

# The Primal Hunter

## Chapter 901: Blood On The Ice

Jake's first time traveling to Skyggen had taken quite a few days of constant travel. After the Ell'Hakan incident, he made the trip again a lot faster. Now that he had reached well into mid-tier C-grade, he was practically zooming across the landscape, the entire trip only taking a few hours at most, and that was partly due to Jake checking things out on his way.

Of course, Jake didn't count his one planned stop in the travel time. The giant mountain was still among the largest Jake had seen on Earth, towering extremely far into the sky, so far that it easily entered the layers of the sky C-grades could occupy. One had to remember that C-grades and even D-grades, to some extent, were still restricted from entering the area designated as human lands. Jake was pretty damn certain this restriction would disappear with the arrival of the Prima Guardian, but for now, it was still in place.

Flying up the mountain, Jake rapidly felt the temperature drop. When he was there last, it was already cold as hell, but now it was even worse. While it maybe wasn't quite needed yet, Jake covered his body in a faint layer of arcane mana to defend himself from the environment.

*If it was this cold when I was here last, I wouldn't even have made it to the wyvern,* Jake mentally noted.

Continuing upwards, elementals began to appear in great numbers. None of them were strong enough to pose any kind of threat, but he still identified them.

**[Ice Elemental – lvl 264]**

**[Snow Elemental – lvl 259]**

Now, this did pose the great question of what the difference between a snow and an ice elemental was, outside of their difference in appearance. The snow elementals looked like badly built snowmen more than anything, while the ice elementals were partly see-through and a lot more angular. In fact, the main difference between the two was that one looked spiky and hard, while the other one looked round and soft.

Ignoring them just as they ignored Jake, he soon was close to the peak of the mountain. Jake was looking forward to seeing if the wyvern was still there and had purposefully

held back on using Pulse to not spoil himself, but when he got closer and heard sounds of fighting, he couldn't help himself.

What he saw was a battle in the sky above the peak, with the expected wyvern in the midst of it. Jake had expected it to maybe be fighting ice elementals or monsters, which was why the opponents surprised him. It was a large group of humans, forty people in total. What's more, he saw many of them use a kind of familiar magic he hadn't seen since Yalsten, making him quickly realize who they were. They weren't humans but vampires.

*Members of the Noboru clan?* Jake quickly assumed. He knew the Sword Saint had the divine artifact of Sanguine given after the defeat of the Monarch of Blood, allowing him to turn others into vampires using it. He knew that some had chosen this Path, and from the looks of it, they were doing pretty well for themselves.

Jake kept watch as he decided to activate his stealth skill to get closer without them noticing him. Flying into the air, he soon saw the fight that was honestly quite intense. Concentrated blue beams of frost shot through the sky as layers upon layers of magic barriers tried to block the attacks. At the same time, over a dozen vampires attacked the wyvern from all sides, five of them carrying large chains as they tried to immobilize the wyvern.

Using Identify, he first focused on the wyvern.

### **[Northpeak Wyvern – lvl 271 – Greater Blessing of the Everfrost Dragon God]**

Back when Jake first encountered the wyvern, it hadn't quite been in mid-tier C-grade yet, while now it most-certainly was. It had definitely grown significantly stronger, and it had even snagged itself a Blessing. Or maybe it always had the Blessing; he really had no way of knowing as his Identify didn't allow him to see Blessings back then.

As for the vampires, Jake was also quite impressed when he saw their levels after just checking out a few.

### **[Vampire – lvl 255]**

### **[Vampire – lvl 259]**

### **[Vampire – lvl 253]**

All of them were between level 250 and 260, as far as he could tell. This did raise some questions of how the hell they had leveled so fast without Nevermore... or, wait, had they leveled without Nevermore? Jake was one of the first people to enter in this generation and also one of the first to go out as far as he knew, but maybe it was possible they had gone anyway? If not for their entire allotted time, but just some of it.

Either way, they were all pretty damn strong, as he saw them fight the wyvern. Individually, none of them stood a chance, but fighting against forty opponents could be very difficult, especially for larger creatures who had more surface area to protect. For Jake, fighting more people wasn't as big of a problem as someone like the wyvern.

Not to say that the vampires were winning, as Jake really couldn't tell who had the edge. After a minute or so of back and forth, he believed there was a turning of the tides when the wyvern unleashed its breath, hitting a party of five that had tried to flank it.

The five of them were blasted back as healers and mages moved to help them. Jake was about to shake his head, as he assumed they must have taken too serious damage to continue fighting, but to his surprise, the five of them had come out of it with only severe frostbite and one of them losing an arm.

*Vampires have high resistance to frost magic by default*, Jake suddenly remembered. They were weak to fire while more resistant to frost magic. Of course, as stereotypes would dictate, the sun affinity was also incredibly powerful against them. It wasn't as if they got weaker while in natural sunlight, but they did get stronger when there was no sun at all due to some passive skills from their race. This also resulted in their high resistance to all forms of frost magic.

The vampires had chosen their prey well from a matchup perspective. They were resistant to the wyvern's attacks, while their primarily blood magic and physical attacks worked fine against the budding dragon.

Jake seriously considered what to do as he observed the battle continue. He had come to this mountain to have a reunion with the Northpeak Wyvern, but it was already preoccupied. Jake also didn't want to just barge in and interrupt that fight, as that was just rude. After thinking for a while, Jake just lifted his legs and sat with his legs crossed in mid-air as he decided to watch how the battle would unfold and then talk with the eventual winner. Not to attack them or anything, as that would also be boring, but just to talk as he was curious about both parties.

Focusing on the battle, it was clear the vampires had great coordination. With forty of them total, they had enough members to fill every role, with several healers and mages focusing solely on defense. A few mages also worked their offensive magic, and Jake even saw an archer in the group, along with two people wielding what looked like rifles.

The attacks rained down on the wyvern, few of them doing any damage as a layer of frost covered the large flying creature's body. Its eyes were glowing blue as it repeatedly unleashed magic, making the ground itself tremble as ice spikes shot up from below.

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Choosing to have the entire battle in the air was an interesting decision by both parties. It allowed the vampires to attack from all sides, including below, while the wyvern got more space to dodge and unleash its magic. It was also clear that the wyvern had better maneuverability and experience fighting in the air compared to all the vampires.

Jake had his eyes on one party within the vampire raid team more than any other. It was led by a middle-aged man wielding an axe and a shield, while his party members broke the holy trinity entirely by being two women and two men who wielded different light weapons, including shortswords and daggers, with no healer or ranged attackers in sight.

These five were an absolute menace and stood for the vast majority of the damage done. The leader was the highest-leveled person in the entire raid, and he proved that by repeatedly blocking the claws of the wyvern and creating openings for his party members to attack, as they left several lacerations on the wyvern, cutting through the ice and drawing blood.

From afar, Jake heard the man also yell several things, though it made little sense to him. He just yelled out numbers and what Jake assumed to be code words that all the other raid members reacted to, and-

*Oops, the first death.*

A mage had been too slow to react, as the wyvern dodged out of the way of a blow and, with a beat of its wing, sent a slicing blue wind toward him, cutting him in two with a web of cutting cold winds following, freezing and turning his body into thirty or so frozen icecubes.

Despite the death, the raid group didn't lose their cool, and a warrior even managed to use the opening to plunge a spear into the other wing of the wyvern. The five with chains also made their move but were rebuffed as the wyvern blasted away the raid leader.

A rogue who believed she hadn't been spotted tried to attack using the perceived opening as the wyvern snapped its head around and chomped down. It ate the woman whole, and a second later, an explosion of blood erupted within the wyvern's mouth, as she seemed to have blown herself up.

Her death explosion allowed the warriors with chains to finally get their chance as the wyvern's feet were wrapped up, disrupting the flight of the wyvern. Right as it was clear the wyvern was temporarily halted, a ritual spell was unleashed as eight mages combined their power, making a curtain of red light descend from above.

This curtain cut through the sky, the wyvern unable to dodge as it was struck, a massive flesh wound getting inflicted on its side, nearly cutting off one of its wings and going more than two meters into its mid-section, clearly doing a lot of internal damage.

“Good attack,” Jake muttered to himself. “But they should have gone for the head.”

The wyvern exploded with power as it roared loudly, releasing a freezing wave of energy that pushed all the melee fighters away. With its maws open, energy gathered as it unleashed a breath. A proper one this time around. The one Jake had been hit with back then had just been a casual one, and so were the earlier ones in this fight... but this breath was made with the clear intent to kill.

For a second, the world flashed a whitish blue as the breath destroyed all the barriers that tried to block it and hit the eight mages who had cast the ritual spell. They didn’t even have a chance to fight back as their bodies froze and were blasted apart, as no amount of natural vampiric frost resistance was going to save them from this one.

Yelling loudly, the raid leader unleashed a large attack himself, as his party members also unleashed a coordinated assault, but the wyvern’s entire body was practically burning with power as they were all blasted away. Find the newest release on [novel\\*\\*fire\\*\\*net](#)

A blue wind began to revolve around the creature as a blizzard appeared in the sky, enveloping all the vampires. Without any warning, the wyvern flew to the side to flank the group, going for the backline.

“Good decision to try and split the group to ruin their coordination,” Jake approved.

The only reason the vampire raid could even hold on was due to their numerical advantage and teamwork, so if the wyvern could address that, this fight would turn into a one-sided slaughter. The vampire side also clearly knew this, as they moved to group up and take a defensive position, as the wyvern was clearly consuming a lot of mana with the summoned blizzard.

A barrage of large ice shards fell upon the grouped-up vampires as the wyvern flew over them. The harsh, cold winds of the blizzard also bore down on the vampires, who quickly summoned a large red barrier around them all to ward off attacks.

Interestingly enough, the barrier did not seem to block out blood magic at all, as the archer shot arrows made of blood toward the wyvern, with the two gun-wielding vampires also going fully on the offensive. While their attacks didn’t do much damage, the three of them targeted one of the wyvern’s wings, ripping holes in the thin flesh between the arms and body.

The mages who weren’t focused on the barrier also tried to attack, as Jake saw faint cracks begin to form on the barrier from the constant attacks of the wyvern. However, before it broke, the vampires made their move again. Over a dozen warriors were buffed up by some of the healers as they flew out, leaving reddish afterimages, all going for the wyvern at once.

Two of them were cut apart by cold winds before they even reached the creature, while a third was ripped in four by a claw. A fourth managed to stab the wyvern before his head was bitten off, while the remaining eight all landed their own attacks.

Several large cuts lined the wyvern as two warriors went together and wrapped a chain around the wyvern's neck. The creature struggled as it did its best to shake off the eight warriors who were upon it while also dealing with range attacks and making sure those in the barrier of blood couldn't relax.

The situation was looking bleak for the wyvern, as Jake saw a faint smile on the raid leader's face, as the man still stood within the barrier, seemingly channeling some kind of buffing skill to those around him. The wyvern began tumbling toward the ground as another chain was wrapped around its wings, disrupting its flight.

As it tumbled toward the ground, it fell past the barrier of blood hiding all the less durable fighters... which was when the wyvern's eyes suddenly opened wide. Jake felt the mana in the air spike to unprecedented levels as from deep within the wyvern, he felt energy well up as it was all unleashed.

For a moment, the world turned white. Pure cold washed over everyone, including Jake who was quite a distance away, as even the mountain below was hit. When the light faded, Jake saw eight frozen statues falling down, as the barrier of blood had been torn open, deep freezing ten of the vampires within, while the rest didn't look that good either.

Jake saw the raid leader make a quick decision as he took out an item and crushed it. A sphere surrounded the leader and all the remaining vampires as Jake felt space magic at work, and in a flash, the surviving vampires were whisked away as they made their retreat.

"A good decision," Jake commented, as it was pretty sure the wyvern had won this fight. He couldn't exactly blame them either, as he closely inspected the tired wyvern. "Damn, it already has a budding dragon's heart."

Dragons were known for their hearts, which were pretty much unrivaled organs when it came to magic. This wyvern had a budding dragon's heart in that it had mutated slightly to more closely resemble one – a pretty common occurrence for wyverns with the potential to become dragons and likely even a required prerequisite for the evolution.

The white flash was the Northpeak Wyvern unleashing all the mana stored in the heart in one devastating attack. It had definitely been saving that one for a crucial moment.

Jake kept watching as the tired wyvern quickly flew down and caught all the falling statues of frozen vampires. With telekinesis, it carried them back toward the cave atop the mountain; Jake very curious about what it was doing with the bodies... wait...

“Not dead yet?” Jake muttered. The vampires were frozen solid, with even their souls frozen as far as Jake could tell, but they weren’t fully dead.

Flying closer, Jake wondered what the wyvern was planning to do with the frozen vampires as he decided to check out the cave. However, when he reached the cave, he saw that a set of powerful magic barriers protected it, and while his stealth skill was good, he wasn’t confident in getting through them without alerting the wyvern to his presence... so he stopped hiding as he dispelled his stealth skill and forced himself through the barrier.

Instantly, he felt the attention of the wyvern on him, but it didn’t make any moves. It just stayed deep within the cave as Jake heard its voice echo throughout.

**“A mantis stalking a cicada is unaware of an oriole behind... have you come to finish me in my weakened state?”**

Yeah, Jake wasn’t entirely certain what the hell that cicada thing was about, and he didn’t even know what an oriole was, but he made an educated guess the wyvern was shit-talking him for sitting back and waiting for his chance to strike.

“Relax,” Jake said in a loud tone. “I’m just here for our reunion.”

**“Reunion?”** the wyvern said, clearly confused, having likely fully expected Jake to be there with the intent to finish it off. This also explained the wyvern’s strategic position to blast the one opening to its main cavern with a breath the second Jake showed up, leaving him with no space to dodge.

“You really don’t remember me,” Jake said, more to himself than the wyvern. “Guess I’ll have to remind you and have a civil discussion about how rude it is to just blast people away with a breath when they come to talk.”

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## **- Chapter 902: Prima Preparations & Northpeak Wyvern**

### **Chapter 902: Prima Preparations & Northpeak Wyvern**

“It was far more powerful than our initial assessments. I believe it possesses a Nascent Dragon’s Heart, too, which is what ultimately led to our defeat,” the middle-aged



vampire said in a serious tone as he reported to the raid organizer. "We may need to reconsider our approach or reach out for assistance."

"I see," the organizer said as she wrote in her report. "Did you get any indication of the beast's inclinations for the upcoming event?"

"Nothing concrete, but what little interaction we did have made it clear the wyvern is incredibly arrogant. I have a hard time seeing it submit even to a far more powerful being, and with its aggressive nature... I believe leaving it be is far too risky."

"Very well," the organizer said with a nod. "I will refer it to the upper brass. Now go to your team... I reckon they need you right now."

"Thank you," the middle-aged vampire said as he stood up. "But... once more, I must warn you. The wyvern is far more powerful than we believed, so make sure not to just send anyone to be slaughtered."

"It's fine; if worst comes to worst, the Patriarch has returned from Nevermore," the organizer said with a smile, making the vampire's eyes open wide at hearing his grandfather had returned.

"In that case, I can go rest with a peaceful mind," the vampire said as he left to rejoin what remained of his failed raid party. Losing so many people was a horrible experience... but it had to be done, even though he regretted the outcome.

Preparation for the Prima Guardian's arrival was already well underway, with the World Council having made a strategy plan. Based on the knowledge provided in the original system message regarding the event, it was clear that beasts who had consumed system-provided natural treasures had to either sit out the event or join the Prima's side.

Additionally, It was theorized that when the Prima Guardian event truly began, all protections of human lands would be lifted. Putting these together, it had been decided to address certain known powerful monsters living close to where humans lived, while actively exploring the unknown zones of the planet.

One of the most powerful examples of a known powerful beast was the Northpeak Wyvern. It lived in between Skyggen, Haven, and two other smaller cities, all so close that the wyvern could reach them in a very short time if it decided to attack. To leave it unaddressed would be the same as leaving an enemy behind your own frontlines.

Originally, the vampires hadn't even gone to fight the wyvern but to try and reach some kind of compromise. Perhaps have the wyvern sign a system-bound contract making the wyvern agree not to fight for the Prima Guardian during the system event.

However, they hadn't even gotten that far before the beast attacked them, forcing the vampire squad to switch to plan B: simply killing it.



It was something they wanted to avoid when possible, but the Northpeak Wyvern had left them little choice. Plus, based on reports, this wyvern was incredibly aggressive toward anyone who entered its domain. It would kill without even asking any questions, so even if it wasn't going to ally with the Prima, getting rid of it was probably for the best, as keeping such a dangerous beast that couldn't even be talked to was simply too risky, especially with its domain being so close to human settlements, and its high level of power.

Sadly, it seemed that even with their high assessment of the wyvern, they had underestimated it. His party had been one of the elite teams that hunted down these known high-level monsters, so they had genuinely believed it was a done deal and that there were few monsters they couldn't handle, at least on the ground. The Sky Whale was leading the assault on the underwater creatures to ensure there wouldn't be an invasion from the depths during the arrival of the Prima.

As with many others, the vampires all had gone to Nevermore but not stayed the full fifty years. They were all fully aware they were not competing for any kind of Leaderboard position, so they had only gone there for the leveling and stayed a couple of decades until they exhausted most of their potential after evolving to C-grade.

The middle-aged vampire had returned not even a month ago and had already disappointed himself and the family immensely. Alas, with the return of the Patriarch, they hopefully no longer had to hold any fear of these powerful creatures hidden across the planet.

Especially when one considered that his return would also mean the return of all those who had competed in the Leaderboards alongside him. With all those elite members of Earth, he had a bright view of the future and foresaw a less-than-bright future for the wyvern.

Jake walked through the icy cave but remained unbothered as he channeled arcane mana through his veins and protected himself with an outer layer of arcane energy. He saw the wyvern ahead of him within its cavern, in prime position to launch a breath at the entrance. Seeing this, Jake had already made a resolution.

*If it dares attack, I kill it.*

No arguments or discussions. Jake wanted to talk, sure, but he did say he wanted to remind it of how rude it was to use its breath on people without warning. If, even with this warning and the wyvern's wounded state, it still decided to attack, Jake would rule this particular beast a lost cause.

Luckily for the wyvern, it didn't attack even as Jake reached the entrance to the large frosty cavern. Instead, it just raised its head and looked at him with wary eyes, seemingly considering if maybe it should attack.

Jake just stood still as he observed the wyvern for a moment. It was pretty large, about nine meters in length, which, in retrospect, probably wasn't that large. Or maybe it was; Jake's only comparison was the Viper back in the day, and he knew sizes between wyverns, dragons, and pretty much all kinds of beasts could vary significantly.

Upon closer inspection, Jake also noticed that the wyvern's injuries weren't actually that bad. Sure, they weren't great, but the frost wyvern seemed to have a lot of Vitality based on how it was already healing. Likely assisted by some passive skill, allowing it to heal faster in a cold environment like this.

What was clear, though, was that it had spent a lot of energy. The half-baked dragon's heart in its chest had been entirely emptied of gas and would take a while to fully recover. Which made Jake wonder why it had unleashed all of the mana at once into one attack. Did it have to? Or was it to ensure the vampires became the living popsicles they currently were.

Off to the side of the cavern, he had already spotted all the frozen vampires, with the wyvern throwing glances toward them as if afraid Jake was going to try and rob it of its loot.

"So, you really don't remember me?" Jake finally asked after a bit.

"You do perhaps smell faintly familiar, but no, I do not remember any creature such as you," the wyvern said in a cautious tone.

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"Oh, so you know how to speak normally?" Jake said, a bit surprised. What the wyvern had done before was more or less mana-speak, if one can call it that. It was sound produced solely through magic, not any physical movement of vocal cords or anything like that.

"What do you want?" the wyvern asked, not bothering with Jake's question or any kind of politeness. THIS CHAPTER IS UPDATE BY **novel·fire·net**

"I told you already, I want to teach you about hospitality," Jake said with a smile. "The last time I came here, I did so with genuine curiosity. You see, this was my first time encountering a wyvern in the wild. Imagine my dismay when said wyvern proceeded to unleash a breath on me before I could even introduce myself, blasting me off the mountain. You really don't remember that or who I am?"

The wyvern was silent for a moment before speaking. "... do you have the slightest idea how little that narrows it down?"

“Wow,” Jake exclaimed. Was... was this frost wyvern just an asshole? So far, all information pointed to the answer yes. “So you just attack anyone who comes here for no good reason?”

“No reason?” the wyvern huffed. “For an inferior creature to invade my domain is more than enough reason!”

“Inferior creature, huh,” Jake said, his smile entirely fading, and instead of using words, he answered with actions as he fully unleashed his aura upon the cavern, even going so far as to use Pride of the Malefic Viper a bit.

Instantly, the wyvern reacted as it opened its mouth, seemingly to release a breath, but at the very last moment, it stopped itself as its eyes opened wide. It had felt Jake’s killing intent the second it showed any indication of an attack, making the wyvern wisely hesitate.

“The only inferior creature I’m seeing here is you,” Jake said as he stared down the wyvern. “And not just because you’re a wanna-be dragon. You’re also a fucking idiot.”

Jake’s words were harsh and insulting, yet the wyvern did nothing but close its mouth as it lowered its head before the pressure.

“Do you have any idea about humans or the enlightened races in general?” Jake asked, making the wyvern hesitate. “Of course, you fucking don’t. Because if you did, you wouldn’t have decided to kill a group that clearly came here and sought you out specifically. Much less flee back to this lair as if nothing happened afterward.”

Based on the weapons that the raid party carried – and the fact they had shown up with a raid party in the first place – it was apparent to Jake that they had come here with the express purpose of hunting down the wyvern. Or at least to be able to fight it should negotiations go south.

Seeing as they were also from the Sword Saint’s clan and failed their raid, it also wasn’t hard to see what would come next. They would send an even stronger party... or the old man himself. Even if the wyvern was pretty strong, even for its level, it wasn’t peak-tier genius. Jake reckoned he could have killed this wyvern even if he was a lot lower level than he was now, and the Sword Saint would also be able to slay it without any issues whatsoever.

In some ways, this realization was a bit disappointing, though it would also be kind of weird if some peak-genius wyvern appeared on a random mountain on Earth. The mere fact a wyvern with the potential to evolve into a dragon was born there in the first place was already pretty damn impressive in its own right.

“Answer me, what do you think is going to happen now with that group of vampires who came to kill you?” Jake asked the wyvern.

It was silent for a moment before answering. "They will have learned to not attack my domain again... or report to their kin and come back with a stronger group for me to overcome."

"Let's assume it's the second one – because it's definitely the second one – what do you plan on doing when that happens? Keel over and die?"

"I shall defeat the–"

"Wrong," Jake cut the wyvern off. "You die. If not with the next attack, the one after. The enlightened races operate like that. If you kill one member of their faction, they will keep coming back until they wipe you out, and the people who attacked you belong to a faction where I'm aware of at least one person who could easily kill you if he so desired."

"Do you belong to their faction?" the wyvern asked with a hint of nervousness, making Jake believe he was finally getting through to the dense lizard.

"No," Jake shook his head. "Not directly."

The wyvern was silent for a while before Jake sighed. "Seriously, you have a Greater Blessing and yet you are this clueless?"

"My Patron has never interacted with me outside of our first meeting..."

"Well, that sucks for you," Jake muttered. "Could have at least told you to not stay in the same place if you piss off people you shouldn't. Makes you a sitting duck."

"I must remain here," the wyvern said with a tone of certainty.

"Even if it means your death?" Jake questioned with a raised eyebrow.

"Leaving would be the end of my ambition," the beast said, once more not leaving anything up for interpretation. This made Jake frown a bit, but he soon realized something.

Jake had walked a lot on the mountain, and while his boots had certainly made him aware of natural treasures, Jake honestly filtered away the feeling most of the time when on stuff like mountains. All the random metals inside the rock registered, which wasn't particularly interesting. He did pick up when a potent piece of metal entered his radar, but that had not appeared on this mountain.

However, now that he checked again, he did notice something peculiar. While there wasn't any particular piece of ore that registered as particularly valuable... there sure as hell was a lot of it. As in, the entire mountaintop was one big piece of metal with a thin layer of rock covering it, with a shitload of ice and snow stacked on top.

With this in mind, Jake quickly reached a conclusion: "You need this mountaintop to progress as you absorb the energies here?"

"Yes," the wyvern confirmed.

Jake also reached another conclusion as he scanned the room and found quite a few skeletons of different beasts encased in ice. "And you feed the mountain itself living creatures you capture in ice?"

The wyvern remained silent to that question, pretty much confirming that as a yes. It did also help that Jake faintly felt energy being drained out of the frozen vampires stashed off to the side of the cavern. With his sphere, he also saw what looked like the body of a large vulture hidden under some snow, having died recently from the looks of it.

"You plan on feeding those vampires to the mountain too?" Jake continued questioning the wyvern, even though it was mostly rhetorical in nature.

Despite it taking a moment, the wyvern slowly confirmed. "I need it for the cold energy to keep increasing."

Jake now also knew why the mountaintop had gotten so much colder since his last visit. The wyvern was the direct cause. From what Jake quickly gathered, the metal around them was rather unique in that it wasn't just cold; it also actively absorbed all heat energy others expelled. Freezing people would keep them still, and they would passively fight back against the cold energy until they ran out of energy and died, giving plenty of nourishment to the metal.

"I'm not saying that's necessarily wrong of you, but capturing any enlightened like this isn't going to end well for you," Jake sighed. "With that in mind, release them."

"What?" the wyvern exclaimed. "I thought they were not part of your tribe?"

"I'm not part of theirs, but that doesn't mean they're not part of mine," Jake said, shaking his head. "They live within my domain, after all."

"How can they live in your domain if-

"You seem to misunderstand," Jake cut off the wyvern with a smile. "You are also living within my domain. Everyone and everything on this planet is."

His words seemed to insult the wyvern, but with his aura bearing down on it, it didn't say anything as Jake continued. "Now, I'll give you an easy choice. Release those vampires and stop messing around with the enlightened species. Additionally, if people come here, don't just fucking attack them, but kindly ask them to leave if you really don't want them here. You can do that... or I'll kill you right here, right now. To make the decision easier for yourself, do me a favor and contact that Patron of yours."

“My Patron will not be plea-“

“Just tell him the Chosen of the Malefic Viper demanded it of you,” Jake sighed.

It took the wyvern a lot longer than Jake thought it should before the wyvern finally reached out. Jake knew that anyone blessed could reach out at all times to their Patrons, though more often than not, they were just ignored or filtered out passively. He did hope that the Everfrost Dragon God would respond, though, as that would make things a lot simpler.

More than a dozen seconds passed as Jake saw the wyvern clearly preoccupied mentally. He saw its lizard face frown and change a lot during this time, probably partly due to dealing with a direct divine message and partly because of the nature of the message.

After what felt like half a minute, the wyvern finally looked at Jake, lowered its head to the ground, and spoke. “This lowly one begs for forgiveness and swears fealty to the Chosen of the Malefic One.”

Jake stared at the wyvern that had an entirely changed demeanor as he sighed internally.

*... maybe I should have just gone with telling the wyvern to get divine customer support from the beginning, huh?*

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## Chapter 903: Results Of (Un)Intentional Assistance

Flexing status was always a great way to get a message across, but it only ever worked when the other party knew who you were. In all honesty, Jake had been surprised the wyvern didn't recognize him even after being blessed. It wasn't that he expected every single god to tell those they blessed about him... but wouldn't it make sense to at least mention the Malefic Viper if you bless a wyvern living not even a day's flight from the home base of his Chosen?

Well, it definitely would; there had just been one problem:

The wyvern was a hermit.

As in, it knew literally nobody. It didn't know anything about the planet it was on or what was going on whatsoever, either. It had lived in its own little bubble, killing anything that dared try and approach it. It didn't even know about Nevermore. As Jake listened, he also realized that the damn dragon god that blessed the wyvern was partly to blame.

That asshole dragon had told the wyvern to just dominate its own domain and keep absorbing energy there. They only ever had one meeting, where all the talks were about making optimal use of the unique mountaintop.

However, now the beast definitely seemed to realize who he was as Jake saw the wyvern get what he assumed was a less funny Villy-style round of exposition. The beast kept its head low throughout, seemingly wanting to bury it in the snowy floor of the cavern every time the wyvern spoke its apologies, trying to excuse its own ignorance while groveling to Jake with promises.

"I had a severe lapse of judgment and can only wish to beg for forgiveness and make up for my transgressions through any form of assistance I can possibly provide," the wyvern said, definitely reading from a provided script.

Jake just stood back as he let the poor wyvern get a talking-to. When he thought about it more, Jake kind of understood why the wyvern had acted like it did. Earth was a pretty fucked up planet for it to be born on, and he was sure that in many other places, the wyvern would have been fine acting as it did. It would be the kind of creature the enlightened on the planet called a Beast King or something, and the mountain deemed a forbidden zone.

The problem for the wyvern was that Jake knew at least a dozen people who could kill the wyvern if they so desired, and when more people returned from Nevermore, it would be even more. Shit, based on the people he saw in Haven, he was confident a forty-man raid party could be gathered there capable of taking down the wyvern, not even to mention if Skyggen got involved and sent a group of high-level assassins recently returned from Nevermore. Jake's brother alone could quickly kill the wyvern.

So... while the wyvern had indeed been a dick, it had acted pretty natural if this had been a normal planet, and as long as it was willing to correct its ways, Jake wasn't going to unilaterally kill it. Besides, with its level, it wouldn't even give him any experience.

Before the wyvern could begin to practically beg again, Jake decided to let it escape from limbo as he spoke.

"Stop. You now seem to realize where your little mountain is located and why your actions up till now have been rather unwise?"

"Yes, Lord Chosen," the wyvern nodded enthusiastically. "My own foolishness and ignorance-"



"It's fine, as long as you know and will change your ways," Jake interrupted. "I can't have a wyvern living here causing trouble for people wanting to just pass by."

"I swear that I shall never attack another of the enlightened races again," the wyvern readily agreed.

"No need to go that far," Jake waved it off. "Just don't kill people randomly. If they attack you, go for it, but if they are just passing by or want to speak, don't automatically attack."

Looking over at the frozen vampires and the burrowed dead vulture, he continued. "When it comes to feeding this mountain, I would advise you to stick with beasts, especially those around your own level of power. You will dilute the quality if you aim for quantity. Needless to say, those vampires also aren't going to stay here."

"Na- naturally," the wyvern said as its eyes glowed for a moment. Instantly, the ice started to melt, releasing them from their icy imprisonment. As they quickly thawed, one thing also became pretty clear.

*They heard everything... which means they were fully awake and aware despite being frozen. Pretty fucking scary way to die if I say so myself,* Jake thought as he saw the clarity in all their eyes, with a few of them even looking with reverence and gratitude toward him.

Jake waited patiently as he even saw the wyvern remove some of the cold energy from around the vampires, allowing them to unfreeze faster while not letting the cold bother them as much. It didn't take long before the first one was fully free, and he didn't wait to bow, despite it looking pretty damn painful as his clothes and even skin cracked in places.

"We thank the Chosen of the Malefic One for his assistance," the vampire said, with the others following suit once unfrozen.

"The old man would have been mad at me if I just left you all here. Now get out of here; I'll handle the rest," Jake smiled as he saw the look of confusion on their faces before they realized who the old man Jake was talking about was. At least they weren't offended, as they just thanked him once more before they left, supporting each other on the way. They didn't even address anything with the wyvern, seemingly trusting Jake to handle this issue without their input. He had kind of expected some calls for revenge, at the very least. Not that Jake would have helped them with that. If they wanted to kill the wyvern they could go home, heal, and then come back for a rematch once they were stronger.

With the vampires gone, Jake returned his attention to the wyvern that had kept its head lowered, not even daring to look up. Sighing, Jake really wasn't sure what to do about

the big lizard. He could literally see it shaking, and it definitely wasn't from the cold. Alas, he had already decided he wasn't going to give it more anxiety.

"I believe this concludes our business," Jake said, seeing a look of surprise on the wyvern's face, as, despite the entire conversation they just had, it definitely assumed he still wanted some kind of personal revenge. Which, to be fair, Jake originally had. The damn lizard had blasted him off a mountain, after all.

However, taking everything into account, he really wasn't in the mood. He also had to admit to himself part of his reluctance was because he was dealing with a wyvern. No, not just a wyvern, the first wyvern he had seen in the wild. Killing it just for some slight born of ignorance would also make Jake feel like he was bullying a teenager or something.

"Truly?" the wyvern asked, though it was clear it was also this Everfrost Dragon God behind the words.

"Truly... though I do have one thing I will demand as compensation," Jake said after thinking a bit.

"Anything," the wyvern insisted.

"What did you evolve from? I do not believe you were simply born a wyvern, so what were you before?" Updates are released by *novel~fire~net*

This was something Jake was genuinely curious about. Mainly knowing if this wyvern had also once been a snake, or if it had become a wyvern from something else.

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"The Chosen wants to know what creature I was born as?" the wyvern asked with a hint of confusion.

"Precisely. Just take it as fulfilling my personal curiosity," Jake said. "Tell me how you became what you are today. The story of your life, if you will."

The wyvern was silent for a moment before it spoke. "I was born as a creature called an iguana. I had lived on this mountain all of my life, simply surviving in the harsh environment. Back then, this was no snow-covered peak, even if it was cold at times. Then, the initiation of the system arrived and everything changed. Day after day, the mountain grew taller as the world expanded beneath me. We all turned feral, killing each other and fighting for this odd energy far more satiating than any food."

Jake listened along as the wyvern told its story. It was interesting to hear the perspective of a beast and how they experienced the integration compared to humans.

The entire thing was definitely a lot rougher than getting Tutorials. Unless you were thrown into a Tutorial like Jake's, that is.

"I grew stronger and increased in size, fighting off all others at this peak. Some were also forced out when the temperature dropped too much, seeking further down the mountain. Yet I stayed until one day, we were all drawn to this cavern. We fought, and I killed all of my kin before I finally consumed that which had brought me here. It was an odd plant, and after consuming it, the cold began to be a source of nourishment, not something to overcome. I do not know specifically why, but when I evolved to C-grade, I became a wyvern, and it was only then that I truly received a true self and realization of what I am."

The entire story wasn't overly long, and it did feel like the wyvern was almost talking about someone else. Which it kind of did, considering the final sentence. The wyvern didn't have any true sapience before it became a wyvern but had acted solely on instinct.

"And how did you obtain the budding dragon's heart?" Jake followed up. "A skill offering at some point?"

"Yes," the wyvern confirmed. "I selected it, and it warped my heart into what it is today. I am also fully aware that I need to upgrade it once more to have any chance of becoming a true dragon in B-grade."

"I see, I see," Jake nodded. Yeah, that tracked. Based on all he read, if the wyvern failed to get the heart upgraded, it could become a quasi-dragon only in B-grade. Having heard the story, Jake looked toward the cavern exit. "This has been enlightening. I shall not bother you anymore than this, and thank you for sharing your life story. I hope this experience has allowed you to wise up, and I look forward to seeing if Earth will one day birth a true dragon."

"Once more, I thank the Chosen for his magnanimity," the wyvern bowed its head. "I shall ensure to not cause you or anyone in your domain further trouble."

Jake just waved the wyvern off as he walked out of the cavern before he felt a minor shift that made him glance back and use one final Identify, which put a wry smile on his face.

### **[Northpeak Wyvern – lvl 271 – Divine Blessing of the Everfrost Dragon God]**

*I came here to scold the lizard and ended up getting it a free Blessing upgrade instead,* Jake admonished himself jokingly as he made his way out of the cavern. His little pit stop for the wyvern hadn't turned out how he'd expected, but it had been rather eventful.

Turning to the horizon, he looked toward Skyggen as he decided to continue his journey back to his family.

--

Thunder echoed in the skies as blue bolts descended upon the land, giving birth to elementals or simply killing anything they hit. These bolts carried the power to slay even S-grades easily, resulting in all but the most foolish or powerful avoiding clouds like these.

Below, the bare ground was filled with scorch marks and corpses, yet in the midst of everything, two figures were fighting, as the rocky terrain that had been molded and empowered by the onslaught of lightning for millions of years was torn up with every clash.

One figure was a tall man, swinging a battleaxe as he attempted to catch his opponent, a winged woman with more muscles than the warrior. She fought using her bare fists, deflecting the weapon of her opponent as blue lightning enveloped both of them, sending out shockwaves with every clash.

Their fight continued for several minutes until the man suddenly appeared distracted. A fist struck him in the face, blowing off his entire head as he stumbled back before it rapidly regenerated.

"A cheap shot," the man said with a scowl as he used his horns to crack his neck.

"Not my fault you got distracted," the woman said with a smile as she looked toward the newcomer who had been the cause of the distraction. A suit-wearing devil had appeared, carrying a light smile on his face.

"Duchess, Duke, I apologize for interrupting your past time, but his majesty requires your presence at the castle," the man said.

"We heading to war with the Fifth Hell again?" the duchess asked.

"No, you moron, it's related to Nevermore, isn't it?" the duke scoffed.

"Indeed it is so," the suit-wearing devil confirmed to the two other devils.

"Has the princeling returned?" the duke asked with a frown.

"Oh, did the kid take the top spot?" the duchess asked. "If not, I don't see why we should bother being there."

“No, he got third, just behind the Chosen of Yip of Yore and the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, who took second and first, respectively,” the suited devil answered. “The Chosen of the Malefic Viper also took the top spot on the All-Time Leaderboards.”

“Impressive,” the duke commented. “But I still fail to realize why his majesty demands our return.”

“It’s related to the Chosen of the Malefic Viper. It would be easier to simply see it rather than me wasting my time explaining everything,” the suited devil said mysteriously as he raised an eyebrow. “Besides, does his majesty need a reason to recall you?”

The duke and duchess gave each other a look, both knowing that opposing the Devil King of the Fourth Hell wasn’t a wise choice. With that in mind, they followed the third devil back to the castle nestled in the middle of the realm known as the Fourth Hell.

There, a massive mountain stood. Thunderclouds encircled the mountain in several layers, and unless one was welcomed, even gods would find it difficult to make their way through unscathed. Atop this mountain was the castle of the Fourth Devil King and the leader of the Fourth Circle of Hell.

Arriving at the castle, the three devils made their way into a throne room that was already filled with other devils and high-ranking mortals who had been allowed there. All these mortals were kneeling under the pressure of the many divine beings, yet one remained standing in the center, speaking to the devil sitting on the throne.

The Devil King stopped speaking as he saw the duke, duchess, and suited devil arrive as he addressed them. “Good. All are here.”

“We greet his majesty,” the three of them bowed, yet the duke couldn’t help but throw glances at the mortal still standing. His aura felt familiar, yet foreign, and there was something odd mixed in there...

The Devil King simply nodded as he returned his attention to the mortal. “Now, continue.”

“Yes, father,” the mortal said, making the duke and the two other devils realize this was the Cerulean Demon – also known as the Prince of the Fourth Hell. “During the gathering of those who placed high on the Nevermore Leaderboards, I approached the Chosen of the Malefic One, and...”

The Demon Prince continued to explain everything that had happened. How he had approached the Chosen, gotten him to agree to help, and the entire ritual that followed, including everything that had gone wrong. Many devils or officials frowned or scoffed when the demon described the ritual. It was a foolish endeavor, no doubt about it, yet the results...

“And this Chosen entered your Soulspace?” the Devil King questioned.

“Yes, and suppressed the Records of the Cerulean Devil entirely,” the Demon Prince explained, not hiding anything. “His presence overwhelmed everything, and it was only due to his assistance I managed to become what I am now.”

Silence roamed the hall as they observed the newly born Cerulean Demon Lord. The duke was confused about how all this had happened, even if he heard the explanation. He hadn’t been particularly aware of this Chosen of the Malefic Viper before now, having only heard in passing that the Primordial had returned to the multiverse with a Chosen.

“Is that also why you remain standing now?” the Devil King followed up as his own aura spread through the room. The duke felt the pressure but remained standing, as did the grand duke, duchess, and a few other of the top devils... as well as the Cerulean Demon Lord.

“I believe that to be the case,” the Demon Prince answered truthfully.

“How amusing,” the Devil King smiled, the show of emotion shocking many. “I also heard you gave him your personal Crest that I bestowed upon you?”

“Yes, father. I seek forgiveness if that-“

“It was a wise decision,” the Devil King interrupted him.

“Thank you... though I fear the Chosen may not use it himself but send a representative or envoy. Perhaps even an ally of his,” the Demon Prince said a bit nervously.

“Even if it’s so, treat whoever he sends as if they were my personal guest,” the Devil King said after a brief pause. He then turned and looked at one of the devils in the crowd. “Begin preparations to send more of our young to the Order of the Malefic Viper. Additionally, contact the Second Hell and propose to them a joint venture to make use of their existing connections with the Order.”

“It shall be done, Your Majesty,” the devil bowed.

Turning back to his son, the Devil King observed him for a moment. “Let us also not waste time where unnecessary. A week from now, I shall appoint the Cerulean Demon Lord as my new Chosen and Crown Prince of the Fourth Hell.”

Surprised expressions flashed through the faces of most in the room as the Demon Prince merely bowed. “It would be an honor.”

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## Chapter 904: To Visit One's Parents

Jake rarely felt nervous these days. He was the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, Harbinger of Primeval Origins, and now even the top performer on the Nevermore Leaderboards. Yet he couldn't deny his own trepidations before arriving at Skyggen.

There was no doubt that Jake was a pretty sucky son and now also uncle. Even before the system, he had been bad at calling home or visiting often enough, and with the initiation, he had become far worse. What made Jake feel even worse about everything was how he didn't really feel that bad for not visiting as often. Just the knowledge they were doing well was enough for him.

His father's words before he left last time also helped a lot, having pretty much given Jake permission to not worry about them. There was also the fact that Caleb was with them at all times and would ensure they were kept safe alongside Maja and Adam – his wife and son, also known as Jake's sister-in-law and nephew.

Mixed in with his slight anxiety was also a lot of excitement. The last time he saw Adam, he had just been a baby, while now he should be solidly out of the toddler years. He naturally also looked forward to seeing his parents and how they were doing.

He was also determined to get some way of contacting them this time around, if not for nothing else but the ability to at least call home once in a while to check in on things. Though, rather than talking about some promotion or a funny anecdote of what had happened that day, Jake would talk about how he had met some frost wyvern or helped create a Demon Lord.

Nearly at Skyggen, Jake decided to have a bit of fun and check the local defenses. Activating his stealth skill, Jake wanted to see if he could sneak in without anyone noticing him. If he could, he would definitely have something to tease his brother about.

Sadly, the moment Jake arrived floating above the city, he encountered one of the outer barriers covering the city that served as the headquarters of the Court of Shadows. It became pretty damn clear Jake couldn't sneak through without triggering it. There were over a dozen layers of barriers, most of which were only primed to the activated to defend against attacks. There were still three different ones designed for detection, though, as well as five, maybe six, made to help hide the city.

"At least Caleb made sure the city is properly defended," Jake nodded. Haven also had defensive barriers, but far fewer than this. Instead, the city was primarily defended by two people: Arnold and Miranda. Both had placed down their own protective measures, and Jake knew that Arnold had launched a number of satellites to keep a lookout.



Entering through the barrier, Jake instantly knew he was detected. He could have taken the main entrance but decided it was more fun to fly down from above. That way, it would also be easier to find where his parents stayed, something he used a quick Pulse of Perception to discover.

As with most other cities on Earth, Skyggen had grown a lot over the last many years. Despite only really being a city for members of the Court and their family members, it looked surprisingly normal, especially the area where he spotted his family. It looked like the regular suburbs of old, with modern-looking houses on a closed-off street and big gardens. It didn't look very defended either, which Jake perfectly understood.

Caleb and Jake didn't want to keep their family in a cage with the justification they were just protecting them. That would be insulting and unhealthy for everyone involved. No, Jake would rather make it so the entire planet was a safe environment for not only his parents but everyone else. Despite never having spoken with his brother about this explicitly, he knew Caleb also felt the same way, which was why he had done things like this.

Flying toward the suburbs, Jake felt a few presences check him out, but the moment they realized who he was, they backed off, resulting in no one bothering him. He saw that his parents were currently both at one house, with his mother sitting in the back garden reading a book while his dad was in the house watching a projector – the system version of a TV. Assuming there weren't already normal TVs.

There probably were normal TVs, especially if Arnold could walk around with a tablet.

In the house next door, he saw Maja with three other women, as well as a group of seven kids. It wasn't hard to spot Adam, either. He looked uncannily like Caleb did when he was small, making Jake smile. The decision where to go first wasn't hard either because there was no fucking way he was going to intrude on his nephew's playdate. Especially not with his current get-up, as he had a slight suspicion a hooded masked man with glowing beastly eyes wouldn't be that popular with the kids.

Landing in front of his parent's house, Jake made his mask invisible, pulled down the hood, and tried to look as representable as he could. Knocking on the door, he was a bit nervous as he saw his father react inside by getting up and walking to the door before opening it. Chapters first released on **novel♦fire♦net**

Jake's dad froze for a moment when he saw Jake who just stood there smiling. "Hey, Dad, I-"

"Debra, there's another of those alchemist salesmen at the door!" his dad yelled, surprising Jake.

"Again!?" he heard his mother yell from the other side of the house as she made her way over to the door.

For a moment, Jake's mind worked at high speeds as he considered what had happened. Could karmic magic affect the memories of people, or was it-

"A fancy one from that snake club, too," his mother said as she walked over and smiled. "Doesn't he also seem oddly familiar, Robert?"

"He does look a bit like our younger son, doesn't he. I wonder what happened to our estranged older one; we haven't seen him in-"

"Ha ha, very funny," Jake said in a dry tone. "Also, calling the Divine Order of a Primordial a snake club would definitely be considered heretical to most people."

"Ah, sorry, I'm just happy you finally found a club you wanted to join since getting you to join any when you were a kid was a real struggle," Debra teased him as she went outside and didn't really give him any time before she pulled him into a hug. "Welcome home."

"Thanks, Mom," Jake smiled as she practically dragged him inside. His father put a hand on his shoulder as they walked in, giving him an approving nod and a look that said it was good he had finally visited.

"Do you want anything to drink?" his mom asked. "We have coffee and... a lot of different teas. Actually, you may know this, how come tea is so popular now?"

"Tea was always popular," Jake argued. "But as for why it's popular in the multiverse in general... well, think about it. Tea is just dried pieces of herbs and can come in a variety of flavors and forms, allowing whoever is making the tea to aim for certain desired effects. Meanwhile, for coffee, it needs to come from coffee beans, right? Limits the variety."

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"I see," his mom nodded. "So I take it you're big into tea now?"

"Not really, do you have any hot chocolate?" Jake asked with a grin.

"I'm sure I can find something," she answered with a smile and went into the kitchen. Jake looked after her as he quickly used an Identify to confirm how she was doing.

**[Human – lvl 144]**

He also used one on his dad, confirming a similar level.

**[Human – lvl 141]**

Both had reached mid-tier D-grade and were on their way. Neither leveled fast at all, but they were still leveling as far as Jake could tell. Actually, he was pretty sure that many would be jealous of his parent's ability to level despite neither of them being fighters.

*If this keeps up, they should at least reach C-grade at some point*, Jake assured himself as he took a seat at the dining table with his dad. Robert, his father, didn't look a day older than his last visit and still looked a lot healthier than he had been before the system. All good things to see.

"I hear you've been quite busy," his dad said after a brief pause. "Something about you placing first on the best Leaderboards in Nevermore?"

Jake was surprised that his dad knew about all that, considering how disconnected they seemed from multiverse stuff the last time he visited. Still, if he was interested, Jake saw no reason not to answer. "Yeah, I managed to snag the top spot above everyone else."

"Very impressive based on how I understand it," Robert said. "I won't act like I really understand how big of a deal it is, but Caleb seemed a lot more impressed than usual... so good job."

"Thanks," Jake smiled. "Say, where is Caleb?"

"At work," his mom answered as she came in carrying three mugs with hot chocolate, having made it a lot faster than Jake expected. "He is quite busy these days, and while he tried to take a small holiday after he returned from this Nevermore place, he was quickly dragged back to work. I guess his desk was full after more than three years of absence."

"Sucks to suck," Jake grinned, happy it wasn't him. In some ways, it was also good to have some one-on-one time with his parents.

"Don't bully your little brother for having a job," Robert scolded him in jest before he turned a lot more serious. "I know that to us, you've only been gone for a few years, but for you, it's been decades... Caleb was quite affected and stuck to Maja and Adam like a magnet for the first day he was back. How are you doing?"

"I'm doing good," Jake said with a reassuring smile.

"No, you're not," his dad said with an exaggerated sigh. "Charity workers do good. You're doing well."

"Way to spoil the serious mood with grammatical pedantry," Jake shook his head. "And how do you know I didn't do good? I recently helped someone transform into a Demon Lord, and just on the way here, I talked sense into a murderous and ignorant wyvern on top of a mountain while freeing a group of vampires from the fate of dying as popsicles."

"The first one doesn't sound like it counts," Debra muttered.

"That's just your bias against demons born from media misrepresentation," Jake said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Most demons I've met have been pretty nice and chill."

"You're also part of what many call an evil snake club, with this Malefic Viper not striking me as a figure many would describe with the adjective good," his dad couldn't help but point out. "That may color your view a bit."

"Is it just me, or do you two seem more educated on matters of the multiverse than last time I was here?" Jake asked with a raised eyebrow.

"We didn't really have much of a choice, now did we?" Debra asked while Jake took a sip of his hot chocolate, which, for the record, was superb.

"What do you mean," Jake asked after a good sip.

"You had a ceremony or something announcing yourself to the world a few years ago, didn't you?" Robert chimed in again. "It isn't anything new for the parents of famous people to get some attention from the public, now is it?"

Jake's smile faded as he turned serious. "Have people been bothering you because of me?"

"I wouldn't say that," his mom sighed. "It's more that there have been some odd types who've approached us, and sometimes it can be hard to judge who is there because of us or you. It isn't that big of a deal, though. We were already having similar issues because Caleb is the Judge of the Court of Shadows. Maja, too, and Caleb is doing a good job of making sure we aren't too bothered."

"I... see..." Jake muttered. "What kind of odd types have appeared?"

"Most people from these new factions who arrived, and they are mostly very polite," Debra answered. "There is this group of very weird people, though... what were they called again?"

"Primordial Church," Robert answered.

"That's right, the Primordial Church. There are these three in particular who are quite peculiar, though they don't seem dangerous or deceitful in the slightest. They're actually very straightforward about what they want, if a little pushy and overexcited," Jake's mom continued.

"What is it they want?" Jake asked with some concern.

He had no idea why it had never crossed his mind this could happen. Even if Jake had things like Shroud of the Primordial to hide him, people could still just do good old detective work to easily find out who his family was. Shit, the fact Caleb was Jake's brother was far from a secret, so all they really had to do was find Caleb's parents, and they would find Jake's.

"They just ask questions," Debra continued, shaking her head. "Their questions are just odd and kind of intrusive. They asked a lot about you, how you grew up, where, who you knew, what you were like when younger..."

"I think one of them mentioned something about writing a book?" Robert added. "Or a biography?"

"Are you sure? One of them tried to show me her poetry collection about Jake..." Debra muttered.

Jake stared at his parents as she scratched the back of his hand. "To clarify... you didn't actually tell them anything about me, right?"

"Not anything bad!" his mom quickly made clear, which didn't make Jake feel better. "But they were really polite and without any bad intentions, especially in the beginning."

His mom's words made a shiver run down Jake's back. He knew enough about the Primordial Church to know they were fanatics, and he really hoped she hadn't told some embarrassing stories he could now look forward to spreading all throughout the multiverse.

"Don't worry, they didn't get much useful," Jake's dad tried to assure him. "And a lot of what they got was just nonsense that will make them laughingstocks with no creditability if they actually try to share it."

"I'm sure they will just ignore the outrageous things you said," Debra sighed. "No one's going to believe any of that stuff you told them."

