demons...”

A tendril of flesh ripped out from under his armor, plastering over the shining metal.

“I...hear their voices...I will continue, even though the flesh screams so loud...”

His chest pulsed once more. A tentacle of veins and writhing organs spread over the side of his neck. Another polyp of flesh expanded from the wrist holding his sword. Kessiah and I looked on in horror as he continued,

“The voices...they scream so loud...”

His cheeks sunk into his face. The cheeks split, his jaw unhinging. He gurgled out,

“Make them stop...I can’t...” He reached out hand towards us, “Please, make them stop.”

Rows of teeth expanded from his unhinged jaw. They opened up, forming many mouths across his jaw and the skin on his face. I opened my status screen, sending Torix and Hod a message,

The Living Dimension(3:21 P.M. 12/06/00) – Dakhma is too strong. Help.

I finished the message, sending it towards them. Dakhma's body expanded out his armor, covering it in molded skin, hair, and organs. Like a nightmare of living flesh, the new, noble knight was consumed by his own body. He gurgled in a deformed voice,

“Please, help me. Please...”

The gurgling turned into a muffled howl as the skin on his right hand split open. Bone and meat covered the handle of his sword. He shifted, turning in agony. Waves of white light beamed outwards in every direction. They crashed against buildings, lopping them in two. I burrowed into the ground while Kessiah hid beneath rubble as he did so.

Once the sound stopped, I pulled myself from the ground. Dakhma's arms no longer grabbed the side of his head. They laid limp at his side as his chest convulsed. Flesh covered the cape along his back, turning it into a writhing, convulsing plate of muscle and veins. Spikes of bone grew along the edge of it. Dakhma lifted his new left arm and smashed his face.

His knees shook as he slammed his fist into his face. Bulbous sores burst, flinging disgusting bile on the ground as he gurgled out a scream,

“Kill me...Kill me...They drown me...I am lost...I...I don't want to...become them.”

He shook his head, his skin shivering. The convulsing stopped, along with any struggle. Dakhma's posture straightened. His body relaxed. The fear in him dissipated. The grimaces on the mouths of the creature smiled. The eyes opened wide, curious, and haunting. The mouths spoke in perfect unison as it caught sight of me,

“You...you are not like the other food here or like my brethren. You are something else altogether.”

It took a step towards me, drool leaking from each of the disgusting mouths,

“You still feel like a little lamb...I wonder how you taste.”

I shook out the wave of fear, grinning at the monster. My armor formed teeth,

“Like something you will grow to fear.”

Chapter 98: To Corrupt

I dashed towards the monster as it swung its sword of coalesced energy at me. Before the wave of blinding light washed over me, I dived into the ground. I drilled around and shot up from under him. I slammed a fist against his chest, but the skin and flesh was hard to the touch. It was like striking steel.

The bones in my armor buckled at the impact, rebounding force radiating up my arm. My armor held me together before the creature buckled over. I sliced another snapping hook into his jaw, the telekinetic impact sending blood in every direction. I swiveled on my feet, firing another hook into the side of the creature.

The armor on my knuckles split. The skin on the creature did as well. He swiped his sword towards me, but I ducked under the swing and drilled another hook into his side. The cape of flesh followed the slash, crashing against my side. I flopped through the air, my vision spiralling as I did.

Through all that chaos, I angled my hands and head so that I drilled into the ground once I met it. I burrowed into the ground, spiralling in a circle before attacking the monster once more. Using The Coming Tide, I bursted up and out of the ground. As I did, the eldritch abomination swung its sword downwards towards me.

I lifted my striking hand, my right fist making contact with the eldritch's sword hand. All the propulsive force was overpowered, shoving me back into the ground. The swing drove me five feet into the ground, my right arm shaking as it stopped his sword arm. Kessiah finally dashed in from the side, but the monster used his flesh cape against her.

She punched the writhing mass, slamming her fists with tectonic collisions. The blood of Baldowah coursed through her, fueling her monstrous strength. As I held the eldritch there, she delivered punishing blow after punishing blow. Her fists turned into speeding blurs as bones in the flesh cape broke.

Despite the enhanced attribute of this thing, it lacked Dakhma's finesse. Without his techniques and skill, the battle turned into one of attributes versus attributes. Since Kessiah's Blood Arts enhanced her strength by an immense magnitude, it gave us an edge.

Using that edge, Kessiah launched an earth shattering strike into the flesh cape. The veins and flesh holding it together ripped open, blood coursing out in every direction. It splattered over Kessiah, covering her eyes. The monster slammed his arm into the side of my chest, knocking me a few feet sideways.

My ribs broke as I lost my breath. The sound of his strike busted my eardrums as I fell towards one knee. The eldritch monster turned around in place, slicing his sword at Kessiah.

