

The Primal Hunter

Chapter 1181 - Planeswarper

Primeval Origin Energy, or Jake Juice as he quite frankly couldn't stop himself from calling it mentally, was still something Jake had little understanding of. He knew he had it, and he knew some ways to use it, but he still wasn't entirely sure of why he had it, how much he had, and all secrets it definitely still held.

Jake had gone into this ritual with assumption that it would leave him completely drained; however, he found himself in pretty good shape instead. When considering amount Jake did expend during ritual, re was only one conclusion he could reach:

His Jake Juice storage was growing.

While that shouldn't have been a surprise, Jake still hadn't been entirely certain before. Back in Colosseum of Mortals, Jake had been reduced to level 0, yet he still had access to mysterious energy pool. As for all or times Jake expended it, he was never sure if it was ever topped up.

This time around, Jake was reasonably confident that his total pool of Primeval Origin Energy was nearly full, which helped him confirm it was growing. However, this also left another major question for him to ask:

How much did he actually spend? What was cost of an evolution like this? Was he even able to find an answer to that question, or was it entirely on a case-by-case basis?

Perhaps reason it had felt so "cheap" to evolve Jasper was because a Shimmerfur Warpsnatcher was already a relatively high-tier creature in first place. It was also entirely possible that jewel Jasper had borrowed helped by granting in C-grade a lot of Records, meaning Jake didn't have to supply as many.

Honestly, re were too many questions for one ritual to possibly provide enough data, but Jake also wasn't going to go around performing a whole bunch haphazardly. He could maybe consider doing more rituals akin to when he helped Demon Prince, but he needed a good reason to agree to do that in first place.

All se thoughts were filling Jake's head as he, Artemis, and Jasper soon reached upstairs of palace. Jasper had been happily lying in Artemis' arms throughout walk,

really hammering home shift he had in how he viewed her. Previously, he would always hide away when she was nearby, whereas now he seemed perfectly comfortable around her. In fact, more than that, he seemed to be weaponizing his cuteness to get closer to her purposefully.

A smart strategy for sure, as why wouldn't a newly evolved B-grade want a close bond with a powerful Godqueen?

Walking outside, three of m were soon spotted by fourth person living in Jake's palace. Usually, he kept himself isolated, just doing his own thing, but appearance of slightly unfamiliar aura of a B-grade instantly caught attention of Forest King.

It didn't take long before Unique Lifeform joined m as he flew over and levitated down to land in front of m.

"You completed ritual, I see," King spoke as he observed Jasper. "Based on your prior results, I shall assume you've created an or monster that shall cause a ruckus once multiverse learns of his appearance?"

"Nah, I think we've got more of a Sandy situation on our hands at best," Jake shook his head.

"Worm?" Jasper asked, remembering Jake's mention of cosmic space worm.

"Yeah, a space worm," Jake nodded. "Very powerful and walking a Path quite similar to yours, as you both aren't focused on combat but instead acquisition of natural treasures to grow. I think you two would get along, but I digress. What I mean by that we've got more of a Sandy situation here is that while I don't doubt you're awesome, your appearance doesn't necessarily warrant more widespread precautions."

"I concur with that conclusion," Artemis agreed. "If re were, I believe Yggdrasil would have reached out to me already."

"And Viper would have told me," Jake, feeling at least somewhat confident about that statement. Sure, Villy could have purposefully not told him, but Jake seriously doubted that was case.

"Good or bad?" Jasper asked, looking a little confused.

"Neutral to good," Jake smiled, shaking his head.

"At least it's not an or True Royal," Forest King commented. "I'm entirely unfamiliar with kind of creature this Shimmershroud Planeswarper is, but I find myself curious to learn if this one lives up to my high expectations after seeing your or creations."

“Only one way to find out,” Jake said with a shrug as he looked at Jasper. “Wanna show off a bit of what you’re capable of?”

“Okay!” cat-like creature said as he jumped from arms of Artemis and landed softly on grass, not making a single sound throughout. Right after he landed, Jasper once more hid himself, and despite Jake staring directly at B-grade, he lost sight a second later.

Only through his sphere did he confirm that Jasper was still re, little guy now covered in what could best be described as a shroud of energy. Jake saw that Forest King had also lost track, showing that Jasper’s stealth skills were truly at an insane level. As a reminder, King didn’t have eyes but perceived souls, which made it a lot harder to hide from him using conventional stealth skills, so fact that Jasper could hide was a great sign.

“Extreme stealth skills,” King commented. “Certainly different from worm in that regard.”

“Sneaky!” Jasper said a moment later, revealing himself standing on top of King’s head.

Jake had expected Unique Lifeform to react in some way, but he just spoke again instead. *“Curious. Despite being in physical contact and seeing that’s case, I do not feel anything on top of me. Something that indicates not only ability to possess no discernible physical properties but also that he doesn’t have any detectable weight.”*

“Soft!” Jasper confirmed happily.

“I can confirm that,” Artemis nodded with a smile. “Unique Lifeform is also correct that Jasper’s physical body doesn’t seem to interact with world in a typical fashion. When he moves around, he produces no sound at all, and when I say that, I don’t mean he’s extremely muted but that re truly is no sound. As for weight thing, I can say that when I held him before, I certainly felt some weight.”

“Magic!” Jasper explained as he jumped once and landed back down on King.

“Indeed, now I feel some weight, even if I cannot feel his touch,” Forest King commented.

“So, we confirmed Jasper is very soft, nearly undetectable, and superb at hiding,” Jake said with a nod. “All of those things sound like y come from Shimmershroud part of name, which leaves Planeswarper aspects.”

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Jasper took cue to show off a little as he disappeared, only to appear on top of Jake’s head next, but he moved on quickly as his entire body just... disappeared.

“Did he enter stealth once more?” King asked.

“No, he’s not anywhere,” Jake shook his head. He wondered if Jasper had managed to teleport all way out of his range, but a quick Pulse of Perception revealed that wasn’t case. Not unless he’d teleported out of range of even that, which was entirely possible.

Looking toward Artemis, she just smiled, likely wanting Jake to learn for himself what was going on soon. He was definitely curious.

When Jasper teleported, he didn’t do so using space magic. Neir had he done so before his evolution. Jake was very used to that kind of instantaneous movement where one teleported from one spot to another, to at least include some space magic, but nope. He also knew that Jasper didn’t just fast but actually teleported, which was seen when he easily moved through solid matter.

A few more seconds passed before familiar B-grade reappeared, standing on grass. He was holding a weird orb of energy in his hands that gave off a very familiar aura. ball began dispersing second Jasper appeared, and less than a second later, it was entirely gone. However, Jake had instantly recognized where it had come from.

“That was shadow energy... native to Shadow Realm,” Jake commented with a frown. “You can go to Shadow Realm?”

Jasper nodded enthusiastically as he disappeared again. About thirty seconds passed before little fella returned with a small red stone in his paws. stone wasn’t some magical item or anything, but it did give off an unfamiliar aura and looked like it didn’t belong.

“That’s a stone from Nine Hells,” Artemis explained with a smile.

“He went to Nine Hells and returned here in thirty seconds? Or are there some time dilations going on?” Jake asked, perplexed.

“No!” B-grade clarified. “Jasper fast!”

“As he said, Jasper is just fast,” Artemis chuckled. “Though I will admit, fashion in which he went there was almost too effortless. Don’t get me wrong, for gods, teleporting to Nine Hells or even any other universe is but a thought away, but for mortals, it tends to be quite a bit harder, primarily because it tends to include passing through void.”

“But from what I remember, Nine Hells aren’t a separate universe but have become a World Wonder of some sort that’s far more easily accessible than a universe would be,” Jake said.

“That’s true, but going by general ease Jasper showed when going to Nine Hells, I suspect he should also be able to travel to or universes on his own, even if it would take a little more effort,” Artemis said, looking at Jasper with curiosity.

“Definitely sounds like we discovered why Planeswarper is in his name,” Jake chuckled as a thought struck him. “Speaking of, what even is a plane? Shadow Realm is a, well, realm, while Nine Hells is some weird pseudo-universe, so I have a hard time seeing similarities.”

“Well... concept of planes isn’t necessarily a fully defined one. One can consider Shadow Realm anor plane of existence that exists on top – or beneath – current space we exist in. However, I also wouldn’t call it wrong to say that each universe is its own separate plane,” Artemis explained as she considered question a little. “I guess I would define a plane as being a stable space that exists on its own, be it a minor world like a fragment of Drifting Planes or an entire universe.”

“I see,” Jake nodded, looking at Jasper, who held up stone literally from hell. Jake took stone, making Jasper happy as he motioned with his paws.

“Jasper fast. Jasper sneaky. Jasper warp!” newly evolved B-grade Shimmershroud Planeswarper brilliantly summarized what y’d learned about his abilities.

“So, you created a small creature that’s near-undetectable, can easily travel between planes, and has a tendency to steal anything of value, even if it’s bolted down,” Forest King added his own summary.

“When you put it like that, Jasper sounds like a bad guy,” Jake said, crossing his arms.

Jasper mimicked Jake’s actions as he turned to look at King, his small, pawed arms also crossed.

“Bad, good, such useless concepts only lesser creatures bor to waste ir inferior minds pondering,” Unique Lifeform said dismissively. *“three of us are slaughterers and destroyers; it would be beyond hypocritical to judge anor creature merely following its Path, even if that Path isn’t one I particularly respect. No, what I instead sought to point out is that this kind of being is bound to make a lot of enemies simply due to what he is.”* This chapter is updated by [novel■fire■net](#)

“You just offended a lot of jobless philosophy majors what that first statement,” Jake said, keeping his arms crossed. “But you do have a point, Jasper will make a lot of enemies.”

“Jasper fast! Sneaky! No scare!” little guy said, arguing that he wouldn’t get caught.