"What... what did he tell them?" Jake said, clenching his fists.

"As I said, nonsense," his dad kept waving him off. "No one, not even people as unreasonable as them, is going to believe a five-year-old fought off a shark or that a ten-year-old became the world record holder for ultramarathons on accidents just because he wanted to have a long run."

His dad laughed a bit at the last part, as Jake just had a look of horror. His father had no idea what he had done as Jake looked up at them.

"They are that unreasonable."

Robert looked confused and stopped laughing before shaking his head. “Even so, if they try to share it, no one will take them seriously.”

“Dad... you don’t understand these people,” Jake said as he looked his father in the eye. “I accidentally showed a projection to a guy depicting a beer bottle and the words danger noodle, and the guy dedicated a significant portion of his life to creating a mythical rarity statue...”

“Wait, are you talking about Felix, the High Priest in Haven?” Debra asked. “I heard he was a sculptor who gained your favor...”

“That’s him, and the fact he is now a High Priest should tell you everything,” Jake said with a serious look.

“They aren’t actually going to write down and publish everything I said, right?” Robert said with a tinge of nervousness.

“Every. Single. Word,” Jake assured him.

Silence hung in the room for several seconds before something vibrated on a small table in the corner of the room. Debra hurried over to it as Jake contemplated if he should try and track down the members of the Primordial Church.

“Caleb is coming over,” his mother said as she held the token with a smile. “He said he’ll stop by and grab Maja and Adam on the way.”

Jake wasn’t surprised Caleb was coming, as someone had definitely reported to him that Jake had arrived, and he was happy to hear he was bringing Maja and Adam. Next door, he saw that Maja had definitely also been called by Caleb as the other women were packing up and leaving, as Maja herself got ready with Adam.

*I’ll deal with that damn Primordial Church later... for now, let’s just try not to mess up my nephew’s first impression of his uncle.*

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## Chapter 905: Quality Family Time

Jake looked through the drawers, trying to find anything suitable as his mom stood at the door. He had never been a fan of his mom’s tendency to buy clothes, as she had a horrible habit of not really remembering what size people were, but in this one instance,

that came in handy as Jake quickly found a T-shirt and jeans that seemed about his size.

"I told you there would be something for you," Debra said in an almost proud tone.

"Not sure you should be bragging about buying things in the wrong size for Dad or Caleb," Jake smiled and shook his head before shooing her out of the room so he could change.

It probably shouldn't come as a surprise, but Jake didn't own any normal clothing. He had his armor, a few party outfits he used at the Order, and some more clothing that really didn't fit with a modern setting. With that in mind, Jake had decided to raid a drawer with clothing no one used, finding his current outfit that fit nicely after putting it on.

Looking at a mirror in the room, Jake felt like he looked weird.

*Since when did looking normal become weird, and looking weird become normal?* Jake questioned. In the multiverse, people really just wore whatever, and finding people walking down the street in full plate armor, or armor obviously made from a dead beast, was considered entirely ordinary. Not to mention polymorphed monsters that didn't even need equipment with enchantments, making them wear even weirder stuff at times.

Jake did still look a bit off, though. He had undoubtedly changed physically after the system arrived and with a few evolutions under his belt, but nothing was as notable as his eyes. While he hadn't exactly tested it, he was pretty sure they glowed in the dark now, or at least reflected light like the eyes of a cat, and if he tried to evaluate them objectively, they did make Jake look a bit... he wanted to say dangerous, but volatile was probably more accurate.

Wearing sunglasses was one option, but one Jake quickly dismissed. Firstly, because wearing sunglasses inside makes you look like an idiot or a blind person, and secondly, because his nephew would definitely end up seeing his eyes at some point anyway, so there was no need to hide them.

Exiting the room in his average outfit, his mom waited on the other side and looked at him from top to bottom, stopping when she reached his feet. "You're still wearing those old boots? According to Caleb, you should be doing pretty well for yourself, so couldn't you get some new ones? They certainly look like they have seen better days..."

"These are the best boots in the multiverse, and I will hear no objections to that statement," Jake said with a tone of utmost certainty. He wasn't really joking, either. Finding awesome mythical rarity boots like this wasn't exactly commonplace.

"Alright, not going to argue with you, but you should look into buying some product to treat the leather," Debra still insisted.



"I doubt it would work," Jake shook his head. "They haven't changed appearance no matter what's happened to them."

"If you say so," his mom finally gave up as the two of them walked into the living room to wait for Caleb and Maja. Jake could already see them next door, preparing to leave.

"Look at him; not wearing dark clothes and looking all grim," Jake's Dad said the moment Jake entered the living room. He had to admit that the blue t-shirt with what he was pretty sure was the logo of some company printed on it did make him look much less serious and grim than usual.

"I'll have you know cloaks and leather armor are quite fashionable," Jake defended himself as he took a seat at the dining table.

His Dad didn't say anything but just looked at the projector that was playing what looked a lot like a TV show of some kind. Except it was clearly one made after the system arrived, making Jake look at it with interest. It was a show about a tailor struggling with finding enough materials because a merchant union had recently moved in and increased the prices, but oh wait, a new shop just opened up on the street with a blacksmith who refuses to back down to the evil merchant's demands...

"You look like it's your first time watching a TV show," his Dad commented.

"It is my first time watching one produced after the system... not gonna lie, I didn't even know it was a thing," Jake readily admitted. Then again, all Paths were viable, so maybe stuff like this was too... though he had a hard time seeing how one could take acting to a particularly high grade. Like, what would the difference between a D-grade and a B-grade actor really be? Straight-up polymorphing into other people? That seemed more shapeshifter-y, though...

"There aren't that many, but some people are trying to bring back a feeling of normalcy, and producing things like these is part of that," his mom added. "Not to say there isn't an entertainment industry, they just don't really do produced shows like this. A lot are recording and showing off spars, hunts, or creating lessons in certain professions and selling those."

"Interesting," Jake said. Recordings like these were pretty easy to make, and many were freely sold back in the Order, but most of the time it was done with the purpose of teaching and not entertainment. Sure, the teachers who were also entertaining were the ones who did best, but the primary objective was still to impart knowledge.

As Jake was watching the show, Maja, Caleb, and Adam finally arrived. He looked toward the door just before they knocked, and his mom got up with a smile. "You two just stay here while I go let them in."

"Alright," Jake nodded, his Dad just letting out a low grunt.

In the entrance area, he saw Debra open the door as he heard them greet each other. It was pretty clear that they visited often, which really wasn't a surprise considering they were neighbors.

The four of them quickly made their way toward the living room, and Jake felt nervous but tried to look as non-intimidating and normal as he could. The first one to come into the living room was Maja, who smiled brightly when she saw Jake.

"Jake, so good to finally see you again!" she said as Jake got up and she came over for a light hug before pulling away. "It has been years! You really need to visit more often; I'm getting tired of hearing about your exploits second-hand from Caleb."

"I know, I know," Jake said apologetically as he looked over her shoulder and saw the three others enter. Caleb looked... calm. A lot calmer than he had in the get-together of all the people who placed on the Leaderboards. While he hadn't really shown it much, Jake could really see now how tense he had been then, and it was great to see him more relaxed.

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Finally, he laid eyes on the newest addition to their family – at least if one talked about the humans in it. Adam looked as one would expect of a kid, and he stared at Jake with big eyes. He really reminded Jake of when Caleb was young.

"This is Uncle Jake," Maja said as she introduced Jake to his nephew. Caleb helped by pushing the little guy forward.

"Hey there," Jake said with a smile as he squatted down.

The kid stared at him for a moment, as Jake felt a bit uncomfortable but tried to not let it show. After what felt like forever, Adam finally spoke:

"Your eyes are weird."

"Adam, that's not nice," Maja said in a scolding tone, as Jake just chuckled and shook his head.

"My eyes are weird, aren't they?" Jake just confirmed. "Why, don't you like them?"

"They're cool..." he muttered shyly, much to the relief of Jake.

Jake didn't really know how to deal with kids. It wasn't that he particularly disliked kids, only when they were annoying or disruptive; he just didn't really know how to act around them. It didn't help that he had zero experience with kids of any age. The system had surely also changed things, as based on what his mom had briefly mentioned before he

went to grab some more normal clothes, kids seemed a lot smarter these days. Adam had been able to speak a lot earlier than usual, as an example, though physically he didn't seem older than Jake would expect. The source of this content is

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"You might not remember Uncle Jake as he was away just like Dad, but he visited when you were little," Maja said as she walked over to Adam.

Adam seemed interested in that as he stared up at Jake. "Does that mean you're super strong like Dad?"

Jake was a bit taken aback as he smiled. "I'm the strongest."

"Even stronger than Dad?" Adam asked with wide eyes.

Caleb's gaze bore into Jake as he stared at him with eyes that looked like they could kill, making Jake consider his answer carefully. "Your Dad and I don't fight, but we're both super strong. Strong people like us shouldn't fight without a good reason, right?"

That answer seemed to satisfy Adam's curiosity, as Caleb also threw Jake a thankful look. Jake got it. Flexing in front of his son would be a bit too much, and what kid didn't want to believe that their Dad was the strongest in the world?

Anyway, with that, the introduction Jake had been so nervous about was over, with the kid seemingly not caring overly much the second his grandma brought out some treats. It was almost anticlimactic, but honestly... kids were probably a lot simpler than Jake believed, they were definitely easily distracted.

Standing next to Caleb, he saw his brother with a content smile on his face as Jake sent him a telepathic message. *"How are you holding up?"*

Caleb threw him a look as he hid a sigh. *"It's been hard. I missed more than three of his most important years being away in Nevermore. What's more, for me, fifty passed... it's like I've been away an entire lifetime. It will take a bit to adapt before I really feel like I'm back. Adam will also need some time. I... I'm not even sure he recognized me when I walked through the door after I returned."*

Jake put a hand on Caleb's shoulder as he gave it a light squeeze of encouragement. He wasn't going to pretend to understand how Caleb felt. To be away from your kid for so long had to be hard for both parties, and no one could pretend fifty years was a short time, even if Caleb could live for thousands at the very least as a C-grade. One had to remember all of them were still very young in a multiversal context, and he was pretty sure Caleb had spent less time than Jake in time-dilation, meaning Nevermore had more likely than not been more than half of Caleb's entire life.

His brother threw him a thankful look, and the two of them just stood there and watched Adam talking with their mother as Maja unpacked a bag with some toys in it. Meanwhile, Jake and Caleb's Dad looked at the projection of the TV show with one eye while keeping an eye on Adam with the other.

If one took a snapshot of this scene, they could almost be confused for an entirely normal family.

*Maybe visiting home once in a while isn't all that bad...*

The Sword Saint had done much to divest himself from being involved in the internal politics of the Noboru Clan. He had put distance between them, but no matter what he did, they still recognized him as their Patriarch, and he realized there was nothing he could do about that and simply accepted the role. With that, he needed to, at the very least, understand the situation of the clan, if not for anything else but his role as a member of the World Council.

Upon his return from Nevermore, he was naturally swarmed by people who wanted to know of his exploits, and to update him on the happenings of the planet over the last few years. Something he gladly accepted, as he heard all that had happened during his absence, and it genuinely surprised him.

He had half-expected *something* major to happen during this time, but everything had just been calm. What happened instead was the rapid expansion of all human settlements, the development of technology, and the growth of the overall power of the planet. All the assistance their small rock floating through space received due to Jake was overwhelming, and while most of it was centralized in and around Haven, the Noboru Clan also benefitted greatly, as it was well-known the Sword Saint was a comrade of the Chosen, and also someone carrying the Divine Blessing of Aeon, making him a person of interest in his own right.

The clan did have one issue, though.

Vampires.

In the multiverse, they were not a very popular race, and the Sword Saint understood why. The clan had been forced to set up an entire system to allow the vampires to exist there, and donations of blood were a requirement.

One had to remember the massive downside of vampirism after Sanguine died, requiring them to consume life energy in the form of blood to regenerate their health. They had no other ways to truly regenerate it, and things like healing spells could only temporarily help. To make matters more complicated, the most effective blood was that of the race they turned into a vampire from, or at least a similar one. In other words, others of the enlightened races.

Ah, and then there was the problem of vampires entering a blood frenzy if starved for too long or injured badly. All in all, vampires were an incredibly problematic race, and that was before one considered the fact that the Risen, Holy Church, and a few other factions openly had kill orders out on any vampire, wanting to wipe the race from the multiverse.

The Sword Saint was fully aware that the only reason they were accepted in any way on Earth was because of Jake and his identity as the Chosen of the Malefic Viper. The Order of the Malefic Viper was the only large faction that officially had vampires in it, and that was only possible because of the Primordial at the helm. The open support for vampires displayed was also apparent, especially after the Order had even been so bold as to bring a vampire to the post-Nevermore political meetings. For the Viper's Chosen to also be accepting of vampires was only to be expected; thus, no one dared openly bother the clan.

Miyamoto also had to admit that vampires were powerful. For their level, they tended to be superior to humans in combat. This primarily stemmed from them only having either a class or a profession, and most of the vampires went with a class. Combined with their racial skills and the often-seen high level of synergy between their class and race, their high combat prowess shouldn't be that surprising.

While sitting in his own courtyard meditating, the Sword Saint was interrupted as a person approached his residence. Opening his eyes, he waved his hand as the gates swung open, revealing a familiar face. It was one of his many grandchildren and one of those who had chosen to embrace vampirism.

"You looked disturbed," the Sword Saint asked when he saw the look on his face.

"Greetings, Patriarch," his grandson bowed. "I apologize for the disturbance; however—"

He proceeded to explain that he had recently taken part in an attempted raid on a frost wyvern and how it had ended in their utter failure. But, the most important part came at the end, as he explained the cause for urgency:

"The life tokens of those frozen are still intact, meaning the wyvern must have captured them. This may be presumptuous, but we have none capable of fighting this beast, so if the Patriarch would—"

"Very well," the Sword Saint agreed as he stood up, understanding the concern. "I shall head out immediately."

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## Chapter 906: All Good Things Must Come To An End

Miyamoto felt the cold winds sweeping across his body as he trekked up the mountain. Many of the ice elementals noticed him, but none approached as he soon reached the summit where this powerful beast known as the Northpeak Wyvern should reside.

Admittedly, an environment like this was far from favorable to him, as his water affinity was severely weakened due to the cold, but he was still confident. Its level more or less matched him, and while the vampire raid team described the wyvern as powerful, the mere fact any of them managed to return alive and that they could injure the beast was proof that it shouldn't be a threat to him.

As described, he found the cavern atop the mountain, and within, he felt the presence of a monster. The last update he got before he headed off from Haven said that the captured vampires were still alive, but he feared things may have changed as he only felt the presence of a single living being within.

If it was so, the least he could do was enact vengeance. The Prima Response Team, as the people in charge of preparing for the Prima Guardian's arrival called themselves, had designated this wyvern too dangerous to leave alive anyway, so someone would have to slay it anyway. May as well be him.

Walking through the cavern, he was ready should it attack with a breath, as he had been informed the wyvern was extraordinarily aggressive and impossible to talk to, and the design of the cave made it a perfect choke point to-

**"Excuse me, can I help you with anything?"** a voice echoed through the cave as the Sword Saint stopped and frowned. The tone did not carry the level of arrogance he had expected, but he wasn't going to let his guard down.

He responded as he infused his voice with energy. **"I hope for your sake you can. A group of vampires recently fought you here, and I believe a number of them were captured alive."**

**"That... that was all a misunderstanding that has been rectified,"** the wyvern responded in a meek tone, making the Sword Saint frown even more. Usually, the data provided by members of his clan was extremely accurate, but the current situation certainly wasn't in line with his expectations. Had he somehow gotten the wrong mountain? No... no, that wouldn't make any sense.

**"I question your claims, but please enlighten me as to the nature of your rectification,"** he responded, not far from his goal.

**"It's... fine if you come to the big cavern to talk..."**

Continuing through the cave, he soon reached the inner cave, where he saw the large wyvern nested in the middle. He was ready to draw his sword but felt no aggression as he got a nervous impression from the wyvern.

“Gre... greetings,” the wyvern said, seemingly trying really hard to be polite.

The Sword Saint didn’t respond immediately but scanned the room and saw no immediate signs of any trapped vampires. “What happened to the vampires you captured?”

“They left,” the wyvern responded quickly. “I, eh, I let them go, and they left a few days ago...”

Narrowing his eyes, Miyamoto placed one hand on the handle of his sword. “And why would you just let them go?”

“I saw the error of my ways?” the wyvern responded before seemingly nodding to itself as if to confirm the answer.

“Do excuse me if I question the validity of any creature changing their entire manner of acting so abruptly,” the Sword Saint said skeptically as he looked directly at the wyvern. “Unless there is more than one Northpeak Wyvern, you are known for attacking indiscriminately any who dares set foot atop this mountain, and you mean to tell me that has suddenly changed within a couple of days?”

“Yes?” the wyvern responded, staring unblinkingly at the Sword Saint. “I, eh... learned my lesson and will no longer be a menace, but always talk first and not just attack.”

“Forgive me for my continued skepticism, but what was the impetus for this change?”

“Impetus?” the wyvern asked, seemingly not understanding what the word meant.

“Reason. Cause. What event caused you to have such a sudden shift in behavior?” the Sword Saint elaborated. He hoped the wyvern had a satisfactory answer; if not, he wasn’t averse to doing what he originally came to this mountain to do, even if the wyvern claimed it had suddenly wisened up, as everything could easily just be a ruse to avoid powerful people actually slaying it. It would need a really good rea-

“The Chosen of the Malefic Viper visited, and-”

*Yeah, alright, that’ll do it.*

--

More than two weeks passed, with Jake doing almost fuck-all in the progress department. Instead, he spent all this time just relaxing with his family, doing a variety of



activities. He watched pretty bad TV shows with his dad, went shopping with his mom, and talked with Maja while playing with Adam.

Caleb sadly still had to do a lot of work, but he tried to be home as much as possible. Alas, he was still the Judge of the Court of Shadows, and he had certain responsibilities he simply couldn't divvy out no matter how much he wanted to. Jake was sure happy he had managed to outsource all his responsibilities.

A lot of people would probably say Jake was wasting his time just relaxing with his family. He barely did any alchemy, only when Adam was sleeping – yes, children still had to sleep – or when everyone else was preoccupied. When he did do a bit of alchemy, he only ever made some potions and stuff, never focusing that much on the task.

Even so, Jake didn't regret this time in the slightest. He wasn't in some extreme rush to optimize every single second of his day, and in some ways, he even felt like a moment of downtime like this would be healthy for him in the long run, even from a progress perspective.

This time around, Jake didn't help Caleb with any kind of presence-resistance training either. Partly because Caleb didn't want to go with Jake and do it, taking them both away from spending quality family time. Jake wasn't complaining either, as he was totally fine, not helping train shadow assassins and learning all about what kids Adam's age played with after the system arrived.

Things had definitely changed for parents and nearly all for the better. Things like sickness weren't really a thing anymore, and many of the usual woes of children were no longer a factor. Kids were also a lot more durable. Adam could climb a dozen meters up into a tree and just jump down without any issues, and while he was still pretty damn clumsy, he wasn't ever really hurt, even when he tripped and tumbled down a grassy hill. Instead, he asked to go again.

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It definitely took a bit of getting used to. If Adam did end up injuring himself somehow, a simple healing spell or potion could also instantly fix the problem. Still, Maja was very protective at times. As an example, she rejected Jake and Caleb's idea of putting Adam in a ball of stable arcane mana and throwing it around up in the sky, no matter how much the three of them begged her to let them.

They ended up doing it anyway but got quite a scolding afterward, even if Adam had a great time.

He didn't speak to Villy at all during this time either but disconnected as much as he could from that entire part of his life. It was a nice reprieve for sure, and he had formed

some good memories. Hopefully, he had also given Adam some positive memories of his cool uncle.

Alas, all things have to come to an end. One day, when he was sitting with Adam playing with stable arcane mana constructs, Jake making whatever shape Adam wanted to see, he got the message he knew would eventually come.

It even happened a bit later than Jake expected, not that Jake was in any way complaining about that. During his entire visit, he had just been waiting for Sandy to contact him for them to begin their own little adventure. He had expected this to only take a few days, but as mentioned, it ended up taking more than two weeks, with Arnold definitely getting a lot of good data from the giant space worm.

In fact, from the sounds of it, when Jake talked to the worm later, Sandy only left because the scientist had run out of snacks the worm's dietitian approved of. While the dietitian couldn't go out of Sandy's stomach, he could check through the things Sandy ate and make the giant space worm spit out whatever wasn't part of the meal plan.

According to Sandy, even if the worm had left before the scientist would have liked, Arnold had been quite happy and talked about how he could combine the data provided by Sandy with what he had gathered from the spaceship Jake had been gifted during his Chosen Ceremony and what he already knew from researching the ruined ship he purchased during the Treasure Hunt auction.

Jake was already looking forward to what kind of spacecrafts he would make, though it did sound like he was primarily working on improving his satellites before making any ships designed for travel. Plus, knowing Arnold, he would definitely want to do a lot of testing first to make sure he got things right the first time.

Finally... Jake already had a living spaceship available by the name of Sandy.

*"I'm wriggling to you now,"* Sandy had sent to Jake as they headed off from Haven, which also marked the end of his family visit. *"Should be there in a jiffy."*

*"Are you sure wriggling is the right term? Not flying or teleporting?"* Jake asked semi-jokingly.

*"I'm the expert here, and the correct term is wriggling. What else would it be? I am wriggling, after all,"* Sandy responded, leaving little room for discussion.

*"Alright, alright... I'll be waiting,"* Jake said as he looked at his family, who had noticed his change in demeanor. They had just eaten dinner, and everyone sat in the lounging area on sofas, just talking.

"It's time for you to head off?" Caleb asked, having realized pretty quickly.

“Yeah,” Jake nodded with a sigh.

“Jake is leaving?” Adam asked, confused.

“Sorry buddy, adventure calls,” Jake smiled as he ruffled the little guy’s hair.

“Where are you going?” his nephew kept asking.

Jake flashed a big smile as he pointed upwards. “To the moon.”

Adam’s eyes opened wide in amazement as Jake’s mom scolded him. “You shouldn’t just make up stories like that.”

“I’m serious,” Jake responded with a deadpan look. “I’m literally going to the moon.”

“Are you going on a rocket ship?” Adam asked, incredibly invested.

“No, something even better,” Jake said. “A big space worm.”

Jake’s mom once more threw him a look, but the gaze he returned made it clear he also wasn’t joking with this one, making Jake’s dad chuckle. Adam looked a bit skeptical, though, making Jake shake his head.

“You don’t believe me?”

Adam didn’t answer but looked at his mom as if he expected Maja to confirm if Jake was telling the truth.

“Well, if you don’t believe me, I won’t let you meet the big space worm,” Jake said, acting offended as he crossed his arms.

“I wanna see...” Adam muttered, Jake taking the victory. It was not like he had much of a choice because if he knew Sandy, the worm would have absolutely no sense of caution or forethought with how they would approach Jake. He was also sure Sandy would indeed arrive fast and have no issues finding him.

One had to remember that Jake carried around a weird rock-egg-thing Sandy had given him, which was apparently the result of the skill Sandy had gained upon receiving the True Blessing of the Boundless Hydra, better known as the Lord Protector of the Order of the Malefic Viper, and even better known as Snappy.

This weird item allowed Sandy to always be aware of where Jake was by tracking that odd item.

As Jake predicted, it didn’t take long before Sandy arrived in an as chaotic manner as Jake expected. With little warning, a hundred-meter-long giant space worm fell from the

sky, landing right in the middle of the road outside, barely missing any of the houses, though definitely doing plenty of damage to the pavement.

Jake's parents, along with Maja, were shocked as Adam ran outside the house and saw the giant mass of wiggling flesh.

"Big worm!" Adam yelled as he ran forward, Maja going to grab him as they all exited the house.

*"Hello, little human! And other humans that are also little, but not as little!"* Sandy said in a cheerful tone. *"Also, did I stick that landing or not, eh?"*

"I am indeed surprised you didn't break anything. Well, break more than you did," Jake said as he walked forward and introduced the worm. "This is Sandy, everyone. A friend of mine and my travel companion for my upcoming adventure."

*"More than a travel companion! I am the very mode of transportation itself!"* Sandy said proudly.

"Are you gonna ride the big worm?" Adam asked with amazement.

"In a way?" Jake said.

*"I'm gonna eat him,"* Sandy said.

"That's not nice," Adam accurately pointed out.

*"It is if you have permission, and sometimes even if you don't have permission. Just ask Tom,"* Sandy responded to the accusations of non-niceness.

"Who's Tom?" Adam asked, a bit confused.

*"Tom is Tom,"* Sandy refused to elaborate. *"Now, you ready to head off?"*

"Yeah, I'm good to go," Jake nodded as Maja picked up Adam, and Jake turned to his family. "It's been fun, and thanks for having me?"

"You remembered the token, right?" his mom asked in a concerned tone.

Jake flashed the communication token and nodded, the item allowing him to call them or them to call him. It was pretty much a magic telephone and even had video calls in the form of being able to project images.

"Take care of yourself," Jake's dad said as Caleb gave him a nod.

Finally, Jake said his goodbyes to Adam as he saw the kid was sad he was leaving. While it did suck Jake made him sad by leaving, it did make him a bit lucky his nephew at least cared he left.

"I'll bring you a moon rock; what do you say?" Jake said to Adam.

"Really?" he asked. "A big one?"

"The biggest one your mom and dad will allow," Jake grinned.

"Okay!" Adam said happily as Maja gave Jake a thankful look.

Going over to Sandy, the giant worm floated into the air.

"See you, everyone," Jake said as the worm opened its mouth and sucked him in.

*"Bye, humans related to Jake!"* Sandy said as they turned toward the sky, wriggling, and propelled themselves forward with a final battlecry that no one had any idea how Sandy learned.

*"To infinity and beyond!"*

As they watched Jake fly off into the sky, Caleb stood staring up with his wife alongside his parents. They saw the two of them disappear into the sky, as Robert commented: Official source is [novel-fire.net](http://novel-fire.net)

"What an odd creature, I wonder how Jake even met and made friends with it."

"Oh yeah, you might not know this, but that worm is the Chosen of the Boundless Hydra and probably one of the creatures with the highest status on the planet, definitely surpassing me," Caleb added.

The others remained quiet as they let it sink in, Debra finally commenting.

"It was a very polite giant space worm, though. Or maybe all space worms are just like that."

"Can't say I would know; I am not familiar with that many space worms," Caleb readily admitted.

"I just hope everything goes well... I don't think anyone has ever been to the moon after the system arrived," Maja commented.

"I'm sure he'll be fine," Caleb said. Genuinely, he was more concerned about the moon and whatever unfortunate creatures lived there than Jake.

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## Chapter 907: To The Moon!

Who hadn't, at one point or another, dreamed of visiting the moon? Or maybe Jake was just weird, but he sure had wanted to at least try going there at least once. To see the world from an entirely new perspective, and, more important of all, finally confirm that Earth wasn't flat like a pancake.

Setting off from Skyggen with Sandy, Jake was naturally eaten and entered one of the space worm's many stomachs. At this point, Jake had no idea how many Sandy had, but he was sure he would figure that out eventually, as he expected the two of them to spend quite a lot of time traveling together over the next months.

Looking around the stomach he had entered, it was more just one large room. The floors were rock-like, with the walls also reminiscent of being inside of a cave, and the rectangular shape made it hard to imagine he was currently inside of a creature.

Inside this room, he spotted a bunch of furniture as the place was set up like an apartment, and when he looked toward the end of the rectangle, he even saw a sealed-off glass cube with a lot of familiar instruments and tools within.

"Is... this an alchemy lab?" Jake said with raised eyebrows.

*"Yep, had some people from the Order set it up," Sandy responded quickly. "Plus, even if you do poison stuff, it won't be annoying anymore as it's sealed within the cube, and I added special ventilation!"*

"Do I want to know how you exhaust these toxic fumes?" Jake joked.

*"Why would I exhaust them? I put them in another stomach where the fumes are absorbed by some toxin-absorbant materials to help them grow,"* Sandy responded as if Jake was being an idiot.

"I see," Jake muttered, sad his fart joke had failed, as he instead turned his attention elsewhere.

One of the walls of the room displayed not just a wall but was entirely see-through so Jake could observe the outside world. Sandy had even placed windows elsewhere, making it seem as if Jake was flying within a big worm-shaped plane. Of course, Jake knew it wasn't as if these were actually windows. They were more just screens displaying the outside.

As he looked out, he saw they quickly flew into the sky with speed surpassing anything Jake could do. It actually wasn't that much faster than he was if he continually used One Step, though, but he knew this was far from Sandy's top speed. Just going by how fast the worm had traveled from Haven to Skyggen, he knew the worm's top speed was absolutely insane.

The reason Sandy didn't go full throttle right now was likely due to the way the sky worked. The atmosphere around Earth, and the sky in general, had several layers to it, and traveling through them haphazardly could get quite dangerous. Especially the outer layers of the atmosphere.

B-grade was recognized as the grade in which one could begin to explore space, and that wasn't only because that was when one rarely could find worthy foes on their home planets, but because that was often when one became able to even enter other planets safely.

Surviving in space wasn't that hard at all, and even D-grades could exist there. Sure, they would have to exhaust energy to protect themselves from the cold and the semi-vacuum of space, but it wasn't that bad at all. It was more akin to just being pretty deep underwater. Granted, there were a lot of threats that could kill one out there, such as rampant blasts of energy just flying across the cosmos or small meteors striking you, but technically, one could live in space. It wasn't recommended, but theoretically possible.

Thing is... you would be kind of stuck there unless someone helped you get back to a planet or you chose to settle down on a large space rock without any proper atmosphere. Going to a place like Earth was out of the question, and Earth wasn't even a massive planet by multiversal standards.

Jake, even with his current level of power, would have to go all-out if he wanted to reenter Earth again without the assistance of Sandy, with the atmosphere effectively creating a natural barrier protecting the planet from threats. Exiting was quite a lot easier than entering, but even that was pretty hard. Arnold had only managed to send out satellites and whatnot by coating them in special metals with high resistance to the concepts in the atmosphere, something Jake's body was definitely not made of.

Sandy was made of this kind of resistant material, though.

The space worm's thick skin seemed nearly unaffected, even as they entered the outer layers of the atmosphere. The dense energies and concepts that sought to tear apart anything they encountered washed over Sandy without any issues, and from inside the worm, Jake saw the grand vista that was Earth's atmosphere.

From below, it wasn't visible, but once inside, it was as if he was standing inside the northern lights. Waves of energy crashed everywhere, and whatever small rocks entered it were instantly torn apart. It was entirely different forces than before the



system that protected planets now, and Jake could only imagine how much stronger the natural defenses of a planet could get if one added their own barriers on top. If the core of the planet was used as a medium, one could perhaps even enhance certain concepts of this natural atmosphere...

Soon, Jake saw as they passed the final layer. The waves of energy dispersed, and all became still as there was nothing but the emptiness of space all around them. Jake couldn't feel the concepts outside, but he got the impression that there wasn't much to feel for either. Space was called a vacuum for a reason, and while there certainly still was a lot of mana, the density was incredibly unvaried. The further they got away from any celestial objects, the less mana there would also be, with certain sectors of space nearly entirely empty of anything at all, save for the bare minimum of space energy required to hold reality together.

*"So, are you ready? I will have to turn the lookout holes off when I jump into Sandy's Sand World,"* Sandy asked him.

"It isn't like I'll have to do anything, so sure, I'm ready," Jake smiled. "How long do you reckon it'll take to get there?"

Jake already had an estimate in mind. It had taken them over an hour to reach space, as Sandy couldn't go as fast in the upper layers as they wanted. Plus, Sandy had also clearly slowed down a lot and absorbed some energy here and there, while allowing Jake to take in the atmosphere. Traveling through empty space would definitely be faster, especially if Sandy's Sand World, as the big worm called it, was used.

Considering the distance from Earth to the moon was approximately thirty times the diameter of Earth and that proportions had been kept roughly the same, Jake reckoned it would take less than a week to get there, maybe even five or six days only if-

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*"Like half a day at most?"* Sandy responded.

"What?" Jake exclaimed. "Did you just say half a day?"

*"Oh, here we go, making fun of the worm for not being fast enough. I'm trying here, and before I reach B-grade, I can't go really fast, so it's kind of rude to bully me like this. Actually, maybe I should just spit you out here and now, and you can just fly yourself. Yeah, let's do that; let's see who's faster!"*

Jake allowed the worm to vent their frustrations until it reached a point where he was afraid of getting tossed out before he responded.

“No... I meant that it's faster than I expected,” Jake said in a calming tone. “From speaking to Arnold, the changes in space have resulted in pre-system space travel no longer being viable, as it's no longer considered a complete vacuum, making the constant accelerations not a thing anymore.”

At least, that was how Jake had understood what Arnold said. He didn't really know overly much about space travel, but he was pretty sure that traveling to the moon hadn't even taken a week before the system, despite the long distance. Jake would have been impressed if Sandy, as a barely mid-tier C-grade, could rival that with the changes to space travel.

So, seeing Sandy not just match it but be a lot faster was great. It boded well for what the giant space worm would be capable of in the future when it was time to truly explore space in B-grade.

*“Oh, you were praising me? In that case, ignore everything I just said and keep recognizing my awesomeness,”* Sandy said. *“Now get ready; we're about to enter the sand world.”*

“Ready,” Jake nodded. He wasn't sure what he was supposed to be ready for, though.

In the next instance, the windows to the outside world disappeared, and Jake felt the shift. Through his sphere that extended outside of Sandy, he saw everything warp. It was as if space contracted around Sandy before suddenly everything broke apart.

A headache instantly assaulted Jake as he took in the environment of the subspace. He saw reality itself stretch and contract in impossible ways as concepts such as distance became nothing more than relative terms. Despite the headache, Jake held on as he vaguely felt himself and Sandy move. Despite the odd changed space, Sandy still managed to wiggle forward, as if swimming through a world that simply didn't make any sense from Jake's perspective.

For a moment, Jake considered releasing a Pulse of Perception but thought twice about doing that unless he wanted to knock himself out. He was curious, true, but not curious enough to potentially deal soul damage to himself by overloading his brain. The chances of it happening were low but still too high to entertain his vanity.

Instead, he contracted his sphere to relieve his headache, pulled out his cauldron, and went into the alchemy bubble Sandy had created for him. Well, alright, that Sandy had people from the Order create for Jake, but it was the thought that counts.

Jake had a lot of profession levels to go before he would catch up to his class, and while half a day, or even half a year, wouldn't do much to close the gap, every little bit counted. Seeing as he was good on potions, Jake worked a bit on poisons, and the hours quickly passed as the trip to the moon, which Jake had expected to be a long endeavor was over before it had barely begun.

*"Alright, we're pretty close now,"* Sandy said after what had only been ten and a half hours.

"How do you even know we're close?" Jake questioned, as the outside world still didn't make any sense to him as he expanded his sphere back out a bit.

*"Because I'm smart."*

"Yeah, that doesn't really answer anything... like, what's the tell?" Jake kept pressing.

*"Alright, alright. You know how when you're swimming through the sand, all the sand looks identical, but if you get really close, no two pieces of sand are the same, and sometimes there's even other stuff mixed in, like small bones, stones, and whatnot?"*

"Sure, let's say I do," Jake just agreed.

*"Well, it's a bit like that. Big stuff is like bones and stuff within the sand, while space itself is like every little sand grain. It varies a bit, and when close to bigger stuff, like planets or the moon in this case, every grain is also a bit different. So, it's just about feeling for that. When I then know I'm close to where I wanna go, I wiggle out, and boom, I'm right at where I wanna be,"* Sandy explained in a very sandy way.

"I see," Jake nodded, as he was pretty sure he got it, at least partly, even if it still didn't make that much sense. It was honestly interesting how stuff like this worked. Sandy legitimately saw the world as filled with sand everywhere, and going into subspace like this was just diving into dense sand. Others could see the subspace entirely differently, maybe like being underwater, a dark void, a beam of light, or nearly anything else.

The result was the same, though. This conceptual understanding also explained how Sandy would get faster and better at locating stuff in the real world with time and levels. Speed would simply be how fast Sandy could swim through the sand, while the worm naturally also got better at sensing their environment, same as when they were a sand worm. This chapter is updated by **novel~fire~net**

*"Alright, here we go..."* Sandy said as the world shifted once more, and Jake instantly knew they had returned to regular space. Expanding his sphere fully, he quickly confirmed this was indeed the case. A few moments later, the windows also reappeared as Jake looked outside.

Jake had to admit... space was pretty. It didn't interest him as much as the celestial object below him, though. They were still floating a good distance above it, outside of the thin atmosphere of the moon. Or, wait, what had Arnold called it... an exosphere? Not quite an atmosphere, but something that strived to be one.

"Can you let me out?" Jake asked. "I assume whatever natural barrier protects the moon won't pose a problem."

*“Yeah, it’s super weak,”* Sandy agreed as Jake felt himself be sucked out of the stomach and he appeared in space.

The shock of the sudden transition was a bit disorientating, especially as he went from somewhere with a nice environment to the cold emptiness of space. However, he quickly adapted, his body more than powerful enough to float in space without any issues.

Being outside, he would also finally make full use of his Perception as he laid eyes on the moon below, and, from the get-go things were looking pretty positive as he spotted a creature shuffling around on the surface.

### **[Lunar Elemental - 258]**

Jake reckoned this elemental was some variant of earth elementals infused with lunar energies. Not lucenti energies, mind you. The lucenti affinity was moonlight, a mix between the moon – or lunar – affinity, as well as the light affinity. Meanwhile, this elemental was just pure moon rock.

*“You feel any natural treasures?”* Jake asked. Should he be surprised he could speak normally in space? Maybe, but he really wasn’t.

*“Hm, a few, but nothing major. At least not on the surface. I do get some responses from inside, though, but they’re oddly hard to sense. Oh, and on the other side of this thing, I also feel a higher energy level there,”* Sandy answered, making Jake smile.

*“It’s only fitting the dark side of the moon is the most dangerous and interesting part of it.”*

In reality, it shouldn’t really be called the dark side, though. Arnold had referred to it as the far side of the moon, as while only one face of the moon ever pointed toward Earth, due to its orbit, the moon did have a day and night cycle, and all parts of the celestial object received sunlight at one point or another during its orbit around Earth.

This remained true even after the system arrived, though it did look like the far side had a higher energy density than Earth. Why this was, Jake naturally wasn’t sure, but he looked forward to finding out as he and Sandy quickly reached an agreement.

*“Only losers stay on the light side of the moon,”* the space worm said.

*“Well, I sure ain’t a loser,”* Jake smirked. He and Sandy began flying above the moon as they headed for the big space rock’s dark – or far – side, Jake hoping to find something worth hunting, while Sandy wanted to find something worth eating. Below, he kept an eye on everything that moved but, so far, had only spotted elementals, which was a bit of a bummer.

However, soon something changed.

Jake felt a shiver run down his back as he rapidly shifted his gaze and peered over the horizon. He felt something staring back at him, but it disappeared before he could see what it was. Nevertheless, his eyes opened wide as he felt the unquestionable presence of something he had never expected to feel so soon after returning to Earth.

*B-grade.*

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## Chapter 908: Dark(?) Side Of The Moon

Jake truthfully had never expected to encounter a B-grade on the moon. Further away from Earth around Jupiter or something? Maybe, but not so close to Earth that it was practically within striking distance. It didn't make much sense to him either how a B-grade had appeared on the moon of all places.

He was ninety-nine point nine percent certain there wasn't a single B-grade on Earth. The World Council had spent years hunting down or making contact with all sorts of beasts, and Arnold had sent drones out scouting to scan much of the underground world, with satellites covering much of what was above ground.

More than that, though... Jake didn't feel like there were any B-grades, and if he trusted one thing, it was his own intuition.

By all accounts, the moon was far more barren and less energy-dense, but it did have some things going for it. Due to the thin exosphere, it got a lot of energy from space, and generally, high-level concepts tended to propagate as many of the usual ones, like wind, water, and nature, weren't anywhere to be seen.

However, even with all of these, Jake only really had one good theory of how a B-grade had appeared, one he quickly shared with Sandy.

"I detected a-

*"B-grade," Sandy quickly said. "I felt it, too. It's gone now, though, and considering the fact we're still flying in the direction that we saw it and how we can't see it yet, I would guess it went underground."*

“Right,” Jake agreed. “Just to make sure, you also think it’s odd that there is a B-grade here, right?”

*“A bit,” Sandy said. “Not that much, though. This moon is large enough to have a pretty powerful core but not large enough to have a fully formed Planetary Core, so it’s probably unprotected and open to exploitation. So, if any creature managed to take advantage, that would explain it. The creature would have to be a rather specialized one, though. So my guess is that this B-grade is the one who controls the core, or at least found some way to siphon its energy.”*

Jake was surprised at Sandy’s insight, though he probably shouldn’t be. The worm had spent a good while in the Order studying under S-grades and even gods based on what he’d heard, and being a creature predominately made for space exploration, it made sense Sandy knew a lot about space and what one might find there.

“Would it be an issue if a creature is siphoning the energy from this moon core?” Jake questioned.

*“Big depends on that one, as it’s entirely up to the method, and there isn’t really any way of knowing unless we go check more closely. Something I would definitely not recommend doing. Better to stay on the surface and the upper layers of the crust, as diving too deep might provoke it and make it think we’re trying to contest the core. I say that, but I’m just guessing, so don’t blame me if we get attacked the second we get too close to the moon,”* Sandy explained.

“Yeah, let’s stick topside for now,” Jake agreed. Even if he maybe wanted to give the B-grade a shot, he wasn’t in a rush. Besides: “I didn’t feel any hostility when it spotted us, so I don’t think it will attack us out of nowhere. However, if it does, how confident are you in escaping?”

*“I’m gonna be fine no matter what,”* Sandy said in a casual tone. *“Better worry about yourself.”*

“Sure, sure,” Jake smiled. Even if the worm was a tad overconfident, that confidence was well-earned.

The two of them kept flying for a good while, and soon, they reached further onto the dark side of the moon, which was actually pretty well-illuminated right now as it was daytime. Not that the time of day mattered much to Jake and Sandy. Sandy didn’t have eyes, so they didn’t care about light, and Jake had too high Perception to let something like bad lighting or even total darkness bother him.

As they traveled, Jake kept an eye on the surface and every one of the many holes he found leading into the moon. There were a lot of large craters everywhere, too, with some of them even having meteorites within. Around these meteorites, elementals tended to propagate, and Jake even began to see other variants of elementals.

No signs of any biological life yet, though. He wasn't sure if he should expect to see any, either. The chances of any kind of life appearing on the moon were incredibly small as it was just one big rock without any water or the conditions to facilitate-

*Is that a fucking tree?*

Jake's eyes opened wide, as far in the distance, above the horizon, he saw what looked like a treetop. Not some crystal tree or anything like that either, but what could be easily confused for a pine tree. Except for the color, as it wasn't green, but had more a very light blue color.

"Are you seeing what I'm seeing?" Jake asked Sandy.

*"I literally don't have eyes, so no, but I'm going to assume you mean the dense life energy in the distance,"* Sandy answered. *"Yeah, not going to lie, I wasn't expecting that either."*

With an incredibly confused expression on his face, Jake picked up speed as he flew even faster than before. All throughout their flight, Sandy had passively helped by creating what was almost a tunnel in space, making them travel faster than expected by making it more of a vacuum, thus removing much of the usual friction that would slow them down.

After some time, they finally got close enough for Jake to have a proper look, and he saw it wasn't just a single tree or even just a small gathering of trees. No, it was an entirely damn forest, and not a small one, either.

The further they got, the more forest they saw. Far below, Jake even saw the edge of the forest off to the side. Grass-like blue growths spread out to a certain point before it began to wilt and disappear. He also saw the curvature of how the grass grew, as he quickly understood that this forest was shaped like a circle, which had a pretty obvious implication.

"There is something at the core of this forest that caused the growth," Jake said in a confident tone.

*"Yeah, and I feel it,"* Sandy said. *"It's... big. Not of super-duper high quality, but very big."*

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Jake frowned as he wondered what it could be. An asteroid that had slammed into the moon filled with life-attuned energy? That did sound very sci-fi and very possible, if not probable. It could also just be that the system had decided to make a moon forest, but Jake doubted it.



As Jake was stuck in thought, something suddenly grabbed his attention below. Movement. With no wind, thus no swaying trees, any movement was notable, and after scanning more closely, he saw it. Between two trees, he could barely spot a creature moving about. It looked almost like a dog but had six limbs and a tail that was more than twice its entire body length, looking a lot like a whip.

Its entire body wasn't made of flesh and blood but a mix of vines, bark, and stone. Like the trees and grass, it had a blueish color, and some of the vines running through its body had a slight glow to them. The creature's entire body was around fifteen meters long, with the majority of that length coming from the tail. It moved rapidly through the land, and when Jake used Identify, he felt a tinge of excitement. The source of this content is *novel•fire•net*

### **[Lunewood Stalker – lvl 316]**

Whatever was going on here had led to the birth of some powerful creatures, as there was a good chance this random plant lifeform was at a higher level than nearly anything on Earth. As he kept scouting, he even noticed some more of them, proving this wasn't just a rare creature but a staple of this biome.

*"How big is the life-place?"* Sandy asked after a bit.

"I can't be sure," Jake shook his head. "But it's pretty fucking big. I would guess it covers nearly a third of this side of the moon based on what we've seen so far, and we're only in the outer edges of the forest."

*"You know, I pretty much expected the moon to just be a big rock with some elementals on it, so this is a pleasant surprise,"* Sandy said after a bit. *"A lot more fun than moons without anything on it. Which is the majority."*

"For sure, for sure," Jake nodded as he considered what their next move should be. They could keep flying deeper into the forest and aim for the center, or they could take a pitstop here in the outer area and get a better feel for the region. He had to remember that he wasn't on this little adventure alone, though.

"What do you think we should do?" he decided to ask Sandy. "Stay here for a bit, or keep moving inwards?"

*"I wouldn't say no to taste-test whatever Lifecore those weird plant creatures got,"* Sandy simply answered, which was enough for Jake as he smiled.

"Then let's see how tough they are," Jake said, pulling out his bow. Now, he did have the choice to shoot a Protean Arrow with all his usual bells and whistles, and chances are that would kill one of those Lunewood Stalkers outright, and even if it didn't, it would cripple the thing.

But, rather than do that, Jake wanted to learn more about these odd creatures, so he decided to go for a more prolonged approach. One that did still include a powerful opening attack, but he wouldn't use everything he had. Shit, to give the poor thing a chance, he wouldn't even do his opening attack from stealth.

Taking a second to summon one, he nocked a Penetrating Arrow. Jake took aim for a lone Lunewood Stalker as he made sure he had a free line of sight. Arcane Powershot charged for a few seconds before Jake let go of the string, and an arcane explosion erupted in the sky above the moon. Sandy had already retreated away to give Jake space to have his fun.

Below, the Lunewood Stalker reacted the second it noticed the incoming attack. The ground around it erupted as a barrier of stone and vines shot up in defense, proving Jake's decision to use a Penetrating Arrow the right choice as it pierced straight through and struck the creature, slamming it into the ground and sending a torrent of odd liquid flying up.

*It's not blood... but it seems to have a similar function. Interesting to see that in a plant-creature.*

Jake quickly shot another arrow, not giving the monster any more time to rest than he needed to. Besides, it quickly recovered and managed to avoid the second arrow, seemingly on accident, though it did struggle when a rain of exploding arrows descended upon it a moment later.

Nevertheless, it broke through as it shot upward toward Jake. He was flying just inside the exosphere of the moon, many, many kilometers up, but the creature displayed some impressive speed as Jake felt another affinity at play.

*Got some space magic in there, too, but seems to only be for movement.*

While it flew for Jake, he kept bombarding the creature with arrows, dealing significant damage to it as parts of it exploded off left and right. Root-wrapped stone bullets also shot up toward him, and with the moon's lower gravity, they easily made it all the way to him, even if he effortlessly dodged.

Jake smiled as the creature just tanked pretty much every arrow, as he had pretty high expectations of it... that's until he noticed something. He had just put blood on his arrows so as to not overdo it with the poison, and with the creature poisoned, he could feel its internals, and to put it bluntly...

*This is the shittiest late-tier C-grade I've ever seen.*

Before the Lunewood Stalker even fully reached Jake, its momentum stopped, and it began falling down toward the moon before getting blasted by an arrow sending it tumbling down, with Jake getting a notification.

***You have slain [Lunewood Stalker – lvl 316] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level***

*“Well, that was disappointing,” Sandy said as the worm appeared beside Jake. “I can also feel the Lifecore now, and I don’t even need anyone to tell me it sucks, though it does have an odd flavor to it. So, you good with me eating it, right?”*

“Sure,” Jake muttered as Sandy shot down, disappeared for a moment, and then reappeared to suck in the still-falling corpse of the Lunewood Stalker.

To say Jake was disappointed would be... pretty accurate, actually. It wasn’t as if he had super high expectations, but he still found the outcome worse than he thought it would be, even if he, after only one “fight,” understood why it was so weak.

The creature had no sapience at all. Shit, Jake wasn’t even sure it had enough to qualify as being called sentient. It had just charged toward him without making any defensive moves outside of trying to defend against the opening attack. It was full-aggro from the moment it noticed Jake till it died, in a death that didn’t accomplish anything.

A few moments later, Sandy reappeared beside him. *“Hey, Jake, I noticed something about the corpse.”*

“What is it?” Jake asked with interest.

*“You see this?”* Sandy said, spitting out what looked like a weird rock that he recognized as a Lifecore of sorts, though it looked... wrong. He tried to use Identify, but the answer didn’t really tell him anything of value.

**[Lunewood Meteorite Fragment (Uncommon)] – A small fragment of a Lunewood Meteorite. Contains a polluted form of life energy. Unknown alchemical uses.**

“Yeah, it looks thoroughly unimpressive, outside of the part about the polluted form of life energy, and that something being both wood and a meteorite at the same time doesn’t really make any sense,” Jake answered. At least he was pretty sure meteorites were made of rock and metals.

*“It’s from a wood meteor,”* Sandy said.

“I learned just now those are even a thing,” Jake muttered.

*“Oh, alright, fair, that explains a lot. Anyway, I heard about these. Pretty much, they are meteors made of wood and filled with life that slowly morphs and changes as it flies through space until they crash into anything big and then spread whatever form of life energy was inside. I didn’t really listen during the part where the lady talked about where they come from; all I know is that this is definitely what we got here,”* Sandy said.

"You learn something new every day, huh," Jake muttered as he looked more closely at the core. "But what do you mean by the "that explains a lot," part?"

*"Just that it explains why you're still so calm,"* Sandy answered.

"... do I have a reason not to be calm?"

*"Well, this Lunewood Stalker wasn't really its own thing, but more just one branch of a big ecosystem that's all connected, so when you kill one-"*

Below, Jake saw more movement than ever before as more than thirty Lunewood Stalkers shot out of the forest, charging straight at Jake.

*"- they all know and move to defend their territory and reclaim the meteorite fragment."*

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## Chapter 909: Lunewood Forest

*"Good luck, have fun!"* Sandy said before disappearing, leaving Jake with the Meteorite Fragment floating in front of him. He didn't even bother putting it in his inventory or anything as he quickly nocked an arrow and turned his attention to the many charging Lunewood Stalkers.

Seeing no need to hold back, Arcane Awakening even activated at the stable 30%. Jake felt his body brimming with power as he released the first arrow rain down upon the many charging creatures who were all roughly the same level as the first Stalker. Another thing they had in common with the first Lunewood Stalker was that they didn't even try to dodge but simply tanked the blow as parts of their bodies were torn off. However, with around thirty of them, this reckless strategy was far more viable, as Jake now also understood why the first one had acted as it did.