The coalesced energy sliced halfway through her chest. Blood spurted from Kessiah's mouth and nose before the monster grabbed her with his cape. The horns clasped onto the sides of her face as the cape dug veins and flesh down her throat.

It was trying to drown her in its body. Before it did so, I stood up and shot towards him. With my runes overcharged, I struck the side of the monster. The monster kept the cape on her face as she struggled. It was like watching a bear trap close through someone's face.

Kessiah's body convulsed, her throat swelling as the flesh invaded her body. Hatred seethed into my limbs as I lashed out at the monster. My strikes turned vicious, my aim immaculate. I evaded each of the monster's attacks, ripping powerful blows into its sides. The more I assaulted the creature, the less it mattered.

The monster's body absorbed the punishment, grinning at me despite the damage I dealt. Blood leaked out of Kessiah's eyes as she scrambled for air. The fleshy tendrils poured out of her eyes and nose, squirming deeper. She used her arms, slamming her fists into the cape holding her. It wasn't enough damage against this thing.

Desperation leaking into Kessiah and my movements. The monster's resilience kept it alive as Kessiah's stomach swelled. My own strikes continued growing in intensity, my own ferocity growing as I struggled. Every ounce of my might aimed at stopping the ongoing horror. A monster of flesh was going to kill Kessiah. I wouldn't watch her die. I refused.

My strikes blended together, molding into a single movement. All of my skills came to one, becoming something undeniable. With each passing second, The monster's movements slowed compared with my own. I perceived the attacks of the creature before they were thrown. The desperation ebbed away as conviction replaced it.

It's vitality was tremendous, higher than even my own. Killing it was like moving a mountain. It was a time where I had no choice. I stood up to the horror in front of me and faced it. I dedicated myself, honing my mind and movements into a single entity.

The monster was faster and stronger, but I shifted and weaved around its strikes with grace. It belched acid at me, but I used gravity as I struck it to move the acid away. It struck towards me, but I molded gravity to misdirect its strikes. It opened its chest at me, flaring a nest of spikes at me. I moved myself with telekinesis away from it, ripping strike against it.

The monster stepped back, no longer able to handle the onslaught of strikes. Even with its massive level lead, it couldn't stop me. I was a force of nature. I tore through it with a relentless, unstoppable rush. It couldn't touch me any longer. It didn't take effort either. It was a relaxing feeling, like liberating myself. That relaxation let me think, even as I destroyed the monster.

With tiny optimizations in how I hit and punched, I added a large advantage over time. The monster kicked at me, but I leapt over its attack. I bounced off a telekinetic pad, slamming my foot into the head of the creature. Teeth fell from its face. Blood shot out from every angle of torn skin. It was only a matter of time before I killed it.

But time wasn't something we had. Kessiah's struggling slowed down as she couldn't fight anymore. Her life force waned as her chest convulsed for air. I berated the monster with my strikes, unleashing torment. I shoved spines of my armor into the beast, tearing it apart. I impaled spikes of my armor into it, ripping through it and gouging out its organs.

Yet it continued. Frustration leaked into my strikes, the weight of them growing. With wilder hits, I let the monster slice at me with his sword, the blade carved inches deep with each cut it made. It was a calculated risk I took. With this sudden ease in combat, I had the option of thinking. Using this new ability, I devised a plan in seconds.

In the corner of my vision, Hod was flying towards us. If we wanted to kill this thing, we needed the energy sword in its right hand. Armed with that knowledge, I angled my strikes, loosening the monster's grip on its blade. Its body had molded over the handle, making it nigh impossible to knock it out of its grasp. It was my only hope of saving Kessiah though.

At the fever pitch of the conflict, the eldritch slashed downwards at me. I caught his arm as he forced it downwards. This was my last chance. I dug into the ground before he slammed his left fist into my right side. Blood bursted from my insides, but it slowed down his flesh cape. As he struggled against me, he no longer dug deeper into Kessiah mouth.

The monster didn't leave me unpunished either. With each strike, he whittled at my health. With each mammoth collision of its hand, my bones rattled. Blood burst from my mouth, my body disintegrated under the onslaught. I kept my hold of him firm. I opened the jaws of my armor and clamped down on the wrist of his sword hand.

Event Horizon helped sustained me, sapping his health as he struggled. Kessiah's arms fell limp against her side as her struggling stopped. A pang of fear jolted up my spine. If Kessiah died like that, I would likely die as well. We could hardly handle this thing with the both of us. It was too bulky and too strong. The sword did unbelievable damage, and it could drown close range targets with its body.

I didn't even know if I had to breath anymore. My blood was metal. My skin was too. I hadn't sat down and looked at myself for a long time. I didn't even know if I could peel back my armor anymore.

