

The Primal Hunter

Chapter 1021: A Hot Way Down

One of the nice quality-of-life features the Prima Vessel had was the ability to teleport one to the core chamber of any given planet it was on. This was to give the World Leader easy access to the Planetary Pylon so the natives could claim it once they'd defeated the Prima Guardian.

However, if one had to get to the core chamber the traditional way, it all became quite a bit harder. Traveling all the way from the surface to the core was quite a distance, with winding paths all throughout, and while planets tended to have cave networks leading all the way from the surface, that didn't make it easy to go there, much less find the optimal path.

This did result in the core having quite tough natural defenses, as most wouldn't even dare try to reach it. Especially now with the local World Leader having the Vessel to teleport themselves and others down there to intercept any potential invader who was aiming at it. Finally, actually doing anything to a claimed Planetary Pylon was hard. Far harder than doing something to an unclaimed one, or if it was still only a Planetary Core.

Jake knew all these things, yet as he was considering what to do, he still decided that he would go the extreme route. With determination to end the conflict between himself and Yip's former Chosen once and for all, Jake made some final preparations as he finally entered the planet's atmosphere, no longer bombarding it from the outside.

Once in there, he began flying down while summoning arcane orbs in his wake which began to slowly fall toward the ground. They were all made out of stable arcane mana except for a small spark of destruction in the middle that would activate after a set period of time. He even shot some of these orbs in random directions, with the goal of having them serve as distractions from what he was actually doing, perhaps even making them think he was still on the surface.

What's more, the orbs even benefitted from his stealth skill, making people not notice them even as they spread out throughout a large part of the planet, ready to explode once the set timer expired. Jake didn't even aim them anywhere specific and was fine with them simply exploding in the middle of nothing, as the explosion itself should be good enough to serve as a distraction.

Still keeping an eye on any C-grades coming for him, Jake soon spotted a good place to start if he wanted to reach the core of the planet quickly. From what he knew about Ell'Hakan's planet, it was rife with volcanic activity, and it didn't take him long to find one

of the largest volcanos on the entire planet. What's more, from a distance, he could even see it was active.

Flying closer, he felt the presence of peak-tier D-grade elementals formed within due to the dense mana. Jake smiled when he released a quick Pulse of Perception, the result from it being pretty good.

Goes far down.

Jake had never been super into physics when young, but he did know some things. One of those was that some volcanos tended to reach a lot deeper into the ground than people thought, and if he remembered correctly, some of the deepest on Earth before the system had connected magma chambers nearly halfway to the core. While he was still guessing, he had a good feeling a massive volcano like this would also reach pretty damn deep.

That's right... Jake's plan was to use a volcano as a highway toward the planet's core chamber by following the magma as far down as he could.

The prior times Jake had wanted to explore deeper parts of Earth, Jake hadn't used a strategy like this, as it was pretty damn risky. Traveling through deep water was already a risky endeavor, so it shouldn't need to be said that going through lava was even more dangerous.

Well, technically, most of his journey would be going through magma- seeing as lava was the molten rock above ground, and magma the molten rock below the surface.

Anyhow, risky for sure. Not just because the magma would get incredibly hot and suffocating but because of the beings that lived within it, especially in the deepest layers. The hotter it got, the less viscous it would become, nearly being reminiscent of water at its most extreme. At that point, Jake would also expect there to be a lot of powerful elementals around, most of them reaching the upper tiers of C-grade.

So, as an early-tier C-grade, trying to have what would effectively be underwater combat with a bunch of elementals on their home turf would have been pretty damn dumb. However, as a late-tier C-grade, Jake didn't believe anything could truly threaten him. From what Jake had briefly observed, the average level of monsters on Ell'Hakan's planet was also lower than that of Earth, likely correlated with the planet also being a fair deal smaller.

All this put together gave Jake confidence to use this method, even if he had admittedly theorized a lot of his reasoning based on what he'd read and briefly spoken with others about, but in the end, the best way to confirm something was to check it out himself.

Speeding up, Jake curved and flew straight down into the volcano, covering his body in a layer of stable arcane energy just before impact. The lava was pretty damn viscous in

the upper layers and far from easy to get through as Jake had to channel destructive arcane energy to forge himself a path forward.

Despite the resistance, he still kept a good pace, using his Sphere and pulses to find his way through the lava. The heat was far from able to bother someone of Jake's level, at least not yet, and he quickly made progress as he got deeper and deeper.

It didn't take him long to reach the deeper layer, where the heat significantly increased. Once there, he had to focus a bit more on not being burned, but he could also speed up as there was less resistance.

Of course, he also had to regulate pressure and whatnot, and honestly, it didn't differ much from diving underwater, except for it being a fair deal hotter. Seeing through magma was also a lot harder, but Jake had enough Perception to make out his surroundings quite clearly, meaning he didn't have to put mental pressure on himself by spamming out constant Pulses of Perception to make sure he was going the right way.

He did still release one occasionally, and with every one he sent out, he continued to be pleasantly surprised. He kept finding new connecting paths to the magma chambers he was currently in leading further down, and all of them went nearly in a straight line. After ten or so more minutes, his surroundings were also so damn hot the magma was far, far less viscous, allowing him to continue speeding up more and more.

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As he kept diving, Jake wasn't even sure what kind of temperature his surroundings reached. It was definitely above where any metal before the system would have melted, and Jake couldn't help but consider how far he would have been able to dive into the pre-system sun with his current body. □aJNÖBEš

The current sun wasn't an option, as it had become a lot more powerful. The heat wasn't even toward the top of the list of dangerous shit going on with stars, after all. Either way, it was a fun thought to dive into a star... alas, Jake would need to be a fair bit stronger before he could do that.

For now, he had to be satisfied with swimming in lava many thousands of kilometers beneath the surface of a planet.

Soon enough, Jake also began to encounter his fair share of C-grade magma elementals just chilling in the environment, absorbing the mana. Jake had long stopped bothering with his stealth skill, and even if these elementals noticed him, he flew by too fast for them to do anything. Not that they wanted to do anything. In fact, in the brief moments some of them did notice him, they quickly veered away, instinctively knowing impeding his path would be dangerous.

Even as the elementals got more powerful, they kept avoiding Jake, who was still speeding up with every passing moment. His stable arcane energy once more proved its incredible power against environmental mana as Jake just kept going further and further down toward the core.

Sometimes, cruel coincidences – assuming it was a coincidence - just happened... and what went down on Ell'Hakan's homeworld was one such cruel event. Or perhaps it was luck. No matter what, time would prove who it would benefit.

Not even five minutes after Jake dove into the volcano, the teleporter in the capital city on the planet lit up, and out walked Ell'Hakan, a serious look on his face as he didn't hesitate to head for the throne room. As he walked, he sent messages to his generals, and by the time he got there, most of them had also arrived.

"Report," he said immediately, frankly having little idea what was going on... but by the expressions on his follower's faces, things weren't good. They also all felt nervous telling him, but they nevertheless still did as ordered.

"My Lord... only a scarce few minutes ago, attacks descended upon the planet from beyond the skies. Arrows," the general said, Ell'Hakan's eyes opening wide. "They struck several cities, and we are yet to have a death toll, but-"

"Are the attacks still ongoing?" Ell'Hakan questioned.

"They are less frequent now, but there are still attacks spread throughout, but they seem different from those prior," the general continued explaining. "We have fortified all defenses where relevant."

Ell'Hakan nodded while in thought. The Chosen of the Malefic Viper had attacked far faster than he'd expected him to. What's more, he hadn't expected the hunter to teleport straight to his planet and begin destroying the surface. It was so odd he even doubted it was the Chosen for a second, but as he had the generals elaborate more, he became certain it was him.

The Chosen of the Malefic Viper didn't seem like the type who cared for causing civil unrest or killing the general populace, and it didn't take Ell'Hakan long to conclude why he had launched those attacks. Nor did it take him long to realize why he'd stopped.

He was trying to bait me out... and when I didn't show, he slowed down. Likely to conserve resources. That means the occasional attacks hitting now are just probing shots to still try and lure me.

It was almost too obvious, but Ell'Hakan could see many fall for it. The Chosen knew Ell'Hakan gained power from his followers, so targeting them was almost likely directly attacking him. Ell'Hakan did also consider showing out in the open but stopped himself.

He was more confident than ever before, but he also knew that overconfidence was a great way to get yourself killed, and even a liogara should use its full strength when hunting a tooth-snapper... and the hunter was no mere tooth-snapper. The hunter was just that – a hunter. He'd also clearly shown his capabilities to launch attacks from orbit, and the generals informed him that many of the attacks weren't fully visible before they struck the ground, making it evident powerful stealth skills were also at work.

It wasn't a stretch to assume he had quite a welcome ready for Ell'Hakan. One that the nahoom would be fine with skipping, which was why he ultimately chose to stay put within the palace for now.

The capital's barrier, alongside the extra defenses on the palace itself, would make it very unwise for the hunter to attack by breaking through those first. He was also surrounded by the generals who remained on the planet and had quite a few competent fighters on standby.

Admittedly, most were spread throughout the galaxy to maintain order during the "truce" that had just ended with the death of his former Patron. And from the following reports from his generals, they were also dealing with quite the mess themselves, as the forces of the Chosen's planet had begun to make their move.

Ell'Hakan sighed. Things had gotten messy quickly, and the time it took to do the Usurper Ritual had a far bigger impact than he could have expected. However, chaos was also a strong anvil for one to forge themselves into something more powerful. It would be a good test for his followers, and even if they all fell, he still had his backup plan handy.

Of course, in the end, he resolved himself to the simplest solution of all. Yip of Yore had feared the multiversal consequences of pissing off large factions, but Ell'Hakan didn't have any of those concerns.

The Holy Church would bear all burdens and consequences. Besides, this was something long coming. Ell'Hakan still remembered the emotions from the Chosen of the Malefic Viper during the Nevermore after-party, and even if he tried to hide it with his acting and the fact he couldn't use his Bloodline during their most recent meeting, Ell'Hakan was sure. Even more now than an hour ago.

No matter how long passed, the Chosen of the Malefic Viper was determined to kill Ell'Hakan. Seeing as they couldn't live under the same sky, the only real solution was indeed the simplest one:

To kill the hunter before he had the chance to kill Ell'Hakan, and now was a time better than any, as Ell'Hakan had never felt stronger. Plus... they were on his home turf. Now, he just had to wait because while he believed the Chosen of the Viper had a way to teleport to the planet, Ell'Hakan felt pretty damn confident he didn't have a way back

without it being detectable unless he used the Prima Vessel. A Vessel that now dwelled in the basement beneath the very throne room he was waiting in.

Jake broke through another tough stone wall, entering another long tunnel leading straight down. After flying for a bit, he spotted another shortcut as he used his Alchemical Flame to quickly burn a hole in the wall, revealing a sea of magma on the other side that began to pour out instantly. The source of this content is

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Entering the newly created hole, Jake used the magma chamber to reach even further down, using its connected chambers to get even deeper. There were a few C-grade elementals just above level 300 in this large magma sea, but none attacked Jake as he flew by.

Breaking another wall, he entered a new magma-free cavern that seemed to stretch quite far down, letting Jake speed up even more as he flew. A large rock beetle was lying in wait beneath the ground in the passageway, but all Jake did was flare his aura as he went by, making it not make a move. More likely than not, it instead hoped Jake hadn't noticed it in hiding.

A few more caverns and tunnels later, and at the edge of his Pulse, he finally saw it. A big empty space ahead of him, and based on how far he'd traveled so far, the distance did seem right. Speeding up even more, Jake soon reached his destination, and after passing through a final tunnel, he saw the large open space in front of him.

Entering the core chamber, Jake finally stopped and calmed himself. He saw the floating Planetary Pylon right there in the middle, pulsing with power and the familiar presence of Ell'Hakan, making it evident he had claimed it.

Even as he floated there, he felt his emotions get messed with. Getting his teeth, Jake was more determined than ever as his eyes turned cold.

"Should have placed actual defenses at the core," Jake muttered as he prepared to get to work. For a long time, he'd considered how he would go about something like this, but not this time. No, this time, he had a very good idea of what he planned... and a sweet new skill to test out in the process.

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Chapter 1022: Bargain & Choice

Jake surveyed the core room a while longer to get a proper understanding of the environment. After having done so, he got to work with making a simple set of magic circles to facilitate what was to come.

Now, Jake had long considered how he could fuck with a Planetary Core, and the most obvious answer was the mythical Sin weapon he carried around. Using Eternal Hunger, Jake didn't doubt he would be able to destroy an entire planet using his current ritual magic skills, but... he wasn't dealing with a Planetary Core right now.

Cores were unclaimed. Natural. Seeing as they were part of the environment, they didn't possess any innate will or intent, which made them a lot weaker to outside influence. It was like the difference between a stone wall summoned by a mage to block an attack or a natural wall of stone.

Once the Planetary Core became a Planetary Pylon, its defenses were heightened to an entirely new level. Someone like the Child of Loss wouldn't be able to do much to a Planetary Pylon as it would passively fight back according to the will of the owner, and that wasn't a fight any C-grade had a chance of winning.

Jake also knew that Touch of the Malefic Viper wouldn't be enough. This isn't to say Jake didn't have any methods in mind. Given enough time and a complex enough ritual, Jake should be able to slowly influence the Pylon, though, once more, it wouldn't be any fast endeavor.