These creatures were indeed just one part of a whole. They were individual limbs of a greater lifeform and simply had no sense of self-preservation. For them to dodge would be the same as Jake making his arrows dodge the attacks of enemies... which he actually did pretty often by making them curve around, but that was beside the point and, at most, just a commentary on how the strategy of these Lunewood Stalkers could still be optimized.

The point is, individually, these Lunewood Stalkers weren't valuable and were just defenders of the forest and life domain they came from. Attacking recklessly like this

also tended to have a better chance of landing blows, as it would give the foe far less time to respond, even if the tradeoff was that you risked taking far more hits in return. The term “tended to” was used very deliberately in this case... as Jake just happened to be the exception to that rule, as few things ever had a good chance of landing blows, but less when they were as predictable as these Stalkers.

Arcane explosions lit up the skies above the moon, and Jake began to retreat as he kept shooting arrow after arrow. A constant barrage of attacks flew for him, forcing him to dodge all the time as the Lunewood Stalkers closed in ever-so-slowly. If Jake didn't have to dodge ranged attacks, he could have outrun them pretty easily, and if he abandoned attacking, he definitely still could, but retreat wasn't on the table. Not knowing how far they would chase, it was potentially even faster to just kill them all.

So, he upped his offenses and mixed in arcane bolts with his attacks, and before any of the stalkers even reached him, four were slain as their lifeless bodies fell toward the surface of the moon below... only for a giant space worm to swoop in and chomp them down before they could land, all while sending an encouraging message to Jake before disappearing again.

Right as the fifth one fell, the first Lunewood Stalker was also upon him. Jake dodged as the creature spun in mid-air, its tail whipping around as it cut through the, well, not air, but whatever existed within the thin exosphere of the moon.

After its initial attack missed, the Stalker tried to bite him with its thorn-filled mouth, as long vines erupted from all over its body, shooting forward to entangle Jake. Pulling out his katars, the vines were easily shredded as Jake closed in and landed a solid punch to the side of the Stalker's head. He wanted to continue and attack the core directly, but two more Stalkers arrived right at that moment, making Jake use One Step to teleport away and pull out his bow again.

A barrage of exploding arrows created some more space as Jake blasted himself backward. A heavily injured Lunewood Stalker shot after him, and Jake's eyes glowed for a moment as the creature flew past him, lifeless, as its already feeble and weak soul crumbled.

***You have slain [Lunewood Stalker – lvl 309] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level***

Turning around, he released an Arcane Powershot, blasting away another Stalker while taking off two of its legs as he used One Step again to dodge two tail swipes from even more of the annoying plant creatures. His sphere expanded slightly as he made sure to keep an eye on all of them, every single Lunewood Stalker also hit with a Hunter's Mark.

It wasn't that hard to keep track of them, though. They didn't attack with any strategy at all but just charged for him in a straight line. There weren't even any attempts to

surround or cut off his paths of retreat, making the fight far easier than it had any right to be.

One by one, he killed the Lunewood Stalkers, not taking any injuries himself. They simply weren't fast or strong enough to pose a real threat, and shortly, the final creature had its midsection exploded by an arrow as it fell dead toward the moon.

The entire fight hadn't even taken that long, as he methodically tore them apart. He also noticed that they seemed to grow a bit weaker the further they got away from the forest, just making things even easier.

Dispelling his boosting skill, Jake sighed as he hoped there would be better foes further inside the forest. While the levels of these Lunewood Stalkers were impressive, their power sure as hell was not. They were so weak that Jake doubted he even got any good experience from them. Disappointing was really the only emotion he felt toward them so far, and while they could offer the flavors of a horde battle if even more attacked him, Jake had always preferred singular powerful foes.

Oh well, at least Sandy had been eating well and made sure to snatch all of the corpses. The worm did spit them out again, though, only really caring about extracting those Lunewood Meteorite Fragments they all had. It effectively served as their cores, and during the fight, Jake noticed striking these cores did more damage than anywhere else, though he had been a bit afraid of accidentally breaking them.

*"We should probably hide a bit,"* Sandy said after the worm teleported back up to him.

"I don't think we have to," Jake said, as he didn't detect anyone or anything coming for them. He had deliberately made sure to retreat away from what he had chosen to dub the Lunewood Forest to test out the detection range of whatever lived there, and it seemed like this was enough. The fact distance from the forest also made the Stalkers weaker had just been a happy bonus.

*"Hm, does seem like we're outside of the domain where we can be detected,"* Sandy said. *"I would guess that the second we reenter the forest, all the Meteorite Fragments will instantly give us away, and another attack will arrive to try and reclaim them. I doubt hiding the fragments in my stomach will be enough either."*

"An attack should we enter does seem probable," Jake nodded in agreement. He didn't have that much confidence in his stealth skill either when it came to hiding the fragments. If Sandy wasn't confident, Jake sure as hell wasn't. He did have one thing he wanted to try, though. "Let's go down and land on the moon. I have one... no, two things I want to try."

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Sandy agreed as the two of them flew down with impressive speed. Jake did kind of like how he could travel a lot faster in space, even without subspace nonsense. He could simply fly a lot faster and even near-constantly accelerate to a far higher top speed. Even his One Step range was significantly longer.

Due to that, he soon reached the surface of the moon. Stopping just before he landed, Jake stood a few centimeters off the ground as Sandy looked at him, confused. Jake cleared his throat and raised a foot as he did something he had wanted to do ever since arriving on the moon.

"One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," Jake said with a stupid grin on his face as he stepped down on the moon's surface.

*"I don't get it,"* Sandy commented, confused. *"Also, wouldn't it be a man and not just man? Your grammar is off."*

"Just let me have this moment," Jake said, throwing a glance at Sandy.

*"Fine... actually, let me give it a try,"* the giant space worm sulked before seemingly getting an idea as they also floated down to be just a few meters off the surface.

*"One small wiggle for worm!"*

A big crash shook the local area as the giant worm crashed down.

*"One giant wiggle for wormkind!"*

Jake just stared at the worm as Sandy giggled. *"I kind of get it now; that was fun."*

"Stealing my moment," Jake muttered, as he decided to just move on to the actual reason he had wanted to touch down on the surface.

With his two awesome mythical boots solidly on the ground, their ability to detect natural earthbound treasures was activated... and it may just be because the moon was primarily rock, but he got a massive response. Closing his eyes to focus, Jake felt hundreds, no thousands of responses below the ground, and as he focused and infused even more power into his old leathery companions, he finally got enough reach to detect the center of the moon.

It was a massive response as he felt the core of the celestial object. Giving Planetary Cores rarities wouldn't really make much sense, but it was unquestionable they contained an absolutely ridiculous amount of power. What's more, they had the ability to produce mana, making them incredibly valuable and near-endless power sources. Jake couldn't feel if anything was siphoning power off the core, but he could feel it and confirm it definitely had enough juice to give birth to a B-grade.



The second largest response came from the direction of the Lunewood Forest, and it wasn't hard to guess this was the Wood Meteorite that Sandy talked about. The fragments of the meteorites within each Lunewood Stalker were about the size of a basketball, and based on the response, he felt that the true meteorite was far, far larger. He wouldn't necessarily say that the size of the fragments had to proportionally correlate with power, though, as if that was true, the meteorite would likely have contained more power than the planetary core.

*"You look like you've noticed something," Sandy said.*

"I more so just confirmed what we already theorized," Jake answered as he opened his eyes. "I think you are right on the money with that Wood Meteorite thing, and I want to go confirm for myself, but before that... do you want those Meteorite Fragments? As in, do you need them?"

*"No, not really," Sandy confessed. "They are too polluted with lunar and other celestial energies. It's a horrible mix that doesn't go well with anything else, which is what tends to happen with these things. The life energy will evolve with time as the Wood Meteor flies through space, undergoing a constant evolution as what may as well be an entirely new form of life affinity is born once all is said and done. Not quite an arcane affinity, as it isn't a cohesive fusion of concepts, but just an amalgamation that could theoretically be split apart by someone successfully talented or powerful enough."*

Jake nodded, once more impressed with Sandy's insights, as he asked: "In that case, can I have them? And would it be fine if I end up effectively destroying them?"

*"You can, but you do know that the moment one of them breaks, every single living being associated with the Lunewood Meteorite on this moon will know?" Sandy asked to make sure.*

"That's actually a very good point," Jake frowned as he reconsidered.

*"If you want to absorb the fragments or use the energies for something, I would suggest maybe seeing if it's possible to merge them together or perhaps to return them to the Lunewood Meteorite? That way, you can absorb or use everything at once," Sandy suggested.*

"Fair enough," Jake nodded along as he considered the plan he had begun to form in his mind. Sandy was correct that the life energy could indeed only be described as polluted. He had nothing to use it for alchemically, and the imbalance and the relative weakness of the Lunewood Stalkers compared to their level likely also had roots in the broken life affinity. In fact, the affinity contained way more raw power, hence the levels, than it had any right to. There was just no cohesion, leading to an ultimately shitty result.

“Say, what do people usually do when they notice a Wood Meteorite has crashed somewhere?” Jake asked.

*“You like to ask a lot of questions where the answer depends on a lot of things. If the meteorite crashed in your backyard, better to get rid of it right away, as the corrupted life energy will try to keep spreading as much as it can. If it’s crashed somewhere far away from anything else, some people like to study it, before then getting rid of the Wood Meteorite before it can affect a too large area or become too dangerous. A third group keeps them around and cultivates them, as they are really good at spawning monsters, and if you regulate the environment properly, you even have pretty good control of the level of monsters there and turn them into training grounds. Some environments created by Wood Meteors even end up spawning unique and actually useful herbs within, so people keep those around. But, in the vast majority of cases, the end result is that it’s best to destroy the Wood Meteorite and get rid of the domain,”* Sandy once more gave a lengthy explanation as Jake learned more neat space facts.

“So, if I say, want to eat the entire Wood Meteorite and kill the entire forest, there would be nothing wrong with it?” Jake asked.

*“I would respect such wise eating habits,”* Sandy said in a joking tone. *“But I’m not sure if you can fit that Wood Meteorite in your mouth, though, I think it’s pretty big.”*

“True, true,” Jake nodded. Even if he used Palate, he wasn’t sure he was able – or wanted – to eat it. But that wasn’t the only option. “I won’t be the one eating it, though. This bad boy will.”

Jake pulled out Eternal Hunger and tossed it up before catching it again. “Life energy is still life energy, and I’m sure this little one will enjoy it fully.”

That’s right, Jake’s idea was to get rid of this entire Lunewood Forest by absorbing it with Eternal Hunger. He even had a ritual in mind to do it and reckoned it would be a good way to get a few profession levels. Plus, based on what Sandy said, these kinds of Wood Meteorites could be problematic if left alone, so wasn’t he doing a good thing?

While he couldn’t confirm it, he wouldn’t be surprised if this Lunewood Forest was expanding and, with time, would cover the entire surface of the moon. So, better nip it in the bud before it could get that far.

*“Well, I wouldn’t say it’s a bad idea to get rid of the meteorite... though do still consider the presence of a B-grade. Pretty low chances the two of them aren’t connected in some way,”* Sandy pointed out.

“True,” Jake nodded. “I will have to scout out the forest properly to find out.”

*“In that case, I’ll hold unto these fragments in the meantime and go explore a bit myself. I don’t really care about anything in that forest; it all smells yucky anyway,”* Sandy said in a disgusted tone.

“Fair enough,” Jake nodded as he and Sandy prepared to split up. “You know where to find me, right? I’ll also throw a Mark on you in case things go south.”

*“Eh, if all else fails, I can just ask the Big Boss Hydra, or you can ask Big Boss Snake for help,”* Sandy said in a casual tone.

“Not sure it’s considered normal to consider your Patron a walkie-talkie,” Jake grinned.

*“I’m not,”* Sandy defended themselves. *“A walkie-talkie would be far more effective.”*

Shaking his head, Jake smiled. “In either case, see you around. I’m gonna go on a picnic inside the creepy polluted life forest filled with weird monsters that wanna kill me.”

*“And I’m gonna go try and eat stuff inside the moon.”*

Indeed, just another normal day in the life of a giant space worm and a human on adventure.

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## Chapter 910: Vipers & Hunters

It was quiet.

Too quiet.

No forest was meant to be like this in Jake’s opinion. There was no wind to rustle the leaves, no movements whatsoever anywhere to cause even the slightest song. No sign of any small wildlife hiding in the bushes or on top of the trees either, or the occasional sound of a bird chirping. It was just silence and stillness as if the forest was frozen over.

Jake walked through the blue forest as he took in the environment and felt just how corrupted the mana was all around him. No D-grade would be able to exist within the forest, and even weaker C-grades would find themselves negatively affected as the energy seeped into their bodies, corrupting them. Perhaps one would even turn into

some kind of Lunewood creature if one spent too long there. He would almost compare it to an area hit by nuclear fallout, and he could only begin to imagine the devastation a Wood Meteor could cause if it ever struck down on Earth and remained unattended.

Then again, Jake wasn't even sure a Wood Meteor would be able to enter Earth due to the powerful atmosphere. It definitely wouldn't if they also added some additional barriers to empower the planet's natural defenses, something he would need to talk to Miranda about doing when she was back from Nevermore. The thought that random objects from space like Wood Meteors existed that could fuck up a planet was definitely a newly unlocked fear for Jake.

Anyway, back to Jake, even without defending himself from the environment, he managed to remain unaffected as he made his way deeper and deeper into the forest under the cover of Unseen Hunter. He kept a lookout for any odd herbs or natural treasures born in the environment of the Lunewood Forest, but nothing really caught his eye, and what he did spot wasn't anything he had any interest in using. The entire place really was a shithole, and Jake got the feeling that this particular Wood Meteorite was uniquely horrible.

At the very least, the brief time he had spent inside the forest only further strengthened his desire to get rid of the Wood Meteorite for good. Also, wouldn't the moon just look too weird if it was filled with a blue forest? Yeah, it definitely would, so best to get rid of it before the forest could spread too far.

Getting deeper than ever, he spotted many more Lunewood Stalkers, all just doing... nothing. They looked like beasts but didn't at all act like them. They were lying down but not even doing the beast-version of meditation, nor did they move to hunt anything. It felt more like their movements were robotic and pre-programmed to set patrol patterns. Entirely unnatural. A lot of them also just stood still like statues, with the only movement visible their pulsating vines filled with life energy.

Luckily, this did help with Jake not getting detected even if he walked right up to one. He did consider trying to give a Stalker a poke but reckoned that wouldn't go well for him. Unless his definition of things going well was to fight another horde of Lunewood Stalkers, that is.

*Maybe later*, Jake told himself, as he kept running forward into the forest. Soon, he finally spotted something noteworthy: another creature.

It was a large monster standing on four legs, but not like a horse or dog would, but more like a spider. Its upper body was vaguely humanoid, as it had four arms, each holding wooden staves. It definitely gave off stronger vibes than the Stalkers, even if it was still a very low-tier creature.

Using Identify, he also confirmed its level was higher than most Stalkers, at least by a little.

## [Lunewood Keeper– lvl 322]

There was also one other difference between these creatures and the Stalkers. These Keepers actually moved around and did stuff, casting some form of magic on the ground all the time and tending to the trees and other plants. The name Keeper was very apt, but seeing that a part of their skillset was clearly reserved for tending to the Lunewood Forest, Jake guessed these would only be on the level of the Stalkers when it came to combat, even if they did feel overall stronger.

Ignoring the creatures and continuing, Jake only now seemed to realize what kind of exploration trip he had dedicated himself to. If his guess was right, and the Lunewood Forest covered a massive part of the far side of the moon, it wouldn't be fast to reach the center. It would take a few days, even if Jake hurried. Considering he also wanted to check out anything interesting he found on the way, it would likely end up taking an entire week.

Considering the long time he would just spend traveling...

*"Is this inferior version of a walkie-talkie working?"* Jake asked as he reached out to a certain snake god, who he was pretty sure had time. Despite Jake not reaching out as much, he knew Villy had an avatar or something watching at all times. Or, at the very least, he was aware of what Jake was doing, which should also mean he was free to take a call.

*"Oh, so he does still want to talk to me from time to time,"* Villy said in a mock-offended tone. *"I thought you had forgotten all about the snake god on your shoulder with how little you've reached out recently."*

*"In my defense, I blame this all on Nevermore. I spent fifty years being unable to contact you outside of a few city floors, and it takes a bit to get used to it again,"* Jake answered. *"Besides, I got another limbless, long-bodied companion I could ask about fun system trivia. It's just unlucky for you. Sandy knew about Wood Meteorites."*

*"I can't believe I've been replaced by a worm,"* the Viper sighed deeply. *"At least it's a unique and interesting worm who got quite a few things wrong during their little info dump."* Latest content published on **novel**◇**fire**◇**net**

*"Such as?"*

*"Now, where would the fun be in telling you that?"* the Viper joked. *"Not going to spoil the fun for you. That would be rude of me, wouldn't it?"*

Jake didn't really want to argue that point, as it would indeed suck to just have everything told to him. It would be a lot more exciting to explore the Lunewood Forest and find interesting things himself. He did have one question, though.

*“What are the chances of a Wood Meteor – objects I’m going to assume aren’t just flying everywhere all the time – crashing into the moon like this? As in, what are the chances the system planted it here directly? And if so, wouldn’t it be a massive risk to Earth if a B-grade is just chilling this close to the planet? A B-grade should be able to reach the Earth pretty damn quickly and effortlessly, so have we just gotten lucky it hasn’t decided to make the trip yet?”* Jake asked about some of the things that had been bothering him with this entire Lunewood situation.

*“Oh, it’s undoubtedly by design that the moon turned out like this. A natural Wood Meteor wouldn’t have had any chance to mature in the brief time the ninety-third universe has existed. They tend to float around in space for at minimum a few hundred thousand years before they crash into anything or burn up in an atmosphere,”* the Viper responded, making Jake nod along as he jumped from branch to branch.

If you discover this tale on Amazon, be aware that it has been stolen. Please report the violation.

*“As for the threat this B-grade may pose to your little planet, I wouldn’t worry. It’s more than likely bound to the moon and unable to leave the celestial object until sometime in the future. This isn’t rare at all, and if you went further into space, I reckon you would encounter even god-level creatures who currently find themselves sealed to certain areas – a confinement that may be permanent, but that’s beside the point. My actual point is that while a B-grade this close to a planet could be a problem, it would only be one if the planet was too weak to give birth to its own B-grades. And I would personally be very disappointed if that was the case in your situation.”*

*“I see... that’s good to know,”* Jake said with a bit of relief at hearing that the B-grade was likely restricted to being on the moon. Not only because he was afraid of the possibility of it deciding to attack Earth any day, but because it gave him more confidence to see if he could potentially make it prey.

Jake had considered what would happen if he tried to fight it and failed. Sure, maybe he and Sandy could escape, but what if it decided to chase them? Or it had some way to track them down after the fact, which would lead it straight to Earth?

Now, Jake wasn’t worried about that anymore, at least. So, a test-fight at minimum was definitely on the table.

*“I should also inform you that the little Demon Prince you helped become a big boy Demon Lord has been making some waves back in the Fourth Hell. The King of the Fourth Hell has made him his new Chosen, and the other hells have also begun to show some interest, not just in the newly born Cerulean Demon Lord, but the one capable of pulling off a ritual to give birth to one,”* the Malefic Viper continued, shifting the topic quite a bit.



*“Can we use another term than giving birth? Feels hella weird when you say it like that,” Jake muttered. “But, hey, happy to hear he is doing well for himself. Will the fact that more demons are now also looking curiously at me change anything?”*

*“No, not really. Your prior actions already gave birth to a lot of interest in your abilities, and all the ritual did was confirm some of the possibilities behind your ability. There was doubt if you could only birth new creatures like with the Vespernat Hive Queen, but now you’ve birthed the idea that you can also assist pre-existing beings in experiencing a rebirth of sorts. The only thing I could realistically see happening was them throwing more succubi at you, who no doubt would be more than happy to take the job of giving birth off your hands if you catch my drift,” Villy said, clearly teasing his poor Chosen.*

*“This is bullying, and I will have you reported to the Humanoid Resource department,” Jake shot back.*

*“Then I’ll begin to release recordings of your most embarrassing moments,” the god said in an evil voice. “Remember, perfect memory. So good that anything I’ve seen I can perfectly recreate a recording of to share with all.”*

*“So now you’ve switched to blackmail and intimidating witnesses...”*

*“Some would argue I am not the most moral of snakes,” Villy continued in a sinister tone.*

The two of them kept chatting, Jake gladly using the god to help pass the time. It was a bit like making a phone call in the car on your way home from work. It just made it feel like the trip wasn’t as long as it actually was.

They covered a lot of topics, and the Viper helped get him caught up on some multiversal politics and stuff. Jake also learned that a few of the people who placed well in Nevermore who didn’t belong to any large factions had begun to find new homes. One example was the weird sloth-like creature that had been sleeping under a table during the entire get-together and had ended up joining the United Tribes. It was not really a big shocker that one.

What was surprising was that the elemental called Wintermaul, that placed right after Jake and Eli’Hakan, had ended up going to the Altmar Empire. Why an ice elemental wanted to join the largest elven empire, Jake really couldn’t figure out, and Villy refused to offer his own theories.

There were a few other notable bits of information, but honestly, most of Jake and Villy’s talk was just shooting the shit. They even ended up discussing the controversial ending of a certain movie Jake had watched shortly before the system arrived, Villy having seen it through his divine Wikipedia skill.



On the way through the forest, Jake also ended up encountering two new types of Lunewood creatures. One was a floating vine-wrapped stone elemental known as a Lunewood Elemental. The stones were covered in glowing blue runes, and on the power scale, they ranked above anything else he had seen before. Not by much, though, and the “job” of this particular elemental seemed to be similar to what the Keeper did in that it helped maintain the forest.

Finally, there was a creature that made Jake chuckle. It was a large snake-like creature made up entirely of pulsating blue vines, and the reason Jake chuckled wasn’t because of its appearance but its name.

### **[Lunewood Viper – lvl 326]**

*“Look, Villy, I found your brother!”* Jake joked while chuckling. *“Or did you also give birth to something without telling me about it?”*

*“You do know I don’t have a monopoly on the name viper, right? It’s a type of snake. Plenty of vipers out there entirely unrelated to me, outside of how my Records may have affected them. Also, this isn’t even a real snake but just an overgrown vine,”* Villy said defensively.

*“The lengths one will go to to hide their shame,”* Jake shook his head. *“Maybe this is what a real viper is, and you’re the fake kind? Ever thought of that?”*

*“Wow... you’re right,”* the Viper said in a mocking tone. *“How could I have been so blind all along? Or, perhaps, have you just failed to realize I have just been a random long vine all along?”*

*“Truly, the plot twist that will shake the multiverse,”* Jake grinned as he continued his journey.

It felt good talking to Villy again like this, and Jake had genuinely missed it during his time in Nevermore. True, he had been able to talk to his four party members then, but it just wasn’t the same. While he was rather open with them, he still had to keep a lot of secrets from them, while with Villy, the snake god already knew most of Jake’s bigger secrets about his Bloodline. That just made everything far more relaxed.

Days passed with Jake getting closer and closer to the center of the forest. One of the reasons he was running through the forest and not flying above it was to keep his feet on the ground to feel for natural treasures, but it also helped him be aware of the exact location of what he assumed was the Wood Meteorite.

And, sure enough, when he used a Pulse of Perception, he finally saw it. The meteorite was more than ten stories tall and had an almost entirely spherical form with spikes all over it. Around it were thousands of Lunewood creatures, including four of a kind he hadn’t seen before.

He didn't need to closely inspect these ones at the meteorite, though, as he saw another one not that far away from him. Getting closer to it, he soon got a clear line of sight to inspect the creature. It was a tall, lanky, humanoid creature with two arms and two legs, along with a head that was eighty percent eyeball. As in, it looked like a cyclops with an eye that was way too big. It had to be said that the eye looked like it was made of stone, though, so Jake wasn't even sure if it was a weak spot. In its arms, it wielded what appeared to be a sling of vines, giving Jake the impression it specialized in ranged attacks.

Using Identify, the name of the creature surprised Jake, as Villy couldn't hold himself back.

### **[Lunewood Hunter – lvl 334]**

*"Well, well, well. What do we have here? The true form of what a hunter is supposed to be? Oh, isn't that a sling? How perfect for a hunter, way better than some silly little bow!"* the Viper teased Jake back for his own teasing earlier.

*"At least this hunter is way better than that stupid viper before,"* Jake shot back, with the Viper not answering again, as if he had seen coming what would happen next.

Because, hey, at least there was one good thing about this Lunewood Hunter... compared to all the other Lunewood creatures he had seen, it was far more impressive. More than that, it was clearly specialized in hunting down those who managed to reach this deep into the forest, making it a purely combat-oriented creature.

As a hunter, it naturally also showed one other impressive trait that Jake soon learned as he felt the eye of the hunter land upon him:

High Perception.

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## **Chapter 911: Ghostvine**

For a moment, Jake and the Lunewood Hunter made eye contact. Jake knew it could see him through his stealth immediately as he prepared himself mentally for what was to come. However, even after a solid second, the Hunter just kept observing him without making any aggressive moves.

Frowning, Jake tried to step to the side as its gaze followed him. Was it looking for an opening or something? Its actions didn't make any sense at all. Even when Jake began walking, it just kept looking at him.

When he tried to pick up speed, the Hunter finally moved but still did not attack him. It just followed Jake as he made his way further into the forest, confused as hell. The Hunter even kept the same distance from Jake, its eye never leaving his body for a split second as it ran after him. He had already cut off his conversation with Villy, but now he seriously considered asking if this Hunter was broken.

Something definitely felt off, and Jake released a Pulse of Perception to scan his immediate area and instantly saw that three more Hunters were making their way toward him, all coming from the direction of the Wood Meteorite.

*Is it not attacking because it judged it can't beat me alone and is waiting for backup?* Jake questioned as he once again prepared himself for a fight.

Yet when the three Hunters arrived, they proceeded to just join the first one in looking at him. It was honestly eerie as fuck, having four large creatures made of vines and stone constantly just stare at you without doing anything. They even stood entirely still when Jake didn't move, only adding to the creepiness.

Deciding to just say fuck it, Jake proceeded toward his target. The four Hunters followed along as Jake got closer and closer to the Wood Meteorite and the army that surrounded it. While he wasn't confident in beating them, he was confident in escaping should things go south, as while the Hunters were the strongest Lunewood creatures he had seen, they were still low-tier.

Soon enough, he reached the Wood Meteorite. Jake entered a large clearing created from the impact crater of the Wood Meteorite, finally laying eyes on the thing. It honestly looked a bit like a spherical spiky pinecone, except it was utterly massive and pulsating with power, as blueish veins covered the entire meteorite.

Through his sphere and with another Pulse, he also saw how extremely long vines extended down from the Wood Meteorite, piercing many kilometers into the moon. These vines spread like the roots of a tree in the immediate area, but they primarily reached downward in a pretty straight line, going directly for the core as far as Jake could see.

Yet he didn't feel as if the Wood Meteorite was actually siphoning any energy out of the core, making him guess it hadn't reached it yet. Even if it did, Jake wasn't sure it would be capable of absorbing anything, as the moon's core remained a lot more powerful than this meteorite.

Checking with the four Hunters, who had now been joined by five more who had been chilling around the Wood Meteorite, Jake saw the nine of them still didn't seem

interested in attacking. To check further, Jake floated into the air as he made his way toward the meteorite, but even as he approached, they didn't make any moves.

They clearly knew he didn't fit there, and yet they didn't see him as an enemy for some reason. It didn't make any sense at all. Was it that they didn't judge him a threat? Or because he hadn't attacked them or destroyed anything yet? Or were they broken somehow? They hadn't even alerted all the other Lunewood creatures to his presence, and Jake felt that it was only the Hunters who even knew he was there due to the peculiar nature of Unseen Hunter.

Once more, trying to ignore them, Jake studied the Wood Meteorite more closely as he flew right up to it. He felt it pulsating with energy, sending waves of its corrupted life energy into the world. This energy also tried to affect him, but he had made sure to cover his body in a few layers of stable arcane mana to ensure his own safety.

Reaching out, Jake touched one of the spikes of the meteorite. The moment he did, he felt a pulse of energy enter his body, but more than just energy; it carried some kind of... desire. Jake felt something go for his soul, as he allowed just a little bit in to understand what was going on. He felt as if he heard a faint whisper telling him to accept it.

The spike Jake was touching then broke off, and he knew what it wanted him to do. It wanted him to take it and absorb it into his body, allowing the Lunewood energy to take over his body and become one with the forest like all the other creatures there.

No... more than that.

It wanted him to become the Lunewood Forest. To merge with the meteorite and be its host. Perhaps it instinctively understood its own shortcomings, and it wanted something to help control it and grow. Jake wasn't sure why, but it seemed to believe he was a good option to make that happen.

Jake was confused, though. Why did it need him? Sandy hadn't mentioned anything like this. According to the worm, these Moon Meteorites didn't have any ego or control at all but were more like a natural force only seeking to expand, and-

*It was wilting.*

He finally remembered. At the edges of the Lunewood Forest, it wasn't expanding, but the grass was wilting. That's also when Jake understood why it wanted him. A Wood Meteorite only sought to spread its affinity and grow, but this one was broken, and it needed something. That something being Jake.

Needlessly to say, that wasn't anything it could have.

Jake let go of the meteorite that had broken off and let it rest on top of another part of the meteorite. Once more, a pulse of energy was released, and Jake felt a rudimentary soul attack that once more tried to compel him.

Shaking his head, Jake turned as he looked at the nine Lunewood Hunters who still stared at him. He still didn't feel any traces of hostility, even as he walked away from the meteorite. They just kept staring creepily, even as Jake began to explore the rest of the crater, finding many smaller Meteorite Fragments he assumed were from slain Lunewood creatures.

There were a lot of them. Thousands, at least, meaning something had killed them, right? Or was this the fragments it made new creatures from? As Jake was thinking this, he saw something in his sphere. A Stalker was approaching him, walking with steady steps.

Turning, Jake was prepared for it to do something, but all it did was jump on top of the pile of Meteorite Fragments. The second it did, its entire body wilted away in seconds, making another fragment fall atop the pile.

"It's losing energy," Jake spoke out loud with a serious look on his face. The forest was already dying by itself for some reason.

One thing was for certain, something very weird was happening on the moon.

Something that was further confirmed after Jake had spent an hour or so inspecting the crater while considering how he would put down a ritual when he received a message from Sandy, passed along by the Viper, saying just one word:

Stolen story; please report.

*"Run."*

Sandy wiggled their way through the many tunnels leading deep into the moon. Using the awesome spatial senses that only a worm as awesome as Sandy could have, they quickly realized the quickest way toward the center of the celestial object. It wasn't even that complicated, as there was what looked like a deep shaft that led most of the way there, just large enough to fit a growing worm.

Getting further and further down, Sandy made a few stops to gobble up something tasty. There were only a few weak elementals here and there, all way too slow for Sandy. Many of the snacks weren't even that tasty, but they were different and worth a try. Variety is the spice of life, after all.

Days passed, with Sandy getting closer to the core. It was a bit odd, but in the cases of most planets or even larger celestial objects like the moon, the core wasn't some large

super-dense area of pure molten lava and metal. Instead, it was a vast open space with a relatively small spherical metal ball floating in the middle.

True, sometimes the temperature was really high in the core room or chamber, or whatever one called it, making the room far from a healthy environment. Not that it bothered Sandy much the times the worm had seen other Planetary Cores. None of the weird phenomena that could happen close to a planet's core ever really bothered Sandy before. However, as Sandy got closer to this core, there was something really annoying.

Because, while Sandy wasn't an alchemist like Jake, the worm was pretty sure large vines weren't supposed to grow this deep underground. What's more, all the vines felt really weird. Like, they had the same aura, but one that felt a bit different than the Lunewood stuff above. It was clearly still related to the Wood Meteor, as they looked the same, but something was definitely different.

It didn't take Sandy long to get close to the center of the moon, where the worm quickly went straight for the core. It was super easy to feel where it was, as it gave off a powerful response from Sandy's treasure-sensing skills.

The odd vines also only multiplied in number and looked even weirder the more Sandy saw. Some of them went through solid rock but didn't penetrate it. No, it was more like they phased through the rock as if they were ethereal.

These vines didn't move around or do anything, though Sandy was on watch, being careful. There was no doubt in Sandy's mind that these vines were related to the B-grade, so caution was key. Even if the B-grade hadn't shown any aggressiveness yet. This chapter is updated by *novel•fire•net*

Passing through a few more tunnels, Sandy finally entered the large open space that also contained the core. However, rather than see a core, Sandy saw a giant mass of vines where the core was supposed to be, with the actual core likely within.

The space containing the core was many kilometers in diameter, yet Sandy felt that the environment was oppressive. The cause of this wasn't hard either, and a moment later, the being revealed itself.

Energies gathered to form a ghostly shade of sorts that regarded Sandy as it sent a powerful telepathic message filled with... a lot of things. It wasn't really words but more a collection of images, emotions, and what Sandy could vaguely interpret as words, with the shade asking just one question:

***"Why are you here?"***

One Sandy could naturally easily answer.

*"I'm here to explore,"* the worm responded in a neutral tone, as Sandy tried to be as non-threatening as possible. *"Not going to bother you at all."*

There was no response for several moments. This gave the worm some time to take in the entire core room and detect everything there. It didn't take long to figure things out.

Sandy was a smart worm. So Sandy quickly realized, as they expanded their senses and felt the traces of what had once been a great natural treasure inside the core room. One provided directly by the system, not unlike the ones Sandy had consumed during their younger days, albeit far, far more potent. With this and everything else, Sandy put together what had happened.

The Lunewood Meteorite had begun to spread all over the planet, and its vine-like roots had drilled into the ground, seeking out the greatest energy source available: the core. It had succeeded most of the way, as it had likely sent some of its creatures down to clear out elementals and stuff in the way.

Then, one day, a Lunewood creature reached the core room and absorbed that special system-provided item, for it to then evolve into what Sandy was currently seeing. Sandy also vaguely felt the concept of death in the air, so it was even likely the creature had died and been brought back to life. Maybe it had been cut off by the Wood Meteorite once it began to change, thus dying? There were many potential explanations, but Sandy was pretty certain they had reached the right one for the most part.

As Sandy had just brilliantly deduced what was going on, the creature spoke again, the message far more coherent and simple this time around:

***"Leave."***

*"Alright, alright,"* Sandy said, remaining calm. *"I didn't mean to intrude, I was just curious, and I'll be on my way,"*

Yep, definitely no reason to annoy the B-grade creature that Sandy didn't at all understand. It was some weird undead creature that somehow still gave off eerie life energy. What's more, Sandy hadn't even found anything they could identify yet. It didn't work on the core or the weird ghostly thing that honestly looked a bit like a large floating carpet.

***"Leave,"*** the message echoed again.

*"Going!"* Sandy responded as they turned around and began flying toward the exit of the core room.

***"Leave... now."***

Sandy got a bad feeling and picked up more speed as-



***"LEAVE NOW!"***

The telepathic message itself carried so much malice that Sandy temporarily froze up as vines flew out of all the walls, seemingly summoned out of nowhere. Reacting quickly, the worm teleported forward to avoid them as more vines moved to block the worm off, making Sandy curse.

*"Did you want me to leave or not!"*

There was no answer, as a massive vine was summoned out of a wall, slamming into Sandy's side, sending the giant worm reeling as they were blasted away. While flying, Sandy did two things... finally managed to land an Identify and sent a message to their Patron to be passed along to Jake.

**[Ghostvine Sovereign – lvl ???]**

He had to get away... because there was no way they could fight this thing. Sandy felt the blood run down their side as the worm's thick skin had been sliced open, and powerful energies of death were seeping in.

*This isn't good.*

Jake reacted instantly, despite not having any sense of danger yet, as he flew into the air. This proved to be a good decision, as only a moment later, he felt it. An aura washed over him as if something had spread out its presence to where he was.

He saw the Wood Meteorite practically shiver as all the Lunewood Hunters, for the first time, diverted their gazes from him as they instead stared at the ground. Jake released a Pulse of Perception, trying to feel for what was coming, but there was nothing but an odd energy permeating this area of the moon, and nothing that should-

Suddenly, a vine shot out of the ground below, aimed straight at Jake. His eyes opened wide, as he barely managed to dodge due to the forewarning from his danger sense. The vine extended many kilometers out from the moon and swung as it tried to whip Jake again.

That's when the Lunewood creatures made their move. All of them moved at once, attacking the vine with all they had, the hunters throwing stones infused with energy, with the thousands of Stalkers, Keepers, and Vipers also attacking.

The response from whatever the fuck attacked Jake was to release another dozen vines, all seemingly summoned out of nowhere. They just sprung up from the moon despite seemingly not coming from anywhere. It was like they had just been stuck onto the moon's surface, only attached with a bit of energy.

These new vines didn't attack Jake, but instead, they attacked some of the Lunewood creatures. Jake saw how the vines whipped a Stalker, leaving a deep gash... that then began to rot, as Jake felt the unquestionable concept of death within the attack.

With a single whip, the stalker wilted away, dying. Jake was alarmed as he'd stopped mid-air. Something that proved to be a bit decision, as that had only led to the continued ire of what he was now certain was the B-grade.

The presence all around him intensified as Jake felt a shiver run down his spine. Below, the Lunewood creatures were getting slaughtered, but they did manage to tear apart many of the vines. But as the atmosphere intensified, they all froze up, and Jake's eyes opened wide.

A wave of energy washed over him as the moon's surface erupted with vines, as far as he could see. Thousands... no, tens of thousands of vines shot up from the moon, seemingly not targeting anything or anyone in particular.

Then, right below Jake, floating just above the treetops of the Lunewood Forest, mana gathered as a giant eye dozens of kilometers in diameter formed, staring straight at Jake as it sent a powerful telepathic message slamming into Jake's head and making him reel backward.

**"Begone!"**

Jake didn't hesitate as he used One Step to repeatedly teleport upwards as vines chased after him. Once he got far enough up, they stopped chasing, but Jake still kept going as he wanted as much distance as possible. Many thoughts ran through his mind, but one more than any other:

What was happening with Sandy? He still had a Mark on the worm, and he felt that they were still deep down inside the moon and-

It disappeared... and he instantly knew:

Sandy had died.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 912: Not An Egg

Jake's mind went blank for a moment as the realization sunk in. Yet what he had expected to follow next never came. There was no anger or desire for revenge... just a belief that he had to get the fuck away from the moon as fast as humanly possible.

Anything capable of killing Sandy wasn't something Jake was confident in facing, and just feeling the aura from the thousands of vines extended up from the surface of the moon, Jake knew that this wasn't just some weak low-tier B-grade. It was already quite a few levels into B-grade and a powerful variant on top of that. The mere fact it had a range extending all the way from the center of the moon to the surface was proof enough of that.

Luckily, it didn't seem to attack him as he flew away. The eye had also faded away, and all the vines began to retract back into the ground, leaving a battered Lunewood Forest behind. Many rotting spots were left where the vines had shot up from, and hundreds of Lunewood creatures had died. For some reason, the B-grade didn't seem to care about the forest at all, and it had more or less just been collateral damage while trying to get Jake to leave.

Speeding up his flight, Jake just went further and further into empty space. He didn't have any particular direction he was flying in, he just wanted to make sure he was out of range from any potential attacks that could reach beyond the moon. Only when he was many thousand kilometers away from the exit of the moon's exosphere did Jake slow down before he stopped and had a while to think. And the first thought he had was to reach out to someone who had to know what had happened.

*"Villy, what the fuck happened to Sandy? I felt the Mark disappear, and I think they died, but-"*

*"Sandy did die,"* the Viper just answered in a casual tone.

Jake's mind went blank a bit again before he quickly gathered his thoughts. *"Then why am I not-"*

Suddenly, Jake stopped as he felt his spatial necklace act odd, as if something wanted to break out.

*"I think you'll find the answer is quite obvious,"* Villy commented, still clearly unbothered.

Things within the moon had not gone as planned for everyone's favorite Cosmic Genesis Worm.

Sandy had met their fair share of powerful beings while traveling around the multiverse and eating stuff, and sometimes, one naturally gets into trouble when eating the tasty snacks of others. Yet, this was definitely in the top two for most dangerous situations Sandy had ever gotten themselves into.

The wound on the worm's side was already rotting, and more vines were closing in as the Ghostvine kept sending those nonsensical telepathic packages, yelling at Sandy to leave while not giving the poor worm any chance to actually do so. Sometimes, a worm had to be decisive, so Sandy steeled themselves and didn't think twice before doing what had to be done:

*"Begin operation clean up and consolidate! Go, go, go!"* Sandy yelled to all the people and creatures in their internal worlds – also known as all the different stomachs - as Sandy opened gateways between all of them. They also quickly tried to spit out the Lunewood Meteorite Fragments hoping they were the cause of the aggression, but it didn't make the attack stop.

A dozen vines closed in as Sandy shifted in space, teleporting out of the way. Entering Sandy's Sand World wasn't possible with space this unstable – the place not really made for fleeing either. It was made for traveling, first and foremost.

Sandy did have other defensive means, though.

Hardening the cosmic dust, Sandy slowed down all the vines, going for the worm. At the same time, the wound was rapidly healing as space shifted, launching Sandy toward the tunnel the worm had entered the core chamber from. Vines moved to block the worm, but with Sandy's intense momentum, they managed to slip through, entering the tunnel.

Yet it wasn't enough, as more vines just appeared, seemingly out of nowhere. They just popped into existence without any rhyme, reason, or warning. It was as if the entire moon was part of the Ghostvine's body, which probably wasn't that far off.

The Ghostvine had integrated itself with the moon's core, after all.

Sandy kept going through the tunnels, teleporting, dodging, and blocking vines, but they just kept coming. A few managed to slip through, leaving nasty wounds all over the worm's body and eating away at Sandy's vital energies.

It definitely didn't help that Sandy had practically trapped themselves within the belly of the beast. To escape and do long-range teleports, Sandy needed to get out of the vast tunnel network of the moon and into open space, but there was just so far.

Too far.

So, rather than escape, the name of the game was dragging things out as long as possible to give Tom and the others enough time to get everything prepared. Thus, Sandy did their best, as the wounds got worse and worse, and Sandy knew that death was inevitable.

Luckily, before death came, Sandy got the confirmation they needed.

*"We're done."*

Sandy didn't hesitate as they turned around and flew at full speed back toward the core chamber. The Ghostvine wasn't ready for this, allowing Sandy to get pretty damn close before too many vines impeded their path, and a dozen wrapped around the worm's body, crushing it.

***"You win this one, stupid vine!"***Sandy telepathically yelled as the worm mobilized the rest of the energy in their body. ***"But I'll be back!"***

Sandy's body began to glow in a silvery light until suddenly, the worm was just gone... a faint mark left behind in space-time that even Jake wouldn't be able to detect.

Jake's spatial necklace was giving off an alarming response, and his eyes opened wide as he felt as if it was about to burst. He didn't hesitate as he pulled out the item that was acting up. Jake had already realized by now what it was, as the egg that Sandy kept insisting wasn't an egg appeared. However, rather than just looking like a weird rock, it was now glowing and filled with complicated runes far more complicated than Jake could comprehend.

Soon, the egg cracked as it leaked intense waves of energy that washed over Jake. Space itself shuddered before Jake saw a familiar tail pop out of the bottom of the egg. Then, the entire thing exploded, as a worm only half a meter across appeared before rapidly expanding in size as a full Cosmic Genesis Worm was born... or reborn?

*"I LIVE!"* Sandy's voice echoed out as the worm wiggled in excitement - a feeling of excitement that quickly died down as the worm turned to look at Jake solemnly. *"I think we should postpone moon exploration for a while..."*

The tale has been stolen; if detected on Amazon, report the violation.

Jake just stared at the worm for a moment as he blurbed out the first thing on his mind:

"Are you okay?"

*"Okay is a relative term,"* Sandy said in a sad tone. *"I feel like crap, and just existing hurts right now. I'm also super weak, so please don't make me do anything for a while, okay?"*

"Alright," Jake said with some concern as he was silent for a dozen seconds, just allowing the worm to wriggle back and forth a bit, getting used to being alive. "I take it this is the backlash from that second life skill?"

"Yep," Sandy said, rolling over in space to lay with the stomach up. *"My poor tummy."*

That's when Jake realized... what happened to everything Sandy had eaten? More importantly, what happened to the people?

"What happened to what was in your many stomachs? Such as the dietitian?" Jake asked, now back to being fully concerned.

*"They're all fine,"* Sandy said calmly.

"Oh, good," Jake sighed in relief as he would have felt a lot worse if he had inadvertently got a few random people killed. "So I take it your internal stomachs aren't negatively affected when reborn?"

*"They super much are negatively affected. I have to limit everything to two stomachs for the skill, with everything not inside them getting consumed. It was only one stomach a while ago when I was reborn, but I got it up to two now, but it's still far from enough! It's pretty hard to put everything into two stomachs only, especially when each has its own environment that I spent time cultivating. Heck, it's impossible to do. Now all of those fun biomes are gone, and I have to start over,"* Sandy explained in a sad and annoyed tone. *"But, together with the people in there, such as Tom and that dietitian that was forced upon me, I can gather everything and everyone important in the two stomachs I keep to at least make the losses not as worse as they could be. Again, it's not perfect... as an example, that alchemy lab you got? Yeah, that's gone."*

"I see," Jake muttered. "That's a big sacrifice but a cheap price to pay for a second life in the grand scheme of things.

*"Easy for you to say. Gonna be a pain to get everything back to what it was. Not to mention the literal pain of having the majority of your stomachs implode. Gotta wait for everything before I'll feel whole again,"* Sandy complained.

"How long do you reckon it will take?" Jake asked with a frown.

*"Depends. If I do nothing... a long time. If I eat stuff to help replenish my energy, not as long. I have some stuff already in my emergency rations to speed things up, but even if everything goes well, it will take me a few months at least,"* Sandy answered.

"Just say if there's anything I can do to help," Jake sighed. He felt pretty damn bad about having dragged Sandy all the way to the moon only for this to happen. From the looks of it, the worm hadn't even gotten anything out of the trip. Meanwhile, Jake had, at the very least, collected a cool-looking rock to bring back to his nephew... yeah, it had been a sucky trip overall.

*"It's fine for now, I don't need anything from you,"* Sandy surprisingly rejected Jake's offer of food. *"Because that's the second thing that sucks right now. I can't even eat a lot before I full super stuffed, as, you know, the vast majority of my stomachs just imploded. Who would have thought that had an adverse effect on appetite?"*



“Alright, alright,” Jake nodded as he tried to lighten the mood. “You know, now I understand why you said you would be fine no matter what. That skill is the one you got from the True Blessing of the Lord Protector, right? I must say, it makes me a bit jealous that you have a skill that makes you impossible to kill. Meanwhile, I just got a skill primarily designed to fuck with people trying to use Identify on me.”

“*Rude,*” the Malefic Viper interjected, as Jake entirely ignored him.

*“Eh, it’s overpowered for sure, but I can’t say it’s perfect. Big Boss Hydra did warn me of some potential flaws. Some skills will allow whatever killed me to still track me down while I’m weakened, and certain attacks can leave bad lingering effects even a rebirth can’t fix. Too bad soul damage and curses are two examples of this that the Big Boss pointed out. Then, there is, of course, karmic magic, which can outright block the rebirth or even tap into the power from the skill to attack me even after the fact. There are other means of blocking off my ability to be reborn, too, but they are super rare, and I am working on counters to all of them,”* Sandy explained willingly.

“Are you sure it’s a good idea to share all the weaknesses of what’s arguably your biggest trump card with others? Even if it’s me?” Jake asked, shaking his head in disbelief.

*“Oh, no, it’s a stupid thing to do, but I reckon if I want you to carry around one of my egg things, it’s only polite to tell you... oh yeah, that gets me to one of the other drawbacks. I need the egg things to do my rebirth trick, so if the final one breaks or is lost or something, I’m screwed. Also, I can’t control which one I use; it’s always the closest,”* Sandy continued, over-explaining their abilities with a sigh. *“So, anyway, I will need to reconstruct the egg, which takes a lot of stuff I could have eaten instead, so that sucks. And all of that comes after I heal my stomachs. It all just takes so much time and energy to do... dying is a real bummer, you know?”*

“From the times I’ve tried it, death indeed has been wholly unpleasant,” Jake answered honestly, remembering the Challenge Dungeons in Nevermore, especially the Colosseum of Mortals and his strategy of just throwing lives at Valdemar.

“*Right?*” Sandy agreed. *“I think we should both strive to not die as much.”*

The two of them fell silent for a while as Sandy slowly got back their bearings. It would take a bit for the worm to feel well enough to move, and Jake didn’t want to disturb Sandy while that happened.

While Jake had asked some questions about Sandy’s skill, he still had no idea how it worked. Not really. Sure, he knew what it did, but the fundamental concepts behind it were a massive mystery to him. He also reckoned there was more to it than Sandy said. Especially seeing as there wasn’t just one egg but multiple, giving Sandy more than one extra life.



If there wasn't more to it than met the eye, why wouldn't all gods give their Chosen a skill like this? Having a Chosen was a risk, and a skill like this would heavily alleviate that risk. Jake wanted to ask Villy, but decided to postpone that conversation for later.

After a bit of time had passed, Sandy spoke again:

*"The thing inside the moon is something called a Ghostvine Sovereign," the worm said. "Ever heard about one before?"*

Jake frowned as he rummaged through his memory before he shook his head. "No, can't say I have, but the name is pretty telling in its own right. Plus, anything with Sovereign in its name makes me assume it can't be weak."

*"It definitely isn't. What's more, it has merged with the moon's core entirely,"* Sandy kept explaining.

"That's... bad," Jake muttered.

*"Yep," Sandy readily agreed. "But, there is one kind of good thing. I don't think this Ghostvine has any real intelligence. It looks like it does, but there is no cohesion in its thought pattern or telepathic messages, and I sensed primarily emotion and not anything truly complex from it. Heck, I think it only attacked me because of the Lunewood Meteorite Fragments I had in my stomach, and that was entirely on instinct. Once I was designated as an enemy, the way the attacks worked seemed almost automatic."*

Jake could only agree as he also found the way the Ghostvine had acted odd. "Then what do you think it wants? For some reason, it didn't attack the Lunewood Forest at all."

*"I'm not sure, and in all honesty, I don't think the Ghostvine is either. It may be because it originated from the Lunewood Forest and thus instinctively views it as a part of it that shouldn't be destroyed, or it may be because it uses the life energy to fuel its own death energy. Or, you know, something entirely illogical since we are talking about a creature that doesn't really operate on logic here."*

They were quiet once more for a minute before Sandy spoke again. *"Just to be clear, we both agree on what we're gonna do about that stupid Ghostvine and the celestial object it integrated itself with, right?"*

"Oh yeah," Jake nodded as he looked at the moon. "We're gonna kill that fucking Ghostvine one way or another... even if the moon has to go along with it."

*"Can we call it Operation: Moonfall?"*

"Sure?" Jake agreed, confused.

*"Thank you. Tom will be very happy to hear that."* This update is available on [novel●fire●net](#)

"I'm sure he will," Jake said with a smile. "Now let's go home, alright?"

*"Alright... but you're in charge of transport this time around, at least for the first part of the trip,"* Sandy said.

"Sure," Jake shrugged, wondering how exactly he planned on doing that. Maybe he could have Sandy-

*"And no, I'm not shrinking down. Can't at the moment."*

... or he could figure something else out.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## Chapter 913: The Sword Of A Hero

As things in Nevermore were still fully ongoing, even after the initial batch of geniuses were done, the rest of the multiverse had fallen into a bit of a lull. Even if plans were still in motion, many factions focused on the mega-dungeon first and foremost, as there wasn't much else to deal with. Yet, shortly after having barely gotten over the appearance of an extinct True Royal, the return of the Malefic Viper, and the Chosen of the newly returned Primordial becoming the new top record holder on the Nevermore Leaderboards, another event shook the many intelligence agencies of the multiverse. The culprit, this time around, was another known figure, but what he had done, few had seen coming:

A clash with another Primordial... the Starseizing Titan.