“I don’t doubt that,” Jake said, unable to hold himself back from petting cute cat-like monster a few times. “And besides, who doesn’t make a lot of enemies? You definitely

shouldn't be talking, being a self-proclaimed monarch and all. From what I recall, you pissed off pretty much everyone by daring to call yourself ruler. Pretty sure that made you quite a few enemies."

"I do not fear m, for my enemies will always hesitate before striking, especially now," Forest King countered. *"I have died twice. Returned both times, and with my most recent resurrection, I've come back stronger than ever. Even most powerful enemy would think twice before attempting to kill me, as even if y succeed, re is a chance I shall once more return and exact my revenge. Meanwhile, Planeswarper is not even capable of being a harbinger of death to those who dare make him an enemy, as he is no slayer by nature."*

"We're getting a bit off-topic here," Artemis said, interrupting bickering between Jake and Forest King. "I will say that I agree with Jake most, though. Making enemies is normal, and in most cases, Jasper likely won't even be discovered. Even if he does make enemies, consider his allies. Those are enough to make people hesitate."

"Very well, I shall defer to assessment of Godqueen," Forest King said, being surprisingly respectful... until next sentence. *"I also understand it would put you in a needlessly awkward situation to disagree with your mate over such a trivial matter."*

"Oh, I'm totally fine disagreeing with my mate," Artemis smiled, not caring about whatever term King used.

"That pleases me to hear. hunter often finds himself in situations where someone disagreeing with his idiocy would prove a boon," Unique Lifeform said pretty harshly. Worst part? Jake couldn't even disagree, considering how many times in Nevermore his party had shot down Jake's strategies. Sure, y respected his ability to navigate floors and make battle-related decisions, but when it came to anything where soft power was required, Jake was competing with Sylphie for last place.

Luckily for Jake, he had Jasper as backup. little guy pointed a paw toward Forest King as he looked up at Jake with an angry face. "Mean!"

"Yeah, he's super mean," Jake agreed.

"Unfortunately, truth is often construed as meanness," Forest King continued to be mean. *"This has been an interesting intermission, but I shall return to my meditation. I congratulate you on your evolution, Shimmershroud Planeswarper. Let us hope you live up to your potential and that hunter didn't waste effort and resources on you undeservedly."*

With those words, Unique Lifeform took his leave, acting as curt as always. Jasper looked after King as he quickly flew up and disappeared before turning to look at Jake.

“Don’t worry, he’s just being an asshole. As I said before, I helped you with evolution partly for myself and partly to pay you back for help you provided me in Hunting Ground,” Jake said with a smile. “We’re even now, and only you have right to define your own Path.”

Jasper slowly nodded, and three of them were silent for a little while until Artemis spoke up.

“There’s also one more important thing to consider,” Artemis said, looking at two of them. “Jasper doesn’t have a Blessing right now.”

“Oh, true,” Jake nodded. “Are you considering giving him one?”

“No,” Artemis shook her head without even considering it. “I’m a hunter who specializes in killing and maintaining natural balance. Jasper’s Path is incredibly far away from mine, and only thing we have in common is that we both have good stealth skills. In other words, we are gods out there far more compatible with Jasper than I am, and it’s better for everyone involved if he pairs up with one of those. Of course, it all depends on what Jasper wants to do.”

Jasper looked at them both for a little while before tilting his head. “Blessing?”

“Yeah, a Blessing from a powerful god. If you get a good one, you get a title giving you some stats and even a cool skill,” Jake explained as he considered the matter. “If you’re interested, I have a friend who may be able to hook you up with someone.”

“Are you treating me like a pimp or a recruitment agent right now?” a certain snake god chimed in, only making Jake smile more.

“I’m sure he would more than happily help you out.”

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Chapter 1182 - Seeker

Jake had spoken about Malefic Viper finding Shimmershroud Planeswarper a god to bless him, partly in jest, but Vilastromoz had taken it seriously. Primarily because he wanted to, mind you.

Introducing talented youth to our gods was a good way to sow positive karma, and it demanded little to no investment from Viper’s side. All he had to do was share a bit of

his knowledge, and it would be a win-win situation for everyone involved. READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT **novel•fire•net**

Finding talented people to bless could truthfully be a challenge, especially those worthy of a Divine Blessing. Sure, there were always some, but for gods at pinnacle, you could nearly always have more, even at a time like this, where a new universe had been initiated and average level of mortals had significantly increased.

What's more, Viper had a good track record, and people he introduced weren't just worthwhile geniuses but tended to be truly good investments.

Stormild and Aeon had both expressed you were extremely satisfied with performances of Sylphian Hawk and swordsman alike, and it wouldn't surprise Vilastromoz if both of them were on list for Chosen candidates. In other words, two of two individuals Vilastromoz had introduced to Primordials had surpassed level of merely being qualified for their Divine Blessings.

Now, admittedly, Cosmic Genesis Worm was a bit more, let's say, complicated. Snappy had expressed a surprising amount of frustration with his new Chosen, yet he didn't outright state he was dissatisfied. Worm was a ridiculously talented monster for sure, and Snappy would certainly end up turning a profit with his investment, but worm definitely inflicted a fair amount of stress and frustration.

Vilastromoz didn't necessarily see this as a bad thing, though. It was good for Snappy to be forced out of his comfort zone by having a Chosen that outright ignored anything their Patron asked of them, while only getting in contact to demand more food.

This Shimmershroud Planeswarper was quite similar to cosmic worm in how their Paths worked, though with some distinct differences. Worm had a Path that revolved around consumption and even had ability to create internal worlds where more food could be cultivated within.

Meanwhile, Planeswarper didn't even seem to consume most of natural treasures it acquired. Instead, it was a hoarder that gained power based on value of gained goods through a unique ritual to that particular Lineage of monsters.

Due to his lack of insight about newly evolved B-grade, Vilastromoz didn't outright want to recommend that any gods bless it, but he would certainly point one or two in Planeswarper's direction for them to observe and judge themselves.

As for who would be a good match for Planeswarper, now that was a bit more complicated.

Right off bat, not a single Primordial came to mind. None of them seemed compatible with B-grade's Path, and when he considered who would be most similar, it was surprisingly Holy Mor who came to mind.

She was one with least combat-focused Path of all Primordials and was also a hoarder at heart. True, rarer than hoard items and natural treasures, she hoarded Truesouls in form of believers, which wasn't most comparable, but it was closest.

Someone like Wyrmgod wasn't even worth considering. Sure, both of them were good at teleporting, but that was about where their similarities disappeared. Wyrmgod was a master of space magic, something Planeswarper hadn't even proven itself capable of, and he was also as much about creating dungeons and whatnot as he was purely about his specialized school of magic.

Looking outside of Primordials, one figure did come to mind instantly. It was someone else who walked a Path where he loved collecting a massive hoard of valuables and was even a decently powerful god. It was an or dragon, more specifically, Aurustromoz, Dragon of Gold. Leader of Regalflight and most powerful dragon amongst all Dragonflights.

Minor snag with that one... dude was kind of racist when it came to giving Blessings. He'd only ever blessed dragons, and he borderline only blessed those from his own clan, so sadly, he wasn't a serious consideration.

Perhaps a merchant god could also be considered. Golden Road Emporium, most powerful merchant faction in multiverse, did have some decently powerful gods among them, including its leader, Midas. Midas himself wasn't a good option, though, but some of the gods working for him could be an option. Especially those in "acquisition and repossession department."

There were a lot of powerful gods focused on thievery there, some of whom could be candidates. The problem with this was that Viper didn't care to get closer to them and forge a better relationship. They weren't powerful enough to ever steal from anyone Vilastromoz would want anything from, and besides, why would he ever need to hire a thief?

Trying to subtly steal from the dead just seemed pointless.

Besides, why would Viper ever need those not at the apex of their Path? Because there was one being far better at acquiring whatever one desired than any other. A god who was always at the forefront of any exploratory team and was a master at breaking into anywhere and everywhere, all to fulfill his insatiable demand to collect things he deemed valuable. Be it knowledge, weapons, natural treasures... even entire worlds and people weren't beyond the scope of his greed. What's more, the harder anything was to get, the more tempted he was to try. A god always seeking something, thus his name:

Seeker.

Perhaps best known for being the creator of Jake's beloved Puzzle Box – creation of which was one of the god's hobbies, as he loved sharing the experience of spending a long

time trying to break into something. In words of Seeker, nothing was ever unreachable; it was just a yet-unsolved puzzle of how to get re.

Unless it demanded too much combat, that is, because Seeker was quite honestly a weakling. Oh, sure, his level was high, and many compared him to figures like Umbra, Autarch of Altmar Empire, Gwyndyr, Eternal Servant, and or gods that were not Primordials but still at pinnacle. However, that didn't mean he knew how to fight.

Seeker was a thief, a safecracker, an explorer, a scholar, a hoarder, an adventurer-for-hire, a cartographer, and many or things, but a warrior was not one of m. Even when facing far weaker individuals that he should, by all rights, be capable of easily killing, he would just run away. In his view, fighting was a waste of time and effort, and his energy was better spent doing something more productive.

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He's certainly best candidate, Vilastromoz thought to himself. Moreover, he was someone it was good to get closer to. Even if Viper didn't need anything from him here and now, just having a way to get in contact would be valuable, and if he ever did need a fellow god to explore some newly discovered unknown area, re was no better option.

more he thought about it, more sure Vilastromoz was that Seeker would also appreciate Shimmershroud Planeswarper. two did walk very similar Paths, but perhaps more importantly, newly evolved B-grade was a unique creature. That in itself was enough to pique Seeker's curiosity, as he had been known to collect and bless interesting and unique creatures in past.

Ah, but one thing Viper would have to clarify to Jake was that when Seeker "collected" a living creature, that didn't mean he entrapped m or hid m away. No, he merely farmed karmic relationships with m one way or anor and observed m, sometimes even stepping in to provide assistance if he believed that would allow m to successfully evolve.