Perhaps this was why Ell'Hakan hadn't bothered much with placing defenses at the Pylon. He didn't expect anyone to be able to cause it any harm, especially not before he would notice. As the owner, he would naturally be notified the second anyone messed with it, putting into risk any long-term ritual. The only times such rituals were useful tended to be with the World Leader missing or put out of commission, neither of which were true here.

All of this is to say that Jake had planned on just killing Ell'Hakan as his primary goal for a reason. Now, things had changed, and he now had the confidence to take on the Pylon due to a certain new skill.

As a reminder, when Jake reached level 260 in his profession, he got the skill called Chosen's Offering of the Malefic Viper. A skill he hadn't touched a single time ever since getting it despite its legendary rarity. The reason for this was because of the other skill he was offered alongside it... one he had now picked after reaching level 290 during his Villy roasting session above Primordial-4.

[Heretic's Offering of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)] – To infringe upon the domain of the Malefic Viper and rob the Primordial's Records is a great achievement. Allows the alchemist to make an offer to the Malefic Viper and be granted an Offering Fragment. Based on the value of the innate Records in the offering, you will be rewarded with a better Offering Fragment. The Offering

Fragment contains Records and energy related to the Malefic Viper and can help empower other sources of Records and energy related to the Malefic Viper. All offerings must surpass a certain threshold to be submittable, and to hide your heretical actions from the Malefic One, there is an internal cooldown of the skill dependent on the value of the Offering Fragment received.

It was a skill practically identical to Chosen's Offering of the Malefic Viper, except for some changes in wording and whatnot. What the skill would do was effectively allow Jake to offer stuff to Villy and get a catalyst for alchemy in return. At least, that's how he read it.

Jake had very purposefully not used the Chosen's Offering skill because he assumed doing so would mean losing the ability to pick the Heretic's Offering one. Alright, there was a risk he would cut him off from the other skill merely by picking the first one, but things had gone the way he'd hoped.

Especially after he picked the second one... and what he'd hoped for happened. The two legendary skills that were so damn alike they might as well have been one turned out to indeed be part of a greater whole. Well, Jake assumed they were, based on how they'd instantly merged with one another. This merge of skills had given Jake something he wasn't sure how worked, but it had to be good based on the fact it was mythical. Right?

[Divine Bargain of the Malefic Viper (Mythical)] – In your eyes, to make an offering is an act of subservience you refuse to take part in. No, to you, the Malefic One is an equal you deem yourself worthy of bargaining with. Allows the Heretic-Chosen to initiate a Divine Bargain using an entity he wishes to use for negotiation, forcibly creating an equal exchange between himself and the Malefic Viper. Upon successfully performing a Divine Bargain, the Heretic-Chosen will, by default, receive a Malefic Bargaining Fragment but may be granted other benefits based on the nature of the Divine Bargain. Malefic Bargaining Fragments contains Records and energy related to the Malefic Viper and can help empower other sources of Records and energy related to the Malefic Viper. Under certain conditions, the Malefic One can actively take part in the Divine Bargaining. Laws of equivalent exchange must be upheld to a certain standard. All bargained entities must surpass a certain threshold of Records to be submittable. This skill has an internal cooldown based on the nature of the Divine Bargain performed.

Right off the bat, it was a really long skill description. Jake did like it a lot more than the previous ones, though. Divine Bargain also sounded a lot more appealing than making an offering, as it was something one did between equals. Well, as equal as a god and mortal could become.

As for the skill itself, it was indeed quite complex, but it had the same concept as the offering ones for the most part. It would allow Jake to give Villy stuff, and Villy would give him a Malefic Bargaining Shard back in return, at least most of the time. With this

version, he could also get other benefits, it seemed, with neither the system nor the innate knowledge he'd been granted telling him what these other benefits were.

What the innate knowledge did let him know was how to do a Divine Bargain. More accurately, it let him know how many ways there were to do it. It also included what he could offer and do with the skill. The more he studied the innate knowledge, he also realized that the skill had some rather unbalanced features, in his humble opinion, one of which would become clear once he was done setting up his ritual in the core chamber.

He also felt as if his decision not to use the skill had been good based on the first section of the skill. At least, it would have been very weird if it spoke about not agreeing to give offerings if he had actually used the skill to ever give any. Getting stuck with just the Chosen's Offering skill would have sucked majorly, and more likely than not, even ended up hurting Jake's Path as a Heretic-Chosen down the line as merely possessing the skill could be viewed as an act of subservience.

Oh, also, small side note... Jake found it really funny that both Chosen's Offering and Heretic's Offering had actual explanations for the skill's cooldown period. Meanwhile, with the Divine Bargain, the system just straight-up told him it had a cooldown, borderline admitting it was entirely system-imposed and nothing else. Then again, based on all his talks with Villy, the system likely had its reasons for placing such a cooldown on a skill, and he should actually be happy he couldn't use it constantly, as doing so would have fucked him up long-term somehow.

Anyway, there was still a lot to unpack with the skill, and Jake felt like it would need quite a few uses to fully understand it. For now, he had to prepare to initiate his first Divine Bargain, which was why he needed a ritual circle.

Starting a Divine Bargain wasn't as simple as pointing at something and going: "Villy, I've come to bargain!" but you had to actually set up proper conditions. The simplest way of doing this was to set up a ritual circle, but other things like having a permanent altar or something like that would also work, a bit like how Miranda had her permanent ritual site below her office in Haven.

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Jake preferred to just go the ritual route, though, primarily because he was actually pretty good at rituals by now. Continuing to work on the ritual circles, he prepared to create a spherical magic circle wrapped around the Planetary Pylon to initiate everything.

Now... before, it was touched upon how a C-grade couldn't realistically destroy a Pylon. Jake couldn't destroy one either, but he knew instinctively he could bargain with it. Of

course, it wasn't as simple as just initiating the bargain. No, he also had to claim ownership during the bargaining process.

In other words, the ritual would set into motion Jake laying claim on the Pylon with the intent of offering it to the Malefic Viper. This would put Ell'Hakan on a timer, with Jake getting the Pylon if either too long time passed or, preferably, he killed Ell'Hakan.

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As for Ell'Hakan stopping the ritual? Well... it wasn't really Jake doing the ritual, now was it? No, it was him *and* the Malefic Viper taking part in the Divine Bargain. So, for Ell'Hakan, his only choice was to either make Jake flee far enough away so that the Divine Bargain would be interrupted – which would require him to force Jake off the planet, seeing as the entire planet was technically what was being bargained – or to kill Jake. Something he assumed Ell'Hakan also viewed as the best option.

Funnily enough, one of the things Jake didn't really consider was what he could potentially get out of the Divine Bargain in the first place. Neither did he consider that it was pretty crazy for him to offer something that didn't even belong to him as part of a bargain. What's more, it was even something that would actively benefit him to get rid of.

Then again... it did take a special kind of mindset and arrogance to believe yourself worthy of dealing with gods as equal to be able to perform something like a Divine Bargain.

One thing that Jake had thought plenty of while ignoring all those other practical things was the facial expression Ell'Hakan would get once he noticed what Jake was up to, and as his preparations were nearing completion, he really couldn't wait.

"Still no signs of him?" Ell'Hakan asked the gathered mages, all of them looking nervous. He already knew the answer to his question, but he still asked.

"None, Celestial One," the oldest of the mages said with a bow. "We've scanned the skies and sent out many scouts, but we fear his stealth skills may be beyond our capabilities."

"I see," Ell'Hakan nodded, tapping the armrest of his throne with a finger. This entire scenario was a rather frustrating one. He wanted to just go out there and look himself, but he knew it would be too risky in case the Chosen of the Malefic Viper was just sitting in wait, like a snake hiding in its mound.

Ell'Hakan had also been actively monitoring the entire planet and even what was slightly outside of it for large ripples in space. One of the things he and his mages had discovered was that these forced teleportations to planets were far from subtle and caused quite a detectable ripple in space. Based on readings, only one teleportation

had been performed in the immediate surroundings of Ell'Hakan's homeworld, meaning they were likely only dealing with the hunter.

This monitoring of space wasn't just to see if he would be getting reinforcements. It was as much to see if the hunter would flee after his initial attack hadn't found its mark. Ell'Hakan knew he could teleport back to his own Prima Vessel whenever he wanted using the ring part of the system event, but that ring also wasn't very subtle. Detection magic attuned to the Prima Guardian Alliance teleportation circles would instantly detect if he used it, but so far, nothing.

Which was why Ell'Hakan found himself so frustrated. While he could contribute somewhat, being trapped in his own palace with a war ravaging the Milky Way Galaxy didn't help at all. He even considered if the hunter was just trying to keep him there to help his allies gain more ground in the conflict.

All he got were reports of them facing more and more problems, especially when faced with the elites of Earth. Truthfully, Ell'Hakan did envy the allies the Chosen of the Malefic Viper had gathered around him. He had, in part, gotten lucky by encountering them, but he'd also actively helped create these powerful allies, so maybe he shouldn't be too envious. He also had to remember he would have plenty of chances to make his own allies in the near future alongside the Holy Church.

As Ell'Hakan was still considering matters while getting constant updates and giving orders to the people he'd spread across the galaxy, the gate to the throne room opened as the Augur walked in.

"Augur, I do not have the time to—"

"Make time," the Augur said, looking Ell'Hakan directly in the eyes.

The nahoom frowned as he raised a hand. "Clear the room." [READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT novel◇fire◇net](#)

None of his subordinates questioned him as they instantly left, with only a few of his closest generals staying. Looking at them, Ell'Hakan shook his head. "Everyone but me and the Augur."

The generals looked surprised but still nodded as they left the room, closing the gate behind them. Doing so also activated the passive seals, hiding the conversation about to take place from everyone.

"You delayed me on purpose back there after the ritual... and if you hadn't, I would have been back around the time the Chosen of the Malefic Viper attacked," Ell'Hakan said, glaring at the Augur.

"Yes," the human simply nodded.

“Why?” Ell’Hakan asked, genuinely unsure. He didn’t even know if the Augur doing so had helped or harmed him. It was entirely possible he would have gotten attacked unprepared if he had teleported back a bit earlier, but it was equally possible he had just lost a great opportunity to kill the hunter.

The Augur was silent for a moment before sighing. “My purpose is to guide people onto their most ideal Paths. For people like you and him, it’s nearly impossible for me to give any advice, but I do have some insights. Going through with the ritual was a good thing for you and will help strengthen your foundation for what’s to come... and wasting all that isn’t in the interest of me or the Holy Church.”

“Wasting it, huh...” Ell’Hakan muttered.

“You still have obligations towards the Holy Church. Ones you must fulfill,” The Augur continued. “So, allow me to give you some advice, not just from the Church, but as an Augur who wishes to guide you... leave. Leave this planet and, eventually, this galaxy. You are to be part of the Holy Church, the largest organization in the entire multiverse. Anything you lose here can be rebuilt a hundredfold elsewhere.”

Ell’Hakan looked at the Augur, reading his emotions as a wry smile appeared on his lips. “You don’t want me to fight the hunter.”

“I do not,” he shook his head.

“Even after everything, you still view him as a friend, huh?” Ell’Hakan asked, and the brief emotional ripple he got from the Augur served as confirmation. “You’re really willing to go far to save him. Then again, I would guess the Holy Church prefers a scenario where they don’t make the Malefic Viper, who’s just shown himself to not be as washed up as first believed, an enemy.”

“You misunderstand,” the Augur sighed, looking at the floor.

“I do?” Ell’Hakan raised an eyebrow. “Are you perhaps implying that the Chosen of the Malefic Viper is more powerful than I, even on my own homeworld?”

“That’s not what I’m saying either. I’m not even going to comment on that, as it’s not my place,” the Augur once more just sighed as he looked up at Ell’Hakan. “What I am saying is that you have a choice to make now. A crossroads is before you. On one path, you stay here and fight the Chosen of the Malefic Viper and whatever that might bring. The other is one where you leave with the Holy Church, putting the past behind you. One where you forget the enemies you inherited from Yip of Yore and focus solely on the future. With time, all old wounds have a chance to mend, and while I’m not saying you could ever be allies or even people who don’t hold hatred toward each other, this will be the only option where the two of you even have a chance to coexist.”

“So you want me to run?”

“I want you to choose, aware that what you do today will define your life and Path going forward,” the Augur said, his words genuine. “I won’t make the choice for you, but I will let you make an informed one and advise you that some fights aren’t worth it.”

Ell’Hakan looked down at the Augur, unsure what exactly he was playing at. Was he trying to protect the hunter? Was he genuine in his advice? Based on his emotional readings, it did appear that Augur was genuine.

“Tell me, and don’t skirt around this one... who do you think would win if we fought?”

“Neither,” the Augur answered without any hesitation. “The only loser will be the Holy Church, no matter the outcome.”

“You really are frustrating,” Ell’Hakan sighed. “But, fine. You’ve said your piece. Now leave.”

The Augur nodded. “Don’t take my word lightly. This is perhaps the most impactful choice you’ll ever make.”

Ell’Hakan waved him off, the Augur turning around and walking toward the gate leading out of the throne room. However, just before exiting, he stopped and looked back at Ell’Hakan.

“You still underestimate him... not because you are overestimating yourself or downplaying him, but because you continue to fail to grasp exactly what you’re dealing with.”

With those words, the Augur walked out of the gate, not giving Ell’Hakan a chance to respond.

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Chapter 1023: Worthy of Being Called Rivals

Ell’Hakan stood atop the highest tower the palace had, alone, as he stared up at the starry sky and two moons hanging far above. He was still hidden within the barrier of the palace but potentially out in the open enough for the hunter to take his shot. However, so far, nothing.