The echoing sounds of the Cosmic Forge, the exclusive forge of the Starseizing Titan, ceaselessly sent waves of energy through the multiverse, yet that day, it had stilled. The many factions housed nearby instantly noticed, as whenever the Titan stopped working, it was due to some disturbance from an outside factor. Yet none dared even suggest who would be brave enough to interrupt the Primordial like this. The level of disrespect was nearly unimaginable unless it was another Primordial or being of equal standing.

Yet, the one who had done it made no attempts to hide as the aura of Yip of Yore spread throughout the cosmos for all of the nearby gods stationed there by their

respective factions to feel. The Starseizing Titan was not one for secrecy either, as his voice boomed through space as the two gods had a very public confrontation.

**“What have you come here for, young god?”** the Titan asked - his question very much an insult by calling Yip nothing more than a young god. What’s more, his aura increased, pushing back Yip of Yore’s, even slightly overpowering it.

**“I merely came to see the creator of the relics of old,”** Yip of Yore answered, amplifying his voice to match that of the Primordial as he strengthened his own aura. **“And to see if you could do me a minor favor and take a look at a little weapon of mine. I heard you know your stuff, even if your knowledge may be a bit outdated.”**

**“Impudent,”** the dismissive voice of the Starseizing Titan said. **“Leave me be, young one. You have no quarrel with me and do not wish for me to quarrel with you.”**

**“I just asked for a quick evaluation...”** Yip answered, not heeding the words of the Titan at all.

All the gods observing with long-range scouting skills had them fully activated as they watched this scene take place. Yip floated in front of the far more massive Starseizing Titan. He was so small, like a single atom before a massive boulder, yet the aura he gave off made his presence unquestionable.

What was also unquestionable was the weapon he held in his hand. It was a simple-looking steel sword, yet it gave off an odd feeling to all who saw it. As if there was far more to the weapon than met the eye... like it had a long history of accomplishments behind it.

**“This sword,”** Yip spoke loudly as he held it up, **“is known as the Hero’s Sword. Not because it was crafted by some mythical being or because it’s made of the greatest materials in the multiverse... but because of what it has done. What’s it’s been through. Rather than being forged in fire, it has been forged in the Records of my Path.”**

He said these words, as if announcing them to the multiverse and not just to say them to the Primordial. No, it was a message to all of them, including the other eleven Primordials.

**“I do not find myself impressed that you have a sword with a storied history. All with a long Path has such weapons,”** the Titan once more dismissed the younger god.

**“Yet none has a story greater than mine,”** Yip smiled. **“Now, please. Evaluate my weapon.”**

**“No. Leave my sight.”**

There was no room for argument. All observed curiously to see Yip's reaction, as he just smiled. Almost as if this was exactly what he had wanted to happen.

**"Then allow me to take the initiative... and, in my own impudence, test my little sword on what most call the most durable thing in the multiverse,"** Yip of Yore said as he lowered the sword and pointed it at the Starseizing Titan.

**"You."**

Without any further warning, reality shattered as the sword was swung. Space bent as a crescent wave of force powerful enough to tear Godkings and Godqueen apart with ease fell upon the shoulder of the massive body of the Starseizing Titan.

A loud scraping sound was heard as the sword seemingly failed to land a single mark, and the Titan retaliated with a simple punch. Yip of Yore was pushed away as if the universe itself commanded it, sending him flying backward as he quickly stabilized with a smile on his face.

**"What a waste of effort,"** the Titan spoke. **"Stop wasting my time with your antics."**

**"Wasted... antics... I don't think so,"** Yip of Yore said as he lifted his sword and pointed at the Starseizing Titan again. **"The sword of a hero... can cut anything and anyone he is determined to fight."**

A crackling sound was heard as everything went silent. On the shoulder of a Starseizing Titan, a long cut had formed, as his almost crystalline body had cracked all along it, and mana poured out of his body like a torrent, shocking everyone who observed.

**"YOU!"** the Starseizing Titan yelled as he swung his right hand holding the hammer. Space imploded as a shockwave was sent out that washed over the already retreating Yip of Yore. The wound on the Titan had already mended itself by the time the swing was over, but the mere fact his natural defenses had been breached...

Yip grinned as he defended himself as best he could while flying backward, a bit of blood on his lips from the shockwave that he had luckily managed to avoid for the most part. **"Not gonna push my luck further than this... and thank you for your high evaluation."**

With that, Yip of Yore disappeared, having made history once more.

The word of what had happened spread like wildfire as the legend of the weapon was further empowered. A sword capable of cutting and injuring the Starseizing Titan, the most durable of all Primordials...

Was one capable of killing any of the Primordial.

And whoever was wielding it had the potential to be the very first Primordial Slayer in the multiverse.

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As the multiverse was getting shaken up a bit, Jake was entirely too busy flying through space, pulling a large net of mana strings with quite the catch on the other end.

*"Forward, my steed! To Earth!"* Sandy yelled as Jake flew as fast as he could while the worm clearly enjoyed themselves. Jake, not so much, as dragging along a giant worm that liked to wriggle from time to time wasn't the easiest job in the world.

"You know, I have a great idea. What if I just shoot exploding arrows at you to propel you toward Earth?" Jake offered. "That would be a lot more fun. Probably faster, too."

*"... you would really do that to a poor worm that got injured to this extent trying to help you? Well... I guess if that's what you want, I can give up my health and dignity to--"*

"Just... fine," Jake sighed as they kept flying.

*"Good steed."*

"You can't whisper under your breath with telepathic messages," Jake muttered.

*"You totally can..."*

"No, you can't."

*"Where there is a will, there is a way."*

The very intelligent conversation between two Chosen of ancient gods continued with Jake having his first real flight through space. While most of his mental energy was spent talking to Sandy, a lot also went into subtly trying to take in the environment and trying to figure out how to fly faster.

Needless to say, One Step was not a possibility, so Jake had to rely solely on his wings for this flight. With constant acceleration space gone, Jake couldn't just burn energy to attain near-infinite speed, but he could still fly a lot faster in space than on Earth. His top speed was especially outstanding, and he believed he would be able to make it back to Earth in only a bit over two weeks if he kept up his current pace. That was roughly five days to fly approximately ten times the diameter of Earth, which was pretty good in Jake's book. Compared to Sandy, it was on the slower side, but considering Jake

wasn't a giant cosmic worm and instead had to drag a cosmic worm along with him, he was more than satisfied.

Not that Jake expected to make the full trip. Sandy was recovering quickly, and one of the first things to usually be replenished was the most important powers – such as movement skills. Sandy would be weakened, sure, but even a Sandy at ten percent speed was faster than Jake in space.

*“By the way, where do you wanna go when you get back to Earth?”* Sandy asked after a bit. *“Sorry to say, but I don't think I'll be a fun adventuring companion for a while.”*

*“It's fine, you just rest... and I'm not sure yet,”* Jake answered honestly. *“But I do plan on staying on Earth for the most part, only popping back to the Order if I need anything there. Besides doing alchemy, I have no other plans before the Prima Guardian arrives, outside of waiting for Miranda and the others to get back.”*

*“Yeah... I think I'll go back to the Order for a while to heal. Big Boss Hydra already told me he got stuff ready to help me,”* the worm said. *“Tasty stuff too...”*

*“I see, I see,”* Jake nodded as he hid his worry while he kept flying. The worrying feeling wasn't just from this one comment but from Jake thinking more about a prior conversation he had with the Malefic Viper. So, he reached out to the god to share his concerns, even if it probably wasn't his place to do so. Fresh chapters posted on [novel·fire·net](#)

*“Hey, Villy, you got a second?”* Jake asked the snake god.

*“I have a lot more than a second. Infinite time, in fact. A perk of being a god, you should try it sometime,”* the snake god answered cheekily.

*“Very funny. My worry is about Sandy and-“*

*“Don't be,”* the Viper cut him off. *“First of all, very heretical of you to doubt the Lord Protector of the Order of the Malefic Viper's abilities to nurture his own Chosen. Secondly, you are correct that the methods Snappy is using with the cosmic worm wouldn't work with you.”*

*“It's just that... won't Sandy's Records be hurt by this? Getting things handed to you like that is generally bad, right? You also say that too much help kills Records, and from the sounds of it, Snappy is helping Sandy a whole lot,”* Jake voiced his concerns. *“Especially with that resurrection skill. Won't it hurt Sandy a whole lot that the worm is very rarely, if ever, in true danger of dying? I know it may affect Sandy less than it would me, but if I had that kind of skill... yeah, I wouldn't want it at all.”*

*“You two are not the same. You are a hunter who needs to find his own prey and needs to do his own thing. Danger is a part of the thrill of the hunt and whatnot. But haven't*



*you considered how much help you've gotten with alchemy? How you've been handed expensive materials, books, teachers, everything you could want is available to you, and you use it freely. Yet it does not hurt your Records... why is that?"* the Viper did that annoying teaching thing where he made Jake realize things on his own.

*"Because... it doesn't matter as much where I get the materials from, but what I make from them... and with books and all that, I still study it myself and reach my own conclusions. Not that I really learn much outside of doing, so... oh. I really only earn Records by doing, huh?"* Jake realized, a bit annoyingly so, as he realized this had been what the Viper was fishing for.

*"Bingo. Now consider Sandy. What do you think is core to that worm's Path?"*

*"Eating?"* Jake said, not really that sure.

*"Pretty much so. Eating and exploration to get things to eat. However, the most important is to just get whatever food Sandy wants. That's where the real Records come from. It's true that self-found objects have a unique flavor of Records that gifted items won't, but Sandy can eat so much gifted food compared to what the worm needs to find alone that the proportions aren't even funny. Sandy would, without a doubt, be capable of reaching A-grade without ever leaving the confines of the Order unless exploring with a god as backup and just sleeping and eating in complete safety. Maybe even S-grade. Because the source of food is such a minor factor for Sandy's Path. Of course, such an S-grade would be pretty weak, even if Sandy is a strong variant. The end result would be a cosmic worm with subpar skills and all that. Sure, it won't be as bad as the forcibly raised angels of the Holy Church, but it is definitely better for the cosmic worm to also explore by themselves and strive for some level of self-improvement,"* the Viper said, going on a bit of a tangent toward the end.

Jake just nodded telepathically, ignoring the part about angels entirely. *"Thanks for putting my mind at ease. Anyway... moon's haunted, eh?"*

*"Indeed, it seems so. Not to worry, it happens,"* the Viper shrugged on the other end. *"Speaking of things that may come to haunt you... kind of a big story in the multiverse these days, and it's probably best you hear it from me so you don't get surprised. It's about how Yip of Yore..."*

The Viper proceeded to tell Jake about the god's recent exploits regarding his "fight" with the Starseizing Titan. This was not something Jake had expected to hear today, and definitely not in the category of good news.

*"Does he really call his sword the Hero's Sword?"* Jake questioned after Villy was done.

*"Weird thing to focus on, but yes, he does. Because he is the legendary hero of his own story,"* the Viper answered.



*"Also, isn't the timing a bit... you know,"* Jake continued.

*"He is reclaiming some momentum. Showing that even if his Chosen has faltered against you, it's inconsequential to his goals. It's to prove he is still more than powerful enough to not only fight but potentially kill a Primordial. The more people believe he can do that, the more powerful he will become when actually facing a Primordial in a true battle to the death. When he faces me in a battle to the death,"* Villy explained calmly.

Calmly enough for Jake to not yet feel overly worried, even if the news were worrying.

*"I'll trust you got things handled,"* Jake just said.

*"A wise choice."*

The connection slowly faded after a bit more small talk as Jake just kept flying, occasionally talking to Sandy on the way. After about a week, Sandy was back in good enough condition to eat Jake and handle the rest of the trip. The worm had even made a new, more private stomach for Jake to be in. No alchemy lab, though.

Jake did say that he could just go where the dietitian and other people were, but Sandy rejected that entirely.

*"I don't want Tom to interact with bad influences,"* Sandy said very firmly.

"Did you just call me a bad influence?" Jake asked in disbelief.

*"You drag people into doing dumb things all the time,"* Sandy argued.

"Are you really going to—"

*"Such as convincing them to go to haunted moons."*

"I had no idea the moon was haunted," Jake muttered.

*"Perhaps it always has been... food for thought."*

"I am beginning to believe you are the bad influence on Tom," Jake said sternly.

*"It's the other way around. Tom is a good influence on everyone else. That's why he's Tom."*

"... and who did you say Tom was again? And don't just say Tom is—"

*"Tom. Glad you understand."*

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## Chapter 914: Back In The Laboratory

Flying on the Sandy Express was definitely faster than riding the Jake Carriage, even if Sandy wasn't in top form. After only about a day, they returned to Earth, where Sandy dropped off Jake at Skyggen before heading off to head back to the Order. Jake did end up asking how Sandy even traveled back and forth, as he usually had to use his connection to Villy when teleporting, and the answer was as obvious as it could be. The teleportation circle made by those snakes had just been altered a bit to allow Snappy to do the same thing the Viper did.

With Jake and Sandy split up once more, Jake made a quick visit to his family, who were all surprised to see him back so soon. Luckily, the moon being haunted was a universally good explanation for why he hadn't wanted to stick around there. It did have the slight downside of Adam being very suspicious of the pretty rock Jake had brought back, and it took a lot of effort to convince him that particular rock wasn't haunted.

Jake ended up staying in Skyggen for another day before he decided to head back to Haven. This time around, he didn't have any stops on the way, so he just took the teleportation circle back. Honestly, the best new thing Jake had gained during all his time in Nevermore was definitely the Unseen Hunter skill, as it allowed him to travel around without being bothered by anyone. He could even take public teleporters and stuff without a whole crowd gathering to stare at him.

Plus, he could skip queues. A bit unethical, but a perk of being invisible for sure.

As Jake had already talked to Sandy about, he truly didn't have plans set in stone. Yet it felt like he didn't really need any plans either, as the Prima Guardian stuff was right around the corner. Having spent fifty years in Nevermore had changed his perspective on time quite a lot, and waiting not even two years was barely worth mentioning. It was a few good alchemy sessions at most.

Once back in Haven, Jake started out by quickly stopping by Arnold's place. The man wasn't surprised when Jake came at all, clearly able to see through his stealth skill. Truly, further proof Perception was the best stat.

"Hey there," Jake said after he was let in as he joined the scientist in his workshop. As always, Arnold was working on stuff Jake didn't at all understand, but a lot of it seemed themed around space exploration stuff. Jake got the feeling this was the topic the guy obsessed the most over these days.

“My satellites spotted you returning from space. Did you arrive on the moon safely?” Arnold asked with a genuinely curious tone.

“Well, we did arrive safely,” Jake scratched the back of his head. “Can’t say it ended well, though.”

Arnold raised an eyebrow, clearly communicating he wanted Jake to elaborate. So Jake did and told Arnold everything that had happened on the moon, including the presence of the Ghostvine and how Sandy believed the B-grade had merged with the core. Likely irreversibly so. He also included his future plans.

“Hm. If this was before the arrival of the system, I would call anyone wanting to destroy the moon someone aiming to doom this planet and humanity. Now, I am not even certain the gravitational forces applied to us by the moon have any tangible effects, nor that there will be any noticeable fallout should the moon cease to exist,” Arnold said after thinking a bit.

“I kind of assumed you would have told me trying to blow up the moon was a bad idea,” Jake muttered.

“I have no attachment to the celestial object. Meanwhile, I can see the risks associated with an instinct-driven antagonistic planet-sized plant living this close. Especially one that seems to carry an innate hatred for life. Getting rid of, or containing it, might be a necessity, not a matter of your vanity,” Arnold said, fully on board with Jake’s brilliant plan.

“You wouldn’t happen to have a bomb capable of blowing it up lying around, would you?” Jake asked.

“No,” Arnold shook his head. “I will not be able to make one before B-grade either.”

The way he said it made it clear the guy had already very much considered the limits of how destructive bombs he could make. Jake wasn’t sure if that should make him worried, but he decided not to be. Just to make a small mental note to not piss off the guy unnecessarily.

“Do you still have the Blackpoint Nanoblade Katar?” Arnold asked after a bit, changing the topic entirely.

“Huh? Oh, yeah, I do,” Jake nodded, surprised, as he took out the weapon and quickly checked it out.

**[Blackpoint Nanoblade Katar (Ancient)] – A katar with a nanoblade made of a composite alloy formed into an ultra-thin blade. The blade itself can cut most materials effortlessly but has little to no effectiveness against magical wards or defenses when not infused with mana. The tip of the blade appears to have been**

**touched by the void. A coating on the blade allows it to have an incredibly high level of mana conductivity and can handle most types of mana. The handle contains a series of energy cores capable of storing mana of any affinity. This stored energy can all be released at once through the tip of the Nanoblade. Enchantments: Extreme Conductivity. Blackpoint Burst.**

**Requirements: lvl 200+ in any humanoid race**

“Did it serve you well during Nevermore, or did you switch to another weapon?” the scientist asked, as he took the katar from Jake without even asking.

“I used it all throughout,” Jake said. “I even had it repaired... three times? All done through system stuff or on city floors. It did a good job, but – and don’t take this the wrong way – it did fall off quite a lot toward the end. Especially the Blackpoint Burst was barely worth using anymore, as I could, in many cases, do more damage without it, and the slight wind-up time made it difficult to even land. But the katar as a whole was still damn sharp and did its job the whole time.”

Jake had genuinely liked the weapon. It was a real stabber. When he first entered Nevermore, it was sharper than even Eternal Hunger, though by now, there was a vast gulf between the two weapons, with the mythical Eternal Hunger having far surpassed the Nanoblade in every area. Not surprising, considering the weapon was constantly growing the more Jake killed and the more souls it ate.

“That’s only to be expected,” Arnold said as he inspected the weapon, finding quite a few chinks in it from the many years of use. “Do you need it currently, or may I have it back for a time?”

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“You’re gonna upgrade it again?” Jake said with a big smile.

“No, I’m going to melt it down and make an entirely new one,” Arnold shook his head. “The methods used during this one’s creation process aren’t up to par anymore. However, I shall analyze its Records for use in the creation of the new katar.”

“Fair enough,” Jake nodded. “I would be more than happy to get a weapon upgrade before the Prima arrives. Do you need any payment or...?”

“I already owe you for the Automaton Spaceship,” Arnold said, as he pointed and made a wall see-through, revealing the giant spaceship behind it, with robot arms poking it all over, doing science stuff. Jake had naturally already seen it in his sphere, but observing it with his eyes was still impressive.

“In that case, thanks in advance,” Jake smiled. “I’ll be in Haven for the most part should you need to contact me for anything.”

“Very well,” Arnold nodded.

Having nothing more to talk about, Jake headed out and back to his little lodge. He was still impressed by how utterly massive Haven had become, and it was honestly to the level where it made Jake a bit uncomfortable. One thing was for sure, it was good Miranda was the person actually in charge of everything and not him.

Returning to his lodge, Jake didn’t wait before heading down to the alchemy lab in the cellar. The last time he was there, he hadn’t really checked out every room, but this time, he did. One room he had remembered was the basin room or whatever it was called. It was a room with a lot of different basins Jake had planned to make and store different liquids in large quantities inside.

He hadn’t ever really used it, but now, he believed it would be perfect because he knew what he wanted to spend the next two or so years working on:

Acids.

Jake had only begun to touch upon it during the House of the Architect and realized how well his arcane affinity synergized with that particular branch of alchemy. It would be a waste not to explore it further. The large basin room, with several different square basins sectioned off by glass walls, would be a perfect place to test things out and store different acids.

This was one of the contraptions Hank had proudly shown off during his tour of the place after Jake came back from the Treasure Hunt. Arnold had helped make it with the glass walls and stuff, and it being glass walls was honestly perfect. That meant Jake only had to put down a glass bottom of every basin, and he would have perfect containers for acids.

As of right now, not all the different sections were raised, but a few were, and one of them even had water inside it. That’s when Jake remembered what he’d done when he was here way back then. Checking out this particular section, Jake saw a stone lying at the bottom of the water as he smiled and shook his head.

**[Dewstone of Serenity (Legendary)] – A small stone created by the combined effort of a group of water nymphs to help heal a close friend. This stone was eventually acquired by a powerful vampire and brought to Yalsten, where it has been ever since. Will passively transform surrounding water by infusing the power of serenity into it. Effect lessens, and the transformation process becomes slower the larger the pool of water. Has many alchemical uses**

“Yeah, I had completely forgotten about that,” Jake said to himself as he also checked the water itself.

**[Concentrated Serene Water (Epic)] – This water calms the mind of anyone who consumes it, allowing them to more easily focus while suppressing the effects of most mental afflictions. Will restore a bit of mana, health points, and stamina upon consumption. Continued consumption will help heal some soul injuries. Has many alchemical uses**

“And I’m pretty sure that was only rare rarity before. I guess it grew more potent over time, hence the “concentrated” tag,” Jake continued muttering.

This was a nice little pleasant surprise that really shouldn’t have been a surprise at all, but Jake blamed the way the system improved memory. You had to think about something to remember it, and Jake sucked at thinking about stuff not related to his immediate surroundings or current situation.

“Hm, maybe I should clean up my spatial storage at some point,” Jake said to himself before quickly dismissing the idea. That sounded way too much like work. Better to just leave everything in there till he randomly remembered something. It wasn’t as if he had anything important stored away that he should really be remembering, right? Yeah, definitely not.

After inspecting the basin room and taking a swig of the Serene Water for fun, Jake finally went to the large glass bubble serving as the main lab. Inside, things were as pristine as ever, and he was happy to be back in the laboratory. Thus, he gladly sat down and got to work, as it was time to finally make some proper acids.

Well, more proper acids than what he’d made in the House of the Architect, anyway.

“Thank you for your assistance, miss,” the big man said.

“Ree,” the noble bird answered.

“The upper layers of the sky are difficult to cover, especially as many of the more powerful beings are nomadic in nature and rarely stick to a single area for long,” the big man that Sylphie knew was called the Whaleman said.

“Ree?”

“Even if I am a Sky Whale, I cannot cover the entire sky on my own, and I am still more of an aquatic animal rather than an aerial one,” Whaleman shook his head.

After Sylphie returned to Earth, the bird really didn’t know what she wanted to do. So, the first thing she did was find her parents, whom she hadn’t seen in a very long time. In the process, she ran into Whaleman, who knew a lot of stuff and helped track them

down. The wind also helped a lot when she got closer. After Sylphie had gotten that Authority skill, the whispers of the wind were even clearer than before, and sometimes even offered hints without Sylphie asking, so that was nice.

Reuniting with Mom and Dad had been nice. Both of them were getting close to becoming big and strong C-grades like Sylphie. It was a bit slow, in Sylphie's opinion, but Sylphie did know that Sylphie was awesome, so maybe Mom and Dad were just more normal? No, they were definitely better than normal. They were her Mom and Dad, after all.

Sylphie ended up spending about three days flying around with them before they split up again. She was too strong to help her parents in battle, and the two hunted best as a pair. They did have a good time together, but they also all had their own things to do. One thing was for sure: her parents were happy Sylphie was doing well, which made Sylphie happy, and she hoped that her parents would also do well.

With the reunion done, Sylphie had flown back to Whaleman, who was hard at work preparing for when the big boss called a Prima Guardian arrived. He was doing that by ensuring the many powerful beasts spread across the planet wouldn't become too big of a problem, through ensuring they were either killed, made into allies, or pacified through special contract magic stuff the Whaleman could do. Something with him being blessed by a guy called Karroch. Follow current novels on *novel·fire·net*

Sylphie, being the best bird she was, volunteered to help Whaleman do stuff. She was super fast and good at finding strong bad guys, and she was also super good at negotiating! Plus, she was strong enough to do stuff only Whaleman or the Whaleman's most powerful allies could do. Whaleman was very convincing when he appeared... because Sylphie was pretty sure Whaleman was the highest, if not one of the highest-leveled creatures on the planet.

### **[Sky Whale – lvl 333]**

Also, even if Whaleman was strong... Sylphie wasn't afraid because Sylphie was also strong.

"Can you handle this area and scout it? It's rather large, but I believe you are more than capable," Whaleman asked, recognizing Sylphie's greatness. "The Crimsonfang Darkbat Lord was last seen in the area east of there, and with its trajectory, we believe this is where It'll be. Also, if it proves too strong, feel free to—"

"Ree," Sylphie interrupted.

"Right, you know," Whaleman nodded. "Just be careful, alright? I wouldn't want to face Lord Thayne if anything happens to you."



Sylphie nodded, understanding him perfectly, as she offered some words of warning.  
“Ree, ree.”

“... why would he hit me with a cauldron that smells?”

“Ree,” Sylphie shook her head as she took off to find the bad guy bat, leaving Whaleman behind to mutter again by himself.

“I guess you’re right... I wouldn’t want to find out...”

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## Chapter 915: Holiday Is Over

Time marched on, and even if Jake and the others had returned to Earth, not much had changed besides stability returning to a lot of factions. Arnold’s workshop was once again running non-stop – though, to be fair, it nearly already had during his absence, too – while factions such as the Court of Shadows finally had their Judge and a few elite members back.

Funnily enough, the Court was one of the factions that suffered the most from this stability on the planet. They were, in the end, an assassination organization, so if there was no one hiring assassins, business wasn’t going well. Alas, they were getting by focusing on training and doing hunting jobs of beasts and whatnot, with the occasional job here and there, though it was often nothing consequential, and more often than not, they were hired by the World Council or people related to the Council.

Quite a number of religious leaders and such had been nipped in the bud, but most of them hadn’t been targets worth talking about.

The Fallen King had also found himself a busy Unique Lifeform after returning. It turns out that a supreme tyrant ruling through power doesn’t establish the most stable organization, so after he had been gone for a while, internal competition within the faction he was building had gotten so bad that the Sky Whale had to get involved.

Now that the Fallen King was back, there was a lot to do. Something that actually suited him quite well. During Nevermore, he had few chances to use the aspects of his Path related to being a King, but now that he had a kingdom in ruins, there were ample Records to be reaped from putting everything back together, and he reckoned there were many levels to be gained while awaiting the coming of the Prima Guardian.

Valhal, who had been keeping a mostly low profile after the Ell'Hakan incident, were starting to rear their head a bit after Carmen and other high-ranking members had returned from Nevermore. It wasn't much, but they had recruited a bit and expanded their influence to some more nearby towns – all with permission, of course.

Arthur, the one doing most of the work for the World Council, was the one who had given permission, which was a big development after he had been so firmly anti-divine factions. But, he began to give a few permission to grow and prosper... while hiring the Court of Shadows to handle those deemed on the harmful side.

Other smaller factions were also simply doing their own thing. As an example, Maria – the follower of Gwyndyr – was busy working on establishing some form of mercenary band of her own, while the Noboru Clan was solidifying their own power on Earth now that the Sword Saint was back.

All in all, Earth had only gotten a tinge more busy after the first batch of Nevermore Attendees returned. Things had slowed down after Miranda and many others left for Nevermore, but now things were at least picking up again, if ever-so-slowly. Moreover, as time passed, the day marking the return of Miranda also grew near, as the planet would soon have all its leaders back to finish the final preparations for the Prima Guardian.

Jake dipped the piece of meat in the clear liquid as he observed what would happen. After a few seconds, nothing happened, and he nodded, satisfied. Then, with his other hand, he raised it, and it began to glow green for a moment.

The second it did, the meat was instantly corroded away. Jake's hand glowed green again as he lowered the big piece of meat further, it again remaining unharmed. With a bit of telekinesis, he then lifted a metal rod from behind him and dipped that into the liquid, too.

This rod also remained unharmed until Jake had his hand glow for a third time. As Jake wanted to see, the metal was corroded away while the meat remained whole without the slightest trace of damage.

With a big smile, Jake flashed his hand green one final time as he dropped both the meat and metal rod into the liquid and saw both were consumed.

"Pretty damn good," Jake praised himself as he picked up the big glass cube he stored the acid in. It was made to slot perfectly into those sections of the basin he used to store all the different acids Jake had made over the last... definitely over half a year. Jake's sense of time tended to be quite off, but it seemed about right. It had been less than a year, though. Definitely.

This acid he had been working on was an improved version of the Adaptable Arcane Acid he had submitted in the House of the Architect. The Arcane Acid he had made

then was pretty good, but it did come with some pretty severe limitations, such as the limit of only being able to switch “target” once. That was the first thing he worked to address. If Jake had more time during the Challenge Dungeon, this would have been the direction of progress he would have walked down, and so far, he was pretty happy with the result as he used Identify on his acid before he put it back in its slot at the basin.

**[Controlled Arcane Acid (Rare)] – An acid created from a mix of energy-corrosive ingredients and arcane energy. Upon coming into contact with any energy it has been attuned to corrode, this acid will turn highly destructive but doesn’t react to any other forms of energy. Has an increased ability to intrude into physical objects and corrode the energies within. This acid is significantly more effective against passive environmental energy. This Arcane Acid is highly controllable by its creator and can adapt accordingly when commanded. By default, this acid is in a passive state, where it will not corrode anything, and it will naturally return to this passive state after a while if not actively controlled.**

Definitely Jake’s best iteration to date. It was highly malleable, and while it did have some problems, such as not being as effective as the acid he’d made during the Challenge Dungeon yet, due to its higher level of adaptability, Jake was more than satisfied. He believed it would soon be more corrosive than the acid he made then while also being far more adaptable and useable in more situations.

When it came to getting materials, Jake had used some of what he’d already stored up, but otherwise he’d just popped by the Order of the Malefic Viper real quick to swipe some stuff. It also gave him an excuse to check in with Meira and Irin, who both volunteered to help get some ingredients Jake was looking for.

All in all, this had been a productive time, and the shift in environment and momentum in his profession after the Challenge Dungeons he hadn’t really been able to spend was showing, as he’d gained 4 whole levels during this relatively short period of time.

***‘DING!’ Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 268 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points***

...

***‘DING!’ Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 271 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points***

***‘DING!’ Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 279 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points***

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***'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 280 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points***

While 4 levels may not seem like a lot to many, for a mid-tier C-grade like Jake, it kind of was. Especially when one considered Jake was doing the kind of alchemy that usually didn't give a lot of experience. He would have gained a lot more levels if he'd just only crafted his best Heartrot Poison over and over again while making small improvements. Or, of course, if he'd done some major ritual with potentially multiversal consequences.

But those could wait. For now, he was happy doing some normal alchemy. As Jake was considering how he wanted to refine the acid mixture further, the phone-like thing Jake discovered Arnold had installed in his lab at some point went off. Jake quickly went over and pressed a button as a brief message played.

"They're back from Nevermore." This chapter is updated by *novel♦fire♦net*

Alas, the time had come. Quickly cleaning himself off Jake didn't wait as he headed to the lodge above.

--

Miranda stood in the highrise as she overlooked the city Haven had grown into. Further, grown into. It had expanded even further during her time away, which was definitely a good sign. She would be lying if she said she hadn't expected things to at least go a little wrong with her absence. However, it looked like things had gone smoothly, no doubt partly due to the great work of Holstred, Arthur, and many others.

"I'm feeling all nostalgic when I remember when this was just a small town at most," she smiled at Lillian, who stood beside her. The woman wore a white mask covering the upper part of her face that she'd begun to use after evolving to C-grade. The primary cause for this was the fact that during the evolution, she had done away with her scarred face. That she had promptly then shifted to a mask instead was a bit weird, but Miranda wasn't going to question her assistant.

"We're both old women by now," Lillian smiled. "It's normal to look back fondly on the good old days."

"Bah, we're still young at heart," Miranda shook her head. "Any word from the Sky Whale or Arthur yet?"

"No, but I believe they have been informed of our return," Lillian answered promptly. "Holstred at least said he'd contact them both promptly."

"I see," Miranda nodded. Truthfully, she wasn't in that much of a rush, and in many ways, it was comforting that there hadn't been an entire welcome party occupying her

office the second she returned to swarm her with all the issues that had propped up. That meant things couldn't be all that bad. It was especially good to know that her decision to focus on Nevermore while in Nevermore and get everything out of the experience possible had been the right one.

Nevermore had been both a great and a harrowing experience. Miranda had never been an exceptionally skilled fighter. She was more of a prepper. She could set up traps and such, but if she was jumped outside of her domain, she would be in trouble. Nevermore had helped her develop many new tools to deal with disadvantageous circumstances and to fight in any situation.

She and Lillian had not gone to Nevermore together. In fact, Miranda hadn't gone with anyone from Earth at all. Her party had consisted solely of members of the Order. As she wasn't trying to compete on any Leaderboards or anything like that, the levels of her party members also hadn't been limited at all, resulting in one of them being another witch from the Verdant Lagoon who was level 250 and specialized in combat. It was clear her role there was primarily to teach Miranda.

The rest of her party members were the usual setup, but it was never a secret the party was put together by the Witches of the Verdant Lagoon to nurture Miranda. In the beginning, the entire thing was very suffocating, especially as Miranda felt unworthy of being treated so well by others, only made worse by how much she sucked at combat.

But, with time, she got used to it, and they cleared many floors, and Miranda gained quite a few levels. She even spent a bit over five years in the House of the Architect Challenge Dungeon. For reference, as she wasn't competing on the Leaderboards, there were no Nevermore Points or anything like that to speak of, and the only thing you got for a good evaluation was a better reward. Rewards that were still considered far lesser than those offered to the Leaderboards contestants.

Now, after Nevermore, Miranda was pretty confident facing even relatively strong people at an equal level to herself, even without any preparations. With preparations, she doubted any but a handful of people on Earth could beat her. Pretty much all the people who'd placed well on the Nevermore Leaderboards would be able to defeat her, bar maybe a few who would struggle if their fighting styles didn't do well against a witch's domain.

The type of magic Miranda had practiced during the World Wonder primarily focused on using different talismans and such in combat, along with basic verdant magic. However, the biggest aspect was definitely learning how to create and use a mobile domain at any point without any warning. Naturally, this domain would be far less powerful than her usual one, but it was something. This was something she had already worked on long before Nevermore, but now she was actually confident in using it.

Anyway, during Miranda's time in Nevermore, Lillian had gone with a party put together by Sultan, using his connections with the Golden Road Emporium to hire what has

effectively highly-skilled mercenaries affiliated with the giant merchant Pantheon. From how Miranda understood it, Sultan had used the fact that Lillian was the right hand of Jake's right hand to ensure they got some of the best they could. Also, apparently, he was in quite good standing with many of the high-ranking merchants after he gave them good information about what kind of presents Jake would like during his Chosen Ceremony. In other words, he had told them that getting Jake slaves would be a bad idea.

To say Lillian had overperformed would be an understatement. It probably shouldn't have surprised Miranda either, as Lillian had always been a very strong-willed woman, but she had excelled a lot more than Miranda expected. After Jake had handed her that Lucenti Mage Tome all the way back in E-grade, she had slowly been growing in power, and by now, she was a respectable mage in her own right.

Jake definitely hadn't known, but the Lucenti Mage class was far from a normal one when he casually handed her the tome. Few classes that relied on celestial concepts and complicated mysticism tended to be, and Lillian was quite good at it. Plus, unlike Miranda, she never needed any setup, even if it could help her.

Many others had also returned to Earth around the same time as Miranda and Lillian, including Reika, who had gone to visit her great-grandfather and the Noboru Clan. Neil had also returned, having been the only one who went to Nevermore of his original party of five. The reason for this was pretty simple... he was the only one among them who'd reached C-grade then, with only Silas the only other person from the party to evolve since.

After everything had truly calmed down, the other three had more or less retired. Eleanor, the archer, had married a local leatherworker in Haven. Christen and Levi had also settled down in Haven and still lived with Silas, with Miranda not really sure what they were doing. Silas was still working, but he wasn't really doing anything combat-related anymore. He had many helpful support skills from his pretty rare profession and worked for what may as well be called Earth's government. His lie-detection skill alone made him a valuable employee, and his other skills were also handy.

"Do people even know Jake is back?" Miranda asked as the thought suddenly struck her. "Outside of a few people, that is."

"Not as far as I know," Lillian shook her head. "There was no public announcement or anything. However, many do assume he is back, seeing as the Fallen King and the Patriarch of the Noboru Clan both returned, as well as Sylphie helping out the Beast Alliance established by the Sky Whale."

"Makes sense," Miranda nodded. "We could call a meeting. Get everyone up to speed about what's going on and take status."

"Who should be invited?"



“The usual, especially those handling the Prima Guardian preparation. Oh, and having Jake there would also make things easier, if for nothing else but to also have him be aware of what’s actually going on with the planet he is supposedly the World Leader of.”

“I understand,” Lillian nodded, but Miranda kept ranting.

“We need him in the loop anyway, as calling a World Congress before the Prima Guardian would definitely be a good idea. Something that would have been a great privilege to have granted before he headed off to Nevermore so I could call one. Oh yeah, he also didn’t give me permissions regarding Land Division outside of Haven, as well as a slew of other things. Oh yeah, and most of the statistical tools, too! Do you think he even knows he has these tools? Do you think he’s touched his Pylon of Civilization a single time since he buried it under his house?”

Lillian didn’t need to answer, as they both knew. Miranda just sighed a bit as the truth was evident. “I guess my holiday is over, eh?”

“Very much so,” Lillian expressed her sympathy.

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## Chapter 916: Board (Read: Bored) Meeting

For the record, Jake had never opened any system menu related to him being a City Lord or the World Leader of his own volition. The only times he’d touched them was when Miranda asked for him to do something, and that something was more often than not just transferring rights and permissions.

In Jake’s defense, he blamed the bad UI of the system. How was it his fault the system didn’t have an “allow all” button? At least these existed for some major categories, and shortly after Jake became the World Leader, he went over these and granted rights to Miranda.

The problem was that the UI wasn’t static. New things would be unlocked with time, and how much the “country” or “kingdom” or whatever expanded. At least when it came to all the City Lord stuff, Miranda did have pretty much every permission available, but the permissions given had begun to fall behind severely with the World Leader stuff.

Also, because Jake didn’t have any profession related to City Lord stuff, he had to actually touch the Pylon of Civilization to activate it and see the system interface. Was it enough for him to just touch it with a bit of mana, or potentially even just his presence,



allowing him to do it from hundreds of meters away easily, including during all the time he'd spent in his lab?

Well, yes, but Jake didn't think about it, and that was the defense he was sticking to after he'd gone to talk to Miranda.

Jake was right nearby, so he'd been the first to arrive for their meeting after Arnold contacted him, with others like Arthur, the Fallen King, and Sword Saint needing a bit to get ready.

"So we both agree that we're going back to your lodge to get this fixed here and now while we still have some time?" Miranda asked after a very enlightening conversation.

"Yes, ma'am," Jake said in a semi-joking, semi-meek tone as he scratched the back of his head. "But... can I just add that I think you've done a brilliant job?"

"Well, thank you," Miranda smiled. "Now imagine how much more brilliant it would have been if I didn't have several options unavailable to me as your stand-in World Leader. To clarify, if you wish to take back full control and manage the planet yourself, I would more than happily-

"Oh, would you look at that? I can give you World Leader permission stuff right here and now without going to the Pylon!" Jake quickly said as he hurriedly found the system menu and began allocating all the new features to Miranda. Seriously, why didn't it just automatically allow her to do all that stuff? He had officially made her his stand-in even by system standards, yet some things were still not granted by default.

After Jake was done, he couldn't help but sigh. "Can I blame the system again? All this should just be automatic..."

"If I may," Lillian, who was now sporting a cool mask – great fashion choice, by the way – spoke up. "Some new features for World Leaders become available that hold quite a lot of power most World Leaders wouldn't ever want to unilaterally grant others. So a manual granting of permissions is likely implemented to avoid problems."

"I kind of get it, but it isn't like the permissions do anything overly dramatic," Jake shook his head.

"You just gave me permission to control practically every single Pylon of Civilization on the planet, and not just their associated defensive barriers, but the ability to simply blow them up, which would cause worldwide panic and the resulting explosions kill thousands," Miranda added.

"And such power couldn't be in better hands," Jake smiled brightly. "Now, let's go to the lodge and get the rest of these dumb permissions granted."

That was precisely what they proceeded to do, as Jake and Miranda quickly popped by his lodge and got all that sorted. On the way, Jake even proposed maybe asking Villy if he had a solution to automate all this granting of permissions, but Miranda made it clear she'd already asked the Verdant Witches and that while it was a bit annoying right now, it would cease to be an issue with time.

The problem was just that their faction was still rapidly growing and in a period of change, leading to many new things happening. Once things like the Prima Guardian were handled and Jake had fully become the World Leader by laying claim to Earth's Planetary Pylon, things should be a lot easier.

Making their way back again, the two also just caught up with everything that had happened to Haven's resident witch. Miranda already knew pretty much everything Jake had done as she got updates every single time they'd stopped by a City Floor. Jake hadn't known much about what Miranda had been up to, though, and he was pretty curious about how she'd handled the place.

When they were back, Lillian also joined the conversation as they waited for everyone to be ready to join for a meeting. Only the three of them, and a few others who would arrive shortly, would be physically present, while the rest would just get in contact remotely. New novel chapters are published on **novel●fire●net**

It was pretty understandable, considering all of them were busy doing their own stuff and pretty far away. Even if they could just use the teleportation network, that would still take some time. Besides, going somewhere for people like Arthur wasn't as easy as someone like Jake. He also needed bodyguards and stuff to come along, making it an entire thing.

On a side note, one of the people who would join remotely was Arnold. Arnold lived only a few kilometers away and could get to the meeting room in a few minutes if he wanted to, but he'd still decided to work from home. Jake very much respected that decision.

Holstred, the guy Jake had tried to prank with Sandy, expectedly entered the room shortly after, along with two people Jake didn't recognize. One of them was a beastfolk man, while the other one was a scalekin. Both of them acted overly polite toward Jake, but he had honestly gotten used to that by now.

Entering the large meeting room with them all, Jake was impressed by everything he saw. It was designed like one of those big board rooms rich people had board meetings in before the system, except they now had the technology to project holograms and stuff of everyone participating.

Miranda directed Jake to take a seat at the head of the table – a seat that was usually left empty, as it was reserved for the true World Leader as a symbolic gesture. Even if he wasn't the one actually leading the meeting or doing much at all, Miranda didn't want to hear any arguments, as it was only considered proper that the one with the highest

status would sit there. Jake's offer of just standing in the corner with Unseen Hunter active was also rapidly shot down, so Jake surrendered himself to his fate and took a seat. Beside him, Miranda and Lillian sat, joined by Holstred, the scalekin, and the beastfolk guy.

With everyone seated, Miranda officially began the meeting.

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Projections appeared all around the table as Miranda activated a crystal in the center. Jake saw the Fallen King, Sword Saint, Sky Whale, Arthur, his little brother, and many more familiar faces. Even the pretty shady merchant Renato, who ran Paradise, the city Jake had visited with Carmen during their little road trip way back.

"Thank you all for making time today. As you can see, Lord Thayne will also be attending this meeting, but please do not pay it too much mind, and let us proceed as usual," Miranda opened the meeting. "Let me begin by saying I am more than pleased to see how well Earth is doing even in my absence. Brilliant work. However, I am fully aware challenges may be lurking under the surface, so do not hesitate to bring them up. Now, Arthur, if you would get us all up to speed with everything."

"Of course," the projection of Arthur answered, his voice sounding just like as if he was there in person. "I would also like to welcome Ms. Wells and everyone else back, and I hope you have had a fruitful journey. Regarding Earth, let us start with—"

What followed reminded Jake way too much of those overly long meetings Jacob sometimes dragged him to before the system. That was, in some ways, lucky, as that meant Jake was trained to not zone out too much, but actually listen in case he would be asked to reference anything said in a later report.

Arthur started out by going over a lot of stats. Not the cool kind of stats, like Perception, but boring stats, like housing developments, employment rates, material gathering, birth rates, and a whole bunch of other things. He even had graphs and stuff to show, making it clear he had prepared for this meeting for a while... or he just kept updated stats at all times. Maybe the latter was actually more probable, considering how much more convenient the system had made a lot of things.

After Arthur, others followed, including some of those who worked with the guy. Renato also joined in to talk about entertainment and the economy, while Holstred touched on the integration of former slaves, joined by the beastfolk and scalekins, who outlined some of the challenges they faced, including quite a bit of xenophobia from humans who didn't like anyone who didn't look enough human for their taste. Elves didn't really face any problems, nor did the few dwarves who had come to Earth. It was primarily the more monstrous races who faced discrimination. Lots of shop owners, adventurer parties, and just people in general were being royal assholes.

Jake had to hold himself back from just suggesting referring these people to the Court of Shadows and dealing with it that way, but the Sky Whale offered some more open-minded solutions. In the end, the conclusion was pretty much that they would actively try to quell these harmful sentiments, with a realization that the more time passed, the smaller the problem would get. The younger generation showed way less apprehension toward dealing with other races, and as the multiverse opened up more, people would have to get used to how the world worked now or get lost.

They could always provide them with totally free one-way trips to the moon if they got too annoying. Just an option.

Once they were done talking about all the overly complicated stuff, they finally got to the topic of the Prima Guardian Preparation Plan. Jake had heard a bit about this plan already, and from the sounds of it, things were going well.

The ones behind the preparations did realize Earth was simply too large to account for everything. There would definitely be some hidden monsters somewhere that could cause trouble for humanity should they side with the Prima Guardian, but there shouldn't be too many. At least not close to human lands. The further they got away from where humanity lived, the less anyone knew of what lived there, though Arnold had tried to map out most things. Jake even came to learn that Arnold had worked with a dozen or so parties specializing in exploration to create a map of the planet with notable locations marked.

The Sky Whale also talked about the sky and oceans quite a bit, where it became clear Sylphie had been quite a help, having spent nearly all the time since they returned from Nevermore hunting down problematic monsters or convincing them to join the light side. Then, there was the entire underground world, which was definitely the least explored overall. Earth was simply too large now, with the planet having tunnels leading all the way to the core. Efforts had been focused on mapping only the upper layers while setting up methods of detection shouldn't anything deemed too dangerous emerge.

All in all, Jake was impressed with all the work that had gone into preparing for the Prima Guardian. He wasn't sure if he should feel bad, knowing how busy everyone had been, especially over the last many months. Someone like the Fallen King had also been busy as hell dealing with monsters and effectively setting up a huge domain of his own in what was once not considered human lands at all.

The Sword Saint was the only one relatable. He had done a bit of stuff with his clan but otherwise focused solely on training. He even spoke a bit about the mythical training formation he had been granted by Minaga and how great that was. Oh, and then he mentioned how he had people go over everything he had gathered in Nevermore within his spatial storage to put it to use... so not that relatable after all. Especially not when he asked Jake if he had time to set up the Minaga's Labyrinth Dungeon he had been given for his top-tier performance in the Challenge Dungeon.

A reward Jake had definitely not forgotten and his explanation that he was waiting for Miranda to return to make the dungeon wasn't just him making up a reasonable excuse on the fly. Nope, Jake would never forget important stuff like that.

Either way, the meeting continued smoothly as Jake learned way more than he needed to about everything going on with the planet. Again, he could only conclude that things were going pretty well, even if there were some major issues they had to address. Jake was honestly impressed with himself for having been zoned in for the whole nearly six-hour meeting because, hot damn, had it been boring at times.

Jake also understood that his own heavy-handed approaches wouldn't work on any of those problems. The only place he could help was with the Prima Guardian preparation, and it didn't particularly sound like they needed help, especially not after Arnold returned. The guy was a one-man army, achieved by deploying a literal army of drones and robots and stuff.

After some final pleasantries, the meeting ended, as Jake had entirely forgotten to bring up one topic. Luckily, Miranda, Lillian, Holstred, and the two with him were still there, even after the projections were gone.

"Things are going better than expected," Miranda said with a smile. "Lillian, inform me when those reports Arthur talked about arrive. Now, let's get out of here, shall we?"

"Just one thing," Jake interrupted her, earning him a raised eyebrow as the three non-natives of the planet also looked at him with their undivided attention. "Would you find any issues with blowing up the moon?"

Miranda stared at him for several moments before collecting herself. "Why are you asking about blowing up the moon?"

"It's haunted," Jake explained with a shrug.

During that day, Jake had spent a lot of time with Miranda, but they had only talked about Nevermore stuff, making him totally forget about bringing up his recent moon visit.

"The moon is... haunted?" Miranda asked, seemingly not entirely sure if she should take him seriously.

"Yep, real nasty haunting too. A powerful B-grade has integrated with the core," Jake further explained. "Ah, this isn't a rush-job... I doubt it's feasible to handle the situation before B-grade. Or maybe I can do it at peak C-grade, but either way, it won't be for a while. Suffice to say, things didn't end well when Sandy and I visited."

"That... alright, it actually makes sense," Miranda nodded. "I take it this B-grade is contained for now, and it won't be a problem with the Prima Guardian?"

“It won’t,” Jake shook his head.

“Great,” Miranda said. “In that case, do as you see fit, as long as it doesn’t result in giant moon rocks destroying half of the planet or something in the process.”

“It should be fine,” Jake said with a shrug as one other concern struck him. “Say, Lillian, would it negatively impact you if the moon is gone? Seeing as you’re walking down a Path related to moonlight and all.”

“Not at all,” Lillian answered, as she explained: “The moon is more of a conceptual representation rather than a physical object. It’s all about visualization and understanding the underlying concepts of lunar energies and other concepts. If I wasn’t able to perform without a physical moon, I would have been quite a burden within Nevermore, wouldn’t I?”

“That’s good to know,” Jake smiled. Thinking back, it wasn’t like there had been a real moon in the Lucenti Plains with the Great White Stag, either.

“What you said also just reminded me,” Miranda said with a frown. “You said the Chosen of the Lord Protector had gone to the moon with you, but it seems no one has heard anything since. Do you know why no one can locate the Chosen?”

“Oh,” Jake said casually. “It’s because Sandy died.”

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## **Chapter 917: "Let the construction begin!"**

The phrasing of words is essential when communicating; everyone knows that. Jake was quite known for sometimes not thinking through what he was saying, but sometimes, he knew exactly what he said. Sometimes, it was just really fun to fuck with people a bit, especially when what you said was entirely truthful.

Miranda had simply given him too good of a setup for Jake to miss the opportunity. It was just perfect. The reaction of Miranda was great as her eyes narrowed in confusion and disbelief... with the one from Holstred and the two who had arrived with him just pure gold as their eyes opened wide as if they had just heard something they really shouldn’t have.

“Jake... what exactly do you mean when you say that the Chosen of the Boundless Hydra died?” Miranda asked after a bit, having clearly sussed out that Jake was messing with her somehow.

“Well, what happened is that we went to the moon,” Jake began.

“Right.”

“And then Sandy wanted to explore the core and met the B-grade ghost haunting the moon deep inside the thing,” he continued.

Miranda nodded.

“This ghost then killed Sandy,” Jake finished.

“To fully clarify, is the Chosen dead as of this moment?” Miranda sighed.

“No? Not right now, as far as I know.”

“Then how exactly was the Chosen of the Lord Protector considered dead?”

“By being killed,” Jake shrugged as if she was asking the most obvious question in the world.

“But they are not dead anymore, correct?” Miranda said with a high level of exasperation.

“Sandy got better.”

“Right... right,” Miranda nodded slowly. “So, to conclude, the Chosen is not actually dead. So where are they right now?”

“Went back to the Order to recuperate. Turns out dying isn’t healthy for you. Who would’ve known?” Jake said with a grin.

“Okay, this was a very enlightening conversation,” Miranda said, as he saw a glint in her eye that made Jake aware she wanted to make him do work stuff. “Now, what’s this about us having to discuss setting up a Minaga’s Labyrinth?”

As she asked, she also threw a look at Holstred and the two others, making them bow and leave. This left only Jake, Lillian, and Miranda remaining in the meeting room. Jake had feared he wouldn’t escape having to set it up now after using Miranda’s return as an excuse for not having done it yet.