Not out of kindness, mind you. Seeker did it purely for selfish reasons. Like a flower that needed care, he wanted to make sure environment for those he collected would allow most growth and would lead m to live longest time possible, as when a living being died, he would lose something he'd collected. So he allowed m to be free and hoped y would perhaps even reach godhood to live forever. A long time ago, he had tried to capture m and create "safe" habitats, but he learned that Interesting creatures tended to die quicker when kept in captivity. Especially more free-spirited ones.

Having decided on whom he wanted to introduce Shimmershroud Planeswarper to, Vilastromoz only had one more important thing to do. Something that likely wouldn't be very easy:

Actually contacting Seeker. Someone who was a mostly solitary god who traveled all time and loved going to hidden realms all across multiverse. Oh yeah, he also

happened to have some of best stealth skills in multiverse, so if he wanted to stay hidden, he would be an absolute pain to find, if it was even possible.

Being put to work by my Chosen once more... what has world come to, Vilastromoz chuckled to himself. He couldn't complain too much, and he did feel like he somewhat owed Planeswarper.

Because Viper had been more than satisfied with rewards he'd reaped from ritual, Invocation having proved itself a worthwhile boon for both Chosen and Patron alike.

"Good news," Jake said with a smile as he looked at Planeswarper busily cleaning up cavern he had evolved in just a few hours prior. "I spoke to Malefic Viper, and he said he's on lookout for a really compatible Patron. So probably don't accept any Blessings from weird gods until he pulls through, alright?"

"Okay!" Jasper yelled back while he continued putting items away from loot piles that had been fully drained during ritual. From what Jake understood, little guy wanted to keep m for sentimental reasons. So, yeah, definitely a hoarder as it was all trash now, but Jasper still carefully sorted everything and stored it away.

"Who did Malefic One consider?" Artemis, who was upstairs in living room while still listening in, asked.

"Seeker," Jake answered, seeing no need to keep it a secret from her. He didn't want to tell Jasper yet, though. In case nothing came of it, Jake would feel bad if little guy had gotten his hopes up. While B-grade wasn't super knowledgeable about multiversal factions and whatnot quite yet, Artemis had already expressed an interest in giving him a crash course while Jake remained at Order.

Jasper had already expressed interest in leaving with Jake.

"Malefic One is planning on reaching out to Seeker?" Artemis asked with surprise. *"I cannot say it doesn't make sense, but Seeker is... a unique figure."*

"He can't be bad, though," Jake argued. He simply refused to acknowledge that creator of his beloved Puzzle Box sucked, because how could someone who made something that cool possibly not be at least a little awesome?

"I never said he was bad, and I have even met him a few times," Artemis said, surprising Jake a little.

"Where? At some divine parties or something?" Jake asked curiously.

"One time at Nevermore, once here on Great Planet, and twice inside of hidden realms," Artemis answered. *"He's an interesting sort, for sure. I've never had any bad interactions with him, but neir would I call m positive. Not a bad choice, assuming he*

decides to give his Blessing. Oh, and that Malefic One can get in contact with him in first place."

"You know what? I'm just going to trust Viper with this one," Jake said, deciding not to put cart before horse. There were several scenarios where this Seeker guy would end up never giving a Blessing to Jasper, so he would be learning more about god when he had to.

For now, Jake was back to doing his regular schedule of alchemy, meditation, and, due to recent mention of Seeker, playing with Puzzle Box and solving a few of its levels.

With ritual involving Jasper complete, Jake began to have very little reason to stick around in Panon of Life. He'd done everything he could do only while there. Also, he found it pretty funny that, despite being official leader of mortal delegation of Order of Malefic Viper, Jake had not been asked a single time to attend anything political whatsoever.

Still, he would stay a little longer. Dina and Sword Saint were still somewhere doing stuff, and he hadn't heard from Sylphie recently, but could feel she was still chilling with those Sylphs at giant space-unraveling tornado, so she was probably having fun.

Jasper also needed his lessons about multiverse from Artemis before he wanted to leave. Finally, Jake kind of just wanted to spend some more time with Artemis as he knew that once he returned to Order, she wouldn't be around as much as before. Hopefully, two of them could even get in one more archery lesson before it was time for him to go.

Because... well... he kind of still hadn't managed to upgrade his archery skill yet.

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Parameters were set. Payloads deployed. Satellites all synced and in position.

A thick cloud of magical smoke covered entire far side of moon, blocking it from all sunlight. This had resulted in Lunewood forest looking far less lush than before, and many of monsters below had entered a hibernation state to conserve energy.

Sitting on Earth, within workshop he would hopefully soon replace with one on moon, he analysed final data and made some last-moment calculations to try to predict outcome of attack and spot any faults he'd failed to consider. According to Oras, such calculative measures, where one attempted to gather as much data as possible to create a predictive model outlining most likely future, were considered a method of divination.

Arnold just called it math.

He was not type of person who would ever do something unless he felt extremely confident he would succeed. Taking unnecessary risks by not being cautious could lead to loss of life and resources, which, before system, had been a major legal liability, but was now simply a waste of time and resources, as Arnold was fully responsible for his own funding.

Finishing his calculations, Arnold checked in with most unpredictable variable in operation.

“Confirming readiness,” Arnold sent to Cosmic Genesis Worm.

“Yeah, yeah, I’ve eaten all your metal men and I’m totally ready! Let’s blow up that damn moon!” Sandy responded enthusiastically.

“We’re not blowing up moon,” Arnold quickly corrected worm for two-hundredth and thirty-ninth time. *“Move on my command to invade core room and deploy golems.”*

“Yeppers!” Sandy agreed, using a word that Arnold didn’t believe existed in any credible dictionary, despite its meaning being clear.

“Good, n let us begin. Commencing Operation: Moonfall in three... two...”

“Let’s blow damn thing to smireens!” Sandy yelled in excitement.

“One.”

With final word communicated, Arnold gave command, putting into motion nearly a hundred thousand drones at once.

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Chapter 1183 - Operation: Moonfall

Miranda adjusted projection to get a better view, knowing that things were about to begin. At her side stood Lillian and Scarlett, who had also shown interest in observing confrontation between B-grade Ghostvine and mad scientist of Earth.

“You think he’ll kill it?” Scarlett asked as she sipped from a drink. “Plant monsters like that are notoriously durable. While I could likely kill it, it wouldn’t be a fast process and totally not worth it.”

"I don't believe Arnold would borrow if he didn't believe he could kill it," Miranda answered truthfully. "He's not the type of person to do anything he didn't believe himself capable of."

"I guess," Scarlett shrugged as she looked at Lillian. "Are you worried he'll damage the moon too much, by the way? You are a moonlight mage or something, right?"

"Lucenti, which can be summarized as moonlight magic, sure," Lillian answered. "As for being afraid of Earth's moon being damaged, it doesn't matter to me. My magic doesn't rely on the literal moon but more on the concept of one. The presence of a physical moon can help amplify certain skills, but the absence doesn't hurt my Path."

Scarlett nodded as she watched the projected screen. "Oh, I think he's about to begin."

"Indeed," Miranda nodded as she dedicated her attention to the screen. She wasn't watching only out of curiosity and to see if Arnold could pull it off, but because this was one of her rare chances to get greater insight into just how powerful one of the most influential geniuses on the planet was.

Arnold was powerful, no doubt about it, but it was hard to quantify just how powerful he was compared to others. Unlike Jake or the Sword Saint, Arnold didn't shoot arrows or swing a sword around to kill his enemies, but was far more similar to Vesperia in his method of dealing with foes.

He was a one-man army who relied primarily on his creations. He had the ability to direct and control this army using his mind and skills alone, which certainly made him dangerous, but Miranda wasn't clear on exactly how dangerous he was.

Usually, people like Arnold had the fatal weakness that they themselves were weak and could be taken out easily. If stripped of his army, he was nothing. However, Arnold didn't seem to fit this archetype entirely. He willingly showed up in person for several events, putting himself "at risk," and he had nothing against meeting even Miranda in one-on-one situations.

Knowing just how cautious and smart Arnold was, the only conclusion Miranda could reach was that he wasn't ever truly at risk. That if push came to shove, he was fully capable of defending himself in person.

If that was true, he had overcome the usual fatal weakness of people with his Path, and if he ever did turn into a problem for Earth, Miranda didn't have a straightforward way to get rid of him. Of course, she didn't have any plans to antagonize or be anything less than an ally of Arnold, but as the de facto leader of the planet, she had to consider even unthinkable.

That's why, with extreme interest, she watched the unfolding of what people had come to call Operation: Moonfall... while really hoping the name wasn't literal, as having the moon fall on the planet would be a troublesome development.

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Far above surface of moon, a total of twenty-four space barges that almost looked like huge metal dumpsters with three compartments had been orbiting to prepare for operation to begin. Each of m was nearly twenty meters across, with its interior spatially expanded to increase storage capacity even furr. All of m were spaced all around moon's orbit to hit every section at once when attack began.

Once command was given, all of se barges opened up first and largest compartment, unleashing an army of drones upon celestial object below.

Tens of thousands streamed down, each with singular purpose of catching attention of B-grade within. Like a swarm, y entered crevices and caves all over moon, each equipped with limited armaments that y quickly began utilizing.

Small laser beams pelted any small movement of Ghostvine as many drones kept seeking deeper and deeper into celestial object. Noticing this intrusion, Ghostvine soon began to respond. vines usually hidden within rock of moon moved out to destroy drones, in what could only be called a bored and monotonous response.

This was far from first time Arnold's drones had entered moon, and as predicted, Ghostvine didn't feel any danger, making its response predictable and easy to exploit. only difference between this attack and those prior was sheer number of drones, something Ghostvine didn't seem to consider a major problem, perhaps in part due to every attack made thus far having been with greater numbers than last.