It was nighttime, and he had a lot of matters on his mind. His most recent conversation with the Augur had truly given him food for thought, and he could admit that what would happen next would be hugely impactful for his Path.

He saw a total of four major Paths before him based on the choices he made and the outcomes of these choices. The first two included running as the Augur proposed. He would flee to another planet ruled by the Holy Church and lay low there until the Prima Guardian event was fully completed, at which point he would teleport to another universe and into the heartlands of the Holy Church. If he was there, no external threats mattered anymore.

The question from there would be if the Augur was correct because that's where Ell'Hakan saw a potential issue. He knew the emotions of the hunter, and currently, he doubted that the Chosen of the Malefic One would simply forgive and forget, no matter how long passed.

He saw his two Paths with the Holy Church either ending with him living in peace or, more realistically, getting hunted down after many years. And, if he was being perfectly honest, he wasn't sure either option appealed to him, as he'd never wanted a peaceful life in the first place.

The second two options included fighting the Chosen of the Malefic Viper. Such a fight would naturally have one of the two outcomes: each where either party won. It really didn't need to be more complicated than that.

So, to run or fight. The Holy Church obviously wanted him to run, and Ell'Hakan knew why. They wanted his Bloodline. That was the deal they'd made, after all. That's why they wanted him to pick the safest option available, and he was sure the Holy Church's ideal scenario was one where Ell'Hakan went with them, advanced a few grades more under their influence, before giving them children who inherited his Bloodline... at which point they would no longer need him.

They didn't care about him reaching his full potential. If he went with the Church, he also knew the lingering sense of regret from having run away from the fight would haunt him for the rest of his life. Chances are he wouldn't be able to go as far as he should rightfully be able to, especially now that he'd become the Usurper of Yip of Yore.

No... even if he thought about everything logically, he really only saw himself having one real choice. Ell'Hakan was now stronger than ever before, and while he could admit that the Chosen of the Malefic Viper was superior to him in potential, that didn't mean the hunter was stronger right at this moment. In the future, the gap would only widen, which made now the best moment to strike.

Should Ell'Hakan win, he would not only have removed a potential threat to his life down the line but cement his Path as a Usurper by creating a legend right off the bat. Proof that even if Yip of Yore had fallen to the Malefic Viper, his Chosen had still been superior to the Viper's Chosen.

Even if he would face backlash from it, the Holy Church still wanted and needed him... and given enough time, he had confidence in getting real influence within the faction. He would make them see him as more than just a way to get his Bloodline, but as someone they truly couldn't do without. Again, it wouldn't be anything fast, but he had confidence down the line.

Of course, it all required him to actually beat the hunter, but as mentioned, Ell'Hakan didn't feel like he had any better choice. It was either fight now while he was at his strongest just after the Usurper ritual, while even on his own homeworld, and with the hunter potentially still slightly weakened due to his recent soul damage, or sit back and wait for the hunter to kill him in the future.

So, even if he only had a one-in-a-thousand chance to win, it was the only option available. Besides, he believed his chances were a lot better than that, even if he wasn't necessarily favored.

Having determined himself, Ell'Hakan gave the night sky a final look before walking down the staircase of the tower. Now he just needed to find the Chosen of the Malefic Viper... which turned out to be quite an easy task, considering about halfway down he got a notification that made his eyes open wide.

"The Planetary Pylon?"

For a moment, Ell'Hakan questioned what the hell the hunter could possibly be doing, but he knew it was a waste of time thinking, and the notification made it clear the Pylon was under actual threat. Without hesitating further, he rushed down the stairs and toward the Prima Vessel to teleport down there... and finally begin the confrontation that would decide how the ill-fated relationship between himself and the hunter would end.

Jake felt pretty damn happy about the ritual circle he'd finally cooked up. Well, multiple circles. With careful hands, he placed them all around the Planetary Pylon. The energy given off by the Pylon aimed to destabilize the magic, but Jake had infused all the circles with enough stability for him to finish what he was doing.

After all the circles were done and placed correctly, several more hours had passed. He was ready to go, but Jake didn't immediately begin as he instead took out a mana potion and consumed it. He then placed barriers around all the magic circles to keep them safe as he sat down in meditation for an hour to fully restore himself and get the potion cooldown back while getting him to an optimal state before the fight he assumed would soon come.

Back in near-top condition, Jake stood up and dispelled the barriers that were pausing the ritual. He then activated his ritualism skill once more and moved all the magic circles to make them overlap and bend as they, one by one, wrapped around the Planetary Pylon. They weren't active yet, but they were still struggling due to the intense energy given off by the Pylon.

Either way, they would hold on long enough as Jake finally activated the ritual. Intense energy began to radiate from the magic circles, and he felt the Pylon instantly begin to fight back, but it was too late as Jake invited someone else into the core room.

“Divine Bargain of the Malefic Viper,” Jake spoke as he held out a palm toward the Planetary Pylon.

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For a second, nothing happened. Then, suddenly, the energy began to change in intensity and aura while taking on a dark green sheen. The wrapping of magic circles broke apart in an instant but was just as instantly replaced with something far more powerful. A dozen dark green snakes appeared in the magic circles' stead, encasing and wrapping themselves around the core like were they constrictors.

At the same time, Jake also felt a connection with whatever was going on as something was drained out of him. He didn't know exactly what, but it mixed with the divine aura of the Malefic Viper and made the snakes take on a purplish gleam reminiscent of Jake's arcane affinity. Right as they changed color, they also stopped squirming and froze, knowledge entering Jake's mind.

The bargain was underway, and the system was evaluating everything as it slowly laid claim to the Pylon. Jake couldn't help but smile as everything had gone as planned so far. While it wasn't very feasible for C-grades to go around claiming and bargaining entire planets like this, in the realm of the gods, this was nothing. That's why the system even entertained the idea... because it was both Jake and Villy doing the bargaining.

That's also why Jake knew no one could stop the Divine Bargain once it had been initiated. Doing so would require whoever tried to overcome not only the aspects of Jake part of the skill but also those belonging to the Viper.

Jake, realizing he had marveled at his own new skill for a bit too long, stopped fucking around and retreated away from the Planetary Core as he also began to enter stealth once more. What he'd just done would surely have notified Ell'Hakan that shit was going down, and it was only a question of time before there would be some kind of response.
RÂNoßEş

Now, Jake was fully aware that deep underground was a shitty place to fight for him, but if that was the only thing he could reasonably get, he would take it. He also considered for a moment if he should pull out his special Eternal Hunger arrow here and now but stopped himself.

If Ell'Hakan was the one coming, he would more than likely do so through the Prima Vessel. If that was the case, he would have to leave it out of its one exit, yes, but he'd

also be incredibly close to an impenetrable barrier leading into an indestructible system-made vessel with teleportation features inside.

All of that is to say, Ell'Hakan had a good chance to avoid the arrow, and even if Jake hit, if it failed to end the former Chosen in an instant, the nahoom would have an easy escape path. And to be clear, Jake didn't believe the Eternal Hunger arrow was enough to kill him in one go, especially not after the Usurper Ritual Jake suspected him of having gone through. Just like how Jake had Moment of , he suspected Ell'Hakan to have a similar survival skill.

No, it would be far better to bait the other Chosen into a long-drawn fight before Jake would unleash his real trump cards. Also... perhaps it was just Jake's vanity speaking, but he didn't want it to be over too quickly.

Jake didn't like Ell'Hakan and wanted him dead, yes, but he also recognized the guy was the number two of their generation. He was a supreme genius in his own right, and Jake simply wouldn't have the opportunity to fight many of his kind. The duel with the Sword Saint was still a core memory for Jake, and it had been an invaluable opportunity.

Hopefully, Ell'Hakan would help push Jake even further.

As Jake was thinking about all these things, something finally happened. Space began to ripple violently, and just below the Planetary Pylon, the large Prima Vessel teleported into the core room. The large metal vessel looked kind of small, considering the massive size of the core room that would serve as the initial battleground of what was to come.

Preparing himself, Jake stood near a tunnel leading out of the core room with his stealth skill active. Taking out an arrow, Jake nocked it as the stealth field appeared all around him, masking the energies of his charging Arcane Powershot.

He slowly charged the arrow so he could keep it ready for longer as he patiently waited. He knew it didn't take long to exit the vessel, yet as the seconds passed, he got more and more confused as nothing happened. Had Ell'Hakan brought more people with him? Were they strategizing inside? Waiting for him to go in or something? Jake could only look outside the Prima Vessel due to his sphere, so they shouldn't be able to see what happened in the outside world... so why the delay? To figure it out, he released a Pulse of Perception, and through it, he saw someone standing right there at the exit, waiting.

More than a minute passed before Jake clicked his tongue and stopped charging his arrow to not put a strain on his body before the fight even began... and only a second after he lowered his bow, movement was seen as a single figure stepped out of the Prima Vessel, his voice echoing.

“Goodness, you gotta learn how to suppress that killing intent of yours... it’s quite an overpowering sensation,” Ell’Hakan said as he turned and looked directly at where Jake was in stealth. **“You should know that even if you can hide your body and energies, you cannot hide your emotions.”**

Jake’s stealth was dispelled as he still stood with his lowered bow and looked down at the former Chosen, now Usurper.

“You went through with your own Usurper Ritual, huh? Stole my idea?” Jake said in a semi-joking tone.

“Great minds think alike, isn’t that what they say? Gotta be ready for the worst-case scenario in all situations, especially when that scenario is the most probable outcome,” Ell’Hakan said in his usual calm tone, more or less admitting he’d expected Yip of Yore to lose.

“And people call me a heretic, yet here you are, actively plotting against your Patron,” Jake scoffed, shaking his head.

“I’m no heretic, and I never was. I believed in Yip of Yore up until the second he died, at which point I inherited his will and power. My so-called betrayal only came after his demise, at which point, can we really call it a betrayal?” Ell’Hakan said, seemingly wanting to start a fight about semantics.

Jake kept looking at Ell’Hakan as he felt for any changes to his emotional spectrum as they spoke, but so far he detected nothing... which was both comforting and concerning. Comforting because it indicated that while he could detect emotions from quite far away, his range to manipulate them remained limited. Concerning because it was also possible that his assessment was entirely incorrect, and Ell’Hakan had just gotten so good at fucking with emotions that Jake couldn’t detect it even while actively trying to.

“I will say I’m surprised you showed up alone. Well, unless you’re hiding an army within the vessel, that is,” Jake said, partly to probe if he was actually alone or had help coming.

“Sadly, my most reliable allies are rather preoccupied elsewhere, and of those I could bring, I believe they wouldn’t be of much help. As we get stronger and stronger, the gaps between the average and the pinnacle only keep expanding. I find it rather envious that you have such truly reliable allies at your side who can be useful, even when it’s in fights at the pinnacle,” Ell’Hakan said, his voice sounding genuine as he continued.

“It’s rather funny... before I came here, I spoke with the Augur. Your friend. He advised me to avoid fighting you and just leave everything behind for a fresh start in another universe. I considered it quite extensively, and even after I made my choice to come here, doubt still lingered... but after seeing you now, I know for

sure,” Ell’Hakan said, tilting his head and looking at Jake with a smile. “I feel your hatred. Your grudge. And it only confirms that neither of us will have peace before the other is dead.”

“That may be one area where we’re actually in complete agreement,” Jake answered, and without further ado, whipped up his bow and loosed an arrow toward the nahoom below.

Ell’Hakan responded by instantly summoning a trident, striking the arrow with it as an explosion of arcane energy erupted, the blast going away from the nahoom. Ell’Hakan didn’t say anything more as he knew that, for now, the time for words was over, and the time to see if they were truly worthy of being called rivals had come.

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Chapter 1024: Jake Thayne vs Ell'Hakan (1)

A barrage of explosions filled the core chamber as Ell’Hakan dodged or blocked every attack Jake made, but he wasn’t able to find an opening to counterattack either. At least, Jake assumed he couldn’t, but it turned out he was somewhat distracted by something else in the room.

The Planetary Pylon was obviously an object of interest to Ell’Hakan, more specifically, the arcane-tinged black snakes that had wrapped themselves around it. This resulted in the first attack Ell’Hakan launched not being aimed at Jake but the core instead as the nahoom was probing what would happen.

A blast of deep yellow flames erupted from his trident and enveloped the large Planetary Pylon, doing absolutely nothing as a thin, nearly invisible barrier appeared around the entire Pylon, blocking any and all attacks.

All it took was this one attack for Ell’Hakan to conclude he wouldn’t be able to do anything to the Pylon as he instead fully focused on Jake. It was evident whatever was going on with the Planetary Pylon still bothered him a lot, but he just as evidently realized that now wasn’t the time to try and figure it out and that, more likely than not, whatever was happening would end with Jake’s death.

During his brief probing of it, he’d smartly also tried to use the Pylon as cover during his attack but hadn’t been prepared as two arrows curved around the large Pylon, one from each side.

He blocked one of them but failed to fully avoid the second as a small cut was made on his shoulder. Usually, such a wound was nothing, but against Jake, the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, it dealt far more damage than it normally would, courtesy of Jake's homecooked Heartrot Poison.

Ell'Hakan didn't seem bothered by the attack, though, as he instantly went on the offensive. Flying over the core, he beelined for Jake, making the hunter jump to the side, having decided to use the vast open space within the core room as the initial site of this battle. He knew Ell'Hakan relied on celestial concepts and was very skilled in using the sun affinity, so hopefully, fighting underground would weaken him a little.