“See, while it may have been an excuse I made up in the moment, I do actually think it’s something worth discussing with you,” Jake said in a pretty serious tone. “In fact, I’m



pretty sure I told Minaga back when I got it that I would likely just hand it to you.” The source of this content is novel~fire~**net**

“We both know it’s more likely you would have forgotten all about the item. Anyway, I have heard a bit about these Labyrinths while at Nevermore. If I remember correctly, they are temporary dungeons that contain an image of Minaga within, with some of the better ones even having a real clone. However, I’m not sure they can be truly viewed as strategic resources. As far as I remember, they have limited usage and a relatively short duration they can exist,” Miranda said.

“Yeah, about that,” Jake scratched the back of his head. “The one I got is a bit better than the average.”

Jake took out the funny-looking statue of Minaga giving two thumbs up as he shared its details with Lillian and Miranda.

**[My Very Own Top-tier Minaga’s Labyrinth (Unique)] – Is that a dungeon in your pocket, or is it just me? Finally, a solution to missing the wondrous Minaga has been found, as you now have the opportunity to place your very own Minaga’s Labyrinth wherever your heart desires (conditions may apply). When placing the dungeon, you must choose a suitable location. The nature and design of the dungeon may be modified upon placement with advice from the Minaga clone within. This Minaga’s Labyrinth is of the top tier, allowing you to customize far more options while expanding the size of the dungeon significantly. As a top-tier Minaga’s Labyrinth, sections within the Labyrinth can cross grades. Note that the dungeon must be maintained after placement, and should it run out of power, it will disappear forever. As a top-tier variant of Minaga’s Labyrinth, it does not have a built-in expiration date.**

**Requirements: Soulbound.**

The two of them read it carefully, as Lillian commented: “I do think that reached the level of being considered a high-value strategic resource.”

“Right,” Miranda nodded. “It’s... a lot different to others I have seen. Especially the part about not having an expiration date and the ability to have parts of it cross grades. Dungeons with creatures of different grades are incredibly rare, especially when you reach the higher grades.”

“So, we all agree it’s good stuff,” Jake smiled. “Now we just need to decide what to do with it. Where should we place it? What kind of dungeon should we make with it? Input for design? Lots of questions.”

“Hm,” Miranda muttered. “A thought just struck me... doesn’t Arnold, the Sword Saint, Sylphie, Carmen, Maria, Caleb, the Fallen King, and a lot of others also have their own Minaga’s Labyrinths to place? I have yet to hear of any of them placing theirs yet.”

"Maybe they just forgot they had it," Jake shrugged, having very reasonably concluded the most likely reason.

"I highly doubt that," Miranda sighed. "Contacting them and having some kind of cohesive placement strategy may be an idea."

"That sounds like a plan," Jake smiled. "See, it was smart of me to have completely forgotten the thing."

"Sure," Miranda didn't even want to argue. "Lillian, can you reach out to those with Labyrinths? Also, Jake, do you know if anyone else has top-tier ones like yours?"

"I think Sylphie does," Jake answered, remembering she also got a 25% amplifier. "Maybe Arnold? Not sure, though. Both of them did extremely well in the Challenge Dungeon."

"I will reach out to them," Lillian agreed. "But, if I may, could I suggest perhaps not placing Lord Thayne's Labyrinth in Haven? The city is already highly congested, and placing a dungeon that will undoubtedly attract even more attention and will only exacerbate this issue."

"Right," Miranda agreed, Jake also nodding along as she probably, no, definitely, had a point there. "Then also consider looking into a good site to place the Labyrinth. Perhaps several Labyrinths if we wish to have them in the same area."

"Labyrinth City," Jake joked, though he knew it probably wouldn't end up being a joke.

They talked a bit more but decided nothing more would be done for now.

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With all that handled, Jake felt like his social battery was well and truly spent for the day. Miranda also knew this and said she would contact him once there was any update on the Labyrinth situation or if she needed him for something. She did seem a bit surprised Jake was actually spending time in Haven and not at the Order, which was definitely proof Jake had spent too much time away from Earth even before Nevermore.

Jake returned to his laboratory and got to work on his acids once more. He had a feeling that he wouldn't have as many relaxing days as before Miranda returned, but what can you do about it?

Days passed before Jake was expectedly contacted and asked to be somewhere a week later. This week also quickly went by before Jake set off to somewhere he hadn't been before. Apparently, there had been a lot of talks about where to place this Labyrinth City – a name that had somehow become official – and in the end, they'd settled on a small town not far from the headquarters of the Noboru Clan. This is to say

that Labyrinth City would be well and truly within the territory of the Sword Saint's clan and also managed by it.

Getting there was pretty easy, as the small town of only about five hundred people already had a teleportation circle placed there. The town was placed in an area right next to a large mountain range with powerful beasts on the other side, making it a popular place to stop by before hunting across the mountains.

When Jake arrived, he was surprised to see that Miranda and Lillian really had gathered quite the group. All the expected people from the post-Leaderboards reveal get-together were there, including even Sylphie, who happily flew over to Jake when she saw him. Even Arnold was there in person, having been dragged out of his workshop. There were also some unfamiliar faces who had also done Nevermore and tried to compete on the Leaderboards.

Jake was the second-to-last to arrive, as Caleb was a bit late, but at least he had the excuse of having a kid at home.

"Thank you all for coming," Miranda said with a smile as she directed her attention to those who hadn't also been at the board meeting. "It's good to see some familiar faces I haven't met in a long time."

A few pleasantries were exchanged before they got down to business and discussed how they actually wanted to do this entire Minaga's Labyrinth thing. With several labyrinths available of many different tiers, it was only natural to specialize some of them and not have too much overlap.

Of course, doing all this without having full knowledge of what exactly the Labyrinths were capable of was quite difficult, but luckily, they had an expert in the matter available.

Because, it turns out that part of the preparations over this week had been to place down a projection circle to allow a certain someone to participate. Jake honestly shouldn't have been surprised when he saw the familiar four-eyed Unique Lifeform appear as a projection in the middle of the small meeting room.

"**Bow before me, mortals,**" the voice of Minaga echoed through the room as he turned toward Jake. "Oh, and hi Jake, short time no see! You know, because any passage of time feels short to me because I'm immortal."

"Can you turn it off?" Jake asked as he looked over at Lillian.

"Hey! That's super rude for someone making time in their busy day to help you!" Minaga complained.

"You're right; we shouldn't take up your valuable time," Jake wholeheartedly agreed.

"Well, too late now because I've already cleared out my schedule, so you're stuck with me," the Unique Lifeform crossed his arms.

"Fine, have it your way," Jake relented with a smile.

"Minaga wins once more! Anyway, I got the gist of it. You want to create an entire city centered around my Labyrinths – very flattering, by the way – and for that, you requested some advice on what kind of design you want for each Labyrinth, right?"

"I greet the All-God Legion, and it is precisely so," Miranda said with a polite nod.

"Alright, let's first see what we have available," the projection said as Jake and everyone else presented their statues. Jake saw that while Arnold's was the second best among all of them, it was still worse than Jake and Sylphie's.

"Hm," Minaga said after inspecting all the statues closely. "Damn, I look good, don't I?"

"Are you sure we can't turn it off?" Jake turned to Lillian again.

"Anyway, we have a few options available to us, but may I offer a suggestion I doubt you've considered?" Minaga asked, entirely ignoring Jake's comment.

"Sure," Jake answered instantly, also fine with moving on.

"Instead of making a bunch of small Labyrinths... make one big one," Minaga suggested with a big smile. Miranda looked surprised, with others also frowning or raising an eyebrow.

"How could any of us have even considered that, seeing as nothing had ever suggested that was even an option?" Jake asked with exasperation.

"I did say I doubted you had thought of it, didn't I?. Also, it isn't usually an option either," Minaga proceeded to explain. "Inside of every Labyrinth is usually one of two things: either an image or one of my clones, with my clones appearing in the good ones. These clones are usually A-grade, sometimes S-grade, if I felt frisky about it when making it. The hawk got an S-grade within her Labyrinth. However, for yours, Jake, I-"

"Put a god-level clone inside," Jake cut him off.

"... do you take pleasure in taking the winds out of my sails?" Minaga sighed.

"Yes."

"Fair enough," Minaga shrugged. "My point is that the god-level clone is a bit more capable than usual. There are still many limitations, but extracting the energy from

several of my idols to create one large Labyrinth with many different sections is more than possible.”

”How precisely would this look?” Miranda questioned. ”If I recall, dungeons usually have requirements to enter, so how would it differentiate between those of higher or lower grades?”

”The requirement to enter will be based on the lowest grade available there,” Minaga explained without any sass. ” Different parts can then be further sectioned off. Honestly, there are a lot of options available. I do have some system limitations, too, but know that this is one of the only ways to create a dungeon where, say, a C-grade can fight B-grades.”

”What is the minimum requirement you can make the Labyrinth?” Miranda continued.

”E-grade.”

”E-grade?” Miranda asked, surprised. ”That low? But won’t that cap off the difficulty at a relatively low grade?”

”It would if this was one Labyrinth and not several fused together,” Minaga shook his head. ”With all the idols here, I can make one going from E-grade all the way to B-grade. B-grade included. Oh, and that is the cap, by the way. Can’t make it have anything A-grade inside. Blame the system for that one, not me.”

Jake had a lot of questions still, and so did others, as Minaga had an entire Q&A about the plans the Unique Lifeform clearly had considered long before even coming here. Or, he was really quick on his feet to think through ideas... actually, that second one seemed entirely possible, considering he was literally a god with who knows how many clones.

At the end of the day, they decided to let Minaga be in charge of most of it. There were some very valid concerns raised, such as the fact that fewer dungeons would result in fewer titles for completing them, which was a sacrifice there was just no way around. Then there was the fact that maintaining a mega-complex dungeon like what Minaga suggested was something that no one on Earth was even close to being capable of. This Minaga quickly proposed a solution to by promising a lifetime warranty, where he would send ”repair-Minagas” to maintain it.

The plans of creating a city with a bunch of different Labyrinths had quickly morphed into something quite different. Jake also knew this wasn’t something normal at all but a very special offer from Minaga to create a unique Labyrinth dungeon for Earth. Another tourist trap for the planet, if you may. Perhaps for the better, as it would distract people from wanting to visit Jake’s lodge.

Placing the dungeon itself was actually pretty simple, at least Minaga assured them it was:

"I can change the entrance point object a bit within the set area where we place the dungeon, but personally, I recommend at least a twenty-meter tall, highly decorated marble gate. Oh, and make it gilded in gold for proper aesthetics. Naturally, a large grand structure should be constructed around this gate, serving as a landmark that can be seen even from space. If you need me to do any poses for reference, I am naturally available. I even heard Earth has quite the sculptor, though I fear he only does works of Primordials," Minaga went on a long rant, where the only valuable information was that the entrance object wasn't a hundred percent set from the moment they created the dungeon.

This allowed them to not delay as they selected a large open spot relatively close to the mountains. While they ignored most of what Minaga said, constructing a grand building around the entrance was a plan, with current thoughts to build it into the mountain. Of course, with how dungeons worked, they could just place a free-standing wooden door on an open field, but everyone, even Miranda, wanted to make something more grand out of it.

In the large open spot, Jake took out his statue that would serve as the base. The projection of Minaga's clone had shown them a pretty simple magic circle they quickly drew, allowing the Unique Lifeform to do his thing even from another universe using the idols as mediums.

Once all the idols were placed, Jake activated his statue to create a dungeon. At the same time, the magic circle came to life as Jake's statue absorbed all the other ones, and a new projection appeared in the sky of a new Minaga. This one felt far different from any prior, and he knew it was the one in charge of the coming Labyrinth.

**"The time has come!"** the projection said with a big smile, as out of nowhere, he pulled out a yellow hard hat and put it on. **"Let the construction begin!"**

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## Chapter 918: Union Oath 2.0

Was Jake going to question why Minaga had a yellow hard hat, or how he even knew what a yellow hard hat was? No. Was he going to point out how absolutely ridiculous the Unique Lifeform looked with it on his head, as it clearly didn't fit properly? Yes, of course, he was.

Jake stayed at the construction site for a little while as the projection of Minaga in charge of construction just stood there, seemingly doing stuff behind the scenes. After a bit, it became clear that he couldn't actually let anyone inside the in-progress dungeon quite yet, but he could make holograms and whatnot of what he was making for others to give live feedback during construction.

Miranda and a few others remained to consult with him as Jake decided there was no real reason for him to stay. According to Minaga, it would take quite a while before anything was ready, and it definitely wouldn't be complete before the Prima Guardian event was already over. For now, all they could do was wait as the Unique Lifeform did his thing, with the Sword Saint looking into getting a top-tier builder team on the structure that would serve as the dungeon entrance.

Ah, but there was one kind of interesting question asked by a beastfolk who had managed to do well in Nevermore and gotten an idol of her own. She was one of the "elites" sent by the United Tribes and pretty strong in her own right. She did seem to have a lacking understanding of Minaga, though, based on her question:

"Should we not also turn the surrounding structure into a temple celebrating the All-God Legion?" she asked, being deadly serious.

"Yeah, no, I don't do temples," Minaga quickly shot the idea down. "I don't do worshippers in general. Faith has nothing to do with my Path at all. All the faith I could ever need, I get from myself. Well, my other selves. We like to believe in each other."

"You're just feeling salty you can't give out Blessings," Jake pointed out very accurately.

"Neither can you, but you don't see me calling you out for it," Minaga rebutted.

"I'm not a god."

"Oh, and now you're stereotyping, eh? Why, are all gods supposed to be able to give out Blessings? That's just pure prejudice right there, and you should feel ashamed," Minaga shook his head in overexaggerated disappointment.

"In my defense, I'm only prejudiced when it comes to you," Jake smiled.

Either way, the conclusion was that Minaga didn't want a big temple to celebrate him. He wanted a large building to instead commemorate the Labyrinth he was making. A pretty respectable attitude in Jake's mind, to prefer people to praise not him as a person, but the dungeon he had created. Alright, he did want them to then praise him for being such a good creator, of course, but the point was that Minaga wanted recognition for something he'd done and not just for existing.

After everything seemed settled, Jake hung out a bit more with some familiar faces before everyone headed back to do their own thing. Everyone was preparing in their



own way for the Prima Guardian to arrive and had taken time out of their day for this Labyrinth-creation day. Jake did have to admit that it felt a bit like a waste of time for everyone to go, but seeing as the idols for the Labyrinth were all Soulbound, they had to show up.

Jake didn't leave the newly named Labyrinth City on his own, though. A certain hawk decided to join him as they decided to do something Jake was reminded of recently when he couldn't easily contact Sylphie or even feel where she was when he prepared to head to Labyrinth City:

They were going to remake their Union Oath.

The reason it hadn't been remade yet wasn't just because of Jake being forgetful, though that did play a factor. It was also because when he did remember, he didn't want to be the one to bring it up. To Jake, Sylphie was like a niece. She was family. Asking her to redo the Union Oath felt like overstepping to him, especially when one considered the limitations of the skill.

Sylphie could only have an Oath with one person at a time, and who was Jake to assume it would be him? She was free to make it with anyone she wanted. The benefits of the Union Oath were originally to allow Sylphie to do certain system events, but Jake doubted that would apply much anymore, as there were no indications she couldn't participate in the Prima Guardian event.

However, Sylphie had asked him to remake it. Jake didn't know if this was partly with the pressure of Stormild or something, and it honestly wasn't his business either. He did insist on only making a temporary Union Oath like the first one, though. These Union Oaths were supposed to be for life, and Jake wasn't going to lock down Sylphie. He wanted her to have ample opportunity to change her mind in the future.

Heading back to Haven using a few teleporters, Jake and Sylphie headed straight for his lodge. On the way, Jake decided to ask a certain someone if remaking the Union Oath temporarily was even possible, seeing as the only reason it had been temporary in the first place was due to him.

*"Hey, Villy. During the last Union Oath, you interfered and kinda helped half-break the thing... can you do that again? Or is it possible to do a halvesie Union Oath like last time?"* Jake asked the snake god.

*"To be clear, it was you who broke the ritual the first time around. I just swooped in to exploit what you broke for my own benefit. Secondly, rather than doing a new Union Oath, it should be possible to rely on the Records of the first one to recreate it, with all its benefits and demerits. Just ask Stormild once you do the ritual,"* the Viper answered, putting Jake's mind at peace. Partly.

He still remembered his first time dealing with Stormild, and it had been... something. Trying to get a read on the massive living natural disaster was quite a difficult task, though she had seemed quite helpful the first time around. Her flighty personality just made her a handful.

Once back at Jake's lodge and the two of them were inside, they didn't beat about the bush as Sylphie reminded him what he had to do:

"Ree, ree," she explained.

"Right, place my hand on the magic circle and accept the prompt. I remember," Jake nodded. "Let's hope Stormild is nice this time around."

"Ree," Sylphie argued that Big Bird Stormild was always nice.

"Sure, sure," Jake smiled as Sylphie did her thing. Her entire body began to glow as Jake felt powerful magic at play. Compared to back in D-grade, Jake now had a far better grasp of just how high-level the small ritual circle summoned was. Truly the work of a Primordial.

Reaching out, Jake touched the magic circle as the prompt appeared:

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***Do you wish to begin the ritual to enter a Union Oath of Stormild with Sylphie?  
NOTE: Both parties can exit the ritual at any point until the final Union Oath has been made***

The answer being obvious, Jake agreed as he once more felt like he existed in two places at once. He was both inside the lodge, and his soul floated as a soul form within a vast starry sky of nothingness. In the space, he couldn't see Sylphie right away until he noticed: the wind all around him, in this entire detection range, carried her aura.

A powerful gust swept through as all the wind began to gather before forming a small hawk. Jake and Sylphie exchanged glances as they looked at the one other thing in this space. A giant tablet with a title on the top.

### **Union Oath of Stormild**

Last time, the rest of this tablet had been entirely blank; however, this time, there were what looked like outlines of runes still remaining toward the top. Jake quickly gathered these were the remnants of the Union Oath they had before and the one they hoped to effectively renew. The entire tablet also looked more worn than last time, with small cracks around the corners, as if it was damaged. Seeing as this was a representation of the Records of the Oath, it wasn't entirely wrong to say it actually was damaged.

"Quite the mess, eh?" a voice suddenly said as a small orb of burning wind appeared between Jake and Sylphie, making Jake instinctively shy away.

Quickly gathering himself, Jake answered: "The tablet?"

"Yepsie," Stormild agreed as the orb morphed into the form of a burning wind bird. "Ah, I don't blame you. I blame Vilas."

"Ree?" Sylphie questioned.

"No, I could fix it, just not sure you want to? You want to do a renewal, right? Renewing an eternal oath is kind of funny, isn't it? I think it is," Stormild said in her usual childish tone. "Anywho, if I fixed it, we couldn't renew the old one, now could we?"

"Ree," Sylphie agreed before adding: "Ree, ree?"

"We could do slight alterations like that to it, sure," Stormild agreed. "But both parties have to agree, and it does seem a bit silly and not at all how the Union Oath is supposed to work."

"I'm, of course, fine with it," Jake said, as the suggestion was excellent. Sylphie had proposed to change the Union Oath to include terms for breaking it, actually putting them into words. From what Jake had gathered, these terms were usually something like one party trying to kill the other or doing something that caused a certain level of bad karma between the two of them.

For the record, you couldn't do terms that were just "one party wants to break it off."

It had to be more complex than that for the system to accept breaking an otherwise unbreakable bond. For the karma thing, as an example, the bad karma would need to be at a level that would only come from either party killing close family members of the other or doing something so morally incomprehensible the other simply found it unforgivable.

Of course, the Union Oath would usually be broken before these things happened simply by the fundamental promise of the Oath being broken. At which point the one breaking the promise in the Union Oath would already be dead.

The thing is... due to how Jake and Sylphie's Union Oath worked, all of the usual terms and conditions applied by it were a bit wishy-washy, and death was never even on the table. Its effects were also lesser in every way, but so were all the downsides. One such lessened downside was that the terms for breaking it could be far less severe, allowing them to simply settle on a term for breaking that wasn't overly harsh.

Still, the terms weren't nothing. Sylphie proposed that should she think Jake was really a baddie, the Oath would break. At the same time, should Jake think Sylphie was an

enemy, it would also break. No questions, no nothing. This was a simple condition and was effectively an anti-betrayal clause. Seeing as their original Oath was pretty much just to be friends, Jake wasn't sure how much this small extra clause even did, but having it put into words couldn't hurt.

Sylphie hadn't made it with that in mind, though. She did it for the upsides. Because it also meant that should they continue to be close, the new Union Oath wouldn't automatically expire for a far longer time. It was still not going to last forever, but far more than just a few years like the last one.

"Alright, alright, I'll help," Stormild said as the Primordial threw Jake a look. "Ah, and make sure Vilas knows that should he interfere again, I'll crush your soul projection so hard it's not gonna be fun for you at all. Okay?"

Jake knew this wasn't an empty threat as he nodded. He also felt that Villy wasn't going to do anything, which was definitely the best for Jake's long-term health. The words of Stormild also made it very clear that even if a lot of factions wanted Jake and would be angry if he died or got crippled, Stormild didn't care in the slightest.

"Ree!" Sylphie scolded Stormild for the threat, as the Primordial backed off a bit.

"I didn't say I'd kill him! Just give him an owie for acting like a baddie."

"Ree."

"What do you mean that's fair?" Jake mumbled, as he *really* made sure Villy wasn't going to try anything.

"Great! Then let's get started with the Union Oath renewal!"

Jake and Sylphie nodded as Stormild got started.

"Ahem," Stormild said as the entire tablet lit up. Words reappeared as the Primordial asked in a serious tone. "Do you, Awesomest Uncle Jake Thayne, take Bestest Bird Sylphie to be your Forever-Friend, and do you agree that should you become a baddie in the eyes of Bestest Bird Sylphie, you are no longer Forever—Friends and the Oath will be undone?"

"I do? Yeah, I do," Jake agreed, a bit confused until he remembered the initial wording of their Union Oath. A simple promise to be Forever-Friends... oh well, it had worked, hadn't it?

"And do you, Bestest Bird Sylphie, take..."

Stormild asked the same thing of Sylphie, as she also agreed. The light of the tablet intensified, and a final system prompt popped up in front of Jake to indeed confirm his decision, proving whatever Stormild had just done was pure theatrics.

They both naturally agreed, and Jake once more felt the Union Oath be established. He also felt his own heartbeat speed up slightly, but he kept it under control. He wasn't going to fight anything this time, and compared to the first Union Oath, his reaction was far less extreme. Stormild also clearly chose to stay out of the Oath entirely but was more of a facilitator than a guarantor – which was also the primary reason the Union Oath didn't have any punishment should it be broken.

Feeling the connection once more made Jake smile. He also vaguely felt Sylphie be happy about it, proving the Oath had been a great success.

"Ree!" Sylphie screeched, thanking Stormild.

"No problem, no problem! Just keep working hard, okay? You already claimed Authority, which is a super good start and mega impressive for C-grade!" the Primordial said. Jake was still far from sure what an Authority was, even if Sylphie and that Wintermaul elemental from the Nevermore get-together had mentioned it. All he knew was that it was a good thing.

"Ree!" Sylphie gladly accepted the praise.

"I don't really have any big pieces of advice to offer except to never become a slacker! Unless you're really tired, then slacking off for a little while is totally fine, but then you have to come back and have super much energy after, alright?" the Primordial whom Jake really had a hard time taking serious continued.

Sylphie just nodded as if such advice was entirely unneeded. Which is probably was. Sylphie was always full of energy and definitely not the type to begin slacking off. And if she did...

"Oh, trust me, I'll make sure she doesn't become some freeloader," Jake assured the elemental Primordial.

"I'm not saying she has to be as zealous as you... just not lazy," Stormild muttered. "Anyhow, Union Oath over! Bye, Sylphie, I'll keep your uncle for a second!"

"Ree!" Sylphie screeched while raising a wing to wave goodbye. With that, she disappeared, leaving Jake alone with the Primordial, giving him a bit of a deja vu from the first Oath. Content originally comes from [movel\\*\\*fire\\*\\*net](http://movel.fire.net)

The moment Sylphie was gone, Jake felt the entire atmosphere shift. It turned incredibly serious as the burning bird of wind looked at him. "You and Sylphie have both grown faster than I expected. Startingly so. I have also heard of your other exploits, and while I

don't care much for the Nevermore stuff, am I right to assume Sylphie was your first creation using your talents as the Harbinger of Primeval Origins?"

Jake, going along with the more serious mood, nodded. "She was. My ability was not the only factor, but I'm certain she was affected."

"Good. The progenitor of any Path is advantaged," Stormild said in a pleased tone. "That was all I really wanted. Do treat her well, for she intends to treat you well."

"Of course, I will," Jake answered, almost offended she felt she even needed to say that.

"Good, good. Oh, and do say hi from me next time you meet our mutual acquaintance!"

"The Viper?" Jake asked, unsure who she was talking about.

"No," the Primordial simply said.

"Then who?"

"That's for you to find out, isn't it?" Stormild said in a teasing tone, before throwing Jake soul out and back to his lodge, as Stormild once more proved themselves quite a handful to deal with.

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## Chapter 919: Prima Guardian Preparations

"How the hell am I supposed to say hi to someone for you if you don't tell me who..." Jake grumbled as the damn birdbrain didn't make any sense at all. He genuinely had no idea who she was even talking about... it could be so many. Maybe another Primordial, seeing as Jake had met, like, half of them during Nevermore? Some Void God was also entirely possible... or maybe Artemis? It could even be that Wintermaul elemental, in case the one who'd blessed that guy was closely related to Stormild. Wait, it could definitely also be Minaga. Both Minaga and Stormild were chaotic as fuck.

Shaking the thought away as it really wasn't worth dedicating any brainpower to, he turned his attention to Sylphie, who looked curiously at him. "Ree?"

"No, just Stormild messing with me," Jake sighed. Yeah, that was his conclusion, even if the Primordial could have actually meant something with her words. He really wasn't a fan of people acting mysterious just for the sake of acting mysterious.

"Ree," Sylphie responded.

"Yeah, not surprising an elemental spirit likes to mess with people," he just agreed. Jake also took a moment to really feel the Union Oath once more. It was odd. When it disappeared, Jake hadn't really missed it overly much, likely because he still always had the Golden Mark of the Fallen King to find and contact Sylphie quickly.

Then, after Nevermore, they quite frankly all could do with a bit of time apart to do their own thing. Now, it felt oddly comforting to have it back, though. Sylphie also seemed happy, which made Jake happy in return.

"So, what are your plans now? Gonna continue to help Whaleman?" Jake asked the hawk.

"Ree, ree, ree," Sylphie confirmed. She also told him some interesting details he hadn't heard before. Sylphie had recently adopted the role of primarily hunting elementals and given them stern talking-tos. Elementals tended not to be very good at listening, and even if they were intelligent, they were more akin to children than adults.

Some more adult-like elementals - such as the water elemental at the harbor town Jake, Carmen, and Sylphie had stopped by on their way to Paradise - were already working on taming the elementals close to human land. At the very least, the elementals were trying to eliminate them as threats to humanity.

Elementals trying to control other elementals was a lot easier than beasts trying to control other beasts, primarily due to their lower level of intellect. If a smart and powerful water elemental entered a group of dumb water elementals, these other water elementals would instinctively begin to follow the smart one.

Sylphie was this concept taken to the extreme. Other wind elementals practically worshipped her. She even told him of the time she went to the cloud islands that had drifted away from hanging above Haven a while ago. All the Cloud Elementals, Storm Elementals, and other variants were incredibly subservient to Sylphie without her even needing to do anything.

*Maybe it has something to do with that Authority skill, too?* Jake questioned himself without having any means to confirm. Sylphie also had no idea when he tried asking her, either.

"Seems like you got a quest ahead of you," Jake smiled, happy Sylphie had something to do.



"Ree?"

"I'll just stay here, I reckon," Jake said. "Gonna do some alchemy and be available for when people start returning to Earth. Jacob, Casper, Eron, and many others will make their way back for the Prima Guardian event, and I want to be ready for when that happens. Or, at the very least, be within quick flight distance to help Miranda when the time arrives."

"Ree," Sylphie nodded in understanding before waving her goodbyes... but not before flying by and stealing one of Jake's time bananas.

Speaking of the time banana musa. It had grown a little, so that was great. Not much else had changed, though. Truthfully, it would have been weird if the musa had experienced any great changes in less than a year, as these things tended to take their time growing.

Anyway, with Sylphie gone, Jake returned back to his laboratory beneath the lodge as he didn't have any more obligations for now. With Miranda back, he also felt a lot more assured that things would be handled elsewhere, and he also trusted that there wasn't really anyone capable of making trouble for her. At least not anyone where Jake's skill set of beating people up could help, as he trusted she could do that herself. She had genuinely impressed him with her progress, but not as much as Lillian.

Both of them had grown strong. They still weren't absolute top-level geniuses, but Jake could see Miranda reach a level where pretty much no one her level stood a chance if they entered her domain. He recalled the Dark Witch and her simple domain that already made her a lot stronger and more difficult to deal with. Adding someone with actual intellect and cunning to control such a domain was just straight-up a nightmare.

Lillian was a far more classical mage, but she still gave off an odd aura and was far from actually being a normal mage. Both of them were the kind of mages that didn't really fight people straight-up but did weird shit to win. To be clear, Jake was totally okay with that, as long as they weren't his enemies, because damn did he hate fighting super-tricky opponents. To date, Valdemar had still been the best kind of foe there was: just a dude with an axe who was really strong.

Inside the laboratory, Jake refocused and went back to his acid project again. He did plan on spending the last half a year or so specializing in creating his most powerful iteration of Heartrot Poison yet. While he didn't know for sure the Prima Guardian would be a flesh and blood Vitality-based lifeform, Jake heavily assumed it was based on how most of the Primas had been beasts. It really wouldn't make much sense for a big robot to suddenly appear... but if it was a robot, then hey, he had something to test his acids on.

With a loose plan in mind, Jake delved into his alchemy once more, as there really was little more to do now than wait for the system event that would decide the fate of the planet. Oh, and greet his acquaintances and friends as they returned to the planet.

As Earth was making its own preparations for the Prima Guardian to arrive, so were all the other planets in the ninety-third universe. The ones that had enlightened ones who successfully united under one banner anyway. Planets like the one Draskil came from had effectively fallen already and were now ruled solely by beasts.

Many other planets that had technically united still faced huge challenges, as even if the World Congress had elected a World Leader, that didn't mean all civil unrest was addressed.

Especially not when one introduced the powderkeg that was people returning from Nevermore. People, more powerful than ever, some of whom had finally hit their stride, were not satisfied with their stations and were now grasping for organizational power. Many changes of leadership happened across the multiverse, and multiple factions appeared, battling it out even if they were meant to work together in preparation for the system event.

For the smaller planets, with less area unexplored, they could perhaps make do even if there was internal chaos. However, for others, this led to their chances of handling the Prima Guardian significantly falling.

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As per the system message during the final mandatory World Congress, the power of the Prima Guardian also scaled with how many Primas had been killed and the overall performance of the people on the planet during the initiation. So, when some people had to abandon the planet – not unlike how the Holy Church and Risen had left Earth – after having killed some Primas, it could cause an imbalance between what the planet looked capable of beating and what they could actually beat.

This method of scaling was also a boon to some – assuming the goal was just to beat the Guardian - if a lot of people from their planet had left to become more powerful with divine factions, having thus killed fewer Primas. This was naturally with the expectation they would return.

Of course, the power of every individual planet wasn't necessarily the only deciding factor. There was also the entire Prima Guardian Alliance – an aspect of the upcoming event Earth had voted not to take part in. At the cost of splitting rewards, this would allow several planets to band together and assist one another. Meanwhile, Earth would not be able to interact with this alliance before they had killed their own Prima Guardian.

All in all, there was a lot going on with this event, but at its essence, it was pretty simplistic:

A powerful boss would appear, and the people on the planet have to defeat this boss along with an army of undefeated regular Primas who had grown more powerful while away. More beasts would likely join them, making it only reasonable to prepare by ensuring that not too many or too powerful beasts would join the Primas. This entire army and the Prima Guardian must be defeated within five years, or the Guardian will claim the Planetary Pylon.

Should the Prima Guardian take over, no one truly knew what the result would be. Perhaps they would enslave the enlightened races, kill them all, or become some sort of benevolent leader, meaning having the Prima win was actually the best outcome imaginable. Or, you know, it could just make the planet go boom. This content belongs to novel◇fire◇met

The point is, no one knew. Not even the gods.

All of these system events during the initiation of a new universe were unique. They did share some similarities here and there, allowing some of the oldest and most knowledgeable gods to theorize, but having a reasonable theory was far from the same as actually knowing.

This Prima Guardian event also being linked to a World Wonder, was something never seen before during any initiations, adding even more interest. As hinted at already, chances are individuals could take control of parts of the World Wonder. With time, perhaps even the entire World Wonder. With how things were playing out currently, it was reasonable to assume one potential method to take control was through these system events during the initiation. That was an utterly massive incentive to get involved, even for the largest of factions, as controlling a World Wonder was simply invaluable.

Yet even with this divine influence, the chances weren't good for some planets across the Milky Way... at least it didn't look like it was initially. But they all had one hope. The most powerful of planets tended to vote for dealing with the Prima Guardian themselves to get the most rewards, just as Earth had. However, there was one exception to this. One pinnacle planet that had voted to join the Prima Guardian Alliance and become their leader and symbol of hope:

Ell'Hakan.

Despite his homeworld being more than fit to solo the Prima Guardian, he had joined the alliance. After he returned from Nevermore, the belief in his skills had grown to newfound heights, as they placed all their trust in him. While he hadn't beaten the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, he had proven himself second of the entire multiverse this generation. He had proven himself more than capable.

Of the planets across the Milky Way that had joined the alliance created by the system, nearly five hundred were now already under his banner. A massive coalition, controlled

by the Chosen of Yip of Yore, with many of the gods supporting Yip, having blessed people on the many planets, as it quickly became clear this alliance was morphing into something more than simply a temporary alliance to defeat the Prima Guardian.

It was Ell'Hakan laying the groundwork for the eventual galactic politics related to the Seat of the Exalted Prima... and who knows, there might even be a Galactic Congress in the future.

Months passed, and Earth only continued to improve. People were also still coming back from Nevermore throughout this time, but there was no turmoil or anything caused by their return. Even people who had left to be with their divine factions in other universes began to make their way back to participate in the upcoming system event.

Their return was once more partly due to the lack of information. Nobody knew what the rewards for this event would be, and no one dared risk missing out on something that could be significant and reward great Records. It was entirely possible that merely participating – no matter how minor your role – would earn you a title or something like that. Many even hoped they could ride on the coattails of the ridiculously powerful people on the planet and get partial credit for defeating a Prima Guardian that was definitely close to the highest difficulty one would find in the ninety-third universe.

While many relatively unknown people returned, many known figures also began to make their way back, or at least been polite, and announced their return to Miranda. Casper had contacted her and given an actual estimated time of arrival, where he also explained it wouldn't just be him coming.

Tens of thousands of Risen would return to Earth in what had to be a massive undertaking. But, not knowing if the rewards would be worth it, it was something they chose to do.

It was also hinted that the group was as big as it was because they wanted to set up a permanent outpost on Earth should they succeed against the Prima Guardian. Even before they officially proposed this as an option, the World Council was in tentative agreement it should be allowed, even if their presence didn't come without... let's just say, challenges.

Miranda was already stressing a bit as there really weren't many Risen on Earth after Casper and the others left. There were only a scarce few, and there were no whole towns or anything like that with only Risen. She had also spent a lot of resources dealing with all the damn xenophobia of both the Earthlings and many of the freed slaves, and having Risen to now also deal with was an entire thing. They were a far more unpopular race across the multiverse than nearly any other race, besides maybe ectognamorphs.

The Risen were not as hated as the damn vampires they already had plenty of, though. A race the Risen also historically didn't like.

Oh, and then, to make matters even worse, Jacob applied to return together with a group from the Holy Church. It was the kind of request that was overly polite from their end, promising gifts and compensation for allowing their visit, making any form of rejection an obvious “fuck you” to the largest faction in the entire multiverse. Something that Jake would have been fine doing, but Miranda had enough diplomatic sense to know there was nothing to be gained from offending them needlessly, so she accepted their application. Though, contrary to the Risen, she had no plans of offering them the possibility of having an outpost after the event was done.

So, to summarize, there would be Risen, vampires, and people from the Holy Church - all supposed to be together, fighting the Prima Guardian. This was despite the Holy Church and Risen both having standing kill orders should one spot any vampires. Yeah, Miranda definitely had her work cut out for her, but hey, dealing with all this was great for her level. Not as great for her general stress level, but the levels made it worth it, right?

Other less controversial individuals and factions also announced their return. Eron would return with only a dozen or so people who belonged to the Dao Sect. They were people Miranda hadn't even known were originally from Earth, and quite frankly, it didn't matter much. The Dao Sect was perhaps the most neutral faction in the entire multiverse, never really getting involved in anything big or causing any trouble.

All in all, this system event would be a massive reunion of everyone from Earth. The ridiculous fighting power they would display was also almost comical, and Miranda genuinely looked forward to seeing what the event could possibly throw at them that Earth couldn't handle.

She assumed the answer was that they could handle the Guardian... which was why she was already looking ahead and making plans. But all of that was for after their own Prima Guardian was confirmed dead. For now, the most immediate thing was making sure all the people who would visit for the event didn't end up killing each other before the boss even arrived.

However, while they waited for many of those who had announced they could come, the first to arrive was someone Miranda hadn't even really considered, and someone Jake wasn't even sure would come. No, someone he wasn't even sure *could* come.

It was still a bit less than half a year till the Prima Guardian, and Jake had just begun his Heartrot improvement spree when he was contacted by Miranda. However, even before she contacted him, Jake had this weird itch that was explained when he heard the message:

*“Sandy has returned to Earth... bringing along a certain Vespernat Hive Queen.”*

That's right, Vesperia had finally come to Earth.

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## Chapter 920: Insecurities

While Jake had thought about Vesperia coming to Earth, and it was even theorized she could, he hadn't actually known it was possible before now. What's more, Sandy had returned with her, making it a double-whammy of creatures he had partly helped "make" come to the planet.

*"Where is she and Sandy right now?"* Jake quickly used the magic telephone Arnold had installed in his lab to ask Miranda.

*"They already left and are heading your way, sho-"*

Right then, Jake saw a giant worm appear above his lodge through his sphere. He smiled and cut off Miranda:

*"They're here, thanks for telling me, and good luck with... stuff!"* Jake said as he also cut the connection without admitting he genuinely had no idea what Miranda was dealing with these days. Hopefully fun stuff.

Hurrying up from his laboratory, he saw how Sandy struggled to find a good place to land without breaking anything. The valley Jake's lodge was placed in wasn't that large, and Sandy eventually shrank down a bit before finally touching down on the soft grass. This chapter is updated by novel•fire•net

Getting outside, Jake smiled as he saw the giant worm. "Hey, Sandy! You look all healed up."

*"Eh, I'm getting there. Still rebuilding stuff. Next time we go on an adventure, I would prefer if it didn't end with me dying,"* Sandy answered.

"Can't make any promises," Jake joked. "I heard you also brought along Vesperia?"

*"Oh yeah, I did,"* Sandy confirmed. *"She's just finishing up some work inside one of my stomachs. Did you know she also has a stomach-like thing for all her bug friends? Well, more bug slaves, but my point is she also got a big subspace."*

"I knew," Jake nodded. "What are you having her help with?"



*“Convinced her to leave one of her spawns within one of my stomachs to create stuff. Very efficient at gardening and stuff like that,” Sandy explained. “Also, quick question, you’re her dad, right?”*

“I... won’t really say that’s accurate,” Jake muttered. “Not really. I don’t actually think there’s any normal word for the kind of relationship we have. Calling me her creator also feels wrong, so I really don’t know what you would call me.”

*“She calls you Sire. So I guess you sired her?”*

“Again, all of those things feel very weird to put into words,” Jake sighed. “Anyway, back to you! Have you remade that resurrection egg yet?”

*“Nope, gonna be a while. Super expensive to make and damn time-consuming. They also take this kind of special resource that isn’t even a real resource that shows up anywhere. I just know when I’m low on it, and it regenerates super-duper slowly, even if it is sped up when I get levels and stuff,” Sandy explained. “It’s a bit hard to understand, so it’s all good if you don’t get it; all I’m saying is that the egg isn’t ready yet.”*

“Pretty sure there are few people who understand better than I do,” Jake smiled, as Sandy had effectively just explained his Jake Juice. And no, Jake wasn’t going to explain back in kind, nor would he use the term Jake Juice, as that would definitely get a lot of comments and jokes from Sandy.

*“If you say so...”* Sandy didn’t really seem to take his words seriously. *“Oh! Vespy is nearly all ready!”*

“Vespy?” Jake raised an eyebrow.

*“A cute nickname for my little sister,”* Sandy joked.

“You do know that if you insist she is your sister, that would mean Sylphie is your big sister,” Jake pointed out.

*“Seeing as I don’t come from an egg, I was born before she was, making me the older sibling among us all. Checkmate.”*

“Recently, there was also this Demon Lord...”

*“Doesn’t count,”* Sandy left no room for argument. *“Besides, Vespy is fine with me calling her Vespy, so you don’t get to complain. Also, here she comes.”*

Sandy opened their mouth before Jake could say anything more as the familiar yellow figure of Vesperia appeared before him. She still towered over him and wore a silken dress with a striped black and yellow bee pattern. Or, well, perhaps calling it a wasp pattern was more accurate.



"It's good to see you again," Jake said with a smile as he looked up at Vesperia. He saw her antennas twitch a bit as she also smiled.

"It is likewise a pleasure to meet you once more, Sire," Vesperia answered. She seemed a bit nervous for some reason. Jake couldn't even begin to guess why, as he really couldn't see any reason why she would be, and he chose not to mention it.

"How have you been? Did everything go well when you returned to the Endless Empire? Did your sisters, the other True Royals, treat you properly?" Jake asked a slew of questions. Vesperia did look like things had been good over the last few years, but he still felt the need to ask.

"Yes, they have all treated me most excellently," Vesperia answered in her usual polite tone. "I have also laid claim to much of my heritage that was left behind when the last Vespernat Hive Queen fell. All of my sisters have been incredibly supportive during this entire process and helped facilitate my growth as much as possible."

Jake nodded, happy to hear that things had been good. She definitely wasn't lying about the growth either... in fact, she was higher level than he was.

#### **[Vespernat Hive Queen – lvl 284]**

It was so high that Jake couldn't help but wonder:

"Wait, have you gone to Nevermore?" Jake asked, clarifyingly.

"No, and I likely won't," Vesperia shook her head. "The World Wonder does not fit me or my Path much. Going there would also be seen as a massive risk, and finally, we True Royals have many secrets we wish to keep hidden from others. Secrets that we do not wish to reveal to the Wyrmgod for him to spread to the highest bidder after the fact, especially not to the Automaton. No, my growth in level has come nearly solely from growing into my powers and accepting part of my heritage."

"I see," Jake nodded. Yeah, Jake doing Nevermore had definitely revealed many of his secrets to the Wyrmgod and others. Some things would still be kept hidden, but a lot had been shown off. One also had to consider that many of Jake's secrets were related to his Bloodline, and not even the Wyrmgod could fully analyze and detect what that did during the World Wonder. The same wasn't true for True Royals, who relied on system-based skills.

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Finally, the Wyrmgod would also be more willing to keep secrets for Jake due to Villy. The Primordials all had some odd bond and a lot of deals and whatnot, something the

True Royals didn't have. So, yeah, he could see why going to Nevermore was a huge risk that Vesperia or any True Royal quite frankly had no reason to take.

It wasn't like Nevermore was mandatory in any way. To the vast majority, it was just a good leveling spot, and a way to bang out some dungeon clears for the Dungeoneering title. Vesperia could clearly level totally fine on her own without relying on that based on her progress so far.

"But I heard you have done quite well in Nevermore," Vesperia commented after a bit. "In fact, as well as anyone possibly could."

"Could have gone worse for sure," Jake jokingly downplayed the entire thing.

"That is an understatement. You know, many of my sisters weren't keen on me going to Earth initially, even if it was to participate in a system event, but when I left, none of them were voicing words of protest anymore, only well-wishes for my journey," the True Royal said, shaking her head. "The Endless Empire truly does want a good relationship between them and you, using me as the binding agent."

"Well, as long as you're part of the Endless Empire, we're automatically on good terms," Jake shrugged.

Vesperia took a second before she smiled and nodded her head again. It was also only now that Jake had noticed she had lowered herself to be about the same height as him by going down on her knees. Jake wanted to point it out but didn't.

"I do fear that it could cause problems with the Automate if you state that publicly..." she said, a bit worried.

"Eh, It'll be fine," Jake waved it off. "As robots, they should have enough logic to know that even if I'm on good terms with the Endless Empire, that doesn't automatically make me an enemy. Shit, I'm good friends with both Risen, vampires, and those from the Holy Church. I am using the Viper's peak strategy to attain perfect neutrality by pissing everyone off and making friends with everyone at the same time. All while trying to make myself someone really risky to outright make an enemy."

Hey, it worked for the Viper, so it should work for Jake. Sure, it did make the Viper some enemies, like Yip of Yore and all his cronies, but wouldn't life be boring if you didn't have at least a few people gunning for you?

"There certainly are a lot of people unwilling to make you an enemy for no reason and even more wanting you as an ally," Vesperia said in a slightly relieved tone. "I just want to ensure I'm not imposing on you."

"Of course you're not," Jake shook his head, not even sure why she would say that.

"Nevertheless, the other True Royals were also concerned that me being here so openly could create diplomatic challenges, so to hopefully make up for any problems my presence might cause, I've brought along some gifts. They aren't something you, Sire, can use but more something to support the budding empire you are constructing. We have already left the spatial stone with your assistant... Miranda, I believe," Vesperia continued.

"Not really making an empire, but sure, I'm sure Miranda will be happy with any resources she can get," Jake said. "I am curious, though, what kind of stuff did you bring?"

"Primarily formation blueprints and materials to make the formations. There were naturally also a great number of metals, gems, wood, bones, leather, carapace, and many other raw resources to support the growth of Earth."

"Sounds like good stuff," Jake nodded, unsure if it was actually good stuff.

"Outside of these gifts, please let me know if there is anything I can directly assist you wi-"

"Why are you being so weird toward me?" Jake suddenly asked, having finally gotten enough of Vesperia acting off. "You're being overly polite, and almost... see, that's what I'm talking about."

As Jake spoke up, he saw Vesperia become quite nervous as she fidgeted a little. Her antennas were practically vibrating, and her eyes kept darting around during their entire conversation, not to mention how she looked like she had no idea what to do with her hands. Then there was the fact she had taken a weird kneeling position to have her head slightly lower than Jake's. It was all super weird.

"I... I did not mean to cause any dissatisfaction... I-"

*"She's nervous because she hasn't seen you in a long time, especially compared to the time you spent together. She already felt insecure if you really needed or wanted her in your life before leaving for the Endless Empire, and you seem to only have grown more powerful and influential since then with all the Nevermore stuff, making her even more insecure now. Pretty sure Vesperia has a strong innate need to feel needed and useful, and you have shown no indications of needing her for anything substantial,"* Sandy jumped into the conversation as Vesperia looked panicked, whipping her head around to look at Sandy.

"You! I confided that to you in confidence, I-"

*"Jake is a bit of a dum-dum and doesn't have proper worm-level intellect, so you need to be straightforward with him at times,"* Sandy said, making Jake feel pretty insulted as he was already processing the first thing Sandy had said.

“Still... I don’t want to...”

*“Jake, stop acting dumb and give her head pats already!”* Sandy yelled, throwing Jake out of his thoughts.

“That’s not what I-“ Vesperia protested.

*“Oh, if you dislike those, Jake should make sure to never give you any ever again,”* Sandy shot back.

“I didn’t say-“

Jake finally interrupted their conversation as he reached over and placed a hand on top of Vesperia’s head as he spoke with a hopefully comforting smile. “While it pains me to admit, I am a bit slow on the uptake sometimes regarding things like this.”

Vesperia didn’t say anything but only lowered her head as she blushed. Jake couldn’t help but shake his head as he saw the movements of her antennae, making him ruffle her hair.

“I feel like I need to apologize for you not feeling comfortable to just talk to me if you felt nervous or insecure,” Jake said after a bit. “But I can say that you have no reason to be nervous. Also... I won’t just trust Sandy’s words for everything, so please just talk to me, alright?”

Seconds ticked by as Jake kept patting her before Vesperia finally spoke. “The Boundless Hydra’s Chosen isn’t entirely incorrect...”

“Just call Sandy, Sandy,” Jake said in a calm tone. “No need to act overly polite toward that big worm either.”

*“Seconded! It’s super weird that my little sister Vespy calls me with some long title,”* Sandy jumped in again to support Jake. *“And as your older sibling, let me once more say... just be candid, alright? That works best with Jake here.”*

“Alright...” Vesperia said, obviously trying to calm herself.

Jake just sat there for a bit, giving her time. He did feel bad about making her feel insecure and nervous despite knowing it wasn’t really his fault or something he could have done anything about.

It took a bit longer before Vesperia finally spoke, having gathered her thoughts. “I... feel like I’ve only caused trouble for you so far. I forced you to reveal your identity as the Chosen of the Malefic One, forced you to openly disclose abilities of your Bloodline, and even made potential enemies for you, all simply for existing. Meanwhile, I’ve done nothing to assist or benefit you in any way. I wanted to pay you back, but I truly have no

idea how to do so meaningfully. I can't see why you would need me or what value my presence adds, as you have proven yourself more than capable all on your own. I... am questioning why I even came or why you would want me here.””

Jake didn't interrupt as she spoke, even if there were many times he wanted to interject. When she was done, he let her words hang in the air for a moment before talking:

“You are right, I am more than capable on my own,” Jake said, as he felt Vesperia fidget slightly. “And as you said, I don't need any of you. The key word here being: “need.” Me not needing you, Sandy or almost anyone doesn't mean I don't *want* you around. I don't need you to add some tangible value or offer me some boon for me to want you here. We're kind of family, aren't we? You just being here is more than enough.”

Vesperia slowly nodded, pushing her head slightly up into Jake's hand. He quickly understood as he started rubbing her hair again.

“Now, me not needing your help doesn't mean you aren't allowed to help,” Jake smiled. “In fact, I'm pretty sure there are plenty of things you can help me with. Just helping those around me also indirectly helps me, and I'm certain you are capable of quite impressive feats. In fact, I've been looking forward to hearing and seeing what you're capable of after having had some time to do your Hive Queen stuff. Of course, only if you want to show me.”

The True Royal finally looked up, her face entirely red, as she clenched her fists. “Please let me show you my abilities!”

So... yeah, Jake wasn't a psychologist or therapist or anything like that, but he was pretty sure Sandy had hit the nail on the head when the worm said Vesperia had a strong innate need to feel needed and helpful.

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## Chapter 921: Hive Queens Are Scary

Jake and Vesperia hadn't ever really spent that much together, and he truly didn't know what she was actually capable of. All he had seen from her was her ability to enter fighting mode, which ultimately wasn't her main power.

She was a Hive Queen. A living one-woman army that commanded an entire hive of powerful insectoids to overwhelm and slaughter anyone who dared oppose her. Her personal ability to fight was a last resort or to be used only alongside her workers and

soldiers. Well, primarily soldiers, Jake reckoned, as workers were meant to stay back at the hive.

Now, after a few years, Vesperia had plenty of time to learn more about her abilities, but more importantly, to actually create some creatures for her hive. Something she enthusiastically wanted to show off.