Of course, this attack was far different from all those prior, even if it looked like usual business in beginning. drones dealt little damage as y dragged out tens of thousands of vines, making m cover much of moon's internal cave system. For more chapters visit *novel•fire•net*

About an hour and a half into operation, only about half of drones remained, high level of surviving drones due to Arnold funneling m into moon at a steady pace. An important act, as he would need se drones for anor task shortly. Ghostvine had only gotten lazier and more careless with its response, and based on all of Arnold's scans of moon, this would be optimal time to move on to next phase.

barges that had brought many drones were activated once more as second and smallest compartment opened up. Contrary to first compartment, se ones weren't spatially expanded, but instead housed roughly a hundred missiles each.

At once, all barges unleashed ir payloads upon moon below. guided missiles flew far faster than drones and quickly made ir way into vast tunnel system, trying to get as far inside as possible before inevitably hitting something or being struck by a vine.

All two thousand four hundred missiles made ir way inside, as one by one, y were triggered. Upon detonation, y unleashed massive explosions of napalm-like flames that consumed entire tunnels and spread for kilometers in every direction, clinging to anything y could, especially organic matter.

se flames had three primary purposes. first one was naturally to do damage to vines, but this was only in service to two next purposes. Because second was that, due to vines taking damage, y couldn't as easily phase into solid matter of moon to hide away again... which made m unable to defend against third purpose.

Throughout moon's interior, Arnold's drones and Sandy had deposited bombs that, upon making contact with se flames, were all triggered. Thousands upon thousands of directional bombs, made to explode inwards through tunnels of moon, were activated as vast majority of moon's expansive interior tunnel system was filled with explosions.

To all outside observers, it looked like entire moon lit up at once from many caves and crevices covering its surface, and for first time, Arnold's scanners detected a sound indicating things were going well.

Ghostvine screeched in pain from core room of moon, tens of thousands of vines shredded and blown apart at once, with flames still lingering on those that remained. drones that had still been inside moon had also blown mselves up to amplify attack furr, perhaps making B-grade think it had a brief moment of respite to recover.

It was wrong.

On space barges above, third and final compartment opened; this one also spatially expanded. Out of se compartments flew a new army of drones, this one far less numerous than last. Each drone was far larger, had more weapons, and was overall roughly ten to twenty times as powerful as ones used in first assault.

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se drones quickly made ir way down to moon and joined remaining smaller drones for next part of assault. A portion of m also split off to target Lunewood creatures, which had expected response to large attack.

Ghostvine had lost a lot of vital energy and was trying to regenerate its vines as quickly as possible, and to do this, it had decided to summon Lunewood creatures to consume vital energies within m. Arnold had long known se creatures were effectively nothing more than living batteries for Ghostvine, which was why he had cut off ir supply of sunlight to put m into a dormant state.

This had allowed creatures not to consume any energy and thus not to waste its battery charges, despite sun's rays not being available. However, it also made it slow to react, as they were forcefully awoken. Too slow for an army of drones, anyway.

Drones descended and began to tear apart Lunewood creatures one after another, stopping them all from trying to assist Ghostvine. Simultaneously, majority of remaining drones entered moon.

With increased firepower of this second wave, remaining vines were quickly torn apart one after another, as all over moon, drones rapidly descended towards core.

However, a B-grade like Ghostvine Sovereign wasn't that easily thwarted and soon mustered a powerful response. Vines rapidly regrew as ghostly aura of B-grade filled tunnels, followed by magic that began destroying drones at an extreme pace.

Despite these larger drones being stronger, they still couldn't stand up to a B-grade, and only reason they could do any damage in first place was due to extreme size of Ghostvine, making it unable to infuse all of its many vines with sufficient energy at once.

It had suffered damage from missiles and planted explosives, yes, but Ghostvine still had advantage as Arnold's drones made little to no progress, its numbers only dwindling by second.

Of course, that had all been part of plan. These drones had never been primary attack force that Arnold wanted to take down Ghostvine.

"ETA?" Arnold asked vehicle carrying what would cause demise of Ghostvine.

"Two-and-a-half jiffies, maybe a little less if these metal bugs of yours keep doing a good job," Sandy responded. "Also, I think you miscalculated those explosives; they totally failed to blow up moon properly. Sure, inside went boom, but it's clearly still here. I should know; I'm inside it right now."

"Concentrating more drones in parallel tunnels to one you're travelling through to draw attention away," Arnold said, not even commenting on Sandy's words outside of ETA, which he had also quickly disregarded and simply done math himself. In fact, he had only asked worm in first place to keep them engaged in task at hand.

"That's nice of you," Sandy responded. "You know, while it's a little sad you forgot to blow up moon, I guess this is also okay. This way, I can confront Ghostvine face-to-face! Wait, does it even have a face? Do I have one? What are qualifications for something to call itself a face in first place? Ah, you don't have to answer; I'll ask Tom; he definitely knows."

Once more, Arnold completely ignored Cosmic Genesis Worm as he proceeded as usual until it was time for him to prepare for final assault. So far, he'd been monitoring

everything and making micro-adjustments to strategy here and re to ensure plan went smoothly, but now he put everything into motion based on his pre-programming as he stood up and went over to a nearby chair.

Sitting down in it, he felt energy enter his body as he took out a helmet that looked like one half of a perfectly cut, hollow sphere. Arnold put it on as he closed his eyes, his entire body seemingly half-disappearing and becoming translucent as void claimed him.

Opening his eyes once more, he found himself within stomach of Cosmic Genesis Worm. Assessing his current state, Arnold looked at his metallic hands as he opened and closed m to ensure he had full control over golem.

To his sides, fourteen more golems stood. If Jake had been re, he would have pointed out how similar y all looked to Altmar Census Golem he had taken down way back in D-grade.

Arnold had naturally based his design around those, meaning each of m was a metallic humanoid equipped with a variety of weapons. Rar than have bodies of se golems be able to warp into weapons, se were instead equipped with ones crafted by Arnold beforehand in preparation for this assault.

All or golems were made of a silverish metal, while one Arnold inhabited was jet-black, primarily caused by void-infused metals he'd used during its crafting process.

Giving a mental command, all fourteen golems around him activated and started moving. All of m were semi-autonomous, meaning y could perform most tasks independently, but Arnold still chose to actively control all fifteen at once during this crucial step of operation.

"Golems and gentleman currently controlling a golem, this is your captain speaking. We are arriving at our destination in ten minus seven seconds. That's to say, I'm spitting you all out in three... two..."

Arnold was already ready as worm reached zero, and space magic enveloped all fifteen golems at once. A second later, y appeared within a vast core room in center of moon.

re, Arnold finally got full visual confirmation of Ghostvine's true body. majority of entire core chamber was occupied by a massive clump of twisted vines that enveloped moon's core, entire thing spanning several kilometers in diameter.

From it, an endless web of vines extended and merged into body of moon in all directions. se were vines Arnold had been fighting with his drones all this time, and even now, y surrounded him on all sides.

“Time to start cutting and stuff!” Sandy yelled as worm was already dealing with over a hundred vines attacking at once, flinging Chosen of Boundless Hydra all over place while doing little to no damage.

A good distraction.

As one, all golems moved. Ten of m were wielding large machetes designed to better cut through vines, while four of remaining ones had specialized flamethrowers using a concentrated compound of napalm used earlier.

Meanwhile, final golem, which Arnold used as his primary vessel, wielded two weapons, with one of m currently stored away. first one was a machete like first ten, while second was a large spear with a pitch-black head at end. That one would only be used once.

Under his direct control, all golems attacked Ghostvine at once. B-grade was evidently distracted, having to also deal with army of drones trying to invade core chamber, making its response slow and allowing Arnold to land several blows before Ghostvine mustered a proper response.

Parts of massive B-grade’s body began to unwind as it attacked with vines far thicker and more powerful than those prior. However, before it could even fully swing down, six golems had appeared and cut it apart with void-infused weapons.

All golems were burning with energy from start, ir cores overcharged to ensure y could keep up. Fire from flamethrowers soon blanketed most of massive B-grade’s body, forcing it to use magic to put it out as all golems cut away.

One weapon Arnold had kept from Census Golem design was eye-laser, allowing all golems to repeatedly shoot it out, beams burning through and severing several of vines extending into moon.

All golems attacked with clinical precision as Arnold played things safe, not rushing anything. B-grade naturally tried what it could and unleashed massive amounts of miasma and death energy to fill up entire chamber with intent of killing everything that had dared to invade its domain.

“Nasty stuff! Blergh!” Sandy was only one who complained as worm wrapped mself in several barriers of space magic.

Meanwhile, death affinity proved itself to have minimal effect on golems that didn’t contain any life whatsoever. With prolonged exposure, Arnold detected that a rust-like substance would begin to appear alongside or signs of erosion, but it was too slow to have an impact on outcome of operation.

Time dragged on as Arnold's relentless attack continued, Ghostvine slowly getting cut apart and burned inside out. Its vast energy had also suffered severely from prior steps of attack. When some of bulkier drones even made it all way to core room, where y promptly self-destructed, causing furr damage to B-grade, it was clear operation was rapidly moving toward success.

As expected, Ghostvine did have some final trump cards up its sleeves as it began to fully untangle itself, blooming like a ghostly flower. More mana than ever flooded entire chamber as core of moon was revealed, showing an actual flower glowing upon it. It gave off an eerie white glow that caused all nine of surviving golems to rust in real time.

Arnold had been waiting for this as he supercharged main golem he controlled. He funneled energy from all or surviving golems into it as it shot toward moon's core, hidden spear already in its hand.

white light grew more powerful closer golem got, its body beginning to rust and fall apart in mid-air, but its momentum was too high. It reached core as Arnold plunged spear down head of flower; spearhead sank into it just as golem lost function.