I crushed those fears and doubts under my heel. I didn't have time to ponder. I would win. I had to win. It wasn't the time for fear. It was time for action. I resolved myself. I wouldn't leave Kessiah here, dead or alive. Who knew what they would do with her body if I left. I didn't want to find out. I would stay here and fight until this thing died. I had to.

As a hole ruptured in my side, silver blood leaking out. Like mercury leaking down my side, it gushed. The eldritch stood still for a moment and licked some silver blood from off his fist. His many eyelids wrinkled in disgust,

"You taste like dirt and stone...What are you?"

It was the opening we had been waiting for. From above, there was a whistle in the air. Hod dived down, using charged shadow claws to slice at the flesh cape. He cut into the tendril of flesh digging into Kessiah's throat. His sword wielding arm was still pressing down on me, so I let it crash into my collar bone. It cracked the bone as I bit deeper into his wrist.

Tendrils of armor leaked out from my teeth. I grounded both my feet and slammed my fists into the wrist holding the energy sword. The eldritch stumbled just enough for Hod to slice twice more with this shadow claws. He finally severed the flesh cape, separating Kessiah from the monster's main body.

Hod dragged Kessiah away before the eldritch turned and reached out for them.

"That is my food, not yours."

As the eldritch dashed towards them, I dug my feet into the ground and bit down hard on his wrist. As I pulled back, my teeth dug into the bone of his arm, severing the ligaments holding him together. After two more tugs from it and I, I amputated his right sword hand.

Without my own mass pulling against him, the eldritch charged into the ground. I stood up. Before anything else, I dashed towards Kessiah. I reached her unmoving body, the tentacle down her throat blocking her breathing. Hod struggled at what to do, so I shoved him aside before grabbing the tentacle.

I pulled at it, the tentacle staying inside her more than I thought it would. I grimaced before putting a foot on Kessiah's chest. I yanked the tentacle out, Kessiah's body deflating as I removed the tendril. After a few more tugs, it was all the way out. Kessiah wasn't breathing though.

I removed my helmet, putting my lips against hers. I breathed into her chest. After two breaths, I pressed against her chest in timed intervals. I alternated between breathing and pressing onto her chest. I turned desperate before a black portal opened beside us, Torix stepping out.

He glanced around, "I'm here. Kade disappearing from his post took maneuvering to fix, but I found a..."

He glanced at Kessiah, his jaw falling open as horror spread across his face. I shouted at him,

“She isn’t breathing. Do something!”

Torix breathed out with a remarkable calm. He pulled his hands apart, arcs of lightning coursing between them. Once fully outstretched, his grimoire floated out from under his robe. It flipped open before static built in the air. He pushed his hands together, a ball of explosive lightning pooling in his right palm.

He lifted the finished sphere, grunting out his words, “I am the only dead one in our group Kessiah.”

He pressed the ball into Kessiah’s chest. She flopped upwards, her limbs flailing around. Torix howled, “You don’t die unless I kill you. Do you hear me?”

She still didn’t breath before Torix raised his palm, mana infusing his palm. Torix thundered,

“You will answer my question. Do you hear me?”

He slammed it into her chest once more. Torix’s blue fire eyes turned red as he lifted his palm once more. Kessiah’s eyes popped open, a plume of blood tearing out of her chest. Using gravity magic, I pulled the blood from her throat, my finnesse amazing me. After removing a gallon of blood, Kessiah gasped for breath.

She rolled over onto her hands and knees, vomiting up blood before breathing deeply. As she coughed right after, the eldritch monster had already stood and stomped towards us. It’s flesh cape was severed. It’s right sword hand was rived from its body. Blood spurted out of its wounds as its many voices gurgled out,

“You’ve earned my respect, little lambs. These injuries will heal whenever I feast on you bodies. You all walking corpses.”

Torix stepped in front of us, his grimoire glowing bright,

A dark portal opened above Torix. A white, scaled arm the size of a bus landed beside Torix. As its claws dug into the ground, the air around us cooled. Pillars of ice jutted out of the ground. The portal stretched open, revealing a massive eye. It glanced around before spotting the eldritch. It pushed against the portal, revealing a smiling mouth full of teeth.

A maniacal grin grew on Torix's lips, "The only walking corpse is right in front of me, I assure you."

Chapter 99: Wrath of a Lich

The eldritch laughed, its wounded body shaking. It lifted its hand, glancing at its torn wrist,

"I do ponder in my own manner...Why am I not regenerating my wounds?"

The eldritch looked at me, my body healing what should be fatal injuries in seconds. The eldritch's eyes narrowed,

"You own quite the life force for a being that tastes like dirt. We could combine our strengths. Would you be willing to join me and my many minds?"

My eyes creased as I seethed, "Hell no you disgusting fuck."