While dodging, Jake loosed an arrow that split into dozens before exploding, but Ell'Hakan stabbed forward with his trident, unleashing an explosion of burning light that canceled out Jake's attack as he continued his chase.

He's fast. Faster than expected... but not too fast.

Right as Ell'Hakan reached Jake, the hunter stepped down and teleported away, spinning around in mid-air to release three arrows in quick succession that Ell'Hakan quickly blocked, or at least he tried to, as one of them once more left a cut.

Ell'Hakan again seemed unbothered as he attacked but focused a bit more on defense this time around while also switching to using ranged attacks of his own. Beams of burning sunlight shot toward Jake at incredible speeds – unsurprisingly, considering it was effectively a form of light magic – seeking to scorch him.

While the sunlight wasn't too damaging, its speed made it a dangerous attack nonetheless, and truthfully, Jake wouldn't have been able to dodge them without his danger sense that pretty much gave him precognition when it came to avoiding taking damage.

A barrage of burning balls of fire was also summoned from all around Ell'Hakan as the former Chosen showed that he was as much a mage as a melee fighter. He was essentially a spellspear, except he used a trident instead, but honestly, same shit, more stabby bits, and spelltrident just sounded dumb.

These balls chased after Jake with far lower speed than the sunlight, but were highly controlled and aimed to surround or cut him off as Ell'Hakan tried to not allow Jake to create too much distance between the two of them.

Even so, Jake was fine with the status quo of this early stage, where they were both feeling out the other. He continued dodging, avoiding damage wherever possible while taking the occasional minor sunlight beam or remnants of explosions, but never without getting a good trade in return.

As the seconds turned to minutes, Jake began to notice something, though... that perhaps he wasn't the only one okay with how things were currently going. His first clue was something he honestly hadn't considered, but now that he actively felt for it, he detected the change.

Seeing as they were deep beneath the ground, the surroundings were already pretty hot in the first place. However, this heat came primarily from the magma and whatnot in the walls surrounding them, not anything Ell'Hakan had done. Now, that was changing. While the temperature had only increased a little, the biggest change was the nature of the surrounding mana. It had begun to take on the mana signature of Ell'Hakan, as he was effectively claiming their surroundings as his own domain.

This empowered all his magic while reducing the cost of using it significantly, and as time passed, Jake began to really feel it. Before the environmental heat was just there, not really bothering him, but soon enough, it began to actively attack him as his body began heating up.

Jake responded by summoning his Scales of the Malefic Viper, effectively nullifying the environmental damage as he dove through an explosion Ell'Hakan tried to block him off with, also using said explosion as cover to shoot a tricky arrow that the nahoom once more failed to dodge as he took another minor wound.

Seeing as Ell'Hakan was working so hard to make the environment hostile toward Jake, he decided to respond in kind. Wings sprung from his back, and instantly, he set ablaze the blood within as dark green mist began seeping out of them and into the core chamber.

With every wingbeat, the poison mist spread, and while the heat was intense, it wasn't able to destroy the mist properly. In fact, all burning it would do was help spread it faster unless the temperature reached a level far beyond where it currently was. řánòB&5

Ell'Hakan, being forced to deal with the poison mist, responded by creating what looked like a faint barrier to cover his body that seemed to cancel out whatever poison mist got too near. Based on how he still tried to stay clear of the mist, this did seem to still consume energy on his end, unlike Jake, who could resist the environmental heat with his Scales' passive effect so far.

Still, the change in the environment made Ell'Hakan ramp up his liberal use of fire magic as he began wielding his trident more like a staff than a true melee weapon. He wrapped deep yellow and red flames around it as he shot out torrents of flames toward Jake, and with every swipe, he sent out an inferno that burned away nearly everything in its path, with even Jake's arrows being thrown off course when hit.

With Ell'Hakan ramping up, so did Jake as he began to use more skills to not fall behind. Things were heating up both figuratively and literally as both went more on the

offensive than before while focusing less on defense, yet both didn't take that much damage even as the attacks started landing.

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Despite the intensity of the battle, it had barely gotten started. So far, neither of them had even touched using a boosting skill, nor had they pulled out any of their stronger skills... Jake wasn't even sure if Ell'Hakan was using any skills with half of the magic he threw out.

He did appreciate the battle being solely ranged right now, though. With Eternal Hunger transformed into an arrow, he didn't have a second proper melee weapon available but would have to rely on the Void Katar. Sure, he did have a backup in case of emergencies, but if it could be avoided, he would like to postpone the melee fighting for later.

Using his Eternal Hunger arrow within the current space also wasn't exactly feasible, as he had no confidence in actually hitting it as things were. The mere fact that Ell'Hakan could afford to hold back as much as Jake was proof that between the two of them, there wasn't that big of a gap if any at all.

To be clear, Jake did currently have an advantage in this purely ranged battle, as his stable arrows occasionally found their mark, leaving wounds on Ell'Hakan's body. Meanwhile, he took far less damage himself. The one place he was losing was in territory control as the environment was becoming more and more encumbering for Jake.

He also began to notice something else very annoying.

The Planetary Pylon... it's still able to help him.

Despite the Divine Bargain being in process, the Pylon still worked. In retrospect, that shouldn't be surprising as the planet needed the Pylon to regulate itself and function properly, and until the Divine Bargain concluded, Jake wouldn't be the owner of the Pylon... so until then, it still belonged to Ell'Hakan.

At the very least it didn't look like he had any skills to directly make use of it, telling Jake Ell'Hakan didn't have a profession directly related to being a World Leader. This did come as a genuine surprise, as Jake had expected him to. In fact, it was one of the reasons why he had been so sure that Ell'Hakan would come running if he went after the Pylon. He expected him to be like Miranda, where he would get hurt if anyone else messed with it too much, but it appeared that Jake was wrong. Ell'Hakan was more like Jake himself and was just the owner of the Pylon, though definitely a lot more involved as a World Leader than Jake.

Still, the Pylon could passively benefit him, and it helped him claim the territory surrounding itself while also giving the other passive buffs Pylons tended to give. This made Jake reach a conclusion pretty quickly.

Will need to move the battle elsewhere before we both get serious.

Continuing to fight somewhere Ell'Hakan got extra resource regeneration and help would just be stupid on Jake's part. Also, while it was true the core chamber was large, it was still small compared to the open planet above, meaning Jake's movements were relatively limited. So far, it hadn't been that big of a problem, but things were soon about to change.

Ell'Hakan seemingly decided that this ranged battle was no longer in his interest, and after Jake had just loosed another arrow, the nahoom didn't respond as usual but instead leaned forward before exploding into motion.

Jake quickly prepared himself, but he wasn't totally ready as his eyes opened wide. He failed to step down in time as Ell'Hakan transformed into a beam of burning light that practically teleported to appear right in front of him, ready to attack.

Twisting his body, Jake bent backward and to the side as he avoided the swing of the trident, waves of burning sunfire still washing over his body despite him not being hit directly. Ell'Hakan attacked again, using the butt of the trident to stop Jake from using One Step while using his other hand to land a palm on Jake's chest, sending him flying back in a bright explosion of sunlight.

Due to Scales and Jake purposefully launching himself back right before getting struck, the blow hadn't done much besides confirming the status quo was rapidly changing to no longer be in Jake's favor. This was further cemented when Ell'Hakan didn't give Jake even a moment's break before charging again, aiming to impale Jake to the ground with his trident before Jake could even stabilize fully.

The environment helps his movement speed? Jake questioned as he welcomed Ell'Hakan's attack. He quickly dismissed his bow and pulled out his Void Katar while keeping the other hand empty.

Meeting the trident, Jake dodged to the side using his wings as he tried to land a stab with his katar. His blow expectedly missed, Ell'Hakan countering with a vertical attack just as Jake expected. He was ready, as before it could get proper swinging speed, Jake lunged forward with his empty hand and grasped the handle while trying to stab Ell'Hakan again while his weapon was temporarily disabled. Sure, his hand felt like it was wrapped around a red-hot iron pipe, but if it allowed him to-

Ell'hakan didn't hesitate for a moment as he simply let go of the trident and used one hand to deflect Jake's katar by punching his wrist from below while using the other to

land a blow to his side. Jake was taken off-guard, his danger sense warning him only after he'd made Ell'Hakan adapt, at which point it was too late.

Jake quickly also let go of the trident, which turned into flames after falling a few meters and countered Ell'Hakan's blows. The nahoom dodged his blow, Jake responding in kind as both unleashed several dozen attacks within a few seconds, none of them landing on either party as all were either deflected or dodged. Jake ended up breaking this brief stalemate by making a minor mistake, resulting in him getting kicked in the leg, thrown off-balance, and elbowed in the stomach to send him stumbling back, genuinely in disbelief as he stared up at Ell'Hakan who stood there in mid-air with a solid stance.

Taking a moment, Jake just adapted a stance of his own. The words of the Sword Saint suddenly echoed in his head... that he shouldn't underestimate Ell'Hakan when it came to martial combat. But, even so, based on the brief display of hand-to-hand just shown, Jake estimated Ell'Hakan to be around the same skill-level as Carmen. This chapter is updated by *novel•fire•net*

"You're surprised," Ell'Hakan said, obviously reading Jake's emotions. "Why? Did you think I didn't know how to fight?"

"I will admit, you don't strike me as the type who likes to get his hands dirty," Jake answered truthfully, seeing no reason not to.

Ell'Hakan just smiled at Jake's truthful response. "It is kind of funny, isn't it... what you know of me is what the public sees. What I'm most known for in the wider multiverse. However, if I went by that logic to judge you, Jake Thayne, you would be a supremely talented alchemist capable of influencing Primeval Origins, who also just happens to like wielding a bow as a hobby."

"Are you trying to say you're not someone who uses his Bloodline to manipulate people to get your way, fucking up the minds of others for your own benefit?" Jake shot back.

"No, no, I definitely do those things," Ell'Hakan chuckled, shaking his head. "But that's not all there is to me nor the sole thing that defines me. Not everyone or everything can be manipulated. Also, believe it or not, there was a time before I could fully control my Bloodline to manipulate others. I had to survive somehow... and fighting seemed like the best way to do just that."

"Touching. Do you have a sad backstory you want to share?" Jake asked in a mocking tone.

"Sad... perhaps, perhaps not. I guess it's a matter of perspective if my past was sad or not," Ell'Hakan said, taking Jake's words far more seriously than he had to. "I believe lingering on such emotions isn't healthy, though. Our pasts are merely there to build experience for the present and knowledge to make better choices in the future. If the past becomes a burden, those emotions are to be severed and forgotten."

Jake had another snide remark ready but bit his tongue as he instead also became serious. He also felt like Ell'Hakan was speaking as much as Jake was himself. "Well, let's hope this becomes a good memory then. For me, that is."

Ell'Hakan just smiled and shook his head. "Just know that it cannot erase your feelings of regret from your past choices, nor the hurt from your memories."

"No... but it will make me feel a whole lot better," Jake shot back as he prepared himself to attack again, remembering an unpleasant memory of the past.

Having noticed this, the nahoom looked perplexed.

"I do still find it hard to believe... does the main source of your anger really stem from that human monument builder? Chris, was it?" Ell'Hakan asked. "Did I misinterpret your relationship with him? From what I knew, he was just a nobody and insignificant in the grand scheme of things, but if he was more than that to you, I—"

Ell'Hakan didn't get further as Jake appeared right in front of him a second later, arcane energy burning through his veins from activating his boosting skill... because those had been fighting words.

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Chapter 1025: Jake Thayne vs Ell'Hakan (2)

Jake understood that in the grand context of the multiverse, him caring about Chris could be viewed as genuinely weird. He and the builder had never been that close, and Jake only really knew him on a surface level before he'd died. Sure, Jake had a good impression of the young man for standing up to Abby and Donald way back then, but that was it.

In this war so far between Jake and Ell'Hakan – and even more if one counted the one between Villy and Yip - millions had died. Far more than Jake even knew about. Many of those were people Jake had seen or known before, though still not closely. Yet he'd never felt anything particular when they died. That's likely why Ell'Hakan was so confused. In his view, Chris was just a worker who Jake employed to make a monument for him. He had no way of knowing Jake and Chris had any kind of personal relationship, as the only people who knew about how the two met were only Miranda, the few survivors from Abby's group, and Neil's party from back. It wasn't something easily found out, was the point.

Maybe it also just wasn't something Ell'Hakan – someone who evaluated others based on how useful they were as assets - could understand in the first place with his mindset. Because the real reason Jake viewed what Ell'Hakan had done as unforgivable was for one simple reason: Chris had been Jake's person. More so than many others. Plus... he had to admit he felt guilty.

With most other people who fought by his side, they'd actively chosen to do so. They knew what they were doing and were fully aware of the risks they were taking. Shit most of them even welcomed it as they used Jake as a way to continue progressing on their own Paths. Even Miranda, who had gotten involved initially because she felt as if she didn't have much other choice, was now fully on board and engrossed in her role, seeking power herself. Not to say Jake wouldn't gladly start a multiversal war of revenge if any of the people close to him died, but at least he would understand that their lives had been inherently risky. This chapter is updated by *novel•fire•net*

Chris was different. He never dreamed of becoming a god or even a C-grade. His dream was to finally get into a relationship with Hank's daughter and find a place where he felt like he belonged. The only reason he had ever gotten involved with Jake was due to happenstance and the Blessing he'd been given to help make the monument, allowing Jake to teleport between other universes and Earth.