Arnold blinked, switching point of view to one of or surviving golems right in time to see ghostly light fade away and many vines still swinging about fall motionlessly to ground, bereft of energy.

"Sandy, retrieve surviving golems alongside your reward and return to Earth," Arnold said emotionlessly to worm that had hidden away right outside core while covering mselves in even more defensive barriers.

"Did we win?" worm asked, peeking into core chamber.

"Operation: Moonfall was a success, yes," he answered before disconnecting from golems as he stood up and went over to one of or stations in his lab to begin writing down post-operation evaluation.

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Chapter 1184 - Caught A Good One

"So Ghostvine is dead, huh?" Jake muttered, having mixed emotions on matter. He'd initially expected to be one who would eventually take it down, and while he had given go-ahead for Arnold to handle B-grade, that didn't mean he couldn't have some unwanted feelings.

"Indeed," Miranda's projection confirmed. He'd summoned it after Miranda asked to talk so y could have a proper conversation where y could actually see one anor.

She had already given him a rough overview of how Arnold had killed B-grade, and Jake was impressed. He had deployed a wide variety of weapons, and especially those golems near end sounded impressive.

"As I said, operation was a glowing success, and talking with man behind it, loss of resources was slightly below calculations, according to Arnold," Miranda explained. "After it was killed, Sandy consumed core of Ghostvine alongside natural treasures it had hoarded throughout its albeit short life. Last I heard, Arnold is busy constructing a dome of some kind as he wants to preserve parts of Lunewood Forest."

"When do you reckon he'll move re fully?" Jake asked, also feeling a little weird about that part. It had long been a trope for people to make moonbases in name of science, but that didn't mean Jake had expected to one day see Earth's moon turn into Arnold's personal base.

"I'm not sure," Miranda shook her head. "What I do know is that he'll maintain some aspects of his base here near Haven. Neil is already working with him on establishing a teleportation circle linking two bases, so my guess is that we'll see him finalize move sooner rar than later. You know that if Arnold is anything, it's industrious."

Jake nodded, as he was in thought for a while before asking: "Do you know how strong Ghostvine was?"

Miranda got quiet for a moment before sighing. "I asked Sandy. Due to Boundless Hydra's Chosen assisting, y also got a kill notification once Ghostvine died. While I cannot evaluate how powerful a variant Ghostvine truly was, I know its level at least."

He didn't need suspense but got it anyway as Miranda revealed number... one that was certainly higher than Jake had expected.

"371. Personally, I had assumed it was around 360, but it turned out to be a lot higher. Overall, I think we all severely underestimated Ghostvine... well... everyone except Arnold."

"From our initial encounter, I knew it was strong," Jake sighed. "With growth it had between n and now, I wouldn't be surprised if it was more powerful than any of B-grades I've killed so far."

"But also far more limited," Miranda said, perhaps to encourage. "It was an immobile monster with low intelligence that allowed its foe to make preparations all around it for a long period. As long as you were able to deal enough damage to kill it, you too could have taken it down fairly easily."

"Maybe, maybe not," Jake shrugged. "My issue would be actually striking at core. If it had gone fully defensive and retracted its vines into moon and hid away, I doubt I could have killed it. Chances were I would need to invade core chamber, too, which could prove very dangerous. You said that even Sandy wouldn't want to take that final trump card attack head-on, meaning I wouldn't walk away from it unscathed."

"Arnold certainly was a terrible match-up for Ghostvine. An army without a single trace of life truly must be stuff of nightmares for a monster specializing in death affinity," Miranda agreed. "His only problem was also getting to core, but with help of Sandy, he managed to overcome it."

"True, he did have Sandy's help," Jake nodded... even if it sounded like worm hadn't done much outside of being transport and a distraction.

"I want to make clear I'm not downplaying Arnold's achievement of power," Miranda clarified. "If he were an enemy, we would truly be in trouble. Some of members of World Council have expressed some concern, as it seems like his military might will only further grow after taking over moon, with Arthur bringing up perhaps signing some kind of official contract."

"Trying to force him into anything won't end well," Jake muttered as he considered matter. "Hiring him as a mercenary also seems prohibitively expensive, doesn't it?"

"It would be for sure," Miranda nodded. "I would certainly prefer to keep our relationship of mutual benefits going. Devices he provided planet and even galaxy with have been invaluable so far and have been fully worth resources we paid him for, but if we had to provide those resources for free..."

"Just keep things as they are," Jake decided after getting done thinking matter over.

"You sure? It could be risky. I don't doubt other factions are eyeing Arnold, especially now that he's somewhat separated from rest of planet. If one of them proves themselves to be a better trading partner, we could get in trouble... especially if he ultimately decides to side with a force antagonistic towards you or planet," Miranda voiced her concerns. "Don't get me wrong, I don't think that will happen, but I need to consider it or I would be horrible at my job."

"I trust in Arnold's intelligence and ability to assess his situation and climate he finds himself in," Jake responded.

"So do I, which is why I bring up fact that another faction may present itself and prove a smarter choice," Miranda reiterated.

"Arnold is fully aware of what would happen if he decides to make Earth an enemy," Jake said. "I don't question if he's powerful and would be hard to deal with, but I'm confident that should push come to shove, I would be one walking away alive. Suppose

he does decide to join an or faction. I seriously doubt we would suffer anything outside of losing him as an ally. At least he won't do it by turning on Earth but simply by leaving us behind and going somewhere else to avoid making us, or more accurately me, an outright enemy."

"An alliance built on threats," Miranda muttered with a sigh.

"No threats," Jake clarified. "Just ... implications."

"implications of a threat," Miranda argued.

"Who am I to dictate his mind and whatever conclusions it jumps to?" Jake smiled cheekily. More he thought about it, less worried he was about Arnold suddenly deciding to nuke Earth. Even if he weren't wary of Jake for some reason, he would make a lot of or enemies he would no doubt prefer not to have. From what Jake understood of Arnold, he was extremely risk-averse unless rewards outweighed risks by a sufficient amount.

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"I'll trust your judgment on this one," Miranda said, clearly not boring herself with that line of conversation. "We'll simply continue as before, and hopefully, Arnold will continue to be a great ally. Speaking of great allies, recently there's been some developments in galaxy that..."

part of conversation Jake had feared would come had finally arrived: Jake's update on political state of things in Milky Way Galaxy. Miranda still insisted it was important for Jake to at least have Cliff's Notes of what was going on, considering he was recognized as leader of galaxy.

Surrendering to his fate, Jake listened to all that was happening, which was mainly good news about how everything had become more and more stable, even with new arrivals from other universes flooding place. Jake was sitting in living room, listening to Miranda's projection speak as he felt arrival of a familiar aura descend on room.

Artemis, who had been off doing her own thing, manifested right behind couch Jake was sitting on, looking curiously at Miranda's projection. Her arrival clearly caught Miranda off guard, but witch quickly calmed herself as her projection bowed.

"Greetings, Mistress of Hunt," Miranda said in a respectful voice. "It's an honor."

Artemis nodded as she studied Miranda's full-body projection. "So this is Verdant Witch serving as leader of your planet?"

"Yep," Jake confirmed. "We were just going over how I'm doing a banger job by not being involved with anything political, thus having successfully avoided messing things up."

"I see," Artemis nodded. "Are you two also sleeping together, or... never mind, I got my answer."

Godqueen couldn't help but smile, and Jake could see why. Second Miranda realized what she had asked, she had a visible reaction where she cringed back, making her response very evident.

"No offense," Miranda quickly said to Jake.

"None taken," Jake chuckled, shaking his head. "Anyway, in case you hadn't already been told, Artemis and I are a thing now. Part of reason why that entire declaration of friendship was made."

"Alright, and I take it this is something to keep under wraps for now until something more official is communicated?" Miranda answered while barely reacting to grand reveal.

"It is," Jake confirmed.

"You seem awfully nonchalant. Did you already know?" Artemis questioned Verdant Witch.

"No," Miranda shook her head. "I just don't care about Jake's personal love life unless it impacts me or my responsibilities."

"Is it just me, or is she an awful lot more casual now than when she greeted me before?" Artemis asked, looking at Jake.

"If you can put up with Jake, you aren't type to care much about etiquette," Miranda answered her.

"Maybe I only allow him to treat me as an equal?" Artemis said, crossing her arms.

"Please do not misunderstand, I don't foolishly believe myself equal to a Godqueen," Miranda said with a small bow. "However, nor do I see need to be overly subservient if it doesn't serve any practical purpose."

Artemis stared Miranda down for a few seconds, witch not budging. After a few seconds, she suddenly smiled and turned to Jake. "You caught a good one re. Better be less of a terrible figurehead and make her defect to some or faction."

"Hey, I'm doing my best over here," Jake said, acting all offended.

"By doing nothing?" Godqueen shot back.

"Didn't you just say I caught a good one?" Jake shot back with a sly smile. "Speaking of, I do seem quite skilled at catching good ones, eh?"

Artemis just rolled her eyes as witch spoke up.

"Believe it or not, I find Jake's current performance as a figurehead quite exemplary," Miranda said with a smile. "He doesn't needlessly involve himself where he isn't needed, but instead only grows more powerful and notorious. That's best he can do. To be that lingering threat hidden in dark, ready to strike should anyone overstep."

"Now that sounds like a witch from Order of Malefic One," Artemis chuckled before looking down at Jake sitting on couch. "I'll leave two of you to it. Join me in yard afterwards?"

"Sure thing," Jake nodded, returning his attention to Miranda. "So, where were we? Also, you really don't have any questions regarding me or Artemis?"

"I don't, no," Miranda answered casually. "Now, as I said before, Kindroth remains in loose contact with Holy Church, and y seem to be fully focused on stabilizing ir presence in Andromeda Galaxy with no intent of trying to return to Milky Way. Of course, we have still found a few smaller organizations scattered across galaxy who claim to be part of Holy Church, but none have had Blessings or any proof of ir affiliation, making us conclude that ir claims are unfounded and ir presence not sanctioned by actual Church. re's also still..."