The monster took a step backwards, its face and eyes riddled with confusion, "Why do you treat me with disgust? You are a living golem...an entity that should not exist, an entity that cannot exist."

Torix waved his arm, ice spears colored a deep blue forming over his head,

"And yet here my disciple stands. Cease with your esoteric chatter."

Another leg of the white monster came out of the portal. Torix clapped his hands, opening the portal wide. The head of a reptile came out. As it did, the air turned frigid. The ground around us turned icy. The blood around us froze, except for my own silver blood. Wings spread out wider than a city block. A whipping tail, ending in an icy scythe, slung around tearing through the rubble.

It was an ice dragon. A few things were off about it, however. The jaw of the creature extended past its throat and down into its belly. Above the jawline, thick, pearly scales covered its back and wings. Below the extended jawline, thinner, glassy scales coated it. Beneath these thinner scales, the monster glowed a deep blue. It looked like it was storing liquid oxygen.

The eldritch dashed towards us, and the dragon breathed out a frigid, white mist. It hit the eldritch monster like frozen fire. Torix channeled his grimoire, covering us in an insulative shield. His grimoire flipped once more, darkening the surrounding area as it glowed black. The deep blue icicle spears zipped through the air.

The mist cleared, showing the skin of the eldritch frozen on its surface. It took a step forward, that skin cracking. The icicle spears pierced into these cracks, digging into the creature. The dragon shot out streams of the blue liquid within the beast's belly. Whenever the streams stopped, the eldritch was frozen solid. I analyzed it.

Endless Flesh(lvl 3646 | Growth Rate: Exponential) – This is a failed experiment of Yawm's tampering. This is what he is trying to do, fuse sentients with the eldritch. The folly of his efforts is obvious. The overpowering energies of the eldritch have consumed this poor fool's soul. Now he is a shadow of what he was, nothing more than a brute.

And a powerful brute it is. With acid, several limbs, and a shining sword of coalesced ambient mana, it is to be feared. It's regeneration is remarkable as well, giving it excellent longevity, and its health pool is massive given that each and every cell has a working brain and heart.

That being such, the creature must be killed in its entirety for death. Even a single living cell could spread outwards, consuming nearby life and becoming a tremendous problem. Fortunately, this superorganism strives for unity. It will not willingly disperse into many small pieces. It's threat level would be much higher then.

It can mold its body at will. Getting close to this creature will cause many problems for closer range combatants if it restricts movement. It can assimilate someone's body while they are alive, turning them into its own flesh. Even saved allies can be consumed by living cells that linger within them. Some kind of cleansing is necessary to prevent their eventual consumption from the inside.

You must stop its regeneration, its assimilation abilities, and its devastating energy sword attacks. Otherwise it will slowly whittle you down to nothing over a long term battle. Strike it fast, hard, and continuously until nothing is left.

Recommended Level: 3000+

Recommended Party Number: Less than 6

Recommended Tactics: Larger parties may make destroying the creature more difficult. Dense parties with no weaker members are highly recommended. Long range disposal is highly advised.

I almost read the entire page in five seconds. My perception let me do so. The passage explained why we were struggling so much against this thing. We were out leveled, it was a bad matchup against us, and we didn't prepare against it. We couldn't have given the circumstances.

Torix's attack was well suited for killing it though. The ice dragon emptied its pouch of blue liquid, sending a plume of it at the monster. The moment the liquid hit the air, it turned into a white mist. Torix raised his hand, a blue fire forming,

"Do you know why I prefer liquid oxygen for my freezing attacks versus liquid nitrogen."

Hod, Kessiah, and I just stared at him in disbelief. Leave it up to Torix to find time in the middle of a life or death battle for a lecture. He continued,

"Because liquid oxygen oxidizes the surface of whatever it touches. It leads to explosive results."

He flicked the blue fire at the creature. The blue dragon flapped its wings, sending the collected mist towards the eldritch monster. The moment the blue fire left the insulated shield, an enormous explosion surrounded us. Torix lifted his hands, laughing at the destruction,

"Hah, hah, hah. I love watching a good fire burn."

He lowered his hands as his eyes narrowed, “Especially when it scorches something so filthy.”

A white smoke covered where the eldritch had been. There was no notification for experience in the side of my vision. It still lived, even after all that. I dashed out of the forcefield before the dragon opened its mouth to fire off another plume of liquid energy. The eldritch shot out of the smoke cloud and into the dragon’s mouth.

The dragon tried biting into it, but the monster just forced itself down the dragon’s throat. The dragon tried breathing, but it couldn’t. I turned around, running towards the dragon before blood spurted out of it. Its massive jaw opened, showing the eldritch spreading all throughout its insides. It was trying to eat the dragon from the inside.

I moved Event Horizon over the dragon, causing it to scream. Torix howled, “Get off of my pet.”