That's why Jake felt guilty. He'd gotten Chris involved. From Ell'Hakan's point of view, it made perfect sense to kill him as he could have repaired the monument if left alive. It was also a "justified" kill in the story he was building, as Chris was a fanatic who carried the Blessing of the Malefic Viper.

None of that mattered to Jake, though. On the day Chris died, Jake had sworn to get revenge, and he saw no reason to break that oath.

His charge and activation of his boosting still may have seemed like a pure outburst of anger, and while he certainly wasn't feeling any positive emotions as he did it, he still kept his head cool. The boosting skill was also only activated at a very low level, not even at the full 30% boost to all stats from the stable variant, but a bit less to conserve energy.

Still, it was enough to take Ell'Hakan by surprise as he failed to fully dodge Jake's stab with his Void Katar, allowing him to land a good puncture wound on the nahoom's arm. Jake tried to follow up, but Ell'Hakan was quick to react as his own boosting skill activated in response, sending out an explosion of flames that pushed Jake slightly back.

Ell'Hakan went on the offensive immediately, but Jake continued to keep his head calm as he retreated away and pulled out his bow again, releasing a barrage of arrows upon the Usurper. The trident met his blows and deflected most as he turned into a beam of light again, but Jake was ready this time and already turned to where he would appear before he was fully there, an arrow nocked and ready.

Jake shot the nahoom at close range, the arrow even splitting right as it left the string, creating a shotgun of explosive arcane arrows. None of the arrows exploded, but instead, Ell'Hakan took five arrows to the chest, which made him stumble back. Jake clicked his tongue as the nahoom had successfully avoided the original arrow with poison on it, but overall he was still satisfied with his attack and quickly nocked a new arrow as Ell'Hakan re-engaged.

The two of them continued to battle as Jake slowly began to lose his momentum as the temperature kept rising. The fire magic unleashed by Ell'Hakan was also only increasing in intensity, and Jake simply couldn't avoid it anymore. Ell'Hakan knew this and took full advantage as he chased Jake, making it hard for the hunter to release any arrows.

However, rather than merely continue moving around the core chamber, Jake changed things up as he dove toward a wall that had already been weakened during their prior fighting. Alright, saying it had been weakened due to the fighting wasn't really fair, as Jake had actively been shooting an arrow at it here and there to weaken it, but all of that had happened during the fight, so it still counted.

Anyhow, Jake descended and smashed straight through this weakened, thin wall with a dropkick as he entered a tunnel running parallel to the core chamber. He instantly began flying down this tunnel as he released a number of Pulses to see if Ell'Hakan was following him or not.

It took the nahoom a moment, but eventually, he gave chase. Jake took advantage of this, including the fact they were moving down a tunnel, as he spun around and blanketed the entire space in explosive arrows, the tunnel too narrow for Ell'Hakan to fully escape the explosions.

In contrast, Jake dodged all the beams Ell'Hakan sent his way, using the winding tunnel to his advantage as they moved further and further away from the core chamber where Ell'Hakan had his advantage. At least, they did so for a while before Ell'Hakan stopped chasing entirely, instead just yelling down the tunnel.

“If you wished to change the venue of battle, you could have merely asked,” he said in a confident voice. **“But I shall interpret your actions to mean such a thing is your wish... in that case, let's meet once more on the surface. Ah, but don't be too long.”**

With those words, Ell'Hakan turned around and, with a Pulse, Jake saw him heading back to the core room... the very same core room where the Prima Vessel that would allow him to teleport topside in an instant sat.

Meanwhile, Jake would be stuck underground, with it taking many hours to get back up there. During all that time, Ell'Hakan would have plenty of time to make preparations for the battle to continue. Even if he didn't do that, he would have time to recover fully, while Jake had to swim through lava and whatnot, wasting resources in the process.

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Jake had also stopped moving, seemingly not in a rush, as rather than panic, he acted. The second he saw Ell'Hakan enter the Prima Vessel, his body began to change color as his wings burned with energy. A bubble of pure corrosion appeared all behind him as all concepts were broken down before Jake shot upwards, having used his Wings of the Malefic Viper escape feature.

As even the concept of space had broken down, Jake had no logical way to control his movements outside of general direction... the keyword here being logical. Jake relied on his intuition to go in the right direction, and after he'd been flying for a good ten seconds, he felt the Hunter's Mark he'd put on Ell'Hakan reappear, allowing him to use that as a guide.

A few seconds later, Jake phased back into reality, now in the bright night sky, nearly directly above the capital city. The second he appeared, Jake didn't hesitate for even a moment as he pulled out his bow, and for a second, he once more considered using the Eternal Hunger arrow, but again, he felt like it wasn't time.

So, instead, Jake nocked a more regular arrow as he began to charge an Arcane Powershot, his stealth skill already activating around him. Below him, he felt Ell'Hakan move through the Hunter's Mark, with the nahoom soon exiting the palace and heading toward the vast empty desert not too far away. Jake assumed he wanted to avoid the city getting destroyed during their fight, which was pretty respectable, though definitely not the greatest decision considering what was hanging several thousand kilometers above him, preparing to launch an orbital strike in the form of an arrow.

It was also pretty evident Ell'Hakan couldn't detect him or his emotions from this far away, allowing Jake to keep charging the arrow as Ell'Hakan flew into the desert. Jake even saw him begin to make magical runes in the air, likely preparing some kind of formation trap for Jake, completely unaware he was just exposing himself further... especially seeing as he'd deactivated his boosting skill again to not waste energy unnecessarily.

After taking another deep breath and being happy with how much he'd charged the arrow, Jake let go of the string as it exploded downward.

Right as he loosed it, Jake's logical side once more questioned why he'd launched this attack with such half-measures. He hadn't upped his boosting skill, nor had he used Eternal Hunger, and this was despite this obviously being the best opportunity Jake would get. This was pretty much the ideal scenario to take the nahoom by surprise, yet Jake had trusted his instincts and held back... something that proved to be a good choice a few seconds later when the Arcane Powershot finally arrived. Ñ&NoBÊs

Ell'Hakan wasn't ready; that much was clear. Right before he was struck, Ell'Hakan tried to dodge but failed as Jake used Primal Gaze for the first time in this fight. Seeing as he

was flying forward, the nahoom was struck in the back, the arrow blowing a hole straight through his chest before continuing down and causing a massive explosion that left a similarly massive crater.

Jake felt the extreme damage done. He saw Ell'Hakan take a huge wound that should have left him reeling... except he wasn't. Instead, the Usurper disappeared, only to appear where he had been flying only a second prior, the wound gone and everything back to normal as if he'd just traveled back in time.

Except, Jake still felt the Arcane Charge built up by his Hunter's Mark having been increased, and Jake had also still gotten a bonus in Hunting Momentum, proving that he had indeed hit. Jake was confused, to say the least, but he quickly reached a conclusion.

Some kind of survival skill like my Moment of , most likely... good to have it be triggered now, assuming it has a cooldown, Jake considered as he stopped overthinking things and took out another arrow as he prepared for some ultra-long range combat.

Below him, Ell'Hakan had stopped to stare shocked toward the sky, trying to locate Jake. Seeing as he wasn't in stealth anymore, Jake was quickly found, the fact he was charging another Arcane Powershot not helping either.

Ell'Hakan began to fly upwards as Jake released another arrow toward his opponent, controlling it mid-flight as he nocked another one. The nahoom turned into a beam of light, flying upwards with incredible speed, but Jake's Arcane Powershot arrows were still far faster, especially seeing as they had the property of only increasing in speed while in flight – up to a certain limit, of course.

The first Arcane Powershot blew past Ell'Hakan who tried to dodge it, but he still took a minor injury as it passed, though he avoided slowing down. The second and third Arcane Powershots he entirely dodged, with the fourth one once more resulting in him getting a nasty cut, but the fifth one was a bit different... mainly because the fifth and sixth were nearly one and the same.

Jake had released a very quick Arcane Powershot before instantly following up with another that had slightly more force behind it, resulting in the second arrow catching up to the first one mid-flight. Ell'Hakan dodged the first one as expected, but the second that had been hiding in the trail of the first struck him head-on, blasting Ell'Hakan downward as he'd only managed to block with his arm at the very last moment.

Still, despite taking a heavy hit, Ell'Hakan quickly began ascending once more, now with a nasty wound on his forearm, the arrow having been powerful enough to penetrate into the bone before exploding, leaving much of the flesh mangled or gone.

He ended up taking a few more hits while approaching Jake, the difference when it came to ultra-ranged combat quite evident. While Ell'Hakan did launch a few sunbeams

and whatnot, Jake easily dodged all of them, and even if they hit, they would be significantly weakened due to the distance. They did look pretty as they lit up the night sky, though.

Sadly for Jake, Ell'Hakan would soon get close enough to close the distance with a single dash, at which point Jake's window of opportunity would close. Still, he expected to get off a few more arrows... until Ell'Hakan changed things up.

Right as Jake nocked an arrow, he noticed a change in his surroundings. Shafts of light appeared in the night sky, and Jake was momentarily confused, as it was still the middle of the night... yet he saw the warm rays of the sun wash the dew of night away.

Ell'Hakan had stopped flying and instead only walked forward, each of his steps heavy despite being in mid-air. As the light intensified, Jake felt the heat get worse as Ell'Hakan spoke.

“Sunrise.”

On the far horizon, the sun fully dawned as light filled the skies as if it was truly morning. Jake genuinely stared at it looked so real that Jake couldn't tell the difference, almost as if Ell'Hakan had truly willed the sun to rise. Logically, he knew no C-grade was capable of causing such a phenomenon, but that didn't make what Ell'Hakan did any less impressive.

Jake wasn't sure if it could even be called a domain skill, but what Ell'Hakan had done was similar to when the Sword Saint summoned his rain, though it was clear whatever Ell'Hakan did was at a far higher level both conceptually and power-wise.

Anyway, while Jake would have loved to theorize what exactly Ell'Hakan had done, he didn't exactly have the time to do so. The scorching sun on the horizon released powerful rays that burned Jake, making him happy he already had his scales active.

What's more, it was clear the sunlight affected Ell'Hakan differently. Jake saw his mangled arm begin to slowly heal as the sun licked his wounds, infusing it with life. The nahoom smiled, basking in the sunlight as he regarded Jake and spoke loudly due to the distance.

“You truly are full of surprises getting up here so fast... but seeing as your wings are gone, I assume it had something to with those? Some form of long-range teleportation skill?” Ell'Hakan asked while theorizing out loud. **“No? Oh, it was an escape skill, wasn't it? Can it be used immediately again, or is it not something you expect to do again during this fight?”**

Jake wondered for a second why Ell'Hakan bothered asking questions he would never get any answer to until he realized...

Motherfucker.

Jake cursed internally, knowing Ell'hakan was reading Jake's subconscious emotional response to the bastard's questions, something Jake obviously wasn't a fan of, as it meant Ell'Hakan got his answers simply by asking the question.

So, before he could continue yapping away, Jake restarted the battle without a single word, Ell'Hakan ready as he stood there with his trident drawn, his silhouette outlined by the rising sun behind him as the day had only just begun.

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Chapter 1026: Jake Thayne vs Ell'Hakan (3)

As the sun rose over the red planet, two figures clashed in mid-air, explosions filling the sky.

Jake once more took the initiative despite Ell'Hakan being the one who'd just unleashed a powerful domain skill upon the world. His scales still allowed him to ignore the passive effects of the sunlight, but he knew that as it intensified and the sun rose further, it would become a problem.

Ell'Hakan also gladly took on a more defensive and passive role as he'd returned to being more of a mage than a warrior. His body was enveloped by sun-affinity fire as he was constantly nurtured by the domain while also using it to empower his attacks. Moreover, due to the inherent life energy in the sun affinity, his wounds were even healing faster under the sunlight.

However, even so, he was on the back foot as Jake made full use of the wide open space in the skies to unleash attacks from all directions. He shot arrows into the air with a package of Willpower, making them slowly turn around and come back to strike Ell'Hakan dozens of seconds later as they took extremely wide curves on their flight path.

This resulted in Ell'Hakan getting attacked from all sides as he tried to lock down Jake, who was gladly teleported around liberally while loosing arrow after arrow. Every single arrow was also soaked in poison, Jake not holding anything back as he had plenty where that came from.

Ell'Hakan did end up taking quite a few wounds, but as his magic got more and more powerful, Jake also began to feel pressured. The nahoom finally made a major move as

he stabbed toward Jake with his trident despite being several kilometers away, and rather than a beam of sunlight, three massive torrents of flames were released from each of the trident's prongs.

These waves of flames transformed after being released, taking forms reminiscent of hydra heads as they chased after Jake, each of them utterly gigantic in size. Jake tried to dodge away and simply keep shooting Ell'Hakan, but one of the heads moved to block his arrows, and to Jake's surprise, the arrow was actually embedded in the hydra as if it was made of something solid.

As this happened, Ell'Hakan was once more stuck from behind by one of Jake's many arrows he'd trick-shot earlier, but it only made the Usurper grunt as he kept pressuring Jake, who was having a harder time than he'd expected with the flames.

Several times, he was nearly caught in one of their massive maws, and the further away Jake fled from Ell'Hakan, the larger these hydra heads came as Jake realized the sun was constantly feeding them power and energy.

Jake gritted his teeth as another one got too close for comfort until suddenly, the second one, which was still a good distance away, opened its mouth and unleashed a breath of flames. Reacting quickly, Jake summoned a barrier of stable arcane mana, successfully blocking the flames that turned out weaker than expected. Then again, perhaps one shouldn't expect too much from fire spewed from something already made of fire.