Jake was tortured for a little longer with Miranda not even allowing him to zone out as she asked questions here and re to ensure Jake was paying attention, while Miranda also got to learn what Jake and ors who had gone to Panon of Life were up to. rest of meeting took an hour before Jake was freed and could finally flee to yard where Artemis had been waiting for his arrival.

Walking into yard, he saw Artemis sitting on a bench with her eyes closed, meditating or perhaps focusing on an avatar or something to pass time. When she detected Jake's presence, she opened her eyes and turned to him. Latest content published on novel**fire**net

"That took longer than I expected."

"Partly my fault, it had been a while since we had a proper check-in, and she also wanted to know what I had been up to," Jake sighed.

"That's reasonable," Artemis nodded. "I would have said something about you not needing to remain a figurehead if you don't want to, but from my understanding, re are

several benefits to it, courtesy of integration. Including newest World Wonder of multiverse, Seat of Exalted Prima.”

“Yeah, it’s gonna be quite something,” Jake sighed. “I reckon Panon of Life also got ir eyes on World Wonder?”

“re isn’t a single faction in multiverse that doesn’t,” Artemis shook her head. “Even weaker ones dare to compete with pinnacle factions, as this is one of ir chances to stand alongside m should se lesser gods succeed. No one would want to make an enemy of a faction controlling a powerful World Wonder, which this one is lining up to be.”

“As I said, definitely gonna be quite something. But that’s for B-grade me to worry about. For now, I have enough or things to deal with, and as we already discussed, I should be heading back to Order relatively soon.”

“I know,” Artemis nodded. “But I also know that one of things you wanted to accomplish while here at Panon of Life was to upgrade your archery skill. You did manage to gain an upgrade while visiting Hunting Ground, but I realize that while you did certainly benefit and even upgrade a skill related to your archery, simply going hunting wasn’t what you needed most.”

“I’m listening,” Jake said with interest.

“You need exposure. You need to encounter or talented archers, and not ones like me who are too far ahead of you in levels and sheer power. Instead, it needs to be peers or at least people close to being considered your peers,” Artemis explained. “Perception is by far your best stat, and you are great at intuiting what you see and integrating it with your own Path. I had considered it perhaps too risky, in case you learned bad habits from or archers around your own level, but I’ll trust your ability to decide and instinctively know what’s worth integrating and what isn’t.”

“Are you telling me Panon of Life has some archery academy or something?” Jake asked. Order had an alchemy academy, so it would make sense that Panon of Life had one for hunters...

“re is, but that’s not what I’m getting at,” Artemis waved him off as she smiled. “No, what I’m suggesting is something far more valuable. Curated sparring partners with archery skills rivalling or surpassing yours, all still in C-grade and all blessed by me.”

“Are you sure you don’t just want to see me getting my ass kicked by your followers?” Jake asked with a smile.

“That’s just a bonus,” Artemis chuckled. “I take it you’re interested?”

“You know what?” Jake said. “I’ve been complaining about not seeing enough skilled archers in multiverse, especially in Nevermore, so no bloody way I’m saying no to finally seeing people who know how to use bows properly.”

“Oh, some of m use crossbows,” Artemis quickly corrected.

He stared at her for a moment, Godqueen unable to maintain her serious expression as she broke out in a big grin. “I’m messing with you. No way I would ever go so low as to bless a crossbow user.”

Jake let out a loud sigh. “Oh, good... I was afraid our relationship would have had to end here because of irreconcilable differences.”

“Totally understandable, that is a valid deal-breaker,” Artemis chuckled, before a thought struck her, and she looked at Jake. “Guns?”

“Glorified wands,” Jake answered without a moment’s hesitation.

Artemis nodded as two made eye contact, Jake once more getting confirmation he had indeed caught a good one.

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Chapter 1185 - Ideal Learning Environment

He sure isn’t holding anything back, Jake thought to himself as he used One Step to teleport away from barrage of arrows that descended from above. When y hit, ground exploded as a massive crater opened up, forcing Jake to teleport one more time to get away without being caught by any of debris.

After stabilizing, Jake glanced at his opponent up in sky as he confirmed he was indeed just fighting a C-grade.

[Beastkin – lvl 348 – Greater Blessing of Artemis]

beastkin was a large man, clearly descended from a tiger of some kind. He stood at just above four meters tall, and bow he wielded barely qualified to be called a bow and was more like a ballista, going by its size. Of course, it was still hand-drawn like a real bow, as Artemis would never bless anyone if ir weapon was even crossbow-adjacent.

Jake was thrown out of his thoughts as another arrow flew toward him, this one even faster than those prior. Each arrow looked to be made of solid metal, which was likely a requirement for what made them so powerful.

Shooting toward sky to dodge, Jake felt his own body being weighed down simply from being in trajectory of attack. This forced him to respond by covering himself in a faint layer of arcane energy so he could properly dodge and loose a retaliatory shot.

Right after he released his arrow, one he had just dodged struck ground, creating another massive crater as entire moon seemed to shake from impact. Shortly after, Jake's own attack arrived, forcing beastkin to summon a layer of energy that stopped arrow dead in its tracks.

With a light smile, Jake made it explode, taking beastkin by surprise and forcing C-grade back. Jake had done little to no damage, and his opponent quickly recovered, nocking another arrow.

From string being drawn alone, Jake felt his own body grow heavier once more, but he responded by also getting into position and drawing himself. He released his arrow first and had another two airborne by time beastkin was fully done drawing his string.

Another incredibly powerful arrow was released, making space itself slightly implode in its wake. It encountered Jake's arrows soon after, breaking through them one by one as each exploded once hit.

Despite his arrows being destroyed, Jake kept shooting with no intention of dodging. arrow continued toward him; however, just before it struck him, Jake's final arrow managed to blow it apart entirely, nullifying attack.

Jake looked to sky and saw beastkin grin, making Jake respond in kind as both drew their bows once more. Soon after, sky of barren moon was once more filled with explosions of arcane mana and subtle quakes of space caused by powerful gravity magic.

Skipping back a bit, Jake was naturally in midst of experiencing promised archery sparring from Artemis, and this was his first opponent so far. Before going into it, Jake had several questions, including whether her helping him directly like this could risk exposing that they were closer than most assumed, but she had shut that down pretty quickly.

"It's well known that I'm one of people meant to make your stay in Pantheon of Life comfortable, including my role to assist you in improving your archery, so me helping you like this is opposite of suspicious."

As for Jake's fear that people could read something from how Jake and Artemis interacted, she also had a brilliant way to avoid that: they wouldn't ever see Jake and Artemis together. In fact, they wouldn't see Artemis at all.

Instead, things had been way simpler. Jake had just been teleported to moon, with a quick briefing on opponent he was about to fight, likely to help Jake know what to look for. A bit later, another person was teleported here. After some polite greetings from which it was clear his opponent already knew why he was here and had also gotten a quick briefing on what Jake could do, the two had just gotten right into it.

Jake had also been a little afraid his opponents would maybe hold back since they were afraid of turning Jake into an enemy by potentially “embarrassing” him, but so far, Beastkin hadn’t shown himself to give a single shit about that.

When it came to rules of engagement, they were simple. All skills besides defensive and movement skills were banned, including ones for boosting and even bow-related skills like Powershot. Jake and his opponent could rely only on their archery and their passive skills to hopefully get an advantage over each other.

As for their battleground... well, Jake still felt a little sad about not taking over Earth’s moon, so Artemis offered to just have their fight on some other moon in vast territory belonging to Pantheon of Life. There were countless completely barren ones just floating around, sometimes equally barren planets, and wanting to at least get some kind of moon trip, Jake agreed to fight on one.

And that was pretty much all set up behind Jake finding himself fighting an archer using gravity-infused arrows on a moon. Genuinely one of the most enjoyable ways to spend his time, according to Jake.

He had quickly realized that when it came to pure power, Jake’s opponent outmatched him several times over. Arrows he shot were all infused with gravity magic, but even without it, they were large and insanely heavy. That’s also part of the reason why Beastkin was a lot slower at shooting.

While Jake’s Arcane Arrows instantly conjured an arrow to shoot, a skill used by Beastkin was slower, but summoned more powerful ones. Jake did learn that Beastkin could also summon his arrows faster, but if he did so, they would be far weaker and not capable of taking full advantage of his stats.

That was another difference between Jake and Beastkin. While Perception was Jake’s highest stat by a fair margin – as it should be – Agility was his second highest, making him quite fast.

Beastkin, on the other hand, had gone fully into Strength. Mind you, Perception was still his second-highest stat, but in part due to his Lineage as a Beastkin, he just got way more Strength per level up than usual.

Besides that, both of them had a decent amount of magical talent, with Jake naturally having a lot more, courtesy of his Path as an alchemist. Beastkin was no slouch, though, and used several defensive skills based on his gravity magic to nullify Jake’s

blows, and he could even change his own gravitational orientation, allowing beastkin to dodge around simply through thought. This method also partly bypassed relatively low Agility of beastkin, so a pretty smart strategy.

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However, perhaps coolest thing was how beastkin infused his archery with gravity magic. More accurately, stats behind it. Similar to Jake's archery skill, it was primarily based on Perception, with Strength a secondary stat to amplify it.

Jake hadn't even considered that Perception could be a stat that empowered gravity magic, at least not directly. However, it appeared that stat could influence far more things than he'd first expected, and that knowledge was exciting in its own right.

Ultimately, Jake didn't end up getting anything tangible out of this first fight. beastkin's archery had some obvious weaknesses, primarily lying in how slow he was to attack compared to Jake. Also, while he could be a tricky guy to hit while dodging, he more often than not found himself forced to block hits rather than avoid them, which put a definite limit on what kind of opponent he could handle.