Torix’s grimoire turned its pages, the runes sucking in the light around them once more. At the center of the eldritch’s writhing mass, the air condensed. It was like the single point was eating all the nearby sound. For a moment, all was silent.

A kinetic detonation imploded the eldritch from the inside. Its body deformed before I jumped onto the eldritch. The disgusting ball of flesh stuck to me, trying to crawl between the kinks in my armor. It found nothing to seep into. I breathed deep and coated myself in the armor.

It was airtight, locking the monster out. In fact, my own armor dug into the flesh of the eldritch, devouring its vitality. I tore at it, ripping the beast’s exposed body apart. The shifting eldritch spread faster than I and Torix could tear down. Torix shouted,

“The dragon is no longer under my control. The eldritch severed the link between us.”

A giant set of claws latched onto my back, pulling me out. I opened my armor, letting me see and hear. It lifted me out of its mortal wounds, giving me a view of the beast. The dragon turned into a shifting abomination as its body spilled out of its scales. It was like watching a candle melt as the magnificent scales were corrupted.

The dragon grinned, many eyes and tiny mouths forming over its face. These human sized mouths spoke in unison,

“Come here morsel.”

It lifted me above its gargantuan mouth before chomping down. Teeth grated against the armor of my back, it chewed, the disgusting saliva and blood surrounding me. I lashed out, expanding my armor into its cheeks. I gashed at the inside of its mouth. After breaking many of its teeth on my back, the monster spit me out.

I flopped around, my vision spiraling before I dived into the ground. A stream of liquified oxygen struck the ground above me before I burrowed back at the beast. I shot out of the ground, a cool rush of air flowing over me. My fist clashed with the flesh dragon's scales, cracks forming on its chest.

The monster spewed the cryogenic fluid, towards me, but I shifted its trajectory back at it with gravity. Doing so burned through my health, but it covered the dragon in its own liquid. The monster howled out, the roar breaking nearby windows. I covered my ears in the nick of time, the sound rattling my bones.

It whipped its long tail towards me, the icy scythe shimmering in the sun's light. I deflected the blade with ease. It dug into the earth before I dug into the ground as well. I grabbed the tail, dragging the dragon into the dirt. My sheer mass let me pull it halfway down before I could no longer move downwards.

I turned upright, reaching out with Tactile Cognition. Hod was tearing at the dragon's tail, severing that piece from it. Torix shot out fire spells. I darted up and out of the ground, aiming at the dragon's head. Its bottom jaw grew in my sight before I smashed the monster's skull.

Like a wrecking ball slamming into it, the dragon's jaw whiplashed. A backbreaking recoil radiated up my arm, but my bones and skin held together. The sound was like a seismic wave, a noise I felt more than I heard. We picked the beast apart like this. I distracted the monster, dealing damage while the others jumped in when it was busy.

Over time the monster was hobbling on its last legs. Torix's spells lost their flare, his mana waning. The shadow claws of Hod were no longer menacing. My own energy was endless, however. I maintained my full fury during the entirety of the conflict.

Torix would normally do the same by summoning, but this eldritch would just eat anything he conjured up.

Without those monsters, the eldritch lacked anything to eat. Blood poured from it by the truckload, red ice forming over the entire block. Hod destroyed the monster's wings and tail, making it useless against me. I pummeled it as the others rested behind Torix's shield of mana. Event Horizon and my regen sustained me, blocking the monster from doing the same.

The monster's movements turned into lashings. It no longer controlled itself with any measure of finesse. Without any technique, I abused the monster's sloppy movements. I leaped over strikes, drilling strikes into its ribs, joints, and jaw. I sidestepped bites and tore out its teeth. My fists were steam rollers, crushing its body in a slow, agonizing manner.

The haughty arrogance faded into fear as the dragon frothed at its mouth. Even though it stole the dragon's body, it was still limited by the abilities of its host. The dragon couldn't maintain this kind of effort for so long. The many fleshy eyes covering its face strained, turning bloodshot. The monster heaved for air as I relentlessly assaulted it.

Not a moment of my time was wasted. I kept this thing moving. After whipping a hook into its broken jaw, the monster coughed up blood over me. It fell over, the limbs flopping over each other. A writhing ball of flesh exploded out of the dragon's back. It was much smaller than the eldritch's first form over Dakhma.

As it dashed out, spears of bone pelted outwards from the dragon's steaming corpse. I blocked my face, the bones spears lodging an inch deep into my armor.

These spears crashed into and shattered Torix's mana shield. The ball of flesh rolled towards Hod, Torix, and Kessiah. Over the course of my combat with the monster, they recovered some of their manas. Hod created a shield made of shadow streaks. From behind it, Torix shot out an eruption of blue fire.