What the flames had done was allow the first head to close in as the more than fifty-meter-wide maw descended upon Jake to consume him. Jake stared up with narrow eyes as he was still within his barrier, and rather than move, he simply stood still and let himself be consumed. Follow current novels on *novel*•

Right as the maw snapped shut, the entire hydra head exploded from the inside out in a mixture of arcane energy and fire, with Jake standing unharmed as he'd used the arcane barrier to destroy the hydra head, and he couldn't help but snicker at his plan having worked.

All that time with the Puzzle Cube had really come in handy as Jake almost subconsciously analyzed the fire construct of mana, found the weak point, and exploited it before Ell'Hakan had time to adapt. Not that Jake would give him any such time if he could avoid it as he released a barrage of arcane bolts toward another of the hydra heads, each of them exploding on contact and disrupting the mana that kept the construct whole.

Left with only a single head, Ell'Hakan reabsorbed the flames into himself once more as he returned to simpler attacks like fireballs, sunlight beams, and the occasional random explosion in mid-air as the nahoom condensed the heat.

By now, Jake had fully activated the stable variant of his boosting skill, giving him a nice 30% increase in all stats. Ell'Hakan had also used his at the same time as that "sunrise" skill, but based on Jake's estimates, his own boosting skill was better. That, or Ell'Hakan's skill just had other effects Jake had yet to learn about, and honestly, one of those effects he suspected was to better attune him to absorb the sunlight because his wounds were healing way faster than they should... no...

More than actually healing him, the sunlight is stimulating his existing vital energy to heal him faster, Jake noted, the poison coursing through Ell'Hakan's veins giving him quite good insight into the nahoom's body.

Instantly, Jake began to doubt this conclusion, making him believe that doing damage to Ell'Hakan right now really was a waste of time as the passive sunlight nullified anything he di-

Get the fuck out of my head! Jake yelled internally as he tried to squash any unnatural emotions of doubt. Ell'Hakan had clearly done some heavy-handed manipulation, which Jake instantly detected, and Jake felt absolute confidence that he could detect any manipulation if he just-

Fucking hell, Jake cursed again as he just stopped bloody thinking and kept attacking as he didn't even trust his own emotions. It was unsettling, to say the least, that Jake couldn't trust anything but the most obvious of analysis, but he really couldn't do anything about it besides being observant of any emotions discordant with his immediate intuitive conclusions.

Jake also only now began to realize he had been way too passive during this time, likely once more due to Ell'Hakan doing his bullshit and making him think things were going fine. The sun had now risen more than halfway, and soon enough, it would be right above them. As it rose, it only grew stronger and stronger, the sunlight getting close to overcoming Jake's Scales' passive resistance. All along, Ell'Hakan had just wanted to buy time while making Jake take a slow and steady approach, and Jake had fallen into it with both feet as he hadn't been cognisant enough about his own emotions to catch on in time.

Upping the offensive, Jake began to mix in his fair share of Arcane Powershots as he also increased the distance between himself and Ell'Hakan. These far more powerful arrows weren't something Ell'Hakan could easily handle, and he seemed to realize Jake had caught on to his manipulation as the nahoom abandoned his passive defensive strategy and decided that offense was the best defense.

Turning into a beam of sunlight, he went straight for Jake, who responded by shooting arrows his way. One of them split in mid-air before exploding, creating a cover of destructive arcane mana as Jake dismissed his bow and also charged forward.

He'd hoped to take Ell'Hakan by surprise, but the Usurper was ready and waiting as he became corporal and stabbed toward Jake's chest with full momentum. Jake met the charge as he used his katar to barely parry the trident, using his other hand to land a palm on Ell'Hakan's chest, sending them flying away from each other once more.

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Ell'Hakan quickly stabilized, a rotting handprint on his chest from Jake's Touch of the Malefic Viper. This extremely brief moment of separation was enough for Jake to quickly pull out his bow and shoot another arrow, Ell'Hakan failing to fully block it before he charged again, this time more carefully as Jake blocked blow after blow while failing to land an attack of his own for the first dozen exchanges.

However, Jake soon found another opening as he landed a low kick followed by a slice of his katar leaving a nasty cut on Ell'Hakan's shoulder. Even if Jake admitted Ell'Hakan was far better at fighting than he would have expected, Jake was simply faster and stronger physically. While it was entirely possible Ell'Hakan had Jake beaten when it came to the mental stats, Jake definitely had more Agility and Strength, allowing him to gain the upper hand in otherwise equal clashes.

There was also one thing to consider:

Ell'Hakan's level. Jake was still level 295, just shy of being considered a high-tier C-grade. At the same time, Ell'Hakan had just barely passed that threshold. ~~RA~~Ne□Es

[Nahoom – lvl 303]

It was a testament to Jake's many titles that he still appeared superior in stats despite the level difference. Also, while Jake's Big Game Hunter and many other skills being stronger against higher-leveled enemies was a thing for sure, that didn't mean it was better for him to be below and not equal to Ell'Hakan's level. While the benefits from those skills were great, they were ultimately only there to help close the gap, not eliminate it entirely.

This is to say, if Jake had also been level 303, the fight would likely have been considered rather one-sided. With the level-disparity... well, time would tell. For now, Jake had the advantage with his superior physical stats and better boosting skill, but Ell'Hakan still had time on his side as the sun was soon at its apex.

Until then, Jake slowly whittled away at Ell'Hakan as they proceeded to fight without Jake giving his opponent any time to rest. The nahoom didn't have many good responses besides fighting back, as any time he created just a bit of distance, Jake used that as an opening to unleash powerful arrows while fighting in melee also resulted in him taking continuous damage, even if it was less than when he faced the bow.

Ultimately, Jake accomplished one of his goals, and soon enough, Ell'Hakan made a concession. Jake had been the first to activate his boosting skill in the stable variant, but now Ell'Hakan was the one to go further as he pushed his own boosting skill further, forcing Jake to respond in kind.

At least Jake had expected to see Ell'Hakan continue to use the same one that relied on the sun affinity, but instead, Ell'Hakan activated what seemed like an entirely new boosting skill. His aura also subtly changed when he used it, and Jake instantly felt the difference when he attacked.

He'd stabbed forward with his katar, aiming for Ell'Hakan's stomach, but as his weapon to close, he felt as if the distance was longer than it actually was. His katar slowed down for a fraction of a second just before it hit Ell'Hakan, giving the nahoom time to twist his body to the side, resulting in Jake only leaving a faint cut.

Jake's response was naturally to activate his own Arcane Awakening using the offensive variant, boosting the relevant stats by 50%. He did lose his boost to his resilience stats, which put an even bigger strain on his scales, but for now, they still held up, primarily due to their high innate resistance to the light affinity.

Attacking again, Jake dodged Ell'Hakan's counter, the higher Agility helping Jake as he reached forward to use Touch, and once more, he felt his aim be weird. However, just then, it was as if his Touch made contact with something, and the odd feeling disappeared as Jake landed another palm blow on Ell'Hakan.

He saw the genuine surprise on the nahoom's face, and Jake quickly realized what was up with Ell'Hakan's skill. It not only boosted his stats but created what was effectively a barrier of probability around him to defend him from lethal blows. Jake had clearly felt the barrier when he broke through with Touch and by making use of his high Perception, he analyzed it enough for a basic understanding.

An annoying skill for sure, Jake noted as he attacked again, this time by shooting an Arrow Rain while Ell'Hakan was still shocked by Jake breaking through the barrier earlier. He defended as well as he could, but three arrows struck Ell'Hakan... yet once more, just before each struck, they slightly veered away from where Jake had aimed them, hitting him, yes, but avoiding areas they would have dealt more damage with two of them even hitting right where there was bone, barely doing anything.

Jake had no idea how high such a skill's rarity had to be, but it couldn't be low. Based on how Ell'Hakan acted unfamiliar with his own skill, Jake also got a feeling – one he was certain came purely from within himself.

"Newly gained or upgraded, huh?" Jake commented as he shot another few arrows, Ell'Hakan ready this time as he moved his trident to block them all. Yet again, something odd happened, as the trident looked like it moved to two positions simultaneously, blocking both arrows at once.

“My rightful bounty as a Usurper,” Ell’Hakan answered. Despite his body looking quite damaged by now, with nearly a dozen arrow holes and close to a hundred cuts marking his body, the nahoom still smiled confidently as he didn’t even give the slightest hint he was reaching his limit.

“Good for you,” Jake just said, meeting the charging Ell’Hakan as they exchanged a few blows, ending with Ell’Hakan having to retreat back again.

“Good for me indeed...” Ell’Hakan smiled, parrying an arrow. “Also... it’s time.”

Jake didn’t need to be told what Ell’Hakan meant, as he already knew. The fact shadows had nearly disappeared was proof of it, as the sun now hung directly above the two of them, shining down with intense sunlight.

Sunlight that only intensified further as the entire world became brighter and began to take on a faint sheen of golden red.

“High Noon.”

As Ell’Hakan spoke those words, Jake heard a cracking sound as the scales on his shoulder where his armor had been broken earlier in the fight became overloaded with energy. Soon enough, more of his scales began to give in as the temperature rose to all-new levels, and Jake hurried to adapt to the environment.

“Unlike your blue planet, this world has always been harsh to us. Throughout history, the sun has caused more deaths than any wars, and even when wars were fought, the sun was often to blame as it dictated the yield of crops or the evaporation of our water depots, causing a lack of resources,” Ell’Hakan began to speak, standing under the harsh sun.

“The only place that was ever safe was the blessed city we now call our capital. Beneath is a massive stream of fresh groundwater, bringing life with it. Without this, I’m not even certain the nahoom would have survived till this day, and to be allowed to live in the capital was always viewed as one of the highest goals for any nahoom...”

Jake was unsure what the hell Ell’Hakan was getting at as he focused on reinforcing his scales to handle the environment as he also tried to adapt to the sudden change in other ways.

Having likely read Jake’s confusion, Ell’Hakan kept speaking. “The reason I’m telling you this is that I need you to understand that to us, the nahoom, the sun is not something to be taken lightly, but a willful god that dictates our fates, demanding respect. Not a single nahoom does not understand this, as the sun is akin to divinity, and all must bow before it... all but one.”

Ell'Hakan's aura suddenly began to grow, seemingly out of nowhere, as the nahoom continued. "For only the Celestial Child is worthy of standing beneath the harsh grace of his father. However, even he can claim nothing but to be equal with the one who gave him life."

As the aura kept growing, Jake was still questioning the source, though he was not for a second questioning whether it was related to Yip of Yore's Legacy. One thing was also for sure... Jake knew he couldn't really afford to hold back anymore as Ell'Hakan had evidently also gotten serious.

The Nahoom looked toward the sky directly at the sun, seemingly ignoring Jake as he spoke. "Hunter... you would be wise to remember that you are on my planet right now."

From above, the sun suddenly flashed, and Jake quickly reacted right as a beam of pure sunlight descended from above at unprecedented speed, barely missing him, but the remnants of heat and energy were still enough to make all the scales on Jake's one side crack and break as Jake felt his skin beneath be scorched.

"And here on my planet..."

Jake barely had time to react as the sun flashed again, but as Jake prepared to dodge another sunbeam, Ell'Hakan appeared right in front of him.

"... you better fear the sun."

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Chapter 1027: Jake Thayne vs Ell'Hakan (4)

Jake had to react quickly to the attacks arriving both from above and right in front of him. Rather than try to retreat as Ell'Hakan would probably expect, Jake dove toward the trident that was stabbing for his chest, narrowly avoiding it while getting out of the way of the sunbeam.

This put him in an awkward position, allowing Ell'Hakan to unleash an inferno blast straight to his front, sending him tumbling back from the impact, his clothes now even more burnt than before. Right as he stabilized himself, the next attack arrived from the sun above as it unleashed yet another powerful beam Jake barely had time to react to while also dealing with the hyper-offensive Ell'Hakan, leaving him with yet more burns.

With the sun having reached its zenith, the momentum of battle had changed entirely, Jake now finding himself constantly on the defensive as he tried to slowly acclimate to the extreme heat while barely holding off Ell'Hakan's constant assault. The fire spells that before were only a little dangerous had been empowered to new levels by the environment, and were quite frankly far more powerful than just casual spells had any right to be.

However, despite being on the back foot, Jake didn't panic or even push himself further with his boosting skill quite yet. Sure, things were looking rough right now, but Jake was looking at the fight from a more long-term perspective and seeing the massive sun in the sky and the fact that Ell'Hakan created such a massive and powerful domain...

How long can he keep this up?

The energy consumption had to be utterly insane. Jake had talked to the Sword Saint and Dina quite a lot during their time in Nevermore, seeing as both of them used massive-scale skills at times, and they were always very vocal about the equally massive energy consumption of such skills. Not to mention the consumed mental energy from keeping something of such a large scale active.

All of this is to say that Ell'Hakan had to be draining his resources at an astonishing speed while keeping the domain active. Combined with all the other attacks he kept releasing... yeah, it was only a question of time before he wouldn't be able to keep up this kind of momentum.

Jake had these thoughts while being hypervigilant if they were truly his own conclusions, but as the logic tracked without any obvious involvement of emotions, Jake chose to go with it. That's why he was fine being so passive for now, as he felt confident that with every passing moment, Ell'Hakan was slowly burning himself dry like the sun above.