His duel ended up taking around an hour before Jake managed to land enough arrows for Artemis to step in. Rather than teleporting in, she decided to make her presence known through her aura descending upon celestial object.

“Enough, we shall stop here. Yljutar, your archery has grown once more, but you remain rigid in both Path and mindset. Expand your approach and be willing to integrate more concepts than simply gravity into your arrows. There are many universal ones that could still...”

Jake listened attentively as Artemis gave a quick archery lesson to beastkin, who was down on his knees, totally ignoring his injuries as he stared at sky with a face full of reverence.

While Jake didn't believe he could learn much from hearing a lesson made for another, he still wanted to see if he could, and either way, he wouldn't be enough of a dick to complain. In fact, Artemis being a good Patron to see people who had come to help him train archery only made him feel better about entire ordeal.

In eyes of these C-grades, having his Patron directly approach him with a task and not even compensate him afterwards had to be seen as a massive opportunity. Even if what Artemis spoke to him about never manifested into anything he used in his Path – a highly unlikely outcome – just Records he would gain from a personal lesson by his Godqueen Patron was more than worth it.

After Artemis was done speaking and her presence faded away once more, beastkin Jake had just learned was called Yljultar turned toward Jake and bowed deeply. "I thank you for this duel, and I wish Chosen of Malefic One success on his Path."

"Likewise," Jake nodded respectfully. A second later, archer was teleported away, leaving Jake alone back on empty moon floating in darkness of space with only a distant sun providing any lighting.

At least he was alone for a moment until a familiar wood elf goddess appeared.

"He held on longer than I thought he would," Artemis said from right behind Jake. "Last time I checked in on him, he was far more of a glass cannon who could do impressive damage but often found himself pressured and forced to use an expensive escape skill of his to survive. His defenses have definitely improved."

"I can only imagine how dangerous he could be in a war or something like that," Jake muttered. "Those arrows carried some serious power."

Turning to see many new craters covering surface of moon, it looked like it had just suffered from a meteor shower, with some of larger craters over a dozen kilometers in radius. All from arrows shot only using passive archery skills.

"Too much at times," Artemis sighed. "y lack efficiency and are often hard to use when fighting in a party."

"I can see that," Jake nodded. "Who's my next opponent?"

"A far more classical archer," Artemis said with a smile. "One that's a good deal stronger than last one."

"Now you're getting me excited," Jake grinned.

"Happy to please," Godqueen chuckled. "But you should recover fully first to meet her at full power."

"Probably wise," Jake nodded as he sat down. Right before entering meditation, he looked up at goddess. "Say, how many opponents have you got lined up?"

"Hopefully enough," Artemis just answered with a sly smile. "See you a bit later... oh, and try not to get your ass kicked."

With those words, she disappeared, leaving behind a small crystal containing some surface information on his next opponent for Jake to study during meditation. As he hadn't used his boosting skills, it didn't take long before Jake was ready once more, and when he was, he stood up and nodded toward sky.

“All good to go.”

A few seconds later, space rippled as, a few dozen meters away, a figure appeared. It was a wood elf like Artemis, wearing expensive-looking leather armor and already holding a bow that made Jake do a double take. Fresh chapters posted on *novel**fire**net*

She's not weak.

[Wood Elf – lvl 338 – Divine Blessing of Artemis]

Ten levels lower than beastkin but still thirteen above Jake himself. Compared to her last opponent, he could tell she was far superior right off bat.

While he was observing her, she also gave him a good look before cupping her hands and bowing. “I greet Chosen of Malefic One.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” Jake nodded. “And thank you for taking time.”

“Your gratitude is entirely unnecessary; it should be me thanking you for allowing me to spar with Chosen,” she said respectfully. “I hope my skills are sufficient to serve as inspiration.”

“I’m looking forward to finding out,” Jake smiled as he waved his hand and summoned his own bow. “Ready when you are.”

“Excuse me, n,” wood elf bowed and stood up straight again. Jake waited for her to make first move. From information crystal, he knew she specialized in a mixture of wind and nature magic; however, her way of utilizing these two common affinities was quite unique.

result of her Path was that she had one aspect that far surpassed pretty much everyone else her level:

Speed.

Jake moved according to his danger sense as arrow was in flight, roughly same time he saw her move. She had only raised bow slightly as string had seemingly been pulled back on its own, as an all-wood arrow appeared and was loosed in an instant.

Dodging first arrow, a second one came right after, this one manually drawn by wood elf and containing even more power than first. He also dodged this one as he released an arrow of his own, right as he saw another two arrows already in flight toward him.

In a swift movement, wood elf dodged Jake’s arrow as he also moved away to avoid being hit. two shot two dozen arrows after each other over next few seconds – wood elf

shooting three for every one Jake got off – and this exchange finally allowed Jake to see what she was doing.

Her bow was practically alive, string a vine, and wood bending on its own to release arrows in between her manual shots. It was almost as if bow mimicked her movements in an even faster fashion, making her shoot twice as many arrows, even if se echoed ones were weaker.

Moreover, se arrows came at Jake like wind, curving, twisting, and more than a little difficult to keep up with. Not to say Jake couldn't keep up, problem was that he didn't get many chances to retaliate without risking being struck.

His decision to fight on a barren moon had definitely come back to bite him in ass. Under usual circumstances, re would have been environmental obstacles he could use to defend himself and obscure his opponent's vision while relying on his own sphere and pulses to keep track of or party, but that wasn't an option with his current choice of battlefield.

All he could do was keep up and try to read pattern of his opponent's attack to hopefully find more openings... which was when he noticed something else unsettling:

She was getting faster.

wind energy seemed to grow in intensity, arrows growing faster. Meanwhile, bow she wielded took in more and more energy. Jake was forced into summoning barriers to deflect incoming arrows, but found m unable to block attacks fully.

Jake felt like he was caught in middle of a storm with arrows raining down on him from all sides, curved and manipulated by wind as his opponent just kept getting faster and stronger with every passing moment.

It was to level where Jake began to question if his opponent wasn't actually using a boosting skill... which was when he heard a voice in his head.

"I think I forgot to tell you... She recently had an impressive epiphany, and in a surprising turn of events, her first-ever mythical skill turned out to be her archery one!" Artemis said in an amused voice.

That explanation certainly helped clarify things as Jake was sent stumbling back, an arrow sticking out of side of his shoulder as he failed to dodge in time, with more than a dozen additional arrows already headed straight for him with ever-increasing momentum.

Truly, setup for an ideal learning environment.

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Chapter 1186 - A Moment To Be Humbled

Jake really hadn't met a lot of archers during his Path so far. Sure, he had been one here and there, but none of those so-called "geniuses" he usually surrounded himself with were archers.

Sure, there was Maria, but Jake had never sparred with her and wouldn't call her super close. She wasn't even part of Jake's "faction" but a mercenary serving under Gwyndyr, who was likely the top archer of the multiverse based on what Jake had heard.

Considering that, her archery skill was likely better than Jake's. In fact, Jake was fairly confident that most archers considered talented had better than an epic rarity skill when closing in on B-grade.

Archery skill was one Jake used every day, and based on his conversations with Artemis, the majority of hunters dedicated a lot of time to practicing and improving their skills. It was, in most instances, the most effective skill to upgrade if one wanted to get stronger, as it affected pretty much everything one did while wielding a bow.

Just the effectiveness alone from a high-level archery skill made it damn valuable. However, knowing all this hadn't done Jake much good. No amount of studying he had done had helped him improve his prowess with a bow, and even when he had tried to merge or concepts into it, nothing had worked... well, not besides getting his Unblemished Arrows upgraded, anyway.

Seeing someone like the wood elf currently bombarding Jake with a ceaseless storm of arrows really made Jake realize how far behind he truly was. Sure, when it came to overall power, he was far superior, and if he used all his other skills, winning wouldn't be difficult.

But that wasn't the point of this. Instead, it was a moment for Jake to be humbled for the first time in a long time.

The wood elf chased Jake all over the moon as Jake slowly learned more and more about her archery skill, and he identified four effects. Sure, it was possible some of them came from her other or passive skills, but he was fairly confident most were related to her archery skill, and he was damn near sure the last one was. The first one was a passive wind that carried each arrow forward, granting it extra speed and striking power while also granting her slight control over its flight path.

Second was bow's ability to "echo" her shots. It seemingly remembered her movements and stored energy to shoot automatic follow-ups in between her regular draws, increasing her firing speed by a quite frankly silly amount.

Third was momentum she was building with every arrow. Wind surrounding her increased in intensity as she continued to attack, and bow seemed to only grow stronger with every echoed arrow.

Fourth and finally was hardest aspect of skill to identify, and one he only noticed after having more than a dozen arrows sticking out of his body. Elf's damage output was incredibly low, courtesy of her insane focus on speed, but this last effect made up for it.

Because he realized that echoed shots didn't grow stronger. Just faster. In fact, when Jake managed to shoot down some of his opponent's attacks, he noticed it didn't consume more energy even as wood elf's power seemed to improve. Same was true when he blocked with arcane barriers.

Yet damage he took from every arrow increased, making Jake conclude that final effect was a stacking damage buff based on how many arrows she had hit on a target thus far. That explained why her first arrows had been so weak, barely penetrating Jake's flesh and armor, and why latter ones were so much stronger.

Making matters worse, Jake learned that even if he blocked an arrow using his bow's body, it still counted as him getting hit, likely simply due to arrow making contact with his Soulshape.

In summary, his opponent was an archer who could shoot insanely fast, with her speed increasing even more as fight continued. Meanwhile, each arrow would deal more damage than last, up to some limit Jake was confident he didn't want to experience.

Usually, an archer like wood elf, who was too focused on speed over power, would find herself struggling against foes with powerful defenses. Based on her first arrows that hit him, she wouldn't even have been able to injure most of C-grades Jake had killed so far. Not with first shot, anyway.