Before the blast landed, Kessiah stood up, her body at an awkward angle. She reared back and struck Torix across the side of his ancient face. Torix's jaw snapped, a cloud of dust swelling from his face before Torix flopped into the shadow streaks. Torix balled himself up, his robe fluttering as he crashed against the streaks.

The shadow streaks shattered along with an invisible shield laying over Torix. Torix rolled on the ground, dirt covering his neat robe as his grimoire flopped over the ground. Hod slashed towards Kessiah as he howled,

“Hod thought you friend. Hod trust you.”

Kessiah grinned,

“She’s not a friend of yours anymore.”

The black veins spread across her body. Hod slashed towards her, but she punched at the claw marks. Her fist crashed through the shadow claws before slamming into Hod’s stomach. A shockwave ebbed from him, the crack of bone following not far behind. The black blood of Hod’s combat form exploded out of his mouth.

Kessiah’s fist blew backwards, and so did Hod. The Eltari warrior shot into the side of a house in the distance. The ball of flesh flopped onto Kessiah. It covered her, molding into new muscle and skin. At the very least, it didn’t absorb her. It just covered her, giving her an exoskeleton of the eldritch.

It all happened over a few seconds. I grabbed the sides of my face, “Why the fuck won’t you just die?”

Kessiah lifted a hand. The fleshy exoskeleton condensed into a black metal, mimicking my own armor. Several slits formed over the face, along with many sets of jaws. They spoke in unison over Kessiah’s voice,

“Let’s see if you can handle me when I have armor like yours.”

I shook my head, “Wait a second.” I pointed at her, “You’re still in there?”

Her head twitched under the armor, her body struggling underneath the armor. She strained out a few words without the mouths and eyes speaking with her,

“I can’t...control it...I don’t know what it’s doing.”

The eyes turned towards her, the mouths whispering, “Do you not remember what these people have done to you? Torix lured you here, trapping you on Earth for his own twisted experiments.”

Kessiah gritted her teeth, straining out her words, “And what did Daniel do to me?”

The mouths hissed, “This inferior creature rejected you and your body. He treated you like a freak. The dirty earthling tried overpowering you and dominating the group. It is time to take back control.”

I frowned as I spread out my arms, “What the fuck are you talking about? That...that’s so stupid. I was trying to survive. I didn’t control anyone.”

The voices seethed at her, “Now he dismisses your own thoughts. He is a filthy backworlder who thinks he is above you. Like a snake, he will strike the moment you turn your back to him.”

I roared back, “If I had a problem with Kessiah, I would tell it to her face. Hard to do when you’re covering her with your ugly ass, so fuck off already.”

The mouths hissed as Kessiah laughed underneath the mask. The eyes squinted at me, “You taste of dirt, little lamb. You hold no sustenance. You are less than even a worm. I’ve peaked through this remnant’s mind. She believes you are inferior as well, nothing more than a lesser being.”

Kessiah grabbed the edges of her helmet, “Stop peeking through my head. These are my thoughts. Mine.”

I rolled my eyes, “Yeah, sure. Kessiah definitely thinks I’m some monkey on a backworld. That’s why she hit on me and gave me a spacial ring.”

The mouths mumbled something, but I slammed my gauntlets together. The clang overwhelmed their voice,

“Enough talking. How about we fight like monsters instead of fighting like lawyers.”

The eyes squinted at me. Hatred dripped from their voice as they spoke,

“We are a monster. You are trash.”

I dashed towards Kessiah as she struggled against the influence of the eldritch. Even with her resisting, the eldritch and her Blood Arts made her movements like tidal waves. The sheer speed and strength of them were far faster than her old ones. Even with their wild, unstable form, her first strike caught me by surprise.

Her fist crashed against my face like a rock slapping against the back of your head. I dragged ten feet back, my feet digging me into the ground. My helmet was ruptured, exposing my mouth. My silver blood leaked from my torn cheek. The mouths on her helmet smiled,

“Well then, walking dirt...you can’t even fight us with her resisting.”

I condensed event Horizon over the skin of Kessiah, instead of all throughout her. The finesse strained me a bit, but killing her wasn’t the plan. I would peel that monster off her and make it suffer. The monster didn’t want to play nice, then neither would I.

I clenched my teeth, breathing out. Blood squirted out from between my teeth, dripping down my chin and neck. My cheek regenerated before I wiped the blood off my face. I molded my helmet back onto my head as I rolled my shoulders. I walked towards the eldritch, cracking my neck,

“Trust me. I’m just getting started.”

Chapter 100: An Unstoppable Force

The confident smile on the mouths vanished. I dashed towards the monster, adjusting my approach. Kessiah shot out a lightning fast straight at my face. I sunk into the earth as I spun on my heels. Without having to even duck, I slid under the punch by sinking into the ground.