“My internal space serving as a temporary hive has expanded significantly as I have progressed through C-grade, and I have even absorbed unique treasures provided to me by the Endless Empire to facilitate further growth. This has led to me having an internal space capable of storing at least a few million creations, though I have far from filled it up. To do that, I will likely need some more Hive Queens to assist me,” Vesperia happily explained, as Jake nodded along with interest.

“Have you made any more Hive Queens yet?” Jake asked.

“Only two so far, and both of them were made without any fertilization,” Vesperia answered nonchalantly. “I find it too early for me to look into any potential mates. Besides, if they are too weak, their Records will only end up weakening the Hive Queen.”

Yeah, Jake wasn’t going to touch that topic with a ten-foot pole. He sure as hell wasn’t going to discuss Vesperia’s potential love life, though going by the tone she spoke with, it didn’t seem like she viewed the act of fertilization as anything that had emotions involved in it. It was purely a way to potentially improve the Records of a Hive Queen.

*“One of those Hive Queens is in my stomach right now! I’m making a wasp farm!”* Sandy added happily.

“That’s nice,” Jake said with a smile. “How about the second one?”

“Would you like to see her?” Vesperia asked. Jake nodded his head without any hesitation, quite curious for sure.

“Do note this one is still very young,” she said, as Jake felt the movement of magic. That is also when he learned that the way Vesperia summoned things from her internal world wasn’t just like pulling stuff out of spatial storage.

A large yellow spinning portal appeared, and a few seconds later, a pretty damn massive wasp walked out. It had no humanoid features at all but just looked like a big wasp with a surprisingly huge thorax compared to the wasps he usually saw. Jake also felt that this Hive Queen was barely in C-grade and not particularly strong either... likely because it was focused on tending to and expanding hives.

**[Vespula Hive Queen – lvl 208]**

It was even an entirely different race. A *Vespula* Hive Queen. Still a wasp but far from a True Royal. Jake wasn't disappointed or anything, though. The mere fact Vesperia could create a creature like this all on her own, possessing a full Truesoul and being its entirely independent being, was incredibly impressive.

"She hasn't had time to learn to change her form yet," Vesperia quickly clarified as she looked at the large warp.

The warp bowed its head toward Vesperia before it looked at Jake. *"I greet the Sire of the True Royal."*

Yeah, Jake definitely shouldn't be surprised the big wasp could talk and responded politely: "Nice to meet you, too."

"As you can see, despite being young, Hive Queens are born with the same innate knowledge that I was, albeit far less. She is only a year old and already ready to establish her own hive once a suitable site is found," Vesperia explained.

"I see," Jake nodded, impressed.

Could he just mention how fucking scary eusocial insects like Vesperia were? She could create creatures that could make more creatures, creating a massive army within only a few years. He totally understood why many sought to eradicate any ectognamorphs once discovered on a planet, as should they go uncontested, most planets would be overrun.

"Alright, please return to the Internal Hive," Vesperia said to the young Hive Queen. It bowed its head once more and quickly walked back through the portal, which did make Jake wonder...

"Say, can others enter the portal? Could I?"

"I apologize, that's not possible. Only creatures I have created can enter. Even that Hive Queen cannot make any spawns within, and I wouldn't be able to house anything she makes in the future either," Vesperia said very apologetically as she deflated a bit.

"Why apologize? That's not necessarily a downside. It means the space is far safer by default, and enemies have no possible way to sneak in and hurt the young within. In fact, I would say it's a feature more than anything else," Jake said, shaking his head.

Vesperia smiled as his words quickly pepped her back up. "Hive Queens are far from the only spawns I have made. Actually, they are the only creatures not truly part of the Vespernat Lineage."

She proceeded to bring out more wasps to show off. Three pretty different insects appeared, all with varying names, looks and purposes, their races pretty explanatory.



**[Vespernat Soldier - 267]**

**[Vespernat Worker- 255]**

**[Vespernat Pollinator - 248]**

All of them looked purely like insects. The Soldier was the biggest of them at about three meters long, and it definitely looked designed to fight. The Worker and Pollinator looked a lot less dangerous, especially the Pollinator. Rather than a wasp, it looked more like a cross between a wasp and a bumblebee, with its many soft hairs, making it look pretty cute.

“These are some of the common drone variants I can create,” Vesperia said proudly as she proceeded to briefly clarify some more ectognamorph things.

These three weren’t like the Hive Queen in that their souls were a bit... lacking. They were the same as the termites from that hive back then. They relied on the Queen and didn’t have the intelligence to act on their own. Should Vesperia fall, they would also cease to function and quickly just die.

This did come with some upsides, though...

“While I am still lacking, I am up to around two thousand Soldiers, five thousand Workers, and a few hundred Pollinators,” Vesperia said with a sigh as if that wasn’t already a fuckload.

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Jake raised an eyebrow, surprised at the number. “How many of those are C-grades?”

He could already imagine... If just a tenth of them were C-grades, that meant she had an army of two hundred C-grade Soldie-

“Oh, those are the C-grades. Counting D-grades and below, I have approximately fifty times that,” Vesperia clarified.

Jake stared a bit as he processed this. Even if these Soldiers were weak variants compared to regular beasts... that was still a fucking army, wasn’t it? What’s more, she genuinely didn’t think this was a lot?

Again... Hive Queens are fucking scary.

“That’s quite the army,” Jake said after a brief pause as he processed Vesperia walking around with a few hundred thousand insects in her pocket. He did have one more thing he wondered, though. “Do you have more powerful variants?”

“Two more,” Vesperia said. “Royal Guards and Queen’s Guards.”

“Damn,” Jake muttered. “How many of each?”

“Twenty-six Royal Guards and four Queen’s Guards,” Vesperia answered.

Sending back the three drone variants, a new specimen appeared that looked a lot different than anything prior. These did not look much like wasps at all but reminded Jake far more of how Vesperia looked in her warrior form. They each carried what looked like stinger spears, as well as carapace shields, and they walked on two thin legs. Their far bulkier forms than Vesperia in her warrior form, as well as them not giving off the same kind of scent – likely pheromones of some kind - made Jake wonder something as he also used Identify.

### **[Vespernat Royal Guard – lvl 274]**

“Are these males?” Jake asked curiously.

“Yes,” Vesperia confirmed. “Royal Guards are those among a brood who failed to fully mature into Queen’s Guards, hence why they are males.”

Jake nodded as he kept observing the five Royal Guards Vesperia had summoned to show off, ignoring the fact that in ectognamorph society, males tended to be the half-cooked specimen. A very matriarchal society that one. Focusing on the Royal Guards, they were impressive indeed and even pretty powerful variants. They are at least above average, and dealing with an entire army of them would be quite the challenge.

Dismissing the Royal Guards, Vesperia finally brought out her biggest guns: the Queen’s Guards.

The four of them were about six meters long, and they looked a lot like regular wasps except massive. No, perhaps calling them hornets would be more accurate, seeing as they had far darker colors and looked more aggressive. One big difference was that their mandibles were far larger, and their legs looked almost metallic, reminding him a bit of the Hive King from the termite nest.

Then, there were, of course, their stingers. They were not as puffy but longer in shape, with a very pointy tip. Jake’s Sense of the Malefic Viper also made it very clear that there was some nasty venom on the other end – something that wasn’t really unique to Royal Guards, as most wasps had venom.

Anyway, the entire bodies of these Queen’s Guards looked made for combat, and even their antennae were glowing with magic. Healing magic, as far as Jake could tell. These weren’t low-tier variants at all but were powerful in their own right and would no doubt be considered high-tier elites worth nurturing if they were part of any faction. He

doubted their level of teamwork was anything to scoff at, either. Even their levels made it clear they were far from weak.

**[Vespernat Queen's Guard – lvl 282]**

**[Vespernat Queen's Guard – lvl 280]**

**[Vespernat Queen's Guard – lvl 281]**

**[Vespernat Queen's Guard – lvl 282]**

These four huge Royal Guards sat passively on the lawn, not doing anything as if waiting for Vesperia to give them any commands.

"I can only create four Queen's Guards currently with my abilities, and the rest of my elites will have to be Royal Guards," Vesperia explained. "I can make way more of the regular drone variants, as they barely consume any Hive Energy to maintain. Ah, Hive Energy is a special resource I have that dictates how many I can spawn, and everything that isn't its own separate Hive Queen counts."

"You sure learn something new every day. Also, I do wonder... why do the Royal Guards have humanoid forms while these four look perfectly insecty?" Jake asked.

"Oh, that was just a choice for this demonstration, and due to the peculiarity of the transformation of these guards," Vesperia said as she looked at the four Queen's Guards. "Transform."

Instantly, they reacted as all four of them grew in size, and within seconds, they turned into carbon copies of Vesperia in her warrior form. Even their auras changed to resemble hers, and without his Bloodline, he wasn't sure he could have told the difference. Jake even tried using Identify...

**[Vespernat Hive Queen – lvl 284]**

"Are these...?"

"Look-alikes," Vesperia said, smiling. "A tried and true strategy of old."

"That's... impressive," Jake said, as he kept comparing the four of them to Vesperia. "Are these also considered drones, or?"

"Partly," Vesperia clarified as she motioned toward one of the Queen's Guards, who promptly spoke:

"We live to serve the Queen and have the required mental faculties to do so efficiently," she spoke in a voice that was even identical to Vesperia's.

“Having a look-alike that couldn’t even act like me wouldn’t be a very good one, now would it?” Vesperia said proudly. “You four may return to the hive.”

The four of them nodded and went through the portal without saying anything more. After they left, Vesperia closed the portal again.

“Ah, I should mention their ability to mimic me isn’t a known ability and shouldn’t be shared, as it would make it far less effective,” Vesperia casually clarified that she had just revealed one of her big trump cards.

“Of course I won’t share anything,” Jake reassured her.

*“I totally would if they had the right bribe,”* Sandy also decided to jump into the conversation. *“Ah, who am I kidding. I wouldn’t do that to my little sister Vespy.”*

“That actually reminds me,” Jake said, looking at Vesperia. “Are you alright with Sandy calling that nickname? I know that Sandy can be a handful, and I would gladly give the big worm a stern talking to.”

“It... it’s fine,” Vesperia said a bit shyly as Sandy jumped right back in.

*“Vespy is also having mixed emotions about having her own name already and you not naming her like the rest of us. Seeing as your naming convention sucks, Vespy totally sounds like the name you would have given her if you had been the one to decide, so me calling her that makes her feel like we’re all closer,”* the worm once more inflicted panic upon Vesperia.

“... if you want me to also call you Vespy, that’s totally fine?” Jake muttered. “And... well, that probably is the kind of name I would have given.”

*“Make it a special family name!”* Sandy wriggled happily.

“I... I would be fine with whatever Sire wishes to call me,” Vesperia said.

*“That means she wants you to call her Vespy as that sounds way more familial,”* Sandy just wouldn’t let up causing Vesperia mental attacks.

“Vespy it is then,” Jake smiled as he saw Vespy blush, making him instinctively reach up and pat her head. Her only response was to lower herself a bit, making it easier for him to do so. Get full chapters from *novel* ♦

“I must say, your abilities surpass my expectations,” Jake said happily while still rubbing her hair. “You really are a one-wasp army. Do you also remember what we talked about earlier regarding you helping me with something?”

Vespy’s head instantly shot up as she looked at Jake. “What is it?”

Jake smiled and shook his head and pulled back his patting hand – much to Vespy's disappointment - before explaining. "While preparing for the Prima Guardian to arrive, we are addressing as many potential risk factors as possible. The skies, seas, and land are very much covered, but the subterranean world is still mostly unexplored. What we do know is that there is quite an Isoptera presence that, last time I heard, is far from fully addressed. There might even be some ants or other hives, too."

"Does Sire wish for me to make contact with these hives and eradicate or place them under our control?" Vesperia asked nonchalantly.

"Not gonna lie, as long as they are addressed, I don't care how you do it," Jake shook his head. "But I would still be careful. They are underground, where I don't know how good your variant is at fighting, seeing as you're wasps and all. They also had a lot of time to grow, so they might have become quite powerful. Not to mention the fact that much of the underworld remains unexplored, and I don't know what other dangers might be waiting. As I said, much of it remains unexplored."

"Firstly, Sire, the Vespernat lineage does not struggle underground. Many of the offshoots from the Lineage are underground dwellers already, and we are more than adapted to that kind of environment. Perhaps not as much as other True Royal Lineages of the Endless Empire, such as the True Royal Lineage ruling the Isoptera line, but in the end, they are only Isoptera. My goal will also not be to fight them. Simply to announce my presence and allow them the honor of swearing fealty."

Jake furrowed his brows. "Are you sure they will be that receptive? What if they choose to fight back?"

Vesperia looked at Jake with a perplexed expression. "Why would they ever fight against the honor of submitting to a True Royal? One who even acts with the blessing of their True Royal ancestors? Even if I asked the Hive Queens to all kill themselves, it would be the greatest moment in their lives, simply for having the privilege of carrying out a direct order from me."

... had Jake ever mentioned that True Royals Hive Queens are mega scary?

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## Chapter 922: The Fine Line Between Cute & Terrifying

Jake knew that the logic of ectognamorphs was something he truly couldn't understand. Vesperia also looked at him as if what she had said was only natural... which in her

world it was. He had already known that the Endless Empire was the most hierarchical organization in the entire multiverse, putting even demons to shame, but still.

Throughout the multiverse, power was the ultimate decider of status. Jake was the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, yes, but he also knew that not a single god in existence viewed themselves as beneath him. Them being nice to him was either a display of respect toward the Malefic Viper, or because they found him interesting for his future potential. None of them would ever agree to be *his* subordinate and swear loyalty to Jake as a person, as he was ultimately just a mortal who was beneath their statute.

For Vesperia, it was different.

During the following conversation, where Jake asked some more things about how sure she was things would work out fine if she approached a bunch of other Hive Queens on Earth, and Vesperia explained a bit about her time at the Endless Empire,

She told him that during her time there, many variants of the Vespernat Lineage had made their way back to the Endless Empire. They had been independent factions before, operating by themselves with only a friendly relationship with the Empire, but when they heard – and felt – that a new Vespernat True Royal had appeared and resided at the Endless Empire Heartlands, they made their way there.

This included Hive Queen gods. Even a few at or around the realm of Godqueen – powerful beings with much renown in the multiverse in their own right – hurried there. Not just to see Vesperia but to recognize her and swear their loyalty without even knowing anything about her. It was also merely an implicit understanding that they were now part of the Endless Empire, ruled by Vesperia and Vesperia alone.

Despite how much weaker she was, they recognized her as their unquestionable leader. It was simply blind, biological devotion and loyalty, with no thought for rhyme, reason, or logic. They were just compelled by their nature. And while Jake had a good grasp of following his instincts... he did find the entire concept tough to fully grasp.

"I... to clarify, if you told a bunch of gods from your Lineage to go kill someone...?" Jake asked, just to clarify, after Vesperia was done with her explanation.

"Hm, I reckon they would ask the reason and offer me advice if it's a good idea or not to carry out the order," Vesperia answered without much thought. "Of course, that assumes it's someone that's controversial to kill."

"And if you insisted, no matter the person?" Jake continued pressing.

"They'd naturally carry out their duty."

"What if the other True Royals of the Endless Empire disagree?" Jake tried again.

“In that case, I would certainly consider the matter carefully,” Vesperia said, thinking a bit more about that one. “But I find the probability of that happening low. My desire to want someone dead badly enough to even disagree with the other Hive Queens beneath me will more likely than not be a desire born of the greater good of the Endless Empire, and my sisters would never disagree with something like that. However, let’s say that I want to do something everyone disagrees with. Just know that, no matter what, they do not have the authority or right to command me, even if I respect their opinions immensely.”

*“What if Jake asks you to do something and the other True Royals oppose?”* Sandy decided to also ask a hypothetical that Jake wasn’t sure he really wanted the answer to.

“That... would be problematic,” Vesperia answered with a frown. “I guess at that point, I would have to understand both sides and the essence of the disagreement and then simply decide for myself what I believe is best.”

Alright, that was a very balanced and reasonable response.

“To clarify, I am not going to be causing trouble,” Jake said. At least he wouldn’t cause any problems on purpose.

*“Sure, sure, but what if the Endless Empires decide to make you an enemy for some reason?”* Sandy continued to try pushing their hypothetical scenario.

“That wouldn’t happen,” Vesperia simply shook her head. “The Endless Empire does not declare enemies that easily, and if only one of the True Royals part of the council disagrees, it won’t happen.”

“So there you have it, no reason to fret over something that won’t happen,” Jake said, closing the subject.

*“Fine...”* Sandy said, sad they couldn’t cause trouble anymore. *“Well, this has been fun, but I’m going to go and say hi to that scientist guy again and see if he has procured anything tasty since last time. He promised me more snacks if I visited again.”*

“Sounds fun, enjoy yourself,” Jake waved the big worm off as Sandy took to the air and headed toward Arnold to do who-knows-what, leaving Vesperia and Jake behind in the valley.

“Sandy sure is a peculiar creature,” Vesperia commented once the big worm was gone. “I looked through the library of the Endless Empire and even consulted my sisters, and there were no traces of knowledge about their race anywhere. Then again, neither could I find anything regarding Sylphian Hawks. Don’t get me wrong, my hope was to perhaps find something to help assist them in their future growth, but... nothing.”



“The Malefic Viper also doesn’t seem to know much, if anything,” Jake shrugged. “Not that it matters, does it? I doubt they need much help to progress or to be told some historical facts about what’s best to do. They just need to follow their own instincts, and I believe they can go far. The same is true for you. Just keep doing what you’re doing.”

Vesperia smiled at his words. “Perhaps you’re right. Simply following my instincts without considerable forethought just seems foreign, yet also familiar. As if it clashes with my inherited memories.”

“Well, you aren’t just a normal True Royal, if there even is such a thing.”

“You’re right... I am also one of Sire’s creations,” she nodded in agreement.

Jake still wasn’t super keen on someone calling themselves his creation, but he just nodded nevertheless as he cracked a joke. “You’re not just a Vesperia... you’re also a Vespy.”

She smiled and lowered her head a bit as Jake got the hint and placed a hand on top of it. Having seen what she was capable of – and what kind of forces she commanded - he was already looking forward to what kind of chaos Vesperia could cause on Earth.

“Would it be fine if I call Miranda over? If you wanna help with the Prima Guardian defense, it would be best to keep her in the loop, and I’m sure she has some good information to get you started,” Jake asked Vesperia.

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“If you deem that the best course of action,” Vesperia agreed with a nod.

“I do, for sure,” Jake said as he pulled out a one-way communication token and quickly infused a message. “Besides, if I don’t keep her in the loop, I’m gonna get quite the scolding later. I can already imagine Miranda sending some poor party into a hive, only to find it already overrun with wasps, causing panic for the poor wayward adventures. Better to work together.”

“I’m still not entirely sure what this Miranda woman is to you. Is she not serving you?” Vesperia asked with some genuine confusion. “How could she dare scold her master?”

“She works for me,” Jake clarified. “No, I guess it’s more accurate to say we work together. I help her, she helps me, it’s all about mutual benefits. I also trust her, and she’s good at her job. But if she wishes to one day leave, I won’t do anything about it either. The same is true if she one day falls too far behind or fails to live up to expectations, at which point she will be fired. I don’t hope that happens, but it’s a possibility.” READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT *novel✕fire✕net*

“You humans have such odd relationships,” Vesperia sighed. “Truly difficult to understand.”

“Maybe,” Jake shrugged as he would argue it was ectognamorphs who had weird as fuck relationships, even if they were a lot simpler on paper.

Waiting for Miranda, they sat and talked a bit more on a bench in front of the pond as he continued to pat Vespy. It didn't take long before Jake detected the resident witch, who'd quickly made her way over. Jake couldn't blame her either... a True Royal visit had to be considered a major thing, right?

He just hoped Miranda and Vesperia could get along. If not, things would get awkward.

--

Miranda was already stressed enough with all of the factions who would soon arrive on the planet. Making sure that fights wouldn't break out was a damn struggle, and there was also still all of the usual existing problems. Earth had truly become a melting pot, and melting pots always had their own unique challenges.

But, she had believed things were getting under control. Everything was finally calming down a bit... and then she got word that Sandy had returned to Earth. That in itself was fine, as the giant space worm didn't really cause much trouble on their own. There were a few annoyances from people wanting to meet Sandy, such as representatives from the United Tribes, but nothing the Chosen of the Lord Protector couldn't deal with on their own.

However, the passenger Sandy brought along wasn't someone Miranda could take lightly. Not in the slightest. True Royal was truly a deserved title, as they represented the peak of the Endless Empire – a pinnacle faction of the multiverse.

What's more, the power a True Royal wielded was of an entirely different nature to people who simply had a high status. Jake was the Chosen of the Malefic Viper, yes, but he was still “only” a C-grade for now, and he wouldn't be able to command the forces of the Order of the Malefic Viper unless the god agreed and gave him express permission.

A True Royal needed no permission. All on her own, she was that peak figure who could command even gods to do her bidding. The ectognamorphs were the only race Miranda was aware of, where the deciding factor in the hierarchy wasn't power but the status of one's caste. What's more, this power in the hierarchy wasn't just some agreed-upon social construct but a tangible biological component of their races. It was simply the nature of every single ectognamorph to follow the command of their True Royal – their queen of Hive Queens.

And now one of those True Royals was on Earth. A thought that was far from comforting. It wasn't just that she was a powerful being in her own right, but that Miranda was legitimately afraid of the consequences if something should happen to her.

*No, look on the bright side, she could also prove very useful,* Miranda tried to tell herself, as she was finally contacted by Jake to go meet this True Royal. It was honestly a huge relief he contacted her, as she had honestly put it down to a fifty-fifty if Jake would keep her in the loop about what he and the True Royal were planning. Good to see they didn't have another Eternal Hunger on their hands from him unleashing a True Royal on Earth haphazardly.

Arriving in the forest part of Haven, she hurried to the lodge. She could already feel the presence of the True Royal there, and she made sure to calm herself down fully before having her meeting with a being that truly deserved to be called royalty of the multiverse.

While she had briefly met the True Royal prior, this would effectively be their first real meeting, and she wanted to make a good impression. It was also undoubtful that this kind of encounter was impactful on her progress as a Court Witch.

Walking into the valley, she turned a corner before finally laying her eyes on Jake and the True Royal sitting on a bench in front of the small pond. Miranda had a lot of thoughts beforehand and felt quite nervous, but...

What she saw was a True Royal, capable of commanding armies that could destroy galaxies with ease, sitting with eyes closed as Jake ruffled her hair. What's more, she didn't lean away or object but leaned further into the hand as if she were a cat getting petted.

*Kinda cute...* Miranda thought before catching herself and clearing her throat.

The True Royal instantly sat up straight, while Jake had clearly already been aware she was there. Miranda chose to act as if she hadn't seen anything weird as she bowed slightly. "I greet Her Majesty of the Vespernat Lineage."

Seeing her stand up, Miranda only now saw how damn tall the True Royal was as she also greeted Miranda. "It's a pleasure to meet the Court Witch of the Verdant Lagoon. I have heard good things from my Sire about your abilities."

Their tones were formal, but the words of the True Royal made it very clear she viewed Miranda as someone of clearly lower status than herself. That wasn't something that really bothered Miranda, as she also knew the only reason a True Royal even bothered being on Earth and was willing to help them was because of Jake.

"I do not wish to waste your time, so let me get straight to the point: I have been informed Her Majesty is willing to assist us with handling ectognamorphs on Earth and

address them before they become potential issues during the Prima Guardian event?" Miranda asked clarifyingly, including what Jake sent in his brief message.

"That is so," the True Royal simply confirmed. "I was told you had some information that would make this task easier for me. Also, it would be best to ensure I do not interfere with your ongoing operations, especially the operations of the Void-Touched Mechanic."

"Naturally," Miranda nodded, agreeing having her and Arnold clash wouldn't be a good idea. "I have brought along a map and an overview of where we are currently focusing. May I ask how Her Majesty plans on approaching the task of spreading the knowledge of her presence?"

"I will send drones with my pheromones across the planet and into any hive they detect," the Vespernat Hive Queen said casually as she received the items Miranda had brought along, containing all the information she would need. "After a brief discussion with my Sire just before your arrival, we agreed that I shall not exterminate or make them surrender to us outright but merely order them not to take part in the upcoming event in any way. That way, you can continue using them as nourishment even after the event concludes."

"A good strategy to keep them around," Miranda nodded. In truth, she wasn't really worried about the ectognamorph hives on Earth. They were more hunting spots than real dangers, as Earth was more than fully capable of handling them. Having the True Royal make sure they wouldn't interfere during the Prima Guardian event would definitely be nice, though.

"Naturally. It was one Sire proposed," the True Royal said, Miranda having to fight really hard not to comment that Jake's ideas weren't usually in the camp of being "good."

"Just to jump in, we did also discuss having some of her drones help map out the underground while employing the hives she encounters to help," Jake joined the conversation.

"I see," Miranda said. "Definitely coordinate with Arnold on that front, as he has also been working on mapping out the underground in the area beneath human-controlled lands."

"Got it," Jake nodded as he turned to the True Royal. "I assume you can discuss with Arnold alone?"

"I will do so," she nodded, her tone very different when she talked with Jake compared to Miranda.

"Goodie," Jake nodded. "I also just had a thought... can you leave one of your Queen's Guards here for a bit? I want some of its venom. For science."

“Of course,” the True Royal instantly agreed to what, according to all the etiquette books when dealing with a True Royal Miranda had read, was a giant no-no.

“Great,” Jake smiled brightly as he patted the True Royal on the head. “Thanks Vespy.”

Rather than be insulted at the pat and nickname, the True Royal simply smiled and lowered her head as Miranda once more had intrusive thoughts about the Hive Queen being quite adorable.

Miranda also couldn’t help but think...True Royals were terrifying, yes. But if they were considered terrifying, then what the hell would you call the guy who was casually patting one on the head while calling her a cute nickname?

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## Chapter 923: Politics Still Suck

Miranda stayed a bit longer, discussing stuff with Vesperia, as Jake tried not to get in the way. He did feel like the two weren’t being very friendly but overly professional. It wasn’t ideal, but better than them being assholes to one another, for sure.

After Miranda left, Jake had half-expected Vesperia to do the same. However, she made no attempts to but stuck around even as Jake planned on heading to his lab to do some alchemy with one of her Queen’s Guards. She seemed to notice his confusion and quickly clarified:

“I see no reason to go out myself, but will instead only send my drones to do the job. No purpose in me taking any risks for myself, and my sisters were also very adamant about being as safe as possible while here on Earth. And the safest place is by your side.”

“So you’re staying here?” Jake asked.

“Can I not?” Vesperia asked, looking at him with big eyes.

“Of course you can; I was just surprised,” Jake quickly wanted to make clear. “I just think it will be boring for you, as I plan on doing alchemy all the time.”

“It’s fine; I shall attend to my own matters, too,” Vesperia said with a smile. “I have much to attend to within my Internal Hive. It will slow down things a bit that I have one less Hive Queen to assist me with Sandy having taken one, but one should be enough to continue to facilitate my growth.”

“That actually got me thinking... how do the Hive Queens help in the internal world? I thought you said they can't spawn anything in there?”

“They cannot... but they can help spawn the eggs I make. Making eggs does not consume that much Hive Energy on its own; it's only as they grow and hatch the true cost comes. I can have other Hive Queens share some of this cost in Hive Energy with me, effectively making spawns cheaper for me, at the cost of reserving some of their Hive Energy on my behalf,” Vesperia explained. “Queens who do this a lot often end up taking one of two Paths. One Path is to become a fully support-type Hive Queen that never aims to make its own hive but only assists the true Hive Queen of the Hive. The second is to become Warrior Hive Queens, focusing all their time on improving their combat skills, as the majority of their Hive Energy remains constantly reserved anyway, making it not worth it for them to focus on creating their own spawns. Ah, but some Warrior Queens also simply never focused on making any spawns in the first place, and they can even lose their ability to do so with evolutions.”

“I see,” Jake nodded, getting a far more detailed and longer answer than he expected. Also, by now, he was wondering how many huge internal secrets of the Endless Empire Vesperia had shared with him so far. Probably a lot, right?

“Well, if you're gonna stick around, how about a quick lab tour?” Jake said with a smile, Vesperia gladly agreeing as the two of them headed down to the laboratory beneath the lodge.

Granted, things did seem a bit cramped in places, as Hank had constructed it with human height in mind, but Vesperia managed nonetheless as Jake showed off the place. He did wonder if she was incapable of shrinking herself in any way, but didn't ask outright as that seemed rude in case she couldn't. Actually, if she could, she definitely would have by now, seeing as how she nearly hit her head on every single doorframe.

Once the tour was over, they ended up in the alchemy lab. Due to the alchemy lab itself being inside a giant bubble of glass, Vesperia couldn't really enter it while Jake did his alchemy, as breathing in toxic fumes wasn't healthy unless you had Palate of the Malefic Viper. The source of this content is *novel●fire●net*

Luckily, there was a bedroom right next door where Vesperia could set up shop. Unluckily, she had to bend her head a bit to not touch the ceiling. Back to being lucky again, that wasn't really a problem as Vesperia didn't plan on actually being in the room much.

Summoning the portal to her internal world, Jake's first thought was that something would break if one of her large spawns tried to walk out of it. However, she didn't plan on bringing anything out. Instead, she would go in.

Now, Jake had very much assumed her way of entering her internal world would be through meditation and having an avatar or something in there. Not to physically walk through a portal with her real body, which just left so many questions.

Seeing as she was the source of the portal, wasn't it like bringing a portal into a portal? Kind of? Secondly, what would happen if someone broke the portal while she was inside? Thirdly, wasn't having a portal constantly active like this incredibly risky? Like, what if someone decided to toss dangerous shit in there while she couldn't sense the outside world? True, no living being could enter, but Jake confirmed that he could pump in toxic mist if he so desired.

Also, while living beings couldn't enter, that didn't mean they couldn't try. Trying would usually result in a rejection, but should they be powerful enough and press hard, they could collapse the portal, which brought Jake back to the second problem.

He couldn't help but voice his concerns at what may be a fatal flaw of how the Internal Hives of the True Royals worked... but in retrospect, he should probably have known they had long either addressed these kinds of things, or it wasn't really a problem.

"Firstly, while I cannot see outside the portal, it's pretty standard to leave some scouts outside to ensure nothing unforeseen approaches. More often than not, I wouldn't even wait for someone to try and enter the portal or throw anything into it but simply collapse it upon noticing their approach. Now, this is a bit annoying, as that leaves me trapped in my Internal Hive, but I can always open up a portal in the same place I collapsed one... and if all else fails, I can simply have one of my sisters come fetch me and help me out," Vesperia explained.

Still, Jake still saw an issue there.

"What if it happens in the ninety-third universe, though?" Jake questioned. "Will you just be trapped until the universe opens up who-knows-when?"

"No?" Vesperia said, looking perplexed. "My Internal Hive isn't located in the ninety-third universe."

"... when you say it isn't located here in this universe, do you mean it has an actual physical location that one can go to?" Jake asked, very confused. As he understood it, something like an Internal Hive had to effectively exist within the soul of someone, right? At least, that's how he knew it worked with Sandy and others who had "internal spaces." Even Jake's Palate, which could house physical items, was inside his soul.

"Yes?" Vesperia kept looking confused. "The Internal Hive is located adjacent to the Hidden World from which True Royals once entered the multiverse – our deepest heartlands. It exists physically within the void, outside of any universe, and it wouldn't be inaccurate to refer to it as a pseudo-nascent divine realm, at least in its function. To



make it clear, my Internal Hive is by no means standard, but one I have obtained due to inheritance owed to me on account of my Lineage.”

“That... huh,” Jake muttered. “Doesn’t that mean it’s a sure-fire escape method to just enter your Internal Hive, collapse the portal, and hide there while waiting for help?”

“No, it’s incredibly risky,” Vesperia shook her head. “I said it’s adjacent to the Hidden World, but distances in the void aren’t truly a concept. No one knows where the Internal Hive is located... but with a collapsed portal, they can track my location, as I lose the system’s effects that help hide it when the portal is active and I’m inside. Seeing as the Internal Hive is located in the void, my enemies will be able to attack me once they know the location. This is how many True Royals have fallen to the Automata throughout the eras. In many ways, it can be compared to how gods try to keep the location of their divine realms within the void hidden.”

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Jake just nodded along, feeling like he learned a lot. Probably a lot of stuff he shouldn’t have, and things that were definitely considered confidential... something that was confirmed a moment later as he heard the voice of the Malefic Viper.

*“I’m sure also learning a lot about True Royals today... or at the very least getting quite a few theories confirmed,”* the god said, sounding quite pleased with himself. This prompted Jake to quickly raise a hand as Vesperia looked about to speak again.

“Hey, I just wanna warn you, the Malefic Viper is listening in to every damn thing you’re saying... so probably keep all the secrets of the Endless Empire under wraps a bit,” Jake said with concern.

Vesperia just smiled at his warning. “I am fully aware and do not worry. It has been agreed that I can provide both you and the Malefic Viper every piece of information I have volunteered thus far. The Endless Empire views you as a close ally and as if you are part of my Hive. Almost like an honorary member of the True Royals, if you will. Seeing as the Malefic One is your Patron, we also view him, at the very least, as someone we wish to foster positive relations to, and thus will show goodwill towards.”

*“And people say you can’t do politics... now look at you, fostering powerful diplomatic ties between the Order and the Endless Empire,”* Villy teased Jake.

*“You are one of the primary people who call me bad at politics,”* Jake shot back.

*“Accidentally being good at it once in a while doesn’t make you a professional. At most, you are professionally good at being accidentally proficient in politics,”* the Viper teased Jake, who chose to ignore the damn snake god and focused on Vesperia instead.

"I guess I can only thank you and the Endless Empire for the trust. From both me and the Viper," Jake said with a smile.

"It's only natural. You're my Sire, after all," Vesperia said, clearly not viewing her show of trust as a big deal. Likely because it wasn't to her.

After a bit more small talk, Vesperia entered her Internal Hive while Jake went into his alchemy lab. His plan was still to work on the Heartrot Poison, but now he had added a bit of stabby-time with wasp venom to feed his Palate.

His alchemy session began, and he was only slightly disturbed when Vesperia went topside and unleashed her army a few days later before going back underground again. She did this a few times, sending her drones in different directions while also using Jake's phone to sometimes talk to Miranda.

Whenever Jake and Vesperia did talk, it was mainly about getting him some wasp venom. Through the grapevine, Jake did hear a bit about what was going on with Earth, but he focused the vast majority of his attention on doing alchemy.

Weeks turned to months, and things were busy on the planet for sure. Vesperia's drones swarmed across Earth, spreading her message to all the hives. What's more, according to her, many of the bigger hives were in contact, and the order of the True Royal would definitely be known to all ectognamorph on the planet before the Prima Guardian arrived. So that was one potential source of trouble dealt with.

Hearing how Vesperia and others helped did make Jake feel a bit guilty about just doing alchemy, but he tried his best to stay focused and with his one-track mind, did a pretty good job.

Even when people started to arrive on the planet, Jake didn't go out to meet them. It simply wasn't needed, and Miranda even told him that Jake staying away made Earth look stronger. Jake wasn't sure if she meant stronger as in actual power or more that Earth's position appeared stronger when they didn't even feel the need to bring out the true leader of the planet. As if telling the arriving groups that they were ultimately only guests, and at a lower position, unable to make any demands.

Now, Jake did want to go say hi when Casper and the Risen arrived, but Miranda once more informed him not to, with Vesperia in vehement agreement. She also explained things to Jake, making it clear that the entire "stronger" discussion before was definitely about political stuff. Jake really hated political stuff... especially when Vesperia made it clear politics were to blame for Jake not going to meet his old buddy.

"You view it as your friend visiting, and if he had arrived alone or with only a couple of people, you could have gone. However, he is not here as your friend but as an envoy and diplomat of the Risen. He is here in an official capacity, and before treating him like the individual who is your friend, you must treat him according to the whole he

embodies. Anything else could cause misunderstandings, especially as the Risen are far from a popular race, and your showing favoritism toward them will cause dissatisfaction for some. Especially seeing as I doubt you plan to show the same welcoming mood toward the Holy Church, a far more popular faction in the multiverse. Remember, even if they do not have any official position on the planet, many still view them as a positive force in the multiverse, and they do still have some believers around, too. Worst case scenario, your actions may even lead to speculation that in the conflict between the Risen and the Holy Church, you side with the Risen.”

“In my defense, I do like the Risen more than the Holy Church...” Jake muttered, making Vesperia shake her head.

“Better to keep such emotions hidden until you can truly act upon them. Neutrality is a powerful weapon and defense, and right now, you have a powerful position as this planet’s World Leader. You are capable of keeping everyone in check because they all fear being the ones to make you break your neutral stance and act against them, so as long as you remain impartial – at least on the surface – you also remain fully in control,” Vesperia continued to explain.

“You know, for someone who has a hard time understanding human relationships, you are very good at human politics,” Jake said with a sigh.

“The Endless Empire is a mostly neutral faction, so having some basic understanding of politics is a given. Sure, we do act in our own interest, and we do not fear making enemies, but there needs to be something to be gained. Right now, I do not see the benefits of making any factions your enemies or even to make them view you less favorably,” Vesperia continued.

Jake wasn’t going to comment on the absurdity of a wasp that was only a few years old teaching about politics, and at this point, he did have to admit that a lot of it was willful ignorance. All of the pussy-footing and political bullshit was just too opposed to his Path, where simplicity was at the center. Still... best to just listen to the people who know how to politic. Even if politics still suck, but that was implicit.

“So, to sum it up... it’s best I remain all haughty and arrogant, staying as the high and mighty World Leader who refuses to even entertain interacting with anyone visiting before absolutely necessary?” Jake wanted to clarify with Vesperia, who had obviously also talked this all over with Miranda.

“You will show yourself before them soon,” Vesperia said with a smile. “You should have received the system invitation already, haven’t you?”

“I have? To what?” Jake asked, confused, as he quickly pulled up his notifications. Firstly, he had to skip past the four levels he had gained over the last quite a few months – a huge reason for which was definitely the tasty wasp venom he had

consumed through repeated stabbings. These notifications also included the period before Vesperia arrived, so it had actually been quite a few months.

***'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 272 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points***

***'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 275 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points***

***'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 281 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points***

***'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 282 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points***

After skipping a few more, he finally found the one Vesperia had been talking about as he wondered how the hell he had missed it:

**Announcement to all eligible nobles and special invitees on Earth: A World Congress has been scheduled, set to start in: 14 days & 11:17:54.**

**You must be within the territory of a Pylon of Civilization and have permission to enter from the City Lord or ruler of the Pylon.**

“Oh yeah... Miranda did talk about calling a World Congress before the event started,” Jake muttered. “I guess I’m expected to attend this?”

“Of course,” Vesperia giggled a bit. “In fact, it will be the one thing you will attend, as it will allow you to meet all factions at the same time in a setting where it’s clear you have a superior position.”

“And I’ll be right next to Miranda so she can coach me,” Jake pointed out as a thought struck him. “Wait, will you also be there?”

“Naturally,” Vesperia smiled.

Jake had to hold back a sigh as he could already imagine this little World Congress being quite... something.

Oh well, Jake saw no reason to fret about it. He returned to his alchemy as two weeks quickly passed, and it was soon time for the fourth World Congress of Earth: Prima Guardian Strategy Meeting Edition.

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## Chapter 924: Someone Just Had To

"So, you're clear on your role, right?" Miranda asked Jake who had three women stare him down with expectant looks.

"Keep quiet and look menacing?" Jake asked a bit nervously. "At least for the most part..."

"You can speak up; just do so with forethought," Vesperia added.

"I would recommend you to only speak up if you deem it absolutely necessary," Miranda kind of disagreed. "Outside of your small opening speech, of course."

"Do I really need to do a speech? Can't you just do it?" Jake tried to worm his way out of it.

"No, as the World Leader, it needs to be you. Plus, it allows you to avoid actively participating in the following discussions if you don't want to, as you've already made your position in the matter clear right from the get-go. Finally, we should at least show a basic level of courtesy by you directly addressing our visitors and all the leaders who are taking part in this World Congress," Miranda continued to explain.

"There's no need to worry; just memorize the speech as best as you can. Or, at the very least, the spirit and central message of it. You can make the words and the delivery your own," Lillian also chimed in.

"Adding some personality would be best," Vesperia agreed with a nod. "And allow them all to bask in your aura meanwhile. Do not actively push it to suppress them, but don't restrain it either. Let them know you are indeed the most dangerous being in the room, and make it clear that declaring you an enemy is not in their interest."

"Indeed," Miranda concurred too. "While the chances of individuals wishing you, I, or any of the other leaders of Earth harm are low, and we have yet to catch anyone with such thoughts, it's still better to be safe than sorry. If you let your aura remain unconstrained, perhaps it can even help sniff out a few of those who are still dissatisfied with you. Make mental notes of these people."

Jake slowly nodded as he tried to remember everything, as he looked at the paper on the table with the speech written on it. At the bottom, they had even included all the key points he had to go over in a concise fashion.

This meeting in Jake's lodge was the final preparations for the World Congress, where the three women wanted to coach Jake and make sure he was ready. While this was definitely way lower stakes than stuff such as the Chosen Ceremony, Miranda still took it very seriously, and Vesperia definitely added a layer of complexity as she would also be participating. This would be her first time openly showing herself to the leaders of Earth, and first impressions were always important.

There were some potential issues they had gone over but didn't really have the ability to prepare or safeguard against. The biggest one was who would take part in this meeting, more importantly, how damn different those participating would be, and what kind of conflicts that could give rise to.

To summarize, there would be a Unique Lifeform leading a group of monsters, vampires from the Noboru Clan, the Sky Whale representing a horde of beasts, Casper and the Risen, Jacob and the Holy Church, assassins from the Court of Shadows, Valhal, Jake himself, Arthur and "normal" humans who were still struggling with adapting to the system, former slaves of different races... and now they even had a True Royal ectognamorph in there, another very unpopular race.

It was, to put it nicely, a clusterfuck of factions where a good chunk of them were openly in conflict, with a few very unpopular races mixed in just for good measure. It felt almost inevitable that something would happen, but they hoped to suppress anyone daring to cause a scene by Jake being a scary guy, making it clear he would come down on anyone who acted like trouble-makers.

Quite the responsibility, but Jake would just have to deal with it.

"I believe that's everything we meant to cover," Lillian said after a brief pause. "Do also remember that the format of this World Congress is a bit different than usual."

"True, I forgot to mention that," Miranda nodded. "It was good you gave me permission to schedule and plan the congress. There are quite a few options for customization, and it took longer than I anticipated, especially sorting out who to invite and issuing these invites to all those who arrived on the planet after the event was planned. Not to mention planning the actual congress and its setup."

Jake could only agree as he kept checking his paper with the speech on. They discussed a few more minor things before finally, the event arrived. Jake received his invite and quickly accepted it as he felt himself being moved elsewhere. This wasn't just moving his soul either, but his entire physical body was teleported to the recognizable World Congress hall.

Things had changed since the last time Jake was there, though. Before, he always assumed it was in some weird system-created space that didn't really exist anywhere, but now he knew... they were deep beneath the ground. As deep as one could possibly get, as Jake was confident:



This space existed within the Planetary Pylon.

He didn't really have time to share this discovery as he stood on the usual platform, though it had been raised to an even higher position than before, making him stand the furthest up by far. Alongside him, Miranda, Lillian, Vesperia, Arnold, Holstred, and two more people Jake didn't really know appeared.

Across the hall, others also began to arrive, as Jake spotted all the expected participants. He didn't know how often this many in-conflict factions and races could be gathered in one space like this, but this had to be a pretty damn rare sight, right?

Jake also saw that the Fallen King appeared on his right while the Sword Saint popped in on his left. He saw that a familiar face had joined him as Reika stood by her great-grandfather's side, along with quite a few vampires. Bringing several vampires had definitely been a conscious choice to "show them off," so to say.

The Sky Whale in his human form also made his appearance, standing next to the Fallen King, with even Sylphie having decided to join him. This was another difference between the purely system-created World Congresses and the one Miranda made herself... the invited members were no longer limited to those with nobility titles or humanoids. She could invite anyone she wanted, which she clearly had, as many beasts and monsters of different sorts appeared in their humanoid form.

Arthur also appeared just one step further to the left of Jake, standing next to the Sword Saint. On another elevated position, Caleb and the Court of Shadows teleported in, showing they were also considered of high status. Now, Valhal wouldn't get one of these elevated podiums, as they were still – at least officially – not on super good terms with Earth's leadership after the Ell'Hakan debacle.

However, they were placed right next to the elevated platforms, proving they were at least halfway out of the doghouse. At least, that's how Miranda had explained it... because, yes, the placement of every single faction had been a huge consideration. This was yet another reason why it was good Miranda had handled everything regarding this event because Jake would have just auto-sorted and told the system to place them alphabetically or some shit like that.

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After about a minute, everyone had arrived, and a system message appeared.

**Welcome to the World Congress of Earth: Prima Guardian Preparation Strategy Meeting.**

**This World Congress is scheduled to discuss Earth's approach to the Prima Guardian event. There will be no votes during this World Congress, but it shall solely serve as a strategy meeting for the upcoming event and for all participating**



**forces to get acquainted. All privacy functions of the booths have been disabled to foster proper cooperation.**

**Violence is not allowed during the World Congress. The purpose of this World Congress is discussion, and outright hostile actions or threats are not permitted. While in this space and on the planet as a whole, everyone is expected to act according to the laws of Earth.**

This message wasn't actually written by the system but by Miranda and Lillian. It did seem like they had made it quite a lot shorter compared to some of the initial drafts Jake had heard about, but it definitely got the job done and set the stage with how it finished by telling everyone to act nicely.

Jake gave everyone a bit to read this message, as sadly, he was the one supposed to initiate this World Congress. Taking a breath, Jake remembered the main parts of the speech and spoke as he infused his voice with mana and let his unconstrained aura spread.

**“Allow me to echo the message earlier and welcome you all to this extraordinary World Congress. I see quite a few familiar faces, some old, some new. Some who’ve acted against my own and Earth’s interests before, and some who’ve always remained allies. Know that this is not a time for grudges, and we are all here to work together for the upcoming event. Not work against one another... and if I can shelve my grudges for now, so can you,”** Jake began his speech, definitely going off-script in a few minor places, but based on how Miranda, Lillian, and Vesperia looked pleased enough, he kept going.

**“With that spirit, let me also clarify to all those who recently arrived: even if we are allies, at least for now, you are still guests. Act like it. This is not your home turf, even if you originated from Earth, and your factions have no power here. This planet – my planet – welcomes all who can stick to the rules, no matter their race or Path. Be they human, Unique Lifeform, Risen, vampire, beast, elemental... or even a True Royal from the Endless Empire.”**

Vesperia took the cue and nodded her head to the crowd as if announcing herself, though it wasn't really necessary. She had a unique aura around her already, and it wasn't like her identity or appearance were a secret. During the Chosen Ceremony, she had openly shown herself, and it was only to be expected many of the factions present had received intelligence about her existence. Plenty of people had already been gawking.

Still, they were definitely surprised she was on Earth. He didn't doubt many telepathic messages were flying at this very moment, but Jake paid it no heed as he continued speaking.

**“We are all here to benefit from the Prima Guardian event, nothing more, nothing less. So, let the ideologies of your faction lie for now and work together as we seek to hunt down this Prima Guardian. Because if you don’t cooperate with our efforts, you work against us... and at that point, you shall share the same fate as the Prima Guardian. Yes, that is a threat, and don’t think, for a single second, that any faction will afford you even a moment of mercy.”**

Alright, he had definitely gone a little bit off-script there, and Miranda did throw him a subtle glance as Jake decided to finish up.

**“But it won’t ever come to that, now will it? Let us all hope not,”** Jake said, softening the blow of the threat a little bit. **“Today, our purpose is to plan out our approach to the event itself and for you to offer whatever insight your factions may have, including any speculations that are worth sharing. Hold nothing back, for we will not. Our goal for this Prima Guardian event is not merely to beat it but to do so as flawlessly as possible. Something that will surely prove mutually beneficial for all who are here, so let’s all cooperate to ensure the ideal outcome and reap the rewards in unison.”**

His speech wasn’t long, but he got the important points across while even throwing in some good subtle – and not-so-subtle – threats. He had wondered why Miranda couldn’t just have said all the things he just did, but she assured him it was best Jake was the one. That way, the words would carry more weight... and they had cause if he acted upon them later.

Either way, the essence of the entire speech had been to clarify everyone was expected to work together, and that he didn’t care for whatever grudges they had. That everyone is welcome on Earth, no matter who or what they are.

“As Lord Thayne said, the goal is for us all to work together as cohesively and effectively as possible,” Miranda finally jumped in, not infusing her voice with any energy, as she already spoke more than loudly enough. All the attention also definitely remained on their platform, helped by Jake not reigning in his aura at all. Instead, he just let it hang there for them all to get used to it while putting a bit of pressure on everyone to act nice. READ LATEST CHAPTERS AT *novel♦fire♦net*

“I don’t believe I have to introduce anyone here, so let me just get started and not drag this out more than necessary,” Miranda began as she summoned a huge projection in the middle of the circular conference hall, showing the entire planet. “Let us begin with the current state of preparations that have already been made...”

The next part was painful for Jake to sit through. Not only was it all information Jake had already heard before, but he even had to deal with people asking questions for clarification throughout, as Miranda did a long presentation on Earth’s current status.

After some time, the Sky Whale and Fallen King also joined, with Arthur jumping in as well. Jake threw a glance toward the Sky Whale's platform and found a sleeping green hawk on one of the chairs. He very much wanted to mimic her, but alas, he had to stand there menacingly.

Carmen, at the Valhal podium, also looked openly bored. Other people he knew who didn't seem overly interested in politics, such as Eron, had far more neutral expressions. The guy was always pretty impossible to read, honestly.

Now, Arnold, that dude knew what was up. He was wearing glasses, and while it was hard to see, they definitely had screens on the inside. Huge respect to him for reading or watching videos and stuff during an important meeting... really gave Jake flashbacks to work before the system.

Looking over at the other person at his old company who was the most likely to also watch videos on the internet during important work meetings, Casper managed to somehow not look bored. Perhaps he had been through a baptism of politics himself, being one of the top figures of the Risen, as he was definitely holding up well.

All in all, Jake would say things were going pretty well, even if he was bored as fuck, and soon, they were done getting everyone on the same page about where Earth was with their current Prima Guardian defense efforts. Vesperia and Arnold didn't talk, but Miranda did make their contributions clear, and no one seemed to be side-eyeing Vesperia much, which was a huge relief to Jake. He had been afraid several factions or humans on Earth would be very against her.

Then again, she did look very humanoid, so that was probably why most didn't have a problem.

Moving on with the meeting, the next topic was what the newcomers would be doing. Seeing as there was still a bit of time before the Prima Guardian arrived, they would definitely be put to work.

"Before we know exactly where on Earth the Prima Guardian will originate, we will designate different teams across the planet. Space mages have been working on means to quickly establish a teleportation circle so we can get everyone there quickly, but we still need powerful enough groups to handle the regular Primas that will come alongside the Guardian," Miranda explained, everything sounding reasonable to Jake so far.

But... just when the meeting was going so damn well, everything was ruined. While Miranda was briefly touching upon some of the current plans of who would go where someone just had to do it. And, of course, it had to be someone affiliated with the damn Holy Church. It wasn't someone who had arrived with Jacob and company, but one of the city leaders who had been left behind when they left, who used to belong to the Church and clearly still subscribed to the religion.

Perhaps he felt empowered from standing next to Jacob, or perhaps he was just an idiot... but he just had to go and do it:

“If you want anyone from my city to go anywhere near there, you need to get rid of those damn abominations first,” the man said, staring at the people – vampires - standing with the Sword Saint. “Having an enemy both in front of us and at our sides will certainly spell doom.”

Miranda had given the man the room to speak when he lifted his hand... but her eyes narrowed at what he said. That is when Jake spoke up.