Ell'Hakan also acted as if Jake's conclusion was correct as he upped the tempo even more. Jake dodged attack after attack without even daring to counter, his scales in a constant state of destruction and regeneration from the fiery assault. He tried to act as cold-headed as possible, but if he kept not attacking, he would-

No.

Annoying emotions kept creeping in from the obvious manipulation of his opponent, but Jake suppressed them to not get baited into doing something dumb. He also quickly began to suspect something else as he looked at the sun above and noticed something.

Despite the skill seemingly having reached its peak of power, the sun kept growing brighter and hotter. It wasn't by a lot and incredibly subtle, but something was definitely happening, which was when Jake reached a quite obvious conclusion:

No day lasts forever.

At some point, the sun would have to set, and the skill come to an end. The skill relied on powerful concepts, concepts far too much for Ell'Hakan to properly control. Him trying to make the sun not act like the sun was like a water mage trying not to make things splashed with water get wet or a wind mage trying to make the wind sturdy and solid like a rock. It simply wasn't in the realm of C-grades to oppose the natural law of affinities and concepts.

It was with this thought Jake kept engaging Ell'Hakan as Jake tried to keep his distance at all times, defending and dodging when necessary. As the sun grew more and more intense, Ell'Hakan also kept growing in power, and Jake was forced to keep up with his own boosting skill as he'd long pushed it to a mid-point between the stable 30% and the extreme 60% boost. Arcane Supremacy had raised his resistance to the skill immensely, and by now, he could reach around a 50% boost before the demerits of the boosting skill began to really show themselves.

Minutes kept ticking by, Jake taking more and more damage as he couldn't dodge everything, but he remained fine with the status quo. Ell'Hakan's attacks turned more and more desperate, but Jake refused to take any baits and avoided inadvertently opening himself up to taking more damage than he needed to by going on the offensive. Why would he need to when time was on his side?

Why do something so dumb when things were going so well?

Going really well...

Too well.

Jake realized, and as he did, Ell'Hakan smiled as the sun above flashed for a moment, an utterly massive sunbeam descending toward Jake as Ell'Hakan unleashed over a hundred torrents of flames that pushed him back while scorching his scales and sending Jake flying toward the ground.

"What an odd conclusion you reached," Ell'Hakan spoke, his voice infused with willpower as a giant magic circle appeared above him as he raised his trident. "Why would this scenario be advantageous to you? Did you believe I was naught but a waning candle?" PANÔBÊŚ

Quickly getting on his feet in the newly formed crater he'd been thrown into, Jake pulled out his bow as magic manifested all around him.

"The sun rises when the Celestial Child beckons it. Everyone knows that, so why believe something so natural would come at a cost?" Ell'Hakan grinned, a spiral of flames forming above him as nine spirals total slowly began to morph into the familiar forms reminiscent of hydra heads.

Jake prepared himself for the attack as he finally knew where he'd fucked up before, and he couldn't help but kick himself despite the obvious emotional fuckery done by Ell'Hakan. When Ell'Hakan first used the skill, Jake had noticed an odd kind of energy, and once again, when he'd used the "high noon" part of the skill, this energy had returned.

Yet Jake had seemingly entirely forgotten about it until now, having dismissed it as just another aspect of Yip of Yore's powers and not something he wanted to or had time to understand. He hadn't been wrong about it being related to Yip of Yore, but he had entirely dismissed the kind of energy he'd felt... energy he now was certain what was as it permeated the entire domain.

Faith energy.

It was energy usually reserved for gods, but that didn't mean others couldn't use it or that it didn't exist even where there was nobody around to control it. False Gods like the Desolate Child of Loss could be born from faith energy alone, and in many ways, the entire Path of Yip of Yore relied on a variant of faith energy, as he required people to believe in him and what he was capable of.

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Jake knew Ell'Hakan truly wasn't much different, except he used it a lot differently than Yip of Yore. He used the faith energy as fuel for his massive domain skill, relying on what he'd just said before: the belief in him as the Celestial Child from all the natives. They truthfully, genuinely believed he could do all this effortlessly, and through Yip of Yore's Legacy, the faith energy born from that belief had been manifested into reality.

Needless to say, Jake's initial assumption had been quite wrong as Jake was also taught the lesson that relying on logic to reach a conclusion didn't mean that it was completely free of emotional manipulation. It was still entirely possible the data he'd used to reach that conclusion were biased from Ell'Hakan making him downplay certain things. He had fallen into Ell'Hakan's trap hook, line, and sinker.

Yet, as Jake faced the nine descending hydra heads and the intensifying sun above, he remained relatively calm. While most of his conclusions had been wrong, no amount of emotional fuckery could change the fact that Ell'Hakan couldn't defeat the laws of the universe when it came to concepts, and the sun would still set soon enough.

Having realized that dragging things out didn't help Jake, he stopped holding anything back. Arcane Awakening fully activated as arcane energy exploded all around him, his body burning with power. To meet the rapidly descending hydras of sun flames, Jake sent out a barrage of arrows to meet them in mid-air.

This only stopped them briefly, but it was enough for Jake to unleash the second assault. Pride of the Malefic Viper activated as Jake's own semi-domain skill covered the area around him, and as the heads of flames got closer, Jake raised a hand and spoke.

“Break.”

Clenching his fist, the five heads at the forefront all exploded as Jake crushed the magic keeping them together. With Pride active, Jake could also more easily control the mana in the area around him, allowing him to slightly push off the heat as he summoned a number of powerful barriers of arcane mana to meet the final four hydra heads descending on him.

A shockwave of flames erupted when the barriers and fire hydras met, sending even Ell'Hakan floating back slightly as he prepared to send another attack down. Yet right as he lifted his trident to unleash a scorching beam, an arrow flew out of the blazing inferno below, striking him in the shoulder and sending him flying back as blood sprayed into the air.

Ell'Hakan quickly stabilized right as a second Arcane Powershot flew out of the flames. He barely blocked this one as it still sent him reeling back from the impact, and he didn't hesitate to retreat as Jake slowly floated up from within the inferno.

Multiple layers of arcane barriers covered him, with several breaking every second, but Jake resummoned them again and again as he kept the flames at bay using Pride. He infused the skill with more mana than ever before to impose his will upon the world and from having done so, not a single lick of flames had touched him.

While it was true that Ell'Hakan was making use of the fanatical populace of the planet to keep the domain active, Jake wasn't afraid of losing out in the slightest when it came to longevity. He had an utterly massive mana pool, rivaling even genius peak C-grade mages due to his Anomalous Soul and Mask of the Fallen King both giving him 25% extra to his total mana pool, not to mention the mask increasing his mana regeneration substantially.

Nocking yet another arrow, Jake kept shooting toward Ell'Hakan, who was ready to deflect every one of them as he closed in again, his entire body ablaze. The heat from his body alone was pressuring Jake as he broke through the barriers swiftly, but with Pride active and liberal use of mana, Jake didn't lose out as he and the nahoom clashed a few dozen times as they flew around the sky.

Jake eventually got a good opening as he straight-up smacked Ell'Hakan in the face with his bow using one hand as he stabbed Ell'Hakan in the stomach with the other using Piercing Fang, penetrating to the handle with his Void Katar. The Usurper quickly attacked to get Jake away, but not before a pulse of arcane energy was released,

sending a shockwave of pure destruction through the nahoom's internals and making him stumble back as he spat up blood.

Despite Ell'Hakan continuously growing in power, Jake still had the stat advantage. Pushing forward, he landed several more blows on his opponent, soon enough getting another major chance. With one hand, he caught the handle of the trident and once more stabbed Ell'hakan through the chest with his katar, this time penetrating even deeper as-

Jake's danger sense instantly exploded as Ell'Hakan smirked despite having Jake's hand halfway buried in his chest. Chains of flames erupted from thin air all around them as these chains wrapped around Ell'Hakan and Jake, effectively tying them together. The nahoom used both his hands to hold onto Jake, even letting go of his weapon as it disappeared.

The chains burned into Jake's back as Ell'Hakan burned his front, the hunter quickly responding to the massive switch-up of an attack. Letting go of his katar, Jake gritted his teeth and placed a hand directly on Ell'Hakan's face as he used the hand inside Ell'Hakan to do even more damage. Both of them began to glow a dark green from Touch of the Malefic Viper, but Ell'Hakan still grinned as his eyes glowed golden, and his gaze met Jake's. The source of this content is novel•

“The harshness of the sun knows no mercy.”

Jake's danger sense went even more wild as the sun's glow intensified at an extreme pace and he knew something big was coming. He quickly switched the hand inside Ell'Hakan to hold one of the chains as he began to break it down and get loose, never once breaking eye contact with Ell'Hakan.

To buy a bit more time, Jake even used Primal Gaze, but all it did was buy Jake a fraction of a second... but it didn't look like it would be enough.

The sun's rays burned the world all around them, and Ell'Hakan didn't let his eyes leave Jake for even a moment as he spoke a single more word.

“Sundown.”

Jake broke the chain and kicked his body off Ell'hakan's right as the sun above exploded into a singular pillar of pure sunlight more than a kilometer in radius that descended upon the planet with enough power to genuinely threaten Jake's life.

Ell'Hakan felt the beam of the sun strike him as he saw the hunter also get hit. The pure light consumed the Chosen of the Malefic Viper's form entirely as he disappeared from sight, the last thing Ell'Hakan saw being the human's scales explode and the skin below vaporize from the Sundown.

Contrarily, Ell'Hakan felt the intense sunlight enter his body as his wounds rapidly healed. Nearly all of the damage he'd taken in the fight so far was restored, and even if doing so had consumed a lot of his vital energy, the sunlight was powerful enough to replenish his pools a little.

The beam of sunlight continued for several seconds more before slowly fading away, yet the world remained bright as if a second sun had been born. Below him, the pillar had burned a hole into the ground several hundred kilometers deep, and from within it, the light kept shining as the walls of stone and soil had been turned into white-hot lava, and at the very bottom, all the remnant energy had gathered.

Ell'Hakan looked down into this hole as he felt the aura of the Chosen of the Malefic Viper remained all the way toward the bottom, having survived the attack. Not entirely unsuspected, but Ell'Hakan felt confident he wouldn't be in a very good state.

Not that he himself was in peak condition. Yes, the sunlight had healed him, but his face still had a visible handprint that radiated poison, and what he'd been inflicted with throughout the fight also still remained.

To fight off this poison, Ell'Hakan consumed a potion he had pre-prepared for this fight, functioning both as a general anti-toxin and a healing potion at the same time. The vital energy washed through his body and battled the poison as it also rejuvenated his body and got him back in a more than acceptable condition. Certainly a better one than the hunter.

He kept feeling for what his opponent was doing down in the hole and even retreated away to not be directly above it lest he'd start shooting arrows from below. Yet as over a minute passed, there was no movement, and Ell'Hakan even felt the aura weaken over time, making him frown.

Yes, Sundown had been far more powerful than expected after upgrading to mythical rarity, but it still shouldn't have been enough. No, it was far more probable the Chosen was simply hiding his own presence to-

Ell'Hakan's eyes flashed open as he felt it. An overwhelming emotion flooded his mind, not from below but above. It was unnatural, simplistic, raw... primal. He felt extremely malnourished as if he hadn't eaten for a century, as a pang of pure hunger dominated every corner of his being.

Despite everything, the shock from the emotion didn't stun Ell'Hakan entirely as he barely managed to lean his head to the side and try to dodge as something struck him from above, yet even as the pain and panic would normally set in, all he could feel was an intense, seemingly eternal hunger.

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Chapter 1028: Jake Thayne vs Ell'Hakan (5)

As the sun set, a lot of things happened at once. Jake found himself trapped as the pillar of pure sun energy descended upon him, with seemingly no time to get away... so he made a gamble. Right before the sunbeam hit, his body split in two as a shadowy version of Jake shot out of the area the sunbeam was in, unaffected by the remnant energy left by the fire chains.

It was an often forgotten feature as Jake didn't use it often, but the Origin of Eternal Shadow still had roots in Shadow Vault, retaining the ability to vault out of danger as per the description:

“Upon activation of Eternal Shadow of , this skill allows both the Eternal Shadow and to embrace the shadows momentarily, vaulting in any chosen direction.”

This allowed the Eternal Shadow to escape just as Jake was hit by the Sundown beam... and he was hit hard. Jake's scales nearly immediately exploded as they were overcharged with energy, and the skin below burnt away in an instant, with Jake feeling as if his entire body was beginning to disintegrate.

As his form was wholly consumed by the beam, and not even a second from when he knew Moment of would forcibly activate – even if he tried to stop it from doing so as he was currently - Ell'Hakan's gaze was finally no longer on him due to the immense brightness.

Jake acted instantly and activated Eternal Shadow again as he switched places with his other half, the clone instantly getting destroyed as Jake appeared outside where the beam hit. Despite replacing his reality with the one of Eternal Shadow's, remnant sun energy still lingered in Jake's soul as he felt hot throughout, but he couldn't give it much thought as he focused on rapidly ascending upwards as he initiated his stealth skill.

This was something Jake had theorized long ago and now finally put into practice, though not exactly as he had imagined. Jake's stealth skill was extremely powerful, but it relied on this opponent not knowing where Jake was when he activated it. Needless to say, that made it pretty challenging to use in the middle of combat... but what if he had a way to make his opponents lose track of him? Perhaps even make his opponent assume he was “someone” else?

That's what Jake had considered... replacing himself with his clone to then gain distance and enter stealth before his opponent noticed the real him. It was still hard to pull off, but Ell'Hakan had given Jake the perfect opportunity.