However, what about arrow number ten? Fifty? one-hundredth? Dependent on how high damage could scale, her damage would eventually become insane, and she had effectively turned matchup on its head, making her an incredible fighter against durable but slower foes.

Of course, her Path did also have some drawbacks. Fact that her first arrows were so weak meant she had to drag out battles to get upper hand, and stealth was also out of question. At least she couldn't ever approach someone like Jake's ability to shoot stupidly powerful arrows capable of killing a monster a grade above himself in a single shot... though to be fair, few archers would ever even get close to that level.

In a battle like this, where stealth wasn't a factor and it was just a pure archery duel, she was in a dream scenario. Even though Jake was a tough opponent for her due to his high mobility and uncanny ability to dodge almost everything, she still had a massive advantage.

With all that in mind, outcome of ir duel shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone.

“Let's stop here,” Artemis' voice in sky echoed after fight had lasted in excess of two hours. **“Before it gets too dangerous for one of you.”**

Jake, who had prepared to shoot anor arrow, lowered his bow as pain wracked his entire body. A few kilometers away – distance created by Jake to try to avoid getting hit too much – wood elf did same as she willed her arrows already in flight to disperse and wir away.

She also had a few wounds here and re, with several burns on her left side from exploded arcane arrows. re were five arrow-holes from when Jake struck her with stable arrows, a feat he was quite proud of.

Though he probably shouldn't be, taking his own state into account.

“ Chosen of Malefic Viper managed to land five direct hits as well as twenty-eight indirect ones,” Artemis nicely summarized ir encounter. **“Gladiel, on or hand, with... two hundred and nine direct hits, seventy indirect ones.”**

... Jake hadn't exactly kept count, but going by his body being entirely red from being covered in his own blood and fact he'd already consumed two healing potions during fight – something that was allowed – it wasn't that surprising.

Even now, twenty-one arrows still stuck out of him that he hadn't had time to pluck out. He had been hit so many times that re were places he had been hit five times after healing wound in between every arrow.

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As for wher Jake had discovered upper limit of wood elf named Gladiel's damage output, answer remained no.

“I need to ask,” Jake said shortly after Artemis made her announcement as he teleported closer despite his multitude of wounds. “That increasing damage effect with every arrow hit... does it scale with Perception?”

Gladiel, who had been kneeling while in presence of Artemis' aura, looked up and nodded. “ damage increases and upper cap both scale with Perception, while my Agility determines speed at which it stacks up.”

"I see," Jake nodded. "That makes a lot of sense. How about effect that made you faster longer battle dragged on? Was that related to your archery skill?"

To clarify, Jake had found upper cap of that skill after fight went on for around half an hour.

"No, that's another passive skill of mine," Gladiel answered respectfully. "Wind's Blessing, Nature's Echo, and Hunter's Fury effects are all from my archery skill. Those are winds enveloping my arrows, my bow repeating attacks, and stacking damage, respectively. There are also some minor aspects to skill that aren't visible or overly impactful."

"Thanks for clarification," Jake said, genuinely grateful that she offered up knowledge like this when she truthfully didn't have to.

"It's an honor to be of assistance to Chosen," Gladiel bowed deeply. "I hope my efforts can prove useful."

"Definitely food for thought," Jake smiled.

"Indeed, let us hope Chosen benefits. As for you, Gladiel, I'm pleased to see that you have adapted your strategy to better suit your new archery skill, but do not let it become a limitation. If one aspect of your Path becomes too powerful compared to rest, it can hamper all progress in other areas. A current weakness of your archery skill is facing mages capable of blocking your arrows, never allowing m to make contact, so I task you with seeking out Druidic Order and..."

As with last duelist Jake had faced, Artemis finished encounter by giving m some advice on how y could improve. For Gladiel, her task was to fight a group of casters to develop strategies for dealing with m.

When it came to Jake, he did feel somewhat inspired. In some ways, archery skill of Gladiel reminded Jake of his own Relentless Hunt in that he could build up Hunting Momentum as fight went on and unleash it in one mighty blow. Of course, what wood elf had was far superior to Jake's skill, but there were also some crucial differences.

Hunting Momentum didn't have to be built up during combat. It could also come to be simply from stalking his opponent for long enough. Moreover, it was best used for a single, powerful blow rather than many smaller ones.

Having something like that, stacking damage with every subsequent arrow landed, would no doubt be a massive benefit to Jake and would increase his damage output significantly... but Jake knew he couldn't get it.

Such a concept simply didn't fit his Path. He could try to adapt his Path to make room for such a concept, but he didn't want to.

Gladiel walked a Path of gradually growing in power throughout battle while starting out weak. Jake's Path was all about starting fight out with a bang, unleashing an opening attack sometimes powerful enough to outright slay or cripple his foe.

If y did survive, it wasn't as if Jake didn't also have accumulating damage. He just didn't get it from his archery skill, but from poison on his arrows. Of course, currently, his archery skill had nothing to do with his poisons or interacted with m at all... which was something to consider.

In fact, it was a little odd that Jake hadn't thought about it before. Maybe because or skills like Malefic Viper's Poison already made poisons he inflicted stronger, sure, but nothing said he couldn't double-dip a little. Fangs of Malefic Viper already did. It passively empowered any toxins on his "fangs," which his arrows weren't considered part of.

He also realized that his archery skill had fuck-all to do with his arcane energy, despite nearly every or archery-related skill he had using his own affinity. Sure, his archery skill did talk about mixing archery with magic, but only to extent of infusing m with Willpower for him to control ir flight path.

more he looked at his archery skill, more he saw how much it was missing, especially when compared to his melee skill, Fangs of Man.

[Archery of Expanding Horizons (Epic)] - An Archer's best friend is bow in his hand and arrow in his foe's heart. As your horizons expand, you realize flaws and build upon a foundation to make that expansion ever-present. You do not shy away from mixing archery with magic and making your arrows arbiters of your will. Your arrows will cross all horizons and bend over any obstacle to pierce your target, with only your own will limiting possibilities. Allows you to apply your will to control trajectory of arrows before releasing m. Adds a small bonus to effect of Agility and Strength when using a ranged weapon. Adds a small damage bonus to all arrows based on distance traveled and Perception. Arrow trajectory control based on Willpower.

It effectively did three things as it was. It allowed him to control flight of his arrows, add damage based on Agility and Strength when wielding a ranged weapon, and add extra damage to his arrows based on distance and Perception. second one was something all archery skills did, so it barely counted, which meant all Jake's could do was make him bend his arrows a little and do a bit more damage.

Quite frankly patric when he compared it to Gladiel, whom he had just faced. It only got worse when he compared it to his own legendary rarity Fangs of Man, which did so much more.

It allowed him to turn anything he wielded into a weapon, merge melee weapons into his Soulshape, increased durability of any melee weapon, made him better at using

anything considered a melee weapon, provided passive stat effectiveness, made his hands and some of his forearms more durable when wielding melee weapons, with this effect being better when used on a Soulbound item. Conservatively, it did at least six or seven things, and it did all of m pretty damn well.

Jake was deep in thought as Artemis got done speaking with Gladiel.

“Return for now. I may call upon you again if I deem it relevant,” she said to wood elf, who bowed with reverence.

“If that’s what Mistress of Hunt desires, n I shall stand ready,” Gladiel said, turning to Jake. “And thank you once more for this opportunity.”

Jake just gave her a nod of acknowledgment, and a second later, she was done. A second later, Artemis teleported onto moon and looked Jake up and down.

“Did you have an accident or something?” she asked in a joking tone.

“Oh, yeah, clumsy me stumbled into a couple of hundred arrows, you know how I am,” Jake joked back as he sat down, still very much in pain.

“You got quite a beating, eh?” Artemis asked rhetorically, shaking her head.

“Sure did,” Jake chuckled.

Artemis smiled as she looked at him. “Seeing you so elegantly accept loss was a relief. I’m not gonna lie, I feared you would decide to use or skills than what we agreed upon once it was clear you would lose. That your Bloodline wouldn’t allow your ego to suffer damage incurred by losing to someone else whom you should rightfully be able to beat.”

“I’m a bit offended by that,” Jake scoffed. “This is just sparring, not a fight to death. If failure doesn’t mean death, it’s not real failure; it’s just practice. Admittedly, re was probably a time right after I awakened my Bloodline when I wouldn’t have accepted possibility of ever losing, and my parents did mention that I was overly competitive when I was really young, but now I really don’t care. I guess alchemy really desensitized me to concept of failure, as hot damn do I fail a lot when doing alchemy.”

“That makes sense,” Artemis smiled. “I guess that means you’re not going to be angry even if your next few opponents beat you as handily as Gladiel did?”

“I would prefer to at least feel like I have a fighting chance,” Jake chuckled, shaking his head. “But I can’t deny it was a good experience. Even if I can’t directly adopt anything my opponent does, just seeing m and ir Path makes me think.”

“And we both know how hard it is to make you do that,” Artemis teased him. “And luckily for you, there are plenty more archers who were more than willing to get a chance to spar with Chosen of Malefic Viper.”

“Let’s just hope this doesn’t end up with my reputation being ruined,” Jake sighed.

“Bold of you to assume anyone cares how good you are at archery,” Artemis shook her head. “All that matters is your overall power. This kind of practice isn’t all that rare either. Several extremely skilled archers suck if forced into melee combat, so you purposefully spar with people that can force you into such a situation to improve, even if it inevitably ends with you getting your ass kicked.”

“That makes me feel a bit better,” Jake said with relief.

“Though it would be super embarrassing if you lost to all of them...”

Jake glared at her as she smiled. “Pleasant recovery, and good luck with your next opponent. Don’t worry, he’s not as strong as Gladiel, but, well, your prospects still aren’t good.”

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