**“Read the rules. You get only one strike.”**

The man looked perplexed at Jake and completely ignored Jacob, who was staring daggers at him. “I apologize, Lord Thayne...”

For a moment, Jake had hope.

“... but those abominations simply do not belong on-“

And just like that, he’d spoken his final words.

A brief glance, two glowing eyes, a single crumbled soul.

Everyone stood there, shocked, while the lifeless man fell forward, slamming into the ground with a thud as the whole room became silent enough to hear a pin – or, in this case, a corpse – drop.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## **Chapter 925: Vision, Phones, & End of World Congress**

Jake had really, *really*, hoped he didn’t have to do that, but alas, it was part of his job. It was not just him making some impulsive decision to kill an asshole – though it would definitely not be out of character for him – but something Miranda and he had discussed long before the congress began. It was also something only he could do.

In a brief moment, the entire atmosphere of the room changed, as none dared say anything for several seconds, while most just stared at the now lifeless man on the ground.

Miranda purposefully let this atmosphere hang in the air for several moments. After what felt like an eternity to many of those present, she let out a loud sigh. "There always has to be one person who can't follow basic rules, huh? Would those who came with him be so kind as to remove the body? If not, we shall dispose of it for you."

One of those who was part of the dead man's entourage quickly moved and picked up the body before putting it in a spatial storage after he'd unfortunately died due to an overdose of overconfidence and stupidity. Jake's method of killing had at least left a pristine corpse, making an open-casket funeral more than possible. How kind of him.

"Now, before we proceed, I guess I should address the thoughts many of you are currently having. You question how we can kill someone in a World Congress where violence is meant to be forbidden. However, this doubt is rooted in a basic misunderstanding of how things work here on this planet," Miranda continued as she had all attention on her.

"You were all given a folder outlining the, quite frankly, very basic laws of Earth, but it appears some had not read the final clause," she continued as she spoke in a far more serious voice with the final part: "These rules do not apply to Lord Thayne, the World Leader. His actions and decisions supersede the law, and every action is justified. To have given the man a single warning for not being able to follow a few basic rules was already a kindness that wasn't warranted."

She definitely wasn't fucking around as she said this. Her explanation was also the reason why Jake had to be the one to do this. If Miranda or others acted outside the rules and laws, it would put the entire system into question. At that point, what even would be the meaning of laws if Jake could exempt some people willy-nilly?

No, if it was only Jake, that was easy to understand and, across the multiverse, a surprisingly normal thing. It was far from odd to see rulers be immune to laws, with their families often also included in this immunity. In fact, many monarchies before the system also had clauses that meant the direct royal family couldn't be punished according to the law... though in reality, they often would if they did commit a harsh enough crime.

All of this is to say is that Jake's action hadn't been out of pocket according to the logic of the multiverse, and Miranda had told him that should a situation like this arrive, he was free to act with impunity. It had all been a political move that helped make it very clear these factions were in someone else's territory now.

"Everyone seems to understand, I hope?" Miranda said with a smile. "Good. Now, let's continue unless there are any more interruptions or complaints?"

Surprisingly, there weren't. Almost as if instant death by someone looking angrily at you was a good deterrent.

"Moving on. Before the rude interruption, we were discussing where the Prima Guardian might appear, and discussing placements of groups to act as rapid-response teams. Based on the description of the event, the Prima Guardian will not act immediately, but we cannot be sure about the regular Primas or any other beasts or monsters fighting alongside them," Miranda continued. "We didn't quite get to it before, but does anyone have something to add or some information their faction has obtained about the event? Probable speculation is also welcome."

Jake hadn't really expected anyone to know much... and when he saw Jacob raise a hand to speak, Jake really hoped he wasn't going to complain about the man who had just been killed. It was clear Jake tended to be fine with killing, but he really didn't want to attack someone he still considered a friend... and while he and Jacob had definitely drifted apart in recent years, Jake still considered the Augur a friend.

Luckily, that wasn't what he wanted to say as he spoke after Miranda gave him the go-ahead.

"Thank you for the time. Let me begin by saying that the Holy Church truly doesn't know more than Ms. Wells has already shared, but personally, I may have gained some insight. What I'm about to say cannot really be confirmed by anyone but myself. However, I believe it's still vital to share nonetheless," Jacob began. "After returning to the planet, I have focused on divining anything I could regarding the upcoming event... and I finally had a vision just yesterday. Please, allow me to share it."

Instantly, quite a few people, Jake included, perked up with interest. Miranda also looked serious and nodded. Jacob closed his eyes for a moment as he continued. This content belongs to novel~fire~net

"I saw a dark void filled with glowing crystals in the sky, barely giving any light. The ground is soft, shifting. I'm hot; the air is dry and nearly devoid of all life. Then, suddenly, the sky is alight. It burns as a grand shadow falls over me before something explodes, and a shockwave rushes over my face, ending the vision."

The room was silent, as Jake really hoped some smart people would interpret the vision. For a moment, Jake thought that Jacob talked about the moon when he mentioned it being devoid of life, but the moon wasn't soft and definitely not hot. Plus, it had to be on Earth, right...

*A desert, maybe?*

"This is the divination in its raw form, but allow me to share my interpretation," Jacob said. "The lights are stars, and the environment I feel makes me believe it's in an area close to the equator. Far from the oceans, as there is no moisture in the air. As for the

shadow and the shockwave... I believe this Prima Guardian will arrive on some kind of meteorite or a celestial object that will crash onto Earth from space."

Jacob finished, getting quite a few murmurs from all around. Jake also subtly nodded, Jacob's interpretation seeming pretty spot on. The Prima Guardian arriving on a meteor or something also made a lot more sense than it just popping into existence somewhere.

As for not believing Jacob's vision or taking it with a grain of salt... well, there was a reason factions were keen on recruiting an Augur. There was no reason not to trust his divination, and it was honestly pretty good information.

"Do you think it's possible to narrow down exactly where it still strike down?" Miranda asked.

A case of literary theft: this tale is not rightfully on Amazon; if you see it, report the violation.

"I can't make any promises, but I will do my best," Jacob answered in a humble tone. "My plans are to travel the planet a bit during this final preparation period and try to find a more exact location."

"Directly on the other side of the planet, there is a massive desert," Jake decided to speak, for the first time not infusing his voice with mana or trying to intimidate anyone. "From your description, that seems like a probable location."

"A desert would indeed match my vision," Jacob nodded. "For the system event to take place borderline as far away from where the enlightened live would also make sense from a system point of view... I shall make it the first place I investigate once the congress is over."

"Sounds like we can avoid much prep work if we can narrow down the location," Miranda smiled. "Nevertheless, we should continue preparations with the assumption the exact touch-down spot of the Prima Guardian isn't found in time. With the vision, we can at least eliminate a lot of potential areas, such as all the oceans, large lakes, forests, and whatnot."

The mood in the room had changed rapidly, no longer as tense, after good news was shared. Jacob and the Holy Church had also quickly "redeemed" themselves after that moron had gotten himself killed, as no one dwelled on the matter anymore.

For the rest of the World Congress, people remained polite and well-mannered. A few discussions did get a bit heated at times, but never in any way that went against the rules. Just what one would expect of normal political stuff.



As the meeting was winding down, they touched on perhaps the most important subject... who was actually going to fight the Prima Guardian?

"It shouldn't come as a surprise, but Earth does not need any assistance dealing with this system event. I truly don't believe we will find ourselves unable to handle it, or the difficulty of this event will be so high that none shall pass," Miranda said. "That is even considering the fact we are going for a perfect record. Also, we don't plan on delaying the engagement at all, but take down the Prima Guardian as quickly as possible."

As a reminder, the Prima Guardian event wasn't necessarily designed to just be a quick boss fight and then be done. Chances were it was meant to be a longer scenario based on the system messages given prior:

**"In five years, the Guardian will arrive on Earth with its army and must be defeated within five years of arrival, or the Guardian will move to claim the world for itself as the barrier naturally falls."**

This message kind of had two implications. The first was naturally that they had five years to do the event... but the wording of saying it will "move to claim the world" kind of indicated that perhaps this Prima Guardian couldn't move much or was limited in its movements somehow within these five years.

Not that these things mattered to Earth, as they planned on slaying the boss immediately. The barrier in the message was the one defending the Planetary Pylon, and the only way to dispel the barrier was to either have both keys – one given to the Guardian and one to Jake - or wait for five years after the Prima Guardian arrived.

"The plan is not to simply amass an army and try to defeat the Prima Guardian this way. I'm going to be honest; the vast majority would only get in the way. No, it's better to focus on reducing or entirely avoiding taking any damage from regular Primas and whatever else may come at us," Miranda continued. "For the Prima Guardian, we will assemble an elite team led by Lord Thayne himself. Those who are deemed qualified will be contacted shortly after the World Congress, and should there be anyone out there believing they are also qualified to participate, they can come to Haven and be tested. Just know that the standards are quite high, and I cannot promise the testing method is safe for those too weak."

Jake had honestly expected some complaints about this announcement, but surprisingly, no one said anything in disagreement. Perhaps they also realized it was better to have one small elite team rather than an entire army. In general, armies tended to be pretty ineffective in the multiverse unless they were facing other armies.

Sure, it was probably possible to overwhelm the Prima Guardian with sheer numbers, and even Jake would struggle if he was bombarded with spells from a few thousand weaker people. Unless he just dodged and ran away, that is.

No, it was for sure better to have one elite team. As for who would be on this team... well, many of the expected people. Jake wasn't entirely sure about everyone yet, but quite a few were already set, and the more Jake thought about the team that would face the Prima Guardian, the worse he felt for the poor boss.

With this final topic getting finished uncontested, there really wasn't much more to discuss. After a few more very minor topics and a few clarifying questions, there was just one more thing.

"To finish, please all take one of these," Miranda said as she summoned a large table filled with what looked like old phones in boxes. "These are developed by Arnold and allow anyone using them to contact a communication central from anywhere on the planet. Additionally, they all have location-tracking magic embedded in them, allowing those using it to send their exact location. Use them to relay information to Haven during this final preparation time, and at the same time, we will use them to keep everyone up-to-date."

Arnold had produced thousands of these magic phones over the last year or so, and Jake already knew they were spread far and wide. Jake had one himself at his home, though he had more of a landline with a direct connection to Miranda.

These phones, as Jake decided to call them, did have the slight downside that they had a pretty limited lifespan. The energy required to fulfill some of their functions wasn't infinite, and Arnold hadn't created any way to recharge them. At first, Jake believed this was a design flaw, but he came to realize it was entirely on purpose.

It was planned obsolescence and a way to protect his designs. Trying to break open the device or analyze it too much would result in the phone breaking itself. Of course, it was technically possible to break the magical encryption, keeping its secrets safe, but that was where the planned obsolescence came into play. Once they ran out of energy, all magic within would disappear, making the phones no more than fancy bricks. So, the encryption didn't need to be unbreakable, just good enough to hold up until the phone died.

Miranda also made sure to warn people of this.

"Just a small side note: do not try to mess with these, or you may break them. We also expect every single one returned after the event is concluded, and a hefty fine will be given if they are lost or damaged in any way. So don't get any fancy ideas, alright? Also, if they leave Earth, they break, so be sure not to do that," Miranda said as Jake saw a few people visually deflate, as they had definitely planned on analyzing or sending the phone back to their factions in another universe.

Analyzing void-related magic, which many – including Jake – suspected these phones used, was of immense interest to even the larger factions.

Also, if anyone did decide to try and take the phone anyway, Earth would get paid handsomely, making this quite a potentially profitable strategy. It was all a great deal for Earth and the coffers of the World Council even if people didn't turn in their phones, and ultimately, it wasn't like Arnold was using some super-secret tech. Arnold had even made clear he expected a number to be "forgotten."

Distributing the phones, nearly every person of influence from the different factions got a good handful to also give out to their subordinates. It really was a massive undertaking, and Jake was glad he wasn't the one working at this communication center Miranda had set up in Haven.

Once all the phones were given out and a bit more small talk, it truly was time to announce the end of the Fourth World Congress of Earth, as Miranda spoke loudly with all eyes on her.

"I wish to thank you all for coming today, and despite a brief moment of rudeness, I believe things went rather splendidly," Miranda said with a smile. "Continue to work hard, everyone, and together, may we reap the best rewards possible. Who knows... maybe there's even some achievement if we're the first planet in this entire universe to take down the Prima Guardian."

With these words, a countdown appeared, marking the end of the congress. The countdown would last an hour for everyone to just do their own thing. During this time, Vesperia looked quite busy as many approached her, and Jake decided to spend this time briefly saying hello to some of his friends before he and everyone else were thrown back from whence they came.

Which, in Jake's case, was his lodge.

Oh, and would you look at that... there was an empty alchemy lab right beneath it. It would sure be a shame to leave it unattended while there was still a bit of time to spare. No one would object to that, right?

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## **Announcement: Book 10 is out! September Break! Patreon Changes!**

Hello there, big announcement time with quite a few topics to cover! Three in total! Latest content published on **novel**♦*fire*♦**net**

### Topic 1: Book 10 Ebook is out today!

Yep, we are already all the way to book 10! Double digits, so that's quite something.

This book marks the beginning of the beloved Nevermore arc! What more do you really need to know? Well, besides the fact that I can't say when the audiobook will come out, something I'm certain a lot of people are wondering.

Anyway, get it today and reexperience the greatness of Minaga once more!

Linky link: <https://www.royalroad.com/amazon/B0D2Z5MC51>

### Topic 2: Break time in September!

Next up, I will be taking a break next month to watch my yearly Dota tournament and to just relax. **As always, I will be pausing payments so no one will be charged for the month of September**, meaning you can just keep your current memberships active without paying a penny (this year, at least... but more on that later).

This year, I'll even be going to my Dota tournament in person, so that's pretty hype.

However, when I return, there will be some changes... none of them really up to me as outlined in topic 3.

### Topic 3: Patreon announcement and the effects it will have.

This story has been taken without authorization. Report any sightings.

I don't know how many of you saw it, but on Monday, Patreon put out a pretty big announcement:

<https://news/articles/understanding-apple-requirements-for-patreon>

TLDR: Paying in the Apple IOS app will now be way more expensive, and my current payment model will be effectively discontinued by the 1st of November, forcing me to switch to the subscription model. That is to say, rather than be charged on the 1st of every month, you will be charged on the date you signed up and have 30 days from there (so for current subscribers, it won't really change anything).

Except it will... though hopefully, something can be done about that.

The big problem comes with how pausing works on the new payment model I'll be forced into. Right now, when I pause payments for a month to go on break (such as this September), new people can still sign up to read the backlog. With the new system, they straight-up can't. No one new can sign up at all, which seriously sucks for more reasons than I want to get into here. What it will mean is that I won't feel comfortable

pausing for a month unless something changes, which will make you all pay for a month without any content, which will make a bunch of you understandably unsub, and it all just sucks dick.

But, as I said, hopefully, there can be a solution before I'll take my break next year. Tonight, I'm having a meeting with the CEO of Patreon and a few others to discuss this, so let's see what happens... oh, and I'll also ask if maaaybe we can get a "next post" button or something like that lol.

Anyway, with this forced change, I also see no reason not to enable Annual Subscriptions, which is exactly what it sounds like. Pay for a year and save 10% compared to just staying subbed that entire year, which will more or less equal out with my yearly break month.

As a last thing with this change... come November, if you are using the Apple IOS app, **FOR THE LOVE OF VILLY, DO NOT PAY THROUGH IT! GO ON THE GODDAMN WEBSITE AND SAVE 30% ON THE PRICE THAT WOULD HAVE JUST GONNA STRAIGHT INTO APPLE'S POCKET ANYWAY. YOU CAN STILL READ AND USE THE APP, JUST DON'T PAY USING IT!**

And, that's about it. Remember that the break in September will be just like every other year, and all these changes will only matter from the time I return from my break.

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## Chapter 926: A Very Black Blade

Time was a cruel mistress... but so was Miranda when she told Jake he couldn't just run down to his laboratory and keep playing with poisons while ignoring the world around him. They only had a few weeks before the Prima Guardian event began, and apparently, that meant Jake had to be "mentally available" or something like that.

At least, this was what she said after returning to his lodge from the World Congress. Jake had appeared first, with Miranda, Lillian, and Vesperia popping in only a dozen or so seconds later. They all chose to take this time to sit down and briefly talk over what had happened – after Miranda stopped Jake from sneaking off to the lab, that is.

Once she had assured Jake wouldn't run off, Miranda let out a loud sigh as she relaxed her shoulders and found a chair to lean back on. "That congress was exhausting, but I guess it went as well as could be expected."

“Would have been better if there wasn’t that one guy...” Lillian sighed, shaking her head. “It seems extreme, but it had to be done.”

“Do not pity a fool who dared go against rules explicitly explained to him,” Vesperia said in a rather harsh tone. “He is lucky death was his only punishment. A rather light sentence if I say so myself. Having him imprisoned and his soul serve as fuel or a seedbed would have been more appropriate for having the audacity to show such disrespect toward Sire.”

“When you say seedbed...” Jake muttered.

“Some wasp Hive Queen variants are parasitoid in nature and use the bodies of other races to lay eggs in. It’s quite effective, and if the body and soul of the target are well-maintained, you can use the same one for quite a while,” Vesperia explained casually with a smile. “I can look into spawning one of these Hive Queens next if you are interested?”

“... no need to go out of your way for my sake,” Jake said as he raised both hands. “Just do what you feel is best, okay? Totally fine if that doesn’t include any of those variants.”

Jake had to try hard not to say “scary as fuck” variants. Also, once more, he wanted to reiterate that Vesperia was a little bit terrifying at times. Just a bit.

“Very well, then I shall put it off for now,” Vesperia nodded. Jake wasn’t sure if she read his discomfort or if she noticed Miranda and Lillian both pulling back from her a bit when she began talking about imprisoning and laying eggs in people.

“Anyway, back on topic... to be honest, of everyone you could kill, someone loosely affiliated with the Holy Church was probably the best,” Miranda said, everyone happy to move from one horrible fate to another – at least from Jake’s point of view. “I did briefly confirm that he was baptized, so at least he will go to the Holy Land as a spirit to live out the rest of his days. Still not a great fate for sure, but this incident isn’t enough to damage our relationship with any factions either.”

“I definitely didn’t assume he would just die for good,” Jake said with a light smile.

“Even if he had, his death would have been a necessary sacrifice to reinforce your rule and position on the planet,” Miranda said nonchalantly.

Jake nodded as he looked out of the window at the pond. For some reason, he couldn’t help but remember when Miranda, Hank, and his two kids had just arrived here in Jake’s small valley and offered to build this lodge for him. He also remembered the conversation way back then he had with Miranda, where he casually mentioned he had killed people and how horrified she had been at the notion. How she had believed he would kill her, too, simply because he was now a killer or something.

*Things sure have changed*, Jake thought with a wry smile. Now, she viewed killing someone during a political meeting as nothing more than another potential tool to gain an advantage. Lillian had always been a bit rougher, but she had also gotten far less soft... everyone from back then had. Well, besides maybe himself. Jake didn't really feel like he had changed *that* much.

Then again, he probably wouldn't really notice any subtle minor shifts that happened over long periods of time. He couldn't with full confidence say he was the same person he was before Nevermore, as he had learned a lot during that time, especially when it came to working with others and relying on their skills. Before the World Wonder, he rarely fought with others, while now, he had nearly spent more time of his life fighting alongside others than alone – though he did find quite a few openings to do some solo hunting during Nevermore.

Either way... they had definitely all changed quite a bit since the early days of the system. If not in personality, then at least what they were now capable of and willing to do.

"Do you need me to do anything while we wait for any updates from Jacob regarding finding where this Prima Guardian will crash down?" Jake asked Miranda after a bit.

"No, but as I said, I need you available. Once we have a better idea, the plan is to gather the elite team nearby where the boss will appear and strike as quickly as possible once we get a clear understanding of how exactly the event will transpire," Miranda said. "I have already contacted the Chosen of the Lord Protector, who will assist in transporting the team. That way, even if we're slightly off, the group should be able to arrive at the Prima Guardian nearly instantly."

"What if Sandy is restricted somehow?" Jake asked with a bit of worry.

"We're gambling on them not being too restricted. There is no precedent of the system outright mind-controlling anyone during a system event, and limiting the movements of every single creature who's absorbed system-given unique items on the entire planet seems too much," Miranda explained. "With all that said, we will also have some teleportation circles set up should the unexpected happen. Better to be overprepared than underprepared."

"Cheers to that," Jake smiled, as he was already looking forward to the event. He really hoped the Prima Guardian would put up a good fight, though a big part of him had some doubt. But, who knows, maybe there was some way to make it harder for themselves for a bigger reward or something. Yeah, that would be awesome.

"Well, I believe we should head off now; there is still much to do," Miranda said as she and Lillian stood up. She also looked at Vesperia who had been sitting silently. "Also, I have been meaning to ask, but will Her Majesty participate in the battle against the Prima Guardian? Are you able to?"



“Both willing and able,” Vesperia smiled. “I am still undecided if I shall help with the suppression of the regular Primas or take part in the battle against the Prima Guardian, but time shall tell. Perhaps I’ll simply do both.”

“Please just let me know your decision a bit beforehand,” Miranda nodded. “Having your assistance will prove most beneficial for certain.”

“Naturally,” Vesperia agreed without a trace of arrogance as if Miranda’s statement had just been the most obvious in the world. The witch didn’t take offense as she and Lillian headed toward the door. Just before exiting, she stopped and turned back.

“Oh, yeah, I was also asked to relay a message from Arnold. He said you had some weapon at his place, I believe? Everything should be ready for collection,” Miranda also added as she looked at Jake. “So, probably go and talk to him.”

“Not gonna lie, I had nearly forgotten he was working on stuff,” Jake admitted with a smile, happy for the reminder. “I’m gonna head there tomorrow. Gonna give Arnold some time to wind down after the World Congress first.”

That was only the polite thing to do. Jake also wanted the rest of the day to himself so he could just relax, and he got the impression Arnold could also do well with some alone time. They both weren’t the biggest people-persons, after all.

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“You do what you deem best. See you around, and remember... stay available,” Miranda said as a final reminder before she and Lillian left to continue working hard. Meanwhile, Jake stayed back with Vesperia, who also had her own matters to tend to.

As for Jake... well, a little alchemy had never hurt anyone, as he briefly popped by the laboratory. Also, Joke’s on Miranda; even if Jake couldn’t run off to his laboratory all the time, he could still do alchemy stuff outside his lab when she wasn’t looking.

The next day, he did as promised and headed off toward the Fort to meet up with Arnold. With a Pulse of Perception, he also confirmed Sandy was there, chilling and eating stuff, he reckoned. The arrangement the two had found was kind of funny but definitely mutually beneficial, as Arnold used Sandy as inspiration for better space-faring inventions, and Sandy used Arnold as a vending machine that also provided free housing accommodation.

Teleporting to Arnold’s place and sneaking his way in didn’t take long. The place had naturally grown even larger once more, as Arnold really had made a giant underground complex by now. It nearly reminded him of an ectognamorph hive, except this one had actual metal walls everywhere with halls filled with assembly lines and teleporters connecting everything.

The huge factories were especially impressive, and it was hard to believe everything was made by one man. Well, one man who created a lot of robots to do stuff for him.

Funnily enough, he still had a pretty small-ish workshop he usually did most of his work in. It had also barely changed since the early days and was more or less just a couple of tables and a bunch of computer-like things.

Jake didn't meet him in this room, though. In fact, Jake doubted Arnold ever invited anyone to his room. Instead, he went to a far larger workshop where the poor space worm was being held hostage by the evil mad scientist.

Arnold had already known Jake was arriving, and all the doors opened for him on the way before he stepped inside the workshop. Sandy was lying on their back, as Arnold had connected a lot of patches with wires to the big worm's skin. A bit of mana constantly emanated from Sandy as several devices measured everything, and Jake spotted the air almost shiver a bit around the worm as the environmental space mana reacted.

"Seems like you two are having fun," Jake commented with a smile as he looked at Sandy. "I'm a bit surprised you didn't wanna participate in the World Congress. No, actually, I guess it's more accurate to say I'm surprised no one forced you to take part in the congress to show off Earth's power or something."

*"Hey Jake! I considered going, but it sounded like a pain, and from what I heard, it was super boring anyway,"* Sandy said, being entirely accurate with their words. *"All I have to do is act as a shuttle anyway, right?"*

"Pretty much," Jake shrugged, turning to Arnold next. "Is Sandy really still that useful of a test subject? Can't be cheap to keep that glutton around."

"I still feel like I am only scratching the surface when it comes to exploring subspace travel and the seemingly infinite spatial layers that surround us at all times," Arnold said as he didn't look away from the screen in front of him. "The data obtained so far has already proven invaluable, and while I am impossibly far from applying the concepts of the Cosmic Genesis Worm in any meaningful setting, I have begun to extract aspects that may prove useful within a reasonable timeframe."

*"I am awesome indeed,"* Sandy wholeheartedly agreed. *"You should also praise me more. Everyone should."*

"Don't want it getting to your head, now do I?" Jake smiled as Sandy and Arnold seemed to get along well, even if their relationship was strictly professional. Still, the thought of Sandy and Arnold traveling space together, with Sandy constantly mocking the scientist's spaceships, was a mental image Jake couldn't get out of his head.

*“Hey, even a worm needs affirmation sometimes. Unlike you, every single system event isn’t tailor-made for me to stand out and look cool on Leaderboards or through getting big titles,”* Sandy complained.

“Are you saying you don’t have any titles?” Jake questioned, actually unsure.

*“I never said that. I only said I don’t get them from constant system events,”* Sandy quickly clarified. *“Besides, titles are overrated. I’d rather collect legendary and mythical skills instead.”*

“That is a good pursuit, too,” Jake smiled. “Titles are still nice, though.”

“Legendary... oh right,” Arnold suddenly muttered, as Jake felt the subtle movement of mana. A few seconds later, a shaft opened in the ceiling as a drone flew down, carrying a case that looked just about the right size to contain what Jake had come to acquire.

The drone stopped right above Jake, who took the cue and caught the metal case it dropped. Arnold finally spun around on his chair and stood up as he spoke. “The weapon has been complete for thirty-two days now, but I wanted to keep it here for at least twenty days even after completion to assure its stability within the material realm.”

Jake just nodded, wondering what the guy had done to his Nanoblade katar.

“You are free to open the case,” Arnold said, Jake quickly following suit.

Opening it, he saw the katar within. Its design was the same as usual. However, it took him a moment to properly distinguish the katar within the box from the foam around it.

To clarify. It took Jake, with all his Perception, a moment to see it.

The reason was that the entire box was entirely black, as the katar had obviously seeped out a bit of energy into the foam, turning it the exact same color. A color so black it didn’t seem like it was supposed to exist.

It reminded him... he had seen this exact blackness before in the void between worlds. But, looking at it in a setting like this felt incredibly eerie and off, and Jake quickly used Identify on the new Nanoblade... or perhaps it should now be renamed the Voidblade.

**[Voidblade Katar (Legendary)] – A katar wielded by a hunter, born from the mind of one touched by the void. The blade is made of a resilient composite metal that has been infused with void energies over time. This has made the blade incredibly sharp, allowing it to effortlessly cut and penetrate nearly all physical material. When striking mana-based entities, the blade must be constantly infused with nascent void energy, or it will be unable to deal any damage or interact with the target. The handle of the katar can absorb all forms of mana infused into it and transform it into nascent void energy. This effect is more**

**potent if the energy infused is the arcane affinity of the hunter. The blade will passively make void any other forms of energy interacting with it as long as it has sufficient nascent void energy. Has been stabilized so it can exist within the material plane. This also makes it able to enter spatial storage. Enchantments: Voidblade. Forced Spatial Stabilization.**

**Requirements: lvl 275+ in any humanoid race.**

He read the description very carefully as he took a deep breath. It was... a lot better than Jake had expected. It was also a bit confusing, though. Especially that it referred to a hunter several times, which was obviously Jake himself. Luckily, Arnold quickly explained.

"I created the Voidblade Katar using your old Nanoblade Katar as a base. The materials were already of high value, and through further refinement and infusion of nascent void energy, the results were better than expected. Using entirely new materials could perhaps have resulted in improved material integrity; however, I chose this approach to also preserve some of your Records within the katar, especially those gathered during your time in Nevermore. These Records proved useful and improved the final product significantly," Arnold said before continuing as he went over and lifted the weapon up.

"Using nascent void energy – a lesser form of void energy – is a challenging prospect within the material plane, as it's antithetical to the concept of matter and energy itself. Even calling void energy a form of energy is an oxymoron, as when there is void, there is no energy. However, the void can still be contained by other forms of energy too stable or resilient to be voided, which is what I have made here. The hardest aspect was the handle that allows you to also deploy this rudimentary form of void energy during combat by transforming your own mana. While this weapon is far from the ideal, it is the best I can make with my current abilities and means available."

Jake could only nod along as Arnold handed him the weapon, and when Jake finally felt it in his hand, the katar felt... odd.

"It doesn't weigh anything," Jake muttered.

"It does; it's merely unaffected by gravitational concepts and has an incredibly low mass," Arnold further clarified before he got a bit more serious. "Also, this is still a prototype. Should it break, or should you discard it, please bring the weapon back, or at the very least, the pieces that remain. It's a valuable research asset, after all. In return, I will allow you to field-test it and continue to improve the weapon continually as my skills and power improve."

"Of course," Jake nodded, seeing that as a very low price for getting a free legendary weapon. He did know there was a bit more to this entire thing, though. "But, be honest... you also want to analyze the Records within, especially those related to the arcane affinity, right?"

“I have never made that a secret and assumed I was an implicit understanding,” Arnold answered casually. “Again, I must reiterate. Do not lose the weapon. As I said, the handle was the hardest aspect of the weapon to create, in part because I had to use a catalyst to allow the transformation of regular mana to void energy. This catalyst is a high-level mythical item provided to me during Nevermore and something I would much prefer not to lose.”

Jake frowned a bit, looking at the katar more closely. Quite the pressure to get put on him, carrying around some mythical void item within his weapon.

“I’ll take good care of it,” Jake nodded.

“Good,” Arnold nodded as he looked to remember something else. “I may also have something else for you if you’re interested?”

“I’m never one to say no to more loot,” Jake smiled as he wondered what else Arnold could have in store.

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## Chapter 927: Favors Owed & One Last Surprise

Jake wondered what more Arnold could have in store for him. He was definitely in need of a gear upgrade after Nevermore, as the place hadn’t really given that much. It was only on the first part of the floors that equipment was really rewarded, while on all later floors, only raw materials for crafting were ever given. It was likely a form of balance to not fuck over crafters too much.

Still, it meant Jake had a lot of stats to be gained from equipment. Some of what he wore was still good, especially his boots, necklace, mask, one of his rings, and all his weapons, but much of his basic equipment had fallen behind.

The Shadestalker Legguards and Shadestalker Chestpiece he currently wore had already only been “pretty good” when he originally bought them. He had gotten them due to how reliable and simple they had been, both having the ability to nullify a bit of physical damage taken, self-repair, and also serve as okay stat sticks.

However, they hadn't scaled with him as he leveled up, resulting in the damage nullification quickly becoming insignificant, the stats falling behind, and the only good thing about his gear now being how it looked and its ability to repair itself.

The reason why he focused primarily on his chestpiece and pants wasn't just because they were the two things he wanted to replace the most, but because that was also exactly what Arnold brought in as a drone entered the room.

"Let me be upfront right away," Arnold said before he opened the boxes that Jake saw the equipment within. "My ulterior motive in offering you these is because I expect them returned for analysis after a period of use. As you wear this equipment, it will be affected by your Records and arcane energy passively, and I have primed them for future analysis already. Additionally, I am but one of several crafters of this. I had assistance from a few acquaintances from other universes to procure materials and complete several parts."

With those words, he opened one of the two boxes. One of them contained a leather jacket of sorts, though it definitely looked more medieval than modern, likely as a very deliberate design choice. It was dark in color, with a few dark green patterns here and there.

Also, while Jake called it a leather jacket, he wasn't sure it was actually made of leather. Lifting up the jacket and looking at it closer, it felt surprisingly soft. It was also heavier than he expected, and not by a little. He would almost assume it was made of metal with how much it weighed... which an Identify proved was actually a very legitimate assumption.

**[Titanssteel Nanofiber Chestpiece (Ancient)] – A marvel of different concepts merged seamlessly together to create an incredibly durable piece of clothing. The Titansteel has been refined into small fibers, making this armor nearly impossible to cut using regular means. Offers respectable resilience to all forms of magical attacks. This chestpiece is able to self-repair and remember all forms of energy passing through it, storing memories of its journey within. This function is especially effective during the self-repair process. Enchantments: +1500 Strength, +1000 Toughness, +1000 Agility, +750 Vitality. Self-Repair. Material Memory.**

**Requirements: lvl 275+ in any humanoid race.**

He also quickly threw an Identify on the pants and saw a very similar result.

**[Titansteel Nanofiber Pants (Ancient)] - A marvel of different concepts merged seamlessly together to create an incredibly durable piece of clothing. The Titansteel has been refined into small fibers, making this armor nearly impossible to cut using regular means. Offers respectable resilience to all forms of magical attacks. These pants are able to self-repair and remember all forms of energy**



**passing through them, storing memories of their journey within. This function is especially effective during the self-repair process. Enchantments: +1500 Agility, +1000 Toughness, +1000 Strength, +750 Vitality. Self-Repair Material Memory.**

**Requirements: lvl 275+ in any humanoid race.**

They were practically identical, outside of the fact that one was a chestpiece and the other a pair of pants. The stats were also shifted around a little bit, with one giving more Strength and the other giving more Agility, but it was nothing extreme.

He also noted how they gave quite a lot more stats than what he had right now... though perhaps that was only to be expected of a mid-tier C-grade item like this. They didn't have a lot going for them outside of the stats and just being super durable, so a lot of the Records could be allocated to just giving stats. Get full chapters from [novel★fire★net](#)

Also... one had to remember just how many stats Jake could actually get from gear. Jake could get just over 34,000 stats from gear total, with each of these offering 4250 stats stats total. Seeing as one could only wear ten pieces of equipment total, and that his mask and cloak didn't offer stats – and both tended never to – he wouldn't even hit the cap if he had eight pieces of equipment that gave as many stats as these two pieces of Titansteel Nanofiber armor.

And even getting this many stats wasn't easy. Certain pieces of gear tended to give more stats than others, with larger pieces usually giving more. In other words, the chestpiece and pants would give more stats than boots, gloves, and bracers. Jewelry did give more than anything else, but part of that was because they were just stats and didn't need to offer any innate protection.

To conclude... Jake would be lucky if he could reach his stat cap wearing a full set of ancient rarity equipment with a level requirement around his own. It was truly the woe of being strong and having a lot of percentage titles and a generally strong Path. The system had effectively deemed that someone like Jake needed quite a few legendary items as standard.

Not that Jake would ever say no to good ancient rarity stuff, and these two Titansteel Nanofiber gear pieces were pretty damn good. There was one thing that did bother him quite a lot though.

“Not gonna lie, it feels incredibly weird to have you just handing me clearly valuable stuff like this all the time. It isn't like I'm doing much for you in return,” Jake muttered. “Sure, you say you analyze my Records and arcane affinity, but this definitely feels like an unbalanced trade and that we have an even more unbalanced relationship.”

Arnold was silent for a moment before he looked up at Jake with a serious expression.



"I do not make my decisions out of a sense of kindness or altruism," Arnold spoke. "Your observation that our working relationship seems unequal is also entirely accurate and purposefully made to be that way. I have provided you with more tangible support than you have given me. However, rather than a loss, I view this as an investment in the future. An assurance, if you will. There currently does not exist any reliable method to protect against future problems, but I believe this to be the best option."

Jake raised an eyebrow as Arnold continued. "There may come a day when I will need your assistance. At that time, I deem it highly beneficial that you feel like you owe me something, spurring you on to act. While the future is uncertain, your mentality on certain matters has proven itself a constant, and I believe my actions will result in you being willing to provide support should something unfortunate and unforeseen happen."

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Arnold's explanation was very... curt. And exactly the kind of explanation Jake would expect out of the scientist. He didn't honey any of his words but outright stated he was effectively trying to manipulate Jake into feeling like he owed Arnold.

The thing is... he was entirely correct. Jake would help Arnold without thinking twice as things currently were. There were still some points of doubt, though.

"Gotta ask, are you expecting any problems since you need this assurance?" Jake asked.

"As of this moment, no. At least none I believe are likely to materialize in the near future that I cannot deal with myself. This is instead an assurance against the unknown. Perhaps nothing will ever happen, but considering our significantly expanded lifespans and the possibility of living eternally, it's effectively a statistical certainty I would one day need your unquestioned support," Arnold continued to answer honestly.

"Thanks for the honesty, I guess?" Jake muttered. It still felt weird that Arnold was effectively trying to bribe Jake into helping him with something neither of them even knew what was. But, no reason to say no to a good thing, and Jake was sure Arnold also knew he couldn't just make Jake do anything he wanted.

"No problem," Arnold clearly took Jake's words at face value. "To note, the Titansteel Nanofiber is also still a work-in-progress material, and I will make improved versions based on the Records they collect during your use."

"Does that mean you think you will eventually become able to make this armor consistently legendary rarity?" Jake questioned.

"Yes," Arnold nodded without a trace of doubt in his voice.

"Mass-produced legendary equipment, huh," Jake shook his head.

“Not mass-produced. The labor and materials going into each creation remain significant, and there are no plans to mass-produce the most powerful version. Lesser iterations will likely be made for cheaper material and using a methodology facilitating mass-production through automation. Additionally, while you may find my claim spurious, I wouldn’t find it difficult to believe if you could also consistently transmute legendary material,” Arnold clarified while also having a pretty good point.

“True, I probably could if the base material is good enough,” Jake agreed. Yeah, probably shouldn’t be surprising Arnold could consistently make legendary equipment if he had good enough materials.

*“I can’t really make anything at all!”* Sandy decided to chime in uselessly. *“But I’m confident I can eat more legendary stuff than both of you combined. Wouldn’t even be a competition.”*

“It wouldn’t be a competition because no one wants to compete with you,” Jake said with a smile as he shook his head. “Though I would be up for a competition of energy-absorption. Specifically vital energy.”

*“No equipment of any kind allowed.”*

“Seeing as it’s a part of my soul, does Eternal Hunger really count as equipment anymore? It’s more an extension of my body,” Jake shot back.

*“With that logic, can I use anyone I’ve eaten to help in the competition? Because if so, let’s have our competition at the Order, and I’ll just have a few A and S-grade vampires jump in there real quick,”* Sandy argued back. *“Seeing as they’re literally part of my body when in my stomach, they don’t count, right?”*

“... you know what, I’ll let you have this one rather than continue a discussion that’s just making everyone in the room dumber for having listened to it,” Jake muttered in defeat.

*“Victory has been claimed!”* Sandy said utterly shamelessly. *“My ingeniousness is truly unmatched, only perhaps matched by a scarce few gods. And Tom, but Tom’s just built different.”*

Arnold had also proven once more he was the smartest of them all because he had clearly not paid any attention at all to their stupidity, ignoring both Jake and Sandy.

Jake stuck around in Arnold’s workshop a bit longer as he got his new katar and clothing before it was back home to the lodge for some more alchemy. Only very briefly, though, as Jake was repeatedly dragged around to do stuff with Miranda.

During this time, he also strongly considered going to the Order of the Malefic Viper for a little bit but stopped himself. It was just too risky to leave the universe, even if there probably wasn’t a big chance anything would go wrong. Still, Jake couldn’t help but

consider what would happen if Ell'Hakan or someone else did some shit that stopped Jake from returning to Earth for the Prima Guardian event.

The reason why he had wanted to go visit the Order was naturally to check in with Meira and Irin primarily, but he also wanted to say hi to Scarlett, who he surprisingly learned wasn't returning for the Prima Guardian event at all. From what Jake gathered when he briefly heard from Reika, the snake simply didn't see any purpose in returning, seeing as she definitely couldn't actively participate in the event. She had consumed *a lot* of energy from system-provided unique items, making her only choice to ally with the Prima Guardian or sit out... and if she was going to sit out, she might as well sit out at the Order. From the sounds of it, she was also making many friends of the draconic kind, so good for her?

Anyway, even if Jake did want to go, he decided to delay till after the event. Besides, Jake still had a lot to do. To make sure he was warmed up, Jake even went on a few minor hunts to take down monsters that couldn't be negotiated with. None of them put up any good fights, but it was still good to flex his magical and actual muscles a bit once in a while.

Like this, the days quickly went by as the system event drew ever nearer, with new updates every day. The atmosphere of Earth had also changed significantly. With the entire planet on high alert and working in unison, it couldn't help but trickle down to even the regular person who was still only in E or even F-grade.

Those living in smaller settlements traveled to larger ones, defensive barriers were reinforced, and Miranda took practically every precaution Jake could imagine, as well as a few he hadn't even thought of. But, in his defense, he had kind of forgotten stuff like the fact some people had to eat to live. What a foreign concept, right?

When only about a week and a half remained, Jacob informed Miranda, and thus, by extension, everyone else, that he had located the exact spot where the Prima Guardian would arrive.

Jake had been correct in his assessment that it was in the massive desert on the opposite side of the planet from where the enlightened races lived. It was incredibly far away from them, but there wasn't any worry about the actual travel time to get there. With Sandy, it would barely take a day.

Also, even if Sandy turned out to be restricted or unavailable, space mages were already hard at work, putting down a track of teleportation circles. It was almost like a railroad where they put down magical circles in a line straight toward the spot Jacob had pointed out.

The one in Haven overseeing the project was also a familiar face who Jake hadn't interacted much with for a long time. It was Neil, who'd also returned from Nevermore quite a bit stronger. Jake remembered that the guy had always been more focused on

the crafting side of space magic, and he had really embraced that by now, being one of the top people managing Earth's teleportation network. Still, that didn't mean he couldn't fight, as space magic was still a very potent school of magic.

Over these final days, everyone also started to arrive in Haven, as that was where they would fly out from. A few had already gone to where Jacob was beforehand, but the vast majority headed to Haven. All the familiar faces were naturally there, with a lot of the more "mid-tier" elites also coming. Even if they wouldn't face the Prima Guardian as part of the strike team, Sandy would still help transport them, as they would form a perimeter to fight this "army" that would arrive.

All in all, it was definitely a massive undertaking to prepare everything, and Jake was happy he hadn't been in charge of any of it. Instead, he had managed to make a good batch of top-tier Heartrot Poison and a few dozen acid bombs he was very much looking forward to seeing if he would have to use. He really hoped he would.

With everyone gathered in Haven and ready to go, Jake didn't expect any more surprises. What could there even be at this point they hadn't accounted for? Well... there was one thing... or, more accurately, one person. Because, with only a day to go before they would head off from Haven to the Prima Guardian touch-down spot, Miranda contacted Jake:

*"Jake, I'm coming over immediately... William is back and needs to talk to you."*

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## Chapter 928: An Emotional Plan

William wasn't the type of person Jake thought much about. Not anymore. After he had turned his back on Eversmile and become a heretic, Jake didn't really hear much about the young metal mage who had turned his Tutorial into a shitshow anymore. Sure, in the back of his mind, Jake probably knew he was doing stuff somewhere, but he hadn't been someone worth dedicating much brain power to consider.

So it came as a genuine surprise when the mage wanted to meet Jake. His timing was also highly suspicious, being this close to the Prima Guardian event. Jake didn't think he was there to sabotage them, though, as if he was, going through Miranda and wanting to meet Jake was perhaps the dumbest strategy.

Nevertheless, Jake was suspicious.

As promised, Miranda and William arrived not even ten minutes after he was informed they were coming over. Miranda had even deployed some kind of stealth field as she walked alongside the metal mage. When Jake saw them enter the valley fully, he instantly identified William as there was one thing he wanted to confirm first and foremost.

### **[Human – lvl 276 – Heretic]**

*Still a heretic*, Jake thought with a bit of relief while also noting the guy's level was pretty good. Still behind Jake and the other top elites, but only by half a dozen levels. He also didn't believe William could have spoofed the identification in any way. Besides, posing as a heretic tended not to end well, and Jake didn't doubt quite a few people would outright attack William upon seeing the tag.

Jake also noted how William looked a lot calmer. Serene, almost. Or perhaps it was just because Jake was used to the guy having quite an intense and somewhat crazy look in his eyes, and now he appeared a lot more normal and put-together. In any case, it definitely looked like getting out from under Eversmile's boot had done him good.

It wasn't like Eversmile seemed to give a damn Jake had turned William to the dark side, either. Sure, he wasn't friendly around Jake, but he hadn't been outright hostile either. He genuinely didn't seem like he cared much. Then again, maybe Eversmile just viewed it as another interesting development for his research. Yeah, that totally seemed like something Eversmile would do.

Sitting on the porch, Miranda and William approached, with Miranda being the first to speak. "Sorry for the lack of warning before the visit."

"It's my fault," William spoke up, indeed seeming a lot more mellow than usual. "I just returned to Earth today from Nevermore, having entered the World Wonder quite late."

"Speaking of Nevermore... you went there in D-grade, so how much time did you lose in C-grade?" Jake asked. Probably not the most pressing question, but he was curious.

"Just the time I was there in D-grade," William shook his head. "Though it did disqualify me from competing on the Leaderboards, not that I ever planned on doing that in the first place. I didn't have a party to go with, but I just found a group in Nevermore City. Ended up joining six different parties during my time there, and that isn't even to mention the members swapped out while in each party."

"Sounds tough," Jake commented, though to be honest, he didn't really care overly much. He did care about the timing of this visit, though. "Quite a day you decide to return. Either you are extremely talented in timing when you would be done with Nevermore, or there's something fishy going on here."

"I didn't finish... I had about a year and a half left, but I knew I couldn't delay my return any longer. In truth, I already cut it a lot closer than I originally planned to, as I had a contact in Nevermore who was delayed," William explained, Jake not detecting any clue he was lying. Still, he remained highly suspicious.

"Alright, fine. I also get that you probably want to participate in the Prima event, but needless to say, you aren't going to be part of the strike team," Jake wanted to clarify quickly. He simply wouldn't trust his back to someone like William... well, alright, Jake wouldn't care much about his own back, as he would definitely see the backstabbing coming, but he didn't want people who didn't have an overpowered Bloodline to trust William either.

"That's fine," William said. "That's not why I'm here."

"William disappeared from Earth around the same time you went to Nevermore, and I confirmed he was no longer on the planet," Miranda chimed in. "This meeting is because of where he went during that time."

This did catch Jake's attention as he looked at William inquisitively.

"I went to Ell'Hakan's homeworld," William said, not beating around the bush. "I did this during the time Ell'Hakan and the majority of the other high-ranking individuals were gone to Nevermore. I spent over a year there, exploring the planet."

"His planet, huh... how did you even find it?" Jake questioned. Truthfully, Jake had looked into Ell'Hakan's homeworld before and found nothing. Even the Viper didn't actually know where his homeworld was. The abilities of the gods to peer into the ninety-third universe remained limited, and while the Viper would easily see any area around Jake or others he had blessed, he couldn't simply scout the entire universe.

Even in other universes, trying to find one particular planet could be extremely annoying. There was one pretty reliable way, though. One it appeared William had used.

"I met Ell'Hakan when he came to Earth. I formed a faint karmic connection with him, and I held onto that bond. Using it to find his planet was far easier than I expected. Far easier than it should have been, as his world is... wrong," William explained.

"Explain," Jake frowned.

William took a moment before he spoke. "On Earth right now, karma is an endless web. It's a confusing mess of different connections between people, and it's what most would call natural. The karmic connections have been formed through genuine emotion. The bond between friends looks like friends, lovers like lovers, and so on. It isn't like that on Ell'Hakan's planet. Not at all."



Jake kept quiet as the young-looking man continued.

"I think a bit of background is in order. Karma is a powerful aspect of Yip of Yore's powers, yes, but Ell'Hakan has specialized further. His Bloodline is almost tailor-made to create powerful karmic connections between himself and others, and it's through this karma he exploits them. As the Chosen of Yip of Yore, they both gain power based on others' belief in their legends, and the more strongly others believe their legends, the more real these legends become. The more power they get," William continued his explanation.

"I told you that here on Earth, the karmic web looks like expected, but on Ell'Hakans homeworld, it's just fucked up. Effectively, the entire population shares one singular karmic bond, more powerful than any other. A singular stronger connection than their parents, partners, and children. Above everyone else, there is Ell'Hakan, the Celestial Child."

"What exactly does this mean?" Jake questioned.

"Rather than a mortal or a mere leader, they view him more as a god... no, a being even higher than a god. They genuinely love and revere him. His word is truth, his actions just. They even believe he is unbeatable and that even if an actual god tried to slay him, they wouldn't stand a chance. Honestly, Yip of Yore's Path fits him so damn well it's disgusting, as this powerful belief gives him actual tangible power."

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Jake's frown only deepened the more William spoke. For a long time, Jake's theory had been that Ell'Hakan had a skill not that dissimilar to Jake's Big Game Hunter, except rather than being triggered by higher-leveled opponents, it was triggered by the belief in his legend. If that was the case... did that mean he had a powerful passive boosting skill active at all times due to the belief from his homeworld?

There was one pretty damn simple potential method to overcome this kind of skill, though. Especially as a boosting skill like this could very well come with some form of backlash should Ell'Hakan lose belief in his legend.

"His legend is built on a lie. If we reveal the truth, it-"

"Won't matter," William sighed as he shook his head. "I tried. Caught a few people and showed them the truth, including some things he said to me that directly contradicted his own doctrine. It had absolutely no effect. Truth isn't anything they care about anymore; it's pure fanaticism."

"Even if the majority of the population is brainwashed, there must be some people to disagree with his rule or people who managed to break out of this delusion," Jake tried to argue.



"I didn't detect a single one," William said before he was silent for a bit, before asking a question Jake had never considered. "Do you know when he took over his planet?"

"I would say shortly after the system arrived... but I have the feeling that isn't right," Jake said.

"Twenty years before the integration. For twenty years, Ell'Hakan had already ruled his planet. Unified all the factions and countries under his own banner as the Celestial Child while doing a purge of anyone who dared not view him as a being above any other. To them, he is the literal son of the twin moons and the sun of his planet. No, not a metaphor or anything... legend has it that on the day of a twin eclipse, he was born, gifted to their world by the stars themselves to rule and bring peace," William explained.

"Pretty sure only Starborn are born from literal stars," Jake joked as he found the notion utterly idiotic.

"To make things even worse, I did also find his actual parents, though they seemed to believe they had only been the ones to raise him, despite the biological connection," William continued. "I want to reiterate. Everything I've said is something every single person on the planet believes with utter unswayable conviction. They are completely fanatical. If he told them all to kill themselves, they wouldn't even ask the reason before doing it."

"So they're like the fanatics of the Holy Church," Jake said, really not needing more people like that in his life.

"They are far worse. Followers of the Holy Church at least know they can go to the Holyland if they die or they get some other benefits. In the end, they still act somewhat selfishly and logically, believing their deaths either serve a greater goal or help their family and friends," William disagreed. "What is happening on Ell'Hakan's planet isn't that at all... it's something the Holy Church could only dream of achieving."

Jake was in thought for a bit before asking the big question: "I appreciate this information, but I'm still not sure why you needed this urgent meeting or exactly what you want me to do with this knowledge. You don't sound like you're offering any solutions here."

"I'm not," William sighed. "But let me get to the crux of it. Ell'Hakan's Bloodline allows him to manipulate emotions, something I'm sure you've already experienced, right?"

"Right," Jake nodded. He really fucking hated that Bloodline. His own was way better and way less insidious.