Even as Jake rapidly used One Step to get height, thus exiting the emotion-detection range of Ell'Hakan, the nahoom still hadn't noticed Jake as the sunbeam lasted a lot longer than Jake had thought it would. Also, even if Jake had dodged it and was now getting height, he was still affected by the immense heat it gave off, but the sunlight was impressively focused in the beam, meaning Ell'Hakan had a lot more control than Jake would expect, considering the sheer scale and power of the attack.

If he'd taken the beam head-on, Jake genuinely couldn't ensure his own survival, even if he tried to use barriers and whatnot. Only with Moment or Eternal Shadow did Jake have a good method of escape, and Jake could only admire the fact that Ell'Hakan could unleash such a skill.

He had clearly earned the title as one of the most powerful people of their generation... but Jake was determined to prove himself *the* strongest once and for all.

As the Sundown beam slowly faded away, Jake's stealth skill finally activated, and he disappeared entirely. Yet he kept going up for a little while longer until he felt like it was good enough. Once there, he turned his attention toward the nahoom below who was looking into the massive hole created by the beam.

Jake felt it then... this was his chance. Without a moment's hesitation, Jake pulled out his special Eternal Hunger arrow and nocked it before taking aim at the Usurper below. Arcane Powershot started charging as Jake kept breathing heavily despite the pain, the heat having caused quite a lot of internal damage.

Ell'Hakan was unaware. He simply kept watching out for Jake, who he likely assumed to be down in the burning hole. Jake honestly didn't know why but assumed that, but perhaps some of the curse energy still lingered down there for a while longer, giving off Jake's aura.

The nahoom even consumed a potion, recovering slightly for the next round of the fight. One could say a lot of things about Ell'Hakan, but he certainly hadn't underestimated Jake. Even after such an attack, he moved forward with the conclusion Jake was still going to continue being a massive threat he had to stay prepared for.

However, no preparation could prepare him for Jake doing something Ell'Hakan didn't even know Jake was capable of.

Soon enough, Jake felt the strain on his body as the Arcane Powershot couldn't be charged more. Even so, he pushed it just a little further as his shoulders began burning from the destructive arcane energy, and the bow he'd upgraded way back just before Nevermore looked like it couldn't handle much more.

It was time.

Go.

Jake let go of the string as the Eternal Hunger arrow exploded downwards, hidden by his stealth skill. Ell'Hakan was none the wiser as he still stood there expecting Jake to be below and not above. $\tau a \square \emptyset B \ddot{E} s$

Only when it was too late did Ell'Hakan react. The nahoom moved his head to the side at the very last moment, avoiding getting struck on top of his head as he tried to tilt his body. Right as he began moving, Jake used Primal Gaze, but it didn't even look like Ell'Hakan noticed as Eternal Hunger's curse energy flooded the area right before it hit him.

The arrow struck him in his collarbone and didn't stop there as the large spear-like construct continued all the way through. As it passed through Ell'Hakan, immense amounts of curse energy invaded the nahoom's body, not to speak of the extremely potent poison also mixed in, amplified by the curse.

Jake watched as the arrow kept flying even after hitting and passing through Ell'Hakan, all the runes and magic covering the mythical weapon gone as it flew out of the Usurper around his thigh area. In its wake, it left all the energy Jake had inscribed upon the weapon, making the physical arrow exiting nothing but Eternal Hunger in the form of a spear-like arrow.

Right as it was free of Ell'Hakan, the entire mythical weapon instantly disappeared rather than crash into the ground, reappearing far up in the sky above, held in Jake's hand. His shoulders were spent from firing the arrow as he stared at Ell'Hakan, almost expecting a notification.

The Usurper floated in the air for a moment before he began to fall down toward the ground, and as he'd moved to avoid Jake shooting him from within the hole, he ended up landing beside the new major geographical landmark he'd just created.

Jake considered for a moment shooting another arrow toward the fallen nahoom, but his bow looked quite a bit worse for wear, so he decided to give it a break as he floated down. While descending, Jake also took the Eternal Hunger spear and held it in front of him as he grasped the arrow's tip and body. With a good twist and yank, he broke off the speartip and a small part of the handle, holding it as the weapon began to slowly morph into a katar as he allowed the rest of the former arrow's body to disperse and reenter his soul.

He soon approached the ground, and as he did, Jake felt himself being observed from somewhere. He looked toward where someone was looking but found nothing. Frowning, Jake tried to identify the source of what observed him, but as this observer didn't appear to hold any malice, Jake decided not to let himself be distracted as he landed only ten meters from where Ell'Hakan was lying on the ground.

Walking over with steady steps, Jake heard the gurgling and struggling breaths and saw the utterly destroyed body on the ground. The arrow had removed more than a third of

Ell'Hakan's entire body mass in one go and, due to its travel path, even blown one of his arms and legs off at the shoulder and thigh, respectively.

All of this wasn't to mention the curse energy pulsating from his body and the smell of rot from the Heartrot poison infecting every part of him that remained. Looking down at him, Jake sighed as he lifted his hand and prepared to use Touch of the Malefic Viper to finish him off.

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

A very small pang of regret to see the fight end like this snuck into his mind, but Jake quickly shook it off. While he had enjoyed a good fight, he knew this could only have one conclusion. With the sun gone and under the light of the twin moons, Jake's hand began to glow dark green with the intent to end their ill-fated relationship once and for all.

Pain mixed with extreme hunger dominated every inch of Ell'Hakan's mind as he didn't even register himself falling and landing hard on the rocky ground below. He was only vaguely aware that he had been hit with an extremely powerful attack, and the logical part of his brain knew he had to do something.

As the seconds passed, Ell'Hakan slowly controlled his emotions one by one, gaining lucidity with every passing second as he desperately struggled. Despite all his efforts, getting rid of the hunger was simply too difficult as it tied into too many other emotions, and the pain was needed as a reminder of what was happening to him... but he did make them slightly more manageable, finally allowing him to understand his own situation.

His body was utterly wrecked, and he could barely move. Curse and poison were coursing through his body, tearing him apart in body and soul. Things... weren't good.

The remnants of the potion he'd consumed just before getting hit were one of the only things keeping him even halfway stable, but he knew that at any point, he could be pushed over the edge. Even if left alone, his chances of surviving were slim, but if he got lucky, then maybe...

That's when he felt the hunter land not far away. As he walked closer, he felt the human's emotions, and a slight hint of killing intent made it evident what he was there to do. Ell'Hakan struggled as he screamed at his body to move, but all he could do was try to breathe and stabilize.

He simply refused to let it end like this... to see everything end like this. Ell'Hakan had done all the preparations he could, never once slacked off or allowed himself to be satisfied. In fact, he'd used his Bloodline on himself all the time. It was one of the reasons he'd even become as strong as he had.

Emotions such as doubt, boredom, fear, apprehension... all of them were things that made one slow down or stop progressing. Ell'Hakan had carefully controlled all these. No matter how hard he had to work on something he never allowed himself to get bored or discouraged, but instead actively amplified all the positive emotions he felt while doing it to keep himself motivated and engaged. He had done this for so many years, even before the system. He'd trained with his spear back then till his hands were bloody but soldiered through everything... and yet...

I can't.

He had too many that believed in him, too much faith. Gritting his teeth, Ell'Hakan's mind calmed for a moment as he gathered everything he could. He felt the faith of every native of his planet enter him, the trust in his victory from all who had chosen his side in the conflict spread throughout the galaxy. They all believed he would win, so who was he to doubt?

As he struggled, his emotions overflowed and coalesced as a notification appeared before his eyes.

Skill Upgraded: [Legend of the Celestial Child (Legendary)] --> [Myth of the Celestial Child (Mythical)]

Instantly, Ell'Hakan felt an influx of energy from all around him as his boosting skill reached an even higher level. This energy fed his body, but... it simply wasn't enough. It was like pouring oil on an already extinguished candle, and all it ended up doing was prolonging how long he would last. Perhaps it would allow him to now survive if left alone, but the hunter would not leave him be.

Ell'Hakan felt his last hope slipping away with every second he couldn't even move a finger on his remaining arm. The hunter was observing him as he lay there, and as Ell'Hakan read his emotions for what may be the final time, he was surprised to find a hint of regret in there. He tried to amplify this emotion, tried to make the hunter decide not to finish him off... but how foolish was it to try and make a hunter go against his own instinct?

That's when Ell'Hakan felt an emotion he had expected even less... and the one he loathed the most:

Pity.

The hunter pitied him as he activated what Ell'Hakan knew to be Touch of the Malefic Viper, making all the poison in his body go on a rampage, quickly quelling whatever newfound power his boosting skill was giving him.

As death approached, memories flooded back into Ell'Hakan's mind as he let go of all the control he had over his own psyche. He remembered growing up on the streets after

his parents abandoned him. Remembered as he tried to survive the long, cold nights and harsh, scorching days, barely scraping by day to day.

The memories just kept entering his mind in an uncontrollable flood as his life flashed before his eyes. His escape from the streets had not been a lucky one, but quite the opposite. He'd been captured by the guards after trying to steal water and was punished with enslavement and to join the slave army as the small kingdom required soldiers.

His days on the battlefield were a daze, but Ell'Hakan realized he was good at it. He always had good control of his own emotions, which allowed him to do better on the battlefield than most, and along with his naturally gifted physique and talent for battle, he excelled. Even so, he was close to death so many times as he grew up in the army from someone who barely qualified as a man to an adult... and as he grew, so did his Bloodline.

Ell'Hakan soon came to learn that it wasn't just his own emotions he could affect. He started out small, making the army cook give him an extra meal here and there, had the blacksmith ensure Ell'Hakan's weapon was always the best taken care of, and even made his captain give him more leeway than any of the other slaves.

Gradually, he got more ambitious. From the captain to the commander to the general, he began to influence the military from within. He spread half-truths and lies that were to his advantage, easily convincing others of anything he wanted to as he kept pushing the limits. Emotions and memories were so tightly tied that as long as he could make anyone believe something was possible, he could make them believe it was the truth.

Eventually, Ell'Hakan became a hero of the army – made himself a hero - his title of slave quickly forgotten as all who knew were either killed or made to believe he had never been a slave in the first place. He was praised by all and brought to the capital of the kingdom, who at the time ruled the city they even called the capital now. There, he was met with nobles and royalty, beings that he had once thought were unapproachable beings, but now they were like clay in his hands for him to manipulate as he so desired. The people who'd looked down on him like vermin were now seeing him as if he was truly worthy of being with them, which only gave him more ambition... ambition to go all the way.

The religion of not just the kingdom but every faction on the planet was to worship the sun and the moons. This religion was a remnant from a very long time ago when his planet had been united as one. During this time, the planet was flourishing with plenty of life and greenery everywhere, grand meadows expanding as far as the eye could see, with lakes and rivers everywhere.

But one day, it all crumbled. It was called a punishment from the sun and stars, but later, Ell'Hakan learned it was the result of a massive supervolcano erupting, causing changes to the atmosphere and the entire planet.

Back during this time of flourishing, when the world was united, it had been done by someone who was viewed as a living god. A being no one could question, as he was the son of the celestials itself... a man called the Celestial Child.

Ell'Hakan had grown up hearing about the Celestial Child of Legend as it was sung about in taverns and in the army many told old stories about him. Perhaps it was hubris or rightful confidence, but Ell'Hakan truly chose the most extreme path forward as in front of the king and queen himself, he proclaimed himself not just the second coming, but the Celestial Child reborn.

It took a lot of effort but little time before he managed to convince just one of the priests... and with one on board, the doubt spread, was turned into a sliver of belief, which he then instantly grasped onto with a vice grip and amplified.

All of this culminated in his lie becoming truth. He was proclaimed the Celestial Child, unified all the kingdoms and clans using the legends of old, and formed the new empire that ruled his planet for many years before the system even arrived.

The initiation was simply another chance for him to continue his ambitions, giving him not just a singular planet but an entire multiverse to make his own. However... as he was on death's door, he finally realized how foolish he had been. How arrogant.

He had played the role of the Celestial Child so long that he'd forgotten he wasn't truly the legendary figure of myths. He was just Ell'Hakan, a pathetic slave from the streets who'd gotten lucky getting a powerful Bloodline.

His position wasn't earned; his powers nothing but a grand lie.

Right as the last vestiges of life left him, he couldn't help but think what the real Celestial Child could have accomplished if he had been born during the time of the system. Surely, he would have done better than some like Ell'Hakan...

If only it had been real... if only he'd been the real Celestial Child, the real son of the moon and stars... if he could only truly become him...

All emotions began to fade from Ell'Hakan's mind as only this one thought and desire remained, and as it did, his mind collapsed as his Bloodline went into overdrive. Ell'Hakan faded, his ego washed away by a singular desire...

ERROR

Due to your Bloodline, the skill [Myth of the Celestial Child (Mythical)] is evolving.

And from the nothingness, the mind of another being emerged. Lies became truth, as what was once a legend and an act became reality.

ERROR

Skill downgraded-Synergy Detected-

ERROR

Skill Upgra- ERROR – Skill Down – Skill Lost – ERROR

...

Synergy Detected The source of this content is [novel•fire•met](http://novel.fire.met)

Skill gained: [Absolute Delusion: Reincarnation of the Celestial Child (Unique)]

Despite seemingly having no path of survival, the ruined corpse of the one once known as Ell'Hakan opened a single eye as he stared at the moonlit skies above and spoke in a clear voice as he lifted his otherwise immovable arm and reached upwards.

“Mothers... I’m here.”

And as he called to his parents, they heard his plea.

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