I slammed my fist into Kessiah’s stomach. It rattled my fist before Kessiah kicked at my legs. Using my overcharged runes, I jumped upwards. Kessiah’s kick glided past

my feet as I grabbed her helmet. I dragged her up with me before slamming her into the ground.

As we landed, giant slabs of earth upturned as a pit formed beneath us. I stood over her with her back against the ground. Keeping composed, I kept my elbows tight against my sides. With quick, controlled strikes, I sliced three hooks against her jaw. Her head whipped back and forth against the ground before she reached out.

I leaned back just enough, her clawed hands scraping my armor. As her arm pulled back, I shot forward, pummeling two more hooks into her jaw. She reached out with her right hand towards my neck, but I sidestepped her grab. With her arm reaching up, I countered with a right straight. It slammed into her face as she howled in frustration,

“Why can I never hit you when we fight?”

I ignored her, gaging my range as I dashed in and out of her grasp. She raised her hands and slammed the ground. A wave of dust and chips of stone billowed out. It might have stopped me a 1000 levels ago, but that was no longer the case.

I covered my eyes and ears with armor, using my gravitational sense in place of sight and hearing. I stomped her chest three times before she flailed her arms in frustration. Based on her mouth moved as she did, she was screaming obscenities. I couldn't hear her. I focused on the task at hand. I slammed strike after strike against her, whittling her down over time.

After several minutes of literally beating her into the ground, I stomped her neck. A shockwave ushered forth from her, pushing me back. She stood up, the eldritch armor smiling.

“She has succumbed.”

I analyzed her,

Kessiah Crow, the Flesh Golem(lvl 3143) – The tiny bits and pieces of the Endless Flesh lingering in Kessiah's body have taken control of her mind. In order to use Kessiah's Blood Arts, the Endless Flesh hasn't assimilated her. This means the eldritch can use its rapid regeneration as fuel for Kessiah's Blood Arts.

Fortunately, even rudimentary combat techniques aren't within this monster's arsenal. It's strength, speed, and power are all extremely high, but it doesn't have the skill to use them. Sacrificing its high regeneration for Blood Arts also makes it susceptible to prolonged combat.

The host, Kessiah Crow, can also create instability in the monster's combat patterns. These limitations lower the danger level of this eldritch. At your current combat level, this enemy will surely kill you regardless. The gap in levels and attributes is simply too high. Evasion is advised until you've strengthened yourself.

Something I learned early on about Schema's advisories are that they are like carpet bombing. They don't consider my history, my armor, not anything important. The warnings are based on what I specced points into and my level, nothing else. Based on my own performance, killing higher level creatures was expected. This fucker would be no different.

So without fear, I kept myself tucked in and tight as I paced towards Kessiah. She bulleted towards me, the ground cracking in her wake. I couldn't keep up as she slammed her fist into my stomach.

The ground beneath us quaked with a great rumble as I shot backwards. The air spiraled around me before I hit it. I adapted, piercing my fingers and feet into the ground. I dragged backwards, momentum carrying me a block further away. Kessiah already enlarged in my sight as she charged towards me.

Ready for impact, I planted my feet. There was no running away. Hod might be dead in a nearby house. Torix laid face down in the dirt, his unconscious body not even breathing. We weakened the eldritch with our fights, but it would feast on the planet if I left it unchecked. The next time I faced it, the monster would be unstoppable.

My only answer was to become unstoppable first. The monster was only so fast. It was only so strong. It was like a child given the body of a god. I didn't need to be faster than it. I needed enough speed to counter, duck, and dodge around it.

The last strike almost hit me faster than my senses could perceive it. In the back of my mind, there was a tiny weakness in my foe. At the very edge of my limits, I could've dodged that strike. At the horizon of my current potential, victory was within my grasp.

This was not impossible. It bordered on impossible, but it only skirted that line. I needed focus. I needed to dig deep and pull out all the stops. Every advantage, every skill, every second of my last year of life boiled down to this. I fought hard every day for this single opportunity. If I slacked off anymore, I wouldn't have the skills I needed for winning this.

But I had put in the time. I had put in the effort. I grounded myself, rooting my mind in a firm belief that I could and would win. All these thoughts passed in a moment before Kessiah reached me. With that absolute conviction, I was ready for her charge.

And so, she came.

Like a tidal wave, she crashed towards me. Straining my senses, I demanded they react faster than before. I overworked my body, commanding it move in time. Kessiah punched for my gut once more, but I countered her.

It took all I was. Nothing else existed in my mind but that single moment. Every part of my body, from my fists to my feet, worked with a brutal grace. I shifted myself, my hand colliding into her face. The force flowed from my knuckles to my shoulders and into the ground.

I pushed on a telekinetic pad under my feet, extending the grip of my feet. The gravity warp and telekinetic augments formed as my fist made contact. My body blew backwards into the pad under my feet, like punching into a wall. The telekinetic panel under my feet pushed back, keeping the force going into Kessiah's face.

It was like a beautiful orchestra of absolute violence. My striking synced together, like notes syncing with a rhythm. I wasted not even an ounce of my limitations, like a symphony blaring out without a single wasted sound. I reached for the totality of my magic and might.

An ounce more of force on my bones, and they would break. A single drop more of mana channeling into my runes, and they would snap. A single crumb more of stress on my telekinetic augments, and they would shatter. By some unknown method, I reached the brink of what I could do.

It was like walking on a tightrope. If I pushed myself any further, then I would break. If I pushed myself any less, then this monster would kill me. The margin of error was inhuman, yet I walked along the razor's edge.

With everything lining up, a large, circular patch of the ground around me sunk a foot deep. It was from the force of my feet slamming into a widened, telekinetic pad. All of that energy dispersed straight into Kessiah's face.

The potency of my strike was palpable. Kessiah's head whipped backwards despite the eldritch and her Blood Arts. A bit of blood leaked from a scrape on her face on one of the eyes spread across her face. The black metal around that eye expanded into bruised skin.

The eldritch grabbed the side of its face. It looked at the blood on its hand,

"How?"

I dashed towards the monster, interrupting its question. It swung its right arm towards me, the speed scorching the tip of my face. I dipped underneath it, ducking, molding the strike over my head with my armor, and sinking into the ground all at once. The blow left a strip of cleaved armor, but made no meaningful contact.

The eldritch sliced diagonally at me with the same arm. I shifted my weight on my heels, balancing as I bent away from the strike. With my body bent, around the blow, I drove a right hook into her jaw. It was a pristine strike, a satisfying crack ebbing from the contact. No matter how she struck at me, that continued.

Like a river flowing around stones, I weaved around her strikes. I felt like an artist painting his masterpiece. Except instead of paint, I worked with violence. I was graceful as a dancer and brutal as bloodshed. I flowed like water and struck like lightning. I was a moving ball of death, grinding the armor from Kessiah's skin.

The monster thrashed with might and malice, the power of storms in each of its blows. I was more than a storm. I was an unstoppable force. This was my domain. I molded the battle as a sculptor molds his creation. I composed the battlefield as a musician composes his magnum opus.

It was like something clicked. With every passing second, my confidence grew. My mind expanded, the movements becoming simple. Even as I completed the most difficult, aerobic maneuvers, I relaxed deeper into this state of mind. It wasn't that I didn't respect my enemy. I did.

It was that I comprehended my physical and mental limits to perfection. This abomination in front of me, as close as it was, lied within those limits. Every few minutes, a cataclysmic blow from the eldritch would strike my side. By the time another landed, I already regained my footing.

Time ceased existing in my head. My mind went blank. It was like I had been trying to break a world record for years. All of the sudden I tripled it, and now instinct was taking over. Even with my heightened senses and willpower, I could only handle so much stress before collapsing. With each passing second, I approached that threshold.

Closer and closer, the point of ruin came to me. The exhaustion built in my head. Every thought was like trudging through a swamp of mud. I struggled on in desperation, the minutes blending into hours. The haze around my head thickened, clogging my senses. Blood like mercury dripped down my nose.

My eyes were bloodshot, but silver lines ran across my eyes instead of red ones. It felt like I had taken a life or death exam for days without sleep. As my mental acuity waned, I dodged fewer and fewer strikes. The punishment built, my body breaking down as I pushed through. My hp dwindled, along with the pain.

By then I wished for pain. It let me know I was still alive. Even now, I can't remember who stopped punching first. I think it was me. It doesn't matter. I was the last one standing. After one of us lashed out with a final strike, Kessiah collapsed beside me.

Beneath me, the eldritch hid under Kessiah's skin. I fell onto my knees, stabbing my hand into her brutalized body. With my armor, I found the eldritch laying within and devoured the energy. Once the last particle of eldritch was eaten. I took out my hands. I spread Event Horizon wide around me, avoiding any allies but blanketing every other inch of area.

I left no eldritch behind. Injuries smothered me from head to toe. Blood soaked deep into the ground beneath my feet. I was a walking wound, a living bruise. I still stood, my knees shaking. I still lifted a fist over my head. I beat my chest once, the sound reverberating around me.

I roared out. It was a primal, untamed howl. I blared it out for all to hear. It echoed across the city, like the rumbling of a storm. It was the call of something not quite human but not quite monster either. It was the thunder of my victory. It was a promise.

I would never shake in fear at Yawm. I would never shake in fear of anyone. Whoever tried dominating me would falter and fail. I would turn that terror against them. Whether a god or legend, they would tremble at the sound of my footsteps.

I would teach them fear.