"What you've experienced is only a mere fleeting moment of it. I want you to imagine what continued exposure can result in, especially when the feelings they foster are never contradicted or argued against. It makes the emotions utterly engrained in your

being and something you don't question. But it's more than that... because these emotions weren't born naturally but forcefully empowered through the influence of a Bloodline. Empowered to a whole new level of emotions – a new conceptual stage - I don't even think we can imagine, and that's coming from someone who's been introduced to quite a few entirely new emotions throughout his life," William explained in-depth.

"People already let emotions rule them more than logic, and this takes that to an extreme. These emotions become so strong there is no way to sway them. They embedded themselves in the soul, becoming core parts of a person. I'm not saying disillusioning someone from Ell'Hakan's manipulation is impossible, but you will need far more than merely showing them the truth. You will need something magical in nature to break this illusion they live under."

"You still haven't gotten to why this is so urgent," Jake pointed out, as he felt like William was rambling quite a bit. He knew the guy liked to talk from way back in the Tutorial, but this was getting a bit much for what was effectively just the guy telling Jake Ell'Hakan's Bloodline was dangerous.

"During the Prima Guardian event, Ell'Hakan has chosen to assist the other planets and not do the event alone. He leads this alliance and will get all other World Leaders in a room with him and access to hundreds of planets. He will spread his legend and create powerful diplomatic connections. People will go to his planet, he will go to theirs, and that's where things get really dangerous..."

William raised a hand as a bit of mana gathered. "You control the nearby Pylon of Civilization. That means all of the territory the Pylon covers is infused with a bit of Records and energy at all times, correct?"

Jake nodded, as he suddenly had a realization. *Wait, he can't mean-*

"The same is true for Ell'Hakan. Your Records have resulted in this Pylon being quite scary to all beasts, and as I'm sure Ms. Wells can attest to, it passively has helped everyone increase their resistance to auras merely living here. Now imagine if this same concept is applied to Ell'Hakan controlling a Pylon," William said.

"He plans on gaining control of other Planetary Pylons by swaying the local World Leaders," Jake had already realized. If a Pylon of Civilization covered a city in the Records and partial aura of a person, a Planetary Pylon definitely covered the whole planet... which would mean...

"That's what I believe he is planning," William nodded. "He wants to make other worlds like his own by making his Bloodline passively affect everyone living on these planets, turning them into fanatics. To make worlds where absolute reverence toward him is the baseline. While I'm sure there is a cap to his boosting ability, it's still undisputable that he gains more power the more people believe in his legend. I'm sure he has other ways

to use this energy that's effectively faith, so if he gains control of more planets, his power will only grow to new heights. So that's why this is urgent. If Ell'Hakan runs wild, he may just lay claim to the entire Milky Way galaxy before Earth even makes meaningful contact with other planets."

"Well... fuck," Jake could only say as he still wondered. "How do you even know all this? I just want to make sure this isn't pure speculation on your part, even if it does sound pretty damn possible."

"I had it confirmed and explained by the person who is effectively the Prime Minister of Ell'Hakan's empire," William answered with a smile. "He was more than happy to tell me everything."

Jake narrowed his eyes as William just flashed a small smile. "Ell'Hakan is not the only innately manipulative person. It wasn't hard to convince the guy I served Ell'Hakan and Yip of Yore by acting as the contact person between Eversmile and them. That my job was to assist in their quest. It didn't take long before we were the best of friends and he told me all their plans as I only nodded along in excitement."

"What are the chances this is all false information planted by Ell'Hakan to throw us off some other real goal?" Miranda asked after a few seconds.

"I doubt it is," William shook his head. "Everything lined up too well, and I doubt he believed anyone would or even could go to his planet. It isn't somewhere that's easy to find at all, and he's even done a lot to keep it hidden. While I don't have much to thank Eversmile for and far more reasons for grief, he did teach me some valuable things that allowed me to find it."

The three of them were silent for a moment as Jake considered everything they had talked about. After a bit, Miranda spoke up.

"When the Prima Guardian dies, this alliance system will also open up to us... we should take this chance to compete openly with Ell'Hakan. Ell'Hakan has recently tried to act more amicable toward Jake, so he can't outright try and shut us out without it looking like he's going back on his word," Miranda said.

Jake considered her words and could only nod. In truth, this had also kind of been the plan... though more so because it looked like a chance to do some fun exploration while even fighting more bosses.

"The most important thing is for others not to hand over their planetary cores to Ell'Hakan," William nodded. "Because if they do... I'm not sure what the solution would be."

"To kill Ell'Hakan," Jake shrugged. Seemed pretty easy.

“That won’t make these emotions go away,” William sighed. “The level of fanaticism exists independent of him. My guess is that they will assume he didn’t truly die but just ascended or will be revived in the future or some shit.” The link to the origin of this information rests in *novel●fire●net*

... Jake really hated dealing with goddamn fanatics.

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## Chapter 929: Mysterious Third Party

William’s revelations about Ell’Hakan and the shit he had been up to were quite something. It sure as hell gave Jake some food for thought, and he did end up asking some more clarifying questions, some of which the metal mage could answer and some he could only speculate about.

One of the things Jake was curious about was how long it would take for people to get what was effectively brainwashed after Ell’Hakan took over a planet, something William naturally couldn’t really know as it hadn’t happened yet.

However, he had been on Ell’Hakan’s planet for over a year. During this time, he had constantly been subtly affected, yet he felt nothing from it, making him believe the manipulation was so subtle that any reasonable level of pushback would nullify the effect. True, William did mention thinking that “maybe he isn’t that bad” a few times, but a quick thought that “no, he actually sucks” was enough for him to remain unaffected.

This made William guess that this passive takeover only really worked if there was no disagreement but pure cultural homogeneity. It wasn’t like he could just take over a Pylon, and suddenly everyone loved him. It was a slow, insidious process that only took hold after continual exposure in a highly controlled society.

That’s assuming the goal was to make them worship Ell’Hakan.

William also reminded Jake that Ell’Hakan’s Bloodline wasn’t to make people feel positive emotions toward him. It was to manipulate emotions. It wouldn’t be a far fetch to believe that Ell’Hakan could manipulate the core emotion amplified by the Pylon of Civilization’s or Planetary Pylons to be anything he wanted... such as to amplify faith toward other gods, factions, or individuals.

Ell’Hakan could also not make it about any positive emotions at all. He could make it about the hatred for others. He could slowly spread a creeping feeling that Jake actually

sucked, and if further amplified with some good propaganda campaigns, this hatred could quickly spread, especially to those who didn't really have any opinion of Jake prior, making all the exposure they ever had to him completely negative. Shit this already worked pretty damn well without any Bloodline-powered manipulation.

Honestly, Jake was even beginning to wonder if maybe Ell'Hakan was the one with the most overpowered Bloodline of the two of them... alright, that was a bad joke. Ell'Hakan's Bloodline probably didn't even give any Perception.

To clarify, while what Ell'Hakan was doing did seem extremely fucked up... it wasn't comparable to something like a plague, much less a karmic plague. It still required direct manipulation. It wasn't something that could spread on its own and get out of control. Comparing it to the Holy Church and their extreme propaganda was far more accurate, as even their indoctrination could sometimes reach such a level where it was borderline impossible to dispel the delusion. Combining both the indoctrination and the Bloodline, though... scary thoughts.

In any case, William had brought back some pretty damn valuable information. There were still a few things that struck him as weird, though.

"I've been thinking... why did you even go to his planet in the first place? What made you decide to go? Because, let's be honest, you don't seem like the kind to just do this out of the kindness of your heart. I also doubt you are invested in the good of this planet, so what made you do it?" Jake asked a thought that had bothered him for a while.

"Firstly, fuck that guy. I wanted to know if Ell'Hakan knew I was getting fucked over by Eversmile, and unsurprisingly, he did. So that's one reason. I want revenge, but I'm also fully aware I don't stand a chance at taking him down myself, so I'm hoping you can do the job," William said. "Secondly, I was hired to go explore the planet and report back to you about my findings."

Jake frowned as he looked at Miranda who just shrugged, clearly unaware this had been a thing. So, definitely wasn't her or anyone from Haven who'd hired him. On the top of his head, he couldn't figure out who it could even be. Especially not someone who would specifically ask William to report back to Jake.

"Who exactly hired you?" Jake questioned further.

"I don't know," William readily admitted. "The one I spoke to was clearly just a go-between of some kind, and I didn't ask too many questions. All I cared about was that they helped me teleport to the planet and offered information about when Ell'Hakan and others were gone, and some basic intelligence on the planet. Perhaps I was used, true, but I can accept that as I don't see myself losing anything doing this. Quite the opposite and I seriously doubt the one who hired me has any positive intentions toward Yip's Chosen."

“So some mysterious hooded guy just came up to you one day and asked you to go to this other planet for an even more mysterious third party, and you just said yes and rolled with it?” Jake asked, more than a little skeptical.

“It was a hooded woman, but yes, that’s essentially what happened. I did try to track down who may have been behind it all, but no traces anywhere. I did find the corpse of the woman who had been used as a go-between, though, but that’s where the trail went entirely cold, so they know what they’re doing, even hiding their karma,” William said.

“Alright, so it gets worse. Someone who is willing to kill people they worked with prior was behind hiring you, and who is powerful enough to manipulate karma to some extent... and they did this while only telling you to report to me and not anyone else?” Jake said, trying to wrap his mind around everything. “This makes no fucking sense.”

“I am not disagreeing,” William just said. “I’m just the messenger here, and I’ve now delivered my message. I truly didn’t come for anything else, and in truth, I would probably have preferred only reporting to Ms. Wells, but I made a promise to report to you, and as someone walking a Path of karmic magic, it would hurt me quite a lot if I broke such a promise.

“Hm...”

Jake sat there for a few moments as he thought everything through. He didn’t really have any more questions, and he did see that William handed Miranda what was effectively a report of all his observations. Now, this report was originally meant for Jake, but Miranda took it in his place, as she was actually going to read and study it all closely. It appeared that the metal mage had done quite a good job with his scouting mission.

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“What are you planning on doing next?” Jake asked William after he was done thinking.

Their conversation had been relatively short, but Jake felt less negative toward the metal mage now than before. Perhaps it was just for the simple reason that this was the first time an encounter had actually been beneficial to Jake. He hadn’t done anything to piss off Jake either but had seemed mellow and a lot more down to earth. Even his ego, which used to be a bit too overinflated, had become pretty reasonable.

Still, Jake wasn’t going to let him be in his good graces after a single encounter, much less trust the guy. Jake knew it could be argued the current William wasn’t even the same person that had been in his Tutorial... but that didn’t mean the thought of repeating their last encounter of the Tutorial didn’t occur to him.

"I'm going to participate in the Prima Guardian event. I missed so many other events because of Eversmile, and I'm not going to miss another. I won't interfere with the strike team for the boss, but I can at least help on the perimeter to kill a few Primas," William answered. "After that, I hope the plan is to do what Ms. Wells said and engage with the Prima Guardian Alliance to assist other planets. The difficulty of the Prima Guardian here on Earth will no doubt be the highest of the entire Milky Way, so if we can kill that, we can kill others. That will benefit Earth as we will get partial rewards from other system events while directly acting against Ell'Hakan's plan."

"Our plan is indeed to travel and help other planets out after we handled our own, right Jake?" Miranda said, with a look in her eyes that made it very clear he shouldn't say no. Not that he would have.

"Do you really think I'm gonna miss a chance to fight a bunch of powerful bosses for cool rewards while even fucking over Ell'Hakan's plans as a bonus?" Jake grinned. "Hell no. Not gonna pass up such a sweet opportunity."

"Good... now I'm nearly feeling sorry for the poor planets that will have you storm in and just dominate their event and monopolize the rewards," Miranda shook her head.

"Eh, I'm sure they can live with it if it also means their planet doesn't get overrun by an army of Primas that kill everything," Jake shrugged. "Seems like an acceptable trade-off."

Seeing as the conversation was very much winding down, the metal mage took his chance.

"I think that's all, so I'll be off now," William said as he stood up. "One last thing... if you ever need to go to Ell'Hakan's homeworld, let me know. I don't think anyone knows I've been there, at least no one that would warn him, so it should be possible to use the same method again. Just be aware it may be a one-way trip, at least with what I can provide."

"As long as you have the coordinates, that may be all I need when the time comes," Jake said in a serious tone. "But such a visit would be for after all these Prima Guardian-related matters are finished."

"Very well," William said with a nod as he hesitated for a moment before speaking. "And thanks for not killing me on sight, I guess." This update is available on *novel•fire•net*

"Don't give me a reason to," Jake said in a curt tone. "Better yet, give me reasons not to."



"I'll try," William said with a wry smile as he walked toward the exit of the valley. On the way, his form shimmered, and he began to fade away. With his insane Perception, Jake still saw him, but one thing was clear...

*He has a stealth skill at least at the same level as Unseen Hunter. Probably, no, definitely, karma-related in some way. Powerful for sure.*

This was the final thing with William... he had always been strong. Eversmile had just fucked him over a lot, and now that he was free, it was almost as if he had gotten new wings. Perhaps he was finally doing things for himself and because he wanted to, which had allowed him to grow into his own. In any case, Jake hoped he wouldn't become a problem because he was strong enough to be.

Now, this isn't saying Jake couldn't curb-stomp him into the afterlife, but it did mean he could be a troublesome fellow to hunt down and stomp into the ground mercilessly before he could do a lot of damage.

Jake was still far from trusting him. There was always the thought of what William had done. He had never really faced any "justice" for what he'd done, and Jake knew that William's actions couldn't just all be blamed on Eversmile. He had been a damn psycho all on his own before Eversmile got involved.

The thing is, now he was no longer a psychopath in that he literally had his brain fixed physically. Could it be argued this meant William wasn't even the same person anymore? That he was only acting as he did because something was wrong with him that he was now cured of?

It was all so damn complicated... but it just felt off to kill William now, seeing as he was proving actually useful. Finally, Jake got the feeling that while he was now a heretic, Eversmile was far from done with the young metal mage.

With William gone from the valley, Miranda turned to Jake inquisitively. "What are your thoughts on this entire thing? Do you think all the information he gave is accurate?"

"It's fishy as hell, but I think the majority is true. At least it all seems both probable and possible and entirely like something Ell'Hakan would be doing," Jake said with a sigh. "I am a bit bothered by this mysterious person or faction who hired him, though."

"*You aren't involved, right?*" Jake also quickly sent telepathically to the Viper through the power of his divine direct connection.

*"Nope, and I don't even know who it is. I have a few theories, sure, but nothing I wanna share as it's far from concrete. I will say that I doubt Eversmile is the one pulling the strings on this one, though. It may very well be an interested third party who wants to see Ell'Hakan taken down,"* the Viper shared.

*“Alright, just wanted to make sure, thanks,”* Jake sent back as Miranda spoke.

“Yeah, I don’t wanna make any conclusions either if they are helping or acting against us, but I definitely don’t think they are on the side of Ell’Hakan. That isn’t to say they are on our side, though. It’s entirely possible they just want to use you to get rid of him or stop him from doing something they wish to avoid seeing happen. Though I guess we can assume the enemy of an enemy is a friend in this case, and we have no obligations as no deals have been made with us directly,” Miranda shared her thoughts.

“All very annoying,” Jake sighed loudly. “Why do schemers have to ruin everything? Why couldn’t we just have a nice fight against a big Prima Guardian boss along with its goons and then go home for a nice long alchemy session afterward?”

“You are aware you carry the True Blessing of one of the famously biggest schemers in the multiverse, right?” Miranda asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Everyone has their bad qualities that we as friends seek to overlook,” Jake sighed once more.

“... sometimes, I’m bewildered how you are even the Chosen of the Malefic One, seeing as you seem to be his least faithful follower,” Miranda said in a dry tone.

“We just have a super special relationship,” Jake said with a smile. He didn’t need to add that he thought it was a really sad state of affairs that being friends was considered a super special relationship, as that would come off as perhaps a bit too heretical... which again was super fucking sad.

“I wouldn’t dare argue against that,” Miranda said. “Sometimes I envy the casualness with which you carry yourself, even when interacting with a Primordial. I feel afraid to even talk when I’m with the Verdant Witches.”

“Different strokes for different folks, what can I say?” Jake said. It was just treading old water going over how odd his and the Viper’s relationship was, and Miranda had definitely realized its oddness a very long time ago. If not, Jake should definitely have fired her for lacking Perception.

The two of them sat there for a bit before Miranda got up. “I should return; there are still some last-minute preparations. You should also come soon; nearly everyone has already gathered.”

“I’ll just go with,” Jake said, also getting up as he stretched a bit.

It wasn’t that Jake needed to come for a strategy meeting or anything, as they planned to use the travel time for that while inside Sandy. Still, after the talk with William, Jake didn’t feel in the mood for alchemy but to hunt some Prima Guardian.

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## Chapter 930: Prima Guardian Cometh

A relatively simple system event about killing a big boss had become a lot more complicated because Ell'Hakan was an asshole who just had to try and ruin a good thing.

However, ultimately, the goal of this event hadn't changed, and Jake wouldn't act any differently than he had already planned. The goal was still to kill Earth's Prima Guardian as quickly as possible, and then once their planet was safely secured, make contact with this Prima Guardian Alliance and offer them assistance. True, while there may now be extra benefits, Jake still wanted to do it because he wanted to fight more bosses.

Less than a day after William's visit, it had been time to set off from Haven toward where Jacob augured the Prima Guardian would arrive. The Sandy Express was already waiting and ready to go as everyone arrived. It wasn't just the strike team that would go with Sandy, but a few hundred people, as it also included many of the elites from Earth who would secure the perimeter. Many of these elites had traveled to Haven specifically to ride the Sandy Express rather than take the still-in-progress Teleportation Tram. The amenities within the giant space worm were also just far better.

Jake did smile at how quite a few were apprehensive about allowing a giant worm blessed by someone called the Boundless Hydra to effectively consume them. They did change their minds quickly once they were inside, though.

While recovering back at the Order, Sandy had some help to rebuild many of their stomachs, and knowing about the upcoming Prima Guardian event ensured that there were good living areas in one of the larger stomachs. Jake truly had no idea how big Sandy's internal world was by now, but making several massive halls filled with tables, a bar, private rooms with beds, and several forms of entertainment clearly wasn't a problem.

The strike team, as Jake kept calling the people who would fight the Prima Guardian, had their own private hall, where they all gathered. It was all the people Jake had expected to see, and it was also good to reunite with three out of his Nevemore party members.

Carmen, Eron, Caleb, the Sword Saint, Fallen King, Sylphie, Casper, Maria, Vesperia, and Arnold were naturally part of this strike team, the members being entirely the expected ones. Alright, maybe Arnold was a bit of a surprise, as Jake could totally have

seen the guy choosing to stay at home to control everything behind a screen, but he had wanted to go in person. Even if he could exert the majority of his power from afar, it was probably still best for him to be as close as possible.

Someone who did choose to stay on the backlines was Miranda. She could have been part of the strike team if she wanted, especially with some setup time, but she would rather set up a domain a bit away to ensure no regular Primas could get past and run rampant. Which was totally fair, and in truth, Jake wasn't even sure how much she could have helped.

To note, most of the large factions had already gone to where the Prima Guardian would arrive a good while ago to set up with large groups. More accurately, they had set up a good distance away and spread out to try and cover so no monsters could sneak by and cause trouble.

During the travel, the thing with William and Ell'Hakan was naturally something Jake shared with the others of the strike team, though Jake did leave out some details, such as everything about this mysterious third party hiring the metal mage to go. Partly because it was a legitimate possibility that one of the factions these people belonged to had been responsible.

Jake wasn't saying any of them were trying to fool Jake, as he knew that many divine factions very much acted on a need-to-know basis, making it entirely possible Valhal, the Risen, Dao Sect, or any other faction was involved without the person belonging to that faction knowing about it.

Still, despite Jake's suspicion that someone's faction could get involved, that didn't make him hold back from having a good time while he chilled with everyone, as they quickly realized that all that stuff about strategizing wouldn't take days... not even an hour.

It could quite easily be summarized, as the Sword Saint put it:

"Without knowing exactly how we can or want to optimally engage the Prima Guardian, nor if there will be some change to the environment or we will have to face it inside of this meteorite it will allegedly arrive in, making any concrete plans make little sense. I also believe we all know how to handle ourselves and not get in the way of others, and through the Golden Marks of the Fallen King, we should be able to quickly communicate and adapt. Nevertheless, I believe the best strategy – assuming the Prima Guardian isn't far stronger than we believe - is that we hold nothing back but strike with the best we have right away once everyone is ready. Oh, and let's have Jake have the first attack. This Prima Guardian will definitely be peak C-grade or at least very close, making him the one with the most powerful opening attack," the old man said.

No one disagreed with that assessment, and besides such a basic plan, everyone would just have to act according to their roles and play to their strengths. Carmen would try and draw attention, being the most durable of them all, while Eron would act as their

only dedicated healer while naturally also being virtually invincible. Everyone else also had their own fighting styles, and honestly...

The team that would take on the Prima Guardian was just insane. They had all the same people who did the Monarch of Blood way back in the day, with the addition of Arnold, Fallen King, Sylphie – as she wasn't strong enough then – and Vesperia. All of them were peak figures who could easily have been the supremely strongest of their own planets if they were elsewhere.

No... they could have been the strongest of their entire galaxies.

With all the super-serious strategy stuff over, they just all chilled and talked, and one of the centers of attention was definitely the complete "newcomer" to their group, who only Jake really knew: Vesperia.

Jake couldn't fault their curiosity... and he also got telepathic heads-ups from half the group that their factions had told them to try and get closer to the True Royal. Jake wanted to warn Vesperia that this was the case, but honestly, she definitely already knew and had it handled as she spoke politely while making sure never to reveal anything that wasn't pertinent to the upcoming Prima Guardian fight.

Vesperia, being such a center of attention, naturally also spilled over to other people showing interest in Jake... with two of them being a bit harder to deal with than the others.

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"You really are just out there popping out kids like a stupid couple trying to save their failing marriage," Carmen commented as she looked at Vesperia, expertly dealing with Casper, who was definitely trying to pry some confidential information out as a representative of the Risen.

"He sure is living the single-father life," Caleb said in complete agreement with a big grin on his face. "You know, he hasn't even brought back the True Royal and giant cosmic space worm to meet their grandparents yet?"

"Maybe he's just trying to prove he can make it without familial support?" Carmen said. "The mothers also seem out of the picture, huh?"

"I would have you know Mystie is still very much around," Jake commented.

"Oh yeah, wasn't she already with a partner when you got involved? Are you an adulterer?" Caleb said in a fake disappointed voice.

"I'm the uncle," Jake argued. "Godfather and good friend of the family at most."

“How about the two other mothers?” Carmen looked at Jake with a raised eyebrow as she leaned over to Caleb and whispered: “He’s probably saying they came from eggs or something like an excuse.”

“Only one of them came from an egg,” Jake sighed. “Sandy was already a whole worm before I came around, so you can’t tease me about being the dad there.”

Caleb looked at Jake with a serious expression. “Adopting *does* make them your child and you as morally and legally responsible as if they are biologically yours.”

“Yeah, Jake, don’t turn into a deadbeat,” Carmen grinned.

“This conversation is making me want to beat something to death,” Jake muttered.

“Hey, if you want any more kids, I’m sure Gwyndyr would more than happily have you visit,” Maria said, having walked over. “In fact, I’m pretty sure you would have a hard time finding any factions who aren’t interested in inviting the Harbinger of Primeval Origins... cool title, by the way.”

“Yeah, where does that even come from?” Carmen questioned. “I had people in Nevermore City refer to you with the same title. Like, I get what it means, but how come everyone agreed on this title?”

“Based on what the Malefic Viper said, it’s something to do with Records or something,” Jake shook his head. “Quite a few gods can apparently glean Records of the multiverse with the system giving stuff names they adopt and use. It kind of makes sense when you consider that I was offered a pretty damn good profession called Harbinger of Primeval Origins.”

“When you say offered, do you mean you didn’t pick it?” Caleb raised an eyebrow.

“I had one I wanted more,” Jake just shrugged. Yeah, he really shouldn’t ever mention the name of his actual profession, and he was very happy no one seemed to realize what it was either. Perhaps gods simply couldn’t detect he was also a heretic, as part of being a heretic was innate resistance to gods detecting you.

“Fair enough,” his brother didn’t try to pry further. “Also, it’s pretty funny seeing you share your intent to screw over Ell’Hakan and help other planets, as I was also informed by the higher-ups that they want us to assist a few planets from that Prima Guardian Alliance thing. We aren’t the only branch of the Court of Shadows in our Milky Way, and as the only Judge, I am viewed as responsible for them.” IF YOU WANT TO READ MORE CHAPTERS, PLEASE VISIT [novel★fire★net](#)

“Valhal is a bit the same,” Carmen commented. “In the sense we have a presence on two more planets in the Milky Way, that is. Both of them are going to face their Prima Guardian alone without all that alliance bullshit, though.”



“That’s what I would expect of Valhal, but do remember that the Court is not a crazy war cult but a murderous assassination cult,” Maria said with a smile. “I don’t have any special orders from Gwyndyr or my crazy flame-obsessed mercenary cult, so I guess I’ll just go wherever. Actually, probably just gonna do what Miranda asks of me.”

The three of them continued talking a bit before more people joined them to discuss the plans for this whole Alliance business, helped along by Vesperia walking over.

“If I may,” Vesperia said, looking at Jake. “If this Ell’Hakan has already managed to claim another planet before we have a chance to step in, what are our plans?”

“First of all, I think getting access to a planet at all will require the permission of the World Leader. That would just make sense. So, chances are we wouldn’t even be able to help, at least not for now, if they don’t allow us to travel there,” Jake said. “Secondly, I’m not sure how I feel about you taking over an entire planet filled with enlightened species.”

Vesperia smiled. “Sire read my intentions that easily?”

“It makes sense,” Jake shrugged. If there was a planet that was relatively weak, he understood why Vesperia would consider taking it over. She wanted somewhere to start a new hive, and she couldn’t place a proper one on Earth. Such hives tended to monopolize all the resources on a planet if allowed to grow freely, and Vesperia wanted somewhere she could have a Hive Queen go full throttle without clashing with Jake or people he knew.

“So, what if a planet that we have both access to and has the right circumstances?” Vesperia followed up.

“I’m not going to tell you what you can and can’t do if it doesn’t involve me,” Jake just said.

He wasn’t an idiot. He knew Vesperia would one day take over a whole bunch of planets as she grew. It was simply her Path to expand and, in many ways, also her responsibility. She hadn’t stated it outright, but Jake knew she felt like she had to create a strong foothold in the ninety-third universe for the Endless Empire.

As the only True Royal capable of being there, she was indisputably the highest-ranked ectognamorph of the entire universe. Jake could understand why she felt a need to do well, and part of doing well meant taking over a few planets plentiful with resources. These planets tended to naturally also have other life, enlightened races included, and their fates wouldn’t be pleasant, as they were viewed as nothing more but a vector of growth.

Either way, Vesperia seemed happy enough with his answer, as they gladly changed the subject that no one within the giant space worm seemed particularly comfortable



with. Besides the Fallen King, that is. The Unique Lifeform honestly wasn't really engaging with a lot of people and only talking with the Sword Saint and Sylphie.

He did speak up a bit when he infused them all with Golden Marks to allow communication and location-tracking on all of them. It was really handy soul magic, for sure.

Like this, the hours of travel quickly passed within the giant space worm, and soon enough, they reached their destination.

*"Alright, we've reached our final stop, everyone out!"* Sandy's voice echoed as, all at once, they were forcibly expelled from within the worm's stomach. *"Sorry, wanted to be nicer about it, but this place feels super weird and wrong and I want out of here sooner rather than later."*

Jake, who had landed on the sand dunes, looked at the worm with understanding. "Yeah... I also feel something. This is definitely the right spot. Do get out of here; we don't wanna risk the Prima Guardian doing some weird shit to you."

*"No need to tell me twice!"* Sandy said as the worm shimmered and flew away at breakneck speed.

"Do you think the worm will go too far away?" Carmen asked. "Kind of assumed that was also our ride home."

"Eh, one thing at a time; let's kill the boss before considering our transportation home," Jake shook his head.

Not far away from them, Jake also spotted Jacob and Bertram standing there. He and the rest of the strike team wanted over, as all the others who had arrived alongside them spread out to do their own pre-planned tasks.

"Soon," Jacob said when Jake got close. "It'll be right around there."

Jacob pointed to an inconspicuous area, but Jake didn't doubt his words. And not just because he was an Augur, but because of what Jake both saw and felt himself. A Pulse of Perception also confirmed the area was odd.

He barely spotted any life anywhere. Outside of the many humans and other races who had arrived, that is. All the wildlife had abandoned the area, even those very deep underground. Jake also didn't believe this was simply due to the many humans in the area.

Minutes ticked by, as the time grew ever-nearer, until finally... a system notification.

**Time grows near, and the Prima Guardian shall arrive on Earth within 1 hour (59:59). All denizens of Earth innately feel where this danger shall appear from.**

And just as the system said, they all knew where the boss would touch down, and yep.

It was right in front of them.

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## **Chapter 931: The Prima Guardian Event Begins**

Countless planets across the ninety-third universe got this message at the exact same time. Countless planets were steeling themselves to face what many believed would be the final system event of the early period of the newly initiated universe... all waiting to realize their fates and to see if they were viable to continue existing going forward.

Some faced this challenge with excitement, expectations, and a bright look toward the future. Others with doubt, fear, and even a sense of helplessness, as they doubted they stood a chance against whatever monster would arrive. Alliances did help, but not every galaxy had powerful alliances. Some had even come into conflict with other planets already, killing all hopes of working together.

No matter what, one thing was clear: this system event would determine the fate of many planets. If they would become worlds ruled by enlightened individuals or one with monsters in charge. Millions of civilizations would fall, as planets would be overrun by Prima Guardians who would then take charge of the Planetary Pylon, making it a world hostile to the enlightened.

In some ways, this could be viewed as a test if the populations of every planet had reached a satisfactory power level, or were due for a reset. Perhaps new enlightened races would appear there in the future, or maybe they wouldn't.

Each galaxy had different circumstances, but one stood out more than any other. A galaxy with not one, but two Chosen of pinnacle gods in it, with people who were not only the strongest C-grades of this generation but of all generations in the history of the multiverse – at least if one went by the Nevermore Leaderboards.

While the vast majority of galaxies had borderline zero divine attention, the same couldn't be said about the Milky Way, which had all eyes on it to see what many believed would be yet another showdown between the two Chosen, who had recently also faced off in Nevermore.

It was a chance for Ell'Hakan to reclaim some of the prestige he had lost in Nevermore... or for the Chosen of the Malefic One to fully prove his superiority. Some would argue this competition wasn't entirely fair, though, as this wasn't a one-on-one duel, but each Chosen had a whole swath of allies. And especially when it came to these allies, there was an imbalance.

Even the gods couldn't agree on who had the advantage, though. Because one side had the entire Prima Guardian Alliance... while Earth had Earth.

Ell'Hakan flew to the exact spot the Prima Guardian would arrive at, followed by thirty other people. Five of them were from his own planet, while the rest of them hailed from the Prima Guardian Alliance. They were the strongest of their own planets, and while none truly reached the peak level, many were quite strong in their own rights.

Tens of thousands of elites from the Prima Guardian Alliance had also arrived to help secure the perimeter, limiting the damage the system event could cause. As the leader of the alliance, it was only to be expected he would make use of his position.

Their plan was quite simple. They had gathered this elite team to take down the Prima Guardian on Ell'Hakan's planet first, before they would move to others, taking down Prima Guardians and regular Primas one after another. The teleportation network provided by the system allowed them to teleport between every member planet incredibly simply, if a bit limited, due to each planet only generally having one teleporter. This was heavily remedied by effective teleportation networks on the different planets, but it could be a pain, especially on the less developed worlds where the alliance had less time to put down solid networks.

On the many respective planets of the alliance, they had also enacted protocols to condense and secure the populace, so even if the elites of the planet were gone, the damage would be minimized. Some defenders did also remain on each planet, but just enough to handle a few wayward Primas.

It was quickly confirmed these Prima Guardians would always appear nearly directly on the other side of the planet from where most enlightened lived, which was both a curse and a blessing. A blessing because it meant the Primas wouldn't reach the enlightened within a short period and likely be very scattered once they did, and a curse because it meant going to face off against the Prima Guardian would take longer in pure travel time.

Time was certainly a big constraint in this event, but it didn't bother Ell'Hakan too much. He had already designated the planets with the least usefulness and low populations, and it was only to be expected some couldn't be saved. Not even the greatest hero could save everyone every time. Sacrifices would also only make those he did save view him more favorably, as they could directly see the unfortunate fate of those who didn't get his help.

Refocusing, he soon arrived at the spot where the Prima Guardian would land together with his elite team who began setting down a formation. As he stood there, he felt the belief of the planet and all other planets he had also begun to influence coursing through his body. He looked up as the sun's rays warmed and empowered his body, the twin moons hidden right now but always there. As one would expect of parents looking after their child.

He felt strong and confident in his plan. Besides, Earth, the planet belonging to the Chosen of the Malefic One, was ultimately still only one planet. Ell'Hakan had the powers of hundreds behind him. Smiling, he felt it was almost a certainty.

*We shall be the ones to claim first blood. We have to.*

--

Back on Earth, no one even seemed to be thinking about some grand universe-wide competition as they were too busy doing their own thing.

With it now fully confirmed that the spot Jacob had picked out was indeed where the Prima Guardian would appear, everyone got to work making their own preparations. The Sword Saint painted a picture of the desert to allow him to teleport back there should something unforeseen happen, Carmen did some small ritual and sacrificed some bones, Arnold began to send out drones and even shot up small satellite-like things, Maria prepared arrows by infusing them with firebombs, Caleb began charging what looked like small bombs, and Casper spread out traps in the area... everyone did something.

Jake also prepared his own Protean Arrow despite not knowing the exact nature of what they would face. He wanted to make a rather basic arrow that would work against most things, so it ended up consisting primarily of purely destructive arcane energy. It was far from ideal, and he could have made a better one if he could confirm what kind of creature the Prima could be. He chose to go with the most all-purpose one, though, because he didn't want to risk making some arrow specialized in killing flesh and blood creatures only for some large elemental to appear, making Jake look like a complete moron when his arrow would fly harmlessly straight through its body.

Vesperia also did her thing. She sent out practically all of her C-grade drones in one direction where she had been assigned to make a defensive line, keeping only her four Queen's Guards with her for this battle. Even the Royal Guards were too weak to be of proper help during the fight that was to come without getting the way, so they joined the regular drones. This section she would be in charge of was definitely one of the most robust ones, showing Vesperia indeed was a one-woman army in that she could literally summon an army.

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A few people didn't have anything to prepare at all. The Fallen King simply floated there while Eron was reading a small book on a summoned chair. Sylphie was also just flying around, getting a feel for the area, occasionally complaining about how still the wind was in the desert.

After around fifty minutes of preparation and relaxation, as the boss grew ever nearer, yet another system message appeared before every person on the planet. It was finally the "real" announcement of the event.

### **The Prima Guardian Event Shall Begin Shortly.**

**From the vastness of space, a Prima Vessel Is bound for Earth, carrying with it Primas who have been empowered within the Seal of the Exalted Prima and the Prima Guardian itself. Seek out where it lands and prepare to fight, flee, and defend what is worth protecting, or find any other strategy to face the Guardian. Do this with the knowledge you have time.**

**The Prima Guardian will be sealed within the Prima Vessel for the first 1000 days after arrival. Each day that passes, the Prima Guardian shall break one of the chains sealing it, expending some of its power to regain its freedom. While sealed, the Prima Guardian cannot leave the Prima Vessel, and none can enter the Vessel either, except for the Key Holder carrying the First Key (current World Leader, Jake Thayne).**

**Even as the Prima Guardian remains sealed, the Primas that have arrived alongside it shall roam free, bringing with them their armies. Defend, attack, and hunt down every Prima, knowing that every slain Prima empowers the remaining seals on the Prima Guardian, forcing it to expend even more energy to regain its freedom, thus making it weaker once fully unsealed.**

**Once the Prima Guardian is free, it shall seek to hunt down the other Key Holder and claim the Planetary Pylon. After 5 years of the Prima Guardian's release, the barrier protecting Earth's Planetary Core will naturally disperse, allowing any with a key to claim it. Current Key Holders on Earth: Jake Thayne. Prima Guardian of Earth (upon arrival). The rightful source is `move!*.fire*.met`**

**Due to the exceptional performance of Earth in prior system events and the number of Primas slain during the first period of this event, the Prima Guardian is significantly more powerful than usual. The hundreds of chains broken before time from the slain Primas allow the Prima Guardian to absorb the Records and energies while expending less energy to break free overall.**

**The faster the Prima Guardian is slain, the greater the reward. Once the Prima Guardian has been slain, Earth will naturally be enrolled in the Prima Guardian Alliance. Participating in the alliance is entirely voluntary but may result in improved event rewards.**

**Let the true battle for who shall ultimately claim dominion of the Planetary Pylon begin.**

**WARNING: Should the Key Holder choose to enter the Prima Vessel before the 1000 days are over, all seals limiting the Prima Guardian are instantaneously broken, and the Prima Guardian is set free. If the Prima Guardian is unsealed before all chains are broken, it will not expend any of its saved-up power doing so, leaving it far more powerful. Caution is heavily advised.**

**All rewards from this event shall be given once all Prima Guardians of the Milky Way Galaxy have been slain or at the event's natural expiration five years after all Prima Guardians have been released. Rewards are based both on the performance of every individual and the planet's performance as a whole.**

### **Prima Guardian Arrival: 9:57**

Just as this message came, Jake felt something. A faint sliver of energy had gathered, and when Jake looked at the back of his hand, a small golden glowing sigil had appeared. Instantly, he knew this was the key spoken about in the system message. One part of what would ultimately allow him to unlock the barrier around the Planetary Pylon, with the other one held by the Prima Guardian.

Everyone quickly read the system message while gathering around, and Jake felt all eyes turn to him. Jake just gave a knowing smile. "I don't think it needs to be said, right? I'm storming head-first into that Prima Vessel the second I can to free the damn thing. No way we're waiting a thousand days."

No one said anything, as this was entirely what they had expected. The system even directly told them that killing the Prima Guardian as quickly as possible would lead to better rewards, and everyone else knew that the system always put a lot of stock on things like being the first to do something.

And there was no fucking way Jake or anyone else wanted to risk someone like Ell'Hakan snagging the first kill. Jake could almost imagine the smug fuck standing somewhere, with a dumb smile on his face, feeling all confident.

Besides... unsealing the Prima Guardian fast would make it stronger, resulting in a more difficult fight, and difficult fights were more fun. Honestly, there were only upsides!

Floating over, the Fallen King regarded Jake and saw the glowing symbol on his hand. *"Do you intend to enter yourself? If the key can be transferred, perhaps it would be better if someone else goes, and you can make distance to strike more efficiently."*

"Maybe I can transfer it, but I see no reason to even try," Jake said, shaking his head. "Say this Prima Guardian turns out to be far more dangerous than we believe, I think it's best I'm the one going into this Vessel. Outside of Eron, I'm the one who's the hardest

to take down, and out of everyone, I'm the one who can escape the easiest while not dying in the process."

There was also the fact that Jake's danger sense would warn him before things even got too dangerous. He truly believed that out of everyone, it was best if he was the one to enter. Besides, as the World Leader, he had to take responsibility and risk sometimes, right?

"*Your logic is sound, very well,*" the Fallen King simply said.

"Ree?" Sylphie questioned, flying over.

"No, I'll enter alone," Jake shook his head.

"Ree..." Sylphie screeched a bit sadly as Carmen went over and comforted the bird with a pat on the head. Jake got a look from Vesperia, but he decided now wasn't the time.

The entire strike team stood together, ready to face what was to come as the timer slowly ticked down until finally...

### **Prima Guardian Arrival: 0:01**

Jake stared up into the cloudless sky as he saw beyond the atmosphere of the planet. There, something warped. Bent. Space itself seemed to collapse in upon itself for a brief moment as reality shattered. Pure darkness remained... until something emerged from this newly formed hole in space.

Something grayish and metallic floated out and began to accelerate straight down toward Earth. It was shaped almost like an egg, with perfectly smooth sides and not a single opening anywhere. The entire thing was at least a few kilometers long and wide, making it about the size Jake would have expected, if maybe a little on the smaller side, considering the many Primas it had to transport alongside their armies.

Even from this distance, Jake could tell with utter certainty that no attack he or anyone else on Earth was capable of could leave a single mark on what he was certain was the Prima Vessel.

The gap in space behind it closed just as quickly as it had come, as the Prima Vessel began flying faster and faster down toward Earth. Soon, it reached the atmosphere as it began to burn, but it effortlessly broke through every layer in its ceaseless descent.

"Be ready, everyone," the Sword Saint said, one hand on his sword as they all stood there and looked at it descending, with it about to land only a few kilometers ahead of them. Everything was ready as the desert lit up from the burning metal vessel coming down like a meteor, until finally, the impact.



A massive wave of sand and wind rushed past them as the shockwave washed over them, with barriers of magic sprung already up to absorb some of the impact. All of them stood still, except for one person who was already charging forward before the Prima Vessel had even hit the ground.

Because Jake wasn't even going to wait for the sand to settle or the Prima Vessel to cool down, as he stormed toward it, the symbol on his hand glowing as a small opening appeared towards its base.

At the same time, many more openings appeared all over the Vessel. Hundreds of them at once began to spew out creatures, with the first one exiting right as Jake entered the Prima Vessel and triggered the final boss fight to claim the Planetary Pylon of Earth.

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## **Chapter 932: Accelerated Difficulty**

One thing became clear immediately: this Prima Vessel was far larger on the inside than it appeared. As hundreds of Primas flew out of the many holes covering its surface, they were far from alone. Entire armies followed them, with some having thousands of their kin.

Some of these creatures even grew in size as they flew out. One of these that instantly caught the attention of many was an utterly massive bird with a wingspan of more than two kilometers, followed by nearly a hundred other birds about half its size. Thunderclaps echoed in their wake with every wingbeat as they headed toward the skies.

From below, many Identified them to get a general idea as to the level of these Primas, and while some took a deep breath and frowned... someone like Jake would have found themselves disappointed.

**[Thunderstorm Roc Prima – lvl 294]**

**[Thunderstorm Roc – lvl 281]**

These Primas did not get far before a dark curtain fell upon them. Black beams shot up from below as shadowy figures appeared out of nowhere among them, wielding magical firearms and daggers. The regular Thunderstorm Rocs were torn apart as the Prima reacted quickly, summoning a storm worthy of its name.

However, its struggle had only begun. A thin beam shot up from a sniper rifle below, piercing straight through its mid-section as a man used two daggers to nearly tear off one of its wings. It quickly tried to retaliate, but the forces led by Matteo and Nadia from the Court of Shadows were more than powerful enough to utterly overwhelm it.

Not powerful enough to kill it quickly, though. The Prima was almost overflowing with vital energy, and even as it was gravely wounded, it began to heal at an alarming rate. It was as if its health pool was many times larger than usual, making the fights longer. Still, there was no cause for concern.

Similar scenes played out all around as the Primas met the vanguard of Earth. All the factions had shown up in force, and even if there were hundreds of Primas, they had quite the wall to overcome if they wanted to spread themselves across the planet.

This wasn't even to mention that the most powerful people on the planet didn't engage these Primas... instead, they were waiting, conserving their energy, as the World Leader entered the Prima Vessel to unseal and awaken the Prima Guardian.

Jake entered the odd egg-shaped structure and instantly felt space around him warp as the key on his hand was glowing. The very next second, he stood in a long white hallway, leading only one way. As he stood there, he also felt the aura of the being deeper within.

He couldn't quite estimate its strength as it seemed to be fluctuating and incredibly unstable. Nevertheless, he didn't hesitate for a single moment before he stormed forward, even using One Step. Jake had almost expected some traps on the way, but he encountered nothing besides the sterile, long white hallway, with locked double doors to both sides, leading into entirely empty rooms.

Soon, he approached his destination as a final large gate appeared. Jake practically drop-kicked it open to get inside, as finally, the boss they would face was revealed in all its glory.

Within a massive circular chamber, sealed within a thin barrier, a single being sat in the middle. Black chains hung from all the walls surrounding it, with hooks piercing into its body while passing through the barrier as if it wasn't even there. Jake counted around a thousand... no, nine hundred and ninety-nine hooked chains.

The creature itself looked like nothing more than a massive blop of flesh. Jake didn't even know what kind of creature it was or if it was even sapient. There was nothing discernable about it at all except for the presence of the other key clearly emanating from the creature.

Using Identify... Jake frowned.

**[Revered Prima Guardian – lvl 320]**

This... felt wrong. Level 320 was lower than the Twinhead Emperor's level, and they faced that one with five people. Now, they had all gotten a few more levels, not to speak of the Nevermore titles and improved equipment. Sure, the Twinhead Emperor was powerful enough to defeat the combined fighting force of nearly all newly integrated planets, but this was supposed to be Earth's super-hard challenge.

It just didn't make any-

### **Crack**

A single chain cracked as it fell limp to the floor before turning into pure energy that rushed into the mass of flesh. A second crack sounded out a moment later, making a second chain fall. Then a third, a fourth... until an entire cascade of chains broke one by one. Jake quickly used Identify on the boss again as he felt something odd.

### **[Revered Prima Guardian – lvl 328]**

Its aura began to grow rapidly as the chains all around Jake shattered and turned into energy. Jake could only stare at the wriggling mass of flesh as fewer and fewer chains hooked into its body, and the flesh wriggled, grew, and began to take shape as its level just kept increasing. During all this, Jake kept intermittently using Identify.

### **[Revered Prima Guardian – lvl 336]**

The shape it took didn't make any sense to Jake yet... but that was when he heard a voice, not from the creature itself but seemingly from the Prima Vessel all around him.

**"A decision made; perhaps an incompetent leader."**

Jake frowned at the words as the being began to take even more shape. More than half of the chains had broken by now.

### **[Revered Prima Guardian – lvl 343]**

**"Power corrupts. Makes arrogant. Overconfident."**

Jake didn't counter – as countering a big egg-shaped spacefaring vessel didn't make much sense - as he just prepared himself. The level of the Prima Guardian was still growing, and he already felt pretty sure where it would end. The mass of flesh had soon grown what looked like a few legs as it raised itself up.

### **[Revered Prima Guardian – lvl 346]**

**"The folly of humanity. You: Living proof."**

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Arms appeared... and not just two of them. Jake counted a dozen arms growing out of the wriggling flesh as its body began to take a shape reminiscent of a cat or a dog or something, except with more legs and arms growing everywhere. Several long tails also extended, and parts of the exposed flesh got covered with flesh, while other places had scales.

**"Yet... bravery. A wish to overcome. A Path to true power."**

#### **[Revered Prima Guardian – lvl 348]**

By now, Jake realized what kind of creature this was... and he had kind of encountered one before with Eternal Hunger. It was more of a classification of creatures rather than a single race. It was a kind of being that one could never truly understand, as no two were alike... seeing as this was a collection of many different creatures, all in one.

A chimera... and Jake recognized one of the horns growing out of a newly appeared head that reminded Jake of a wyvern or perhaps even a dragon. It was the horn of the Gazelle Prima Jake had encountered while adventuring with Carmen. Jake wasn't one to forget an aura, and he felt the aura of this chimera be a mix of so many, some of which he recognized.

Rather than just a chimera of random creatures, it was the fusion of all the slain Primas during the first part of this event.

Then, the final chain broke, and Jake used Identify to confirm its level as a small smile appeared on his lips before shaking his head.

#### **[Revered Prima Guardian – lvl 349]**

The Prima Guardian slowly began to stand up as Jake prepared himself to kite the Guardian out of the Vessel and face it with the others. It was definitely the strongest C-grade Jake had ever seen, and it could put up a good fight for sure, but it wasn't anything he feared.

As Jake was preparing himself... everything just seemed to stop for a moment. He felt as if time slowed down, yet the environmental mana seemed normal. That's when something appeared within his Sphere of Perception. His gaze darted upwards and spotted a floating metal ball with a blue eye-like thing in it. One he recognized from the time he went to the Seat of the Exalted Prima for the system event.

#### **[Prima Watcher of Earth - ?]**

That's when Jake realized that what had slowed down wasn't Jake. Only the Prima Guardian seemed frozen in time as this Prima Watcher observed Jake silently for several seconds before its mechanical voice echoed.

"Greetings, Administrator Candidate," the Watcher spoke, the voice different than the earlier calling him overconfident.

"Hi?" Jake said, confused. No system messages had said anything about this happening.

"The planet Earth and you as its leader have been deemed qualified by the Exalted Prima to experience the Accelerated Difficulty Prima Guardian Protocol. Be aware this will increase your potential to become an Administrator and all rewards gained should you succeed. As the World Leader, do you wish to accept the accelerated protocol?"

Now, this was perhaps one of the times when Jake should have tried to use his Golden Mark to communicate with his team or to think carefully about this choice... but in his defense, he was cut off and couldn't communicate with the outside world right now. As for the part about thinking carefully? Well, that had never been Jake's strong suit to begin with. This chapter is updated by [novel■fire■net](#)

"Not gonna say no to an improved challenge," Jake responded with a big smile.

The Watcher looked at him for a second more before its eye flashed blue for a second. "Acknowledged. Applying Accelerated Difficulty Prima Guardian Protocol. Good luck."

With that, the Watcher disappeared as if it had never been there, and Jake felt something come alive within the room. Magical scripts, placed where all the chains had been attached to the walls, suddenly lit up as beams of energy shot toward the boss. The entire body of the Prima Guardian exploded with light. A kind of light that even blinded Jake's Sphere of Perception... the kind he only ever saw when a creature was born or evolved.

Then... Jake heard a different voice than any prior.

**"Prove thyself, leader of man. Best mine Exalted Guardian."**

Jake felt a sense of utter power within the voice as he instinctively knew he had just heard the Exalted Prima itself – the one he and Villy theorized to be the Bound God of the Seat of the Exalted Prima. However, he didn't have much time to think about any of that as the light faded, and the Prima Guardian was revealed once more. It looked about the same, but its aura had just risen to a whole new level, as it had indeed just evolved.

**[Exalted Prima Guardian – lvl 349]**

At the same time, a message from the system also arrived, and not just to Jake but everyone else on the entire planet, too.

**Message to all residents of Earth: the Prima Guardian has been freed from its seals and can now roam the planet freely. Defeating Primas will no longer serve to weaken the Prima Guardian.**

**WARNING: Through the decision of the World Leader, the Accelerated Difficulty Prima Guardian Protocol has been engaged. Revered Prima Guardian evolved to Exalted Prima Guardian. The Prima Guardian has grown substantially in power, but so have the rewards for defeating it. The Exalted Prima wishes the denizens of Earth luck.**

Within the Prima Vessel, Jake scanned this message as he felt eyes lock in on him. The Prima Guardian had finally settled on a form as a monstrosity stood before him. It had eight legs, with four like that of a cat, with two more growing out on each of its sides, seemingly just dangling there. Three heads with the necks of snakes and the heads of dragons showed its front side, while the behind had five tails... reminding Jake a bit of the very first Prima monkey he had killed.

From its back, countless tentacle-like grows spurted out, many of them looking like arms due to the hands at their ends. Some parts of its large body were covered with scales, while others had skin, with the chimera clearly not having settled on any kind of consistent color. The random horns and bones sticking out in random places didn't help it look pretty, either. The entire creature looked mismatched and broken... but its aura definitely told another story.

It was strong enough for Jake to quickly make his decision as he stepped down and teleported backward down the hallway he had arrived from. He saw that the Prima Guardian didn't move after him immediately, likely because it couldn't. There was still a very thin barrier around it that was growing ever-thinner by the second. By the time Jake turned a corner, it fell entirely.

At least, that's what Jake assumed happened when he heard a loud roar that sent a shockwave through the entire Prima Vessel right before he reached the exit and flew out.

Appearing in the real world, he was instantly reconnected to everyone through his Golden Mark, and he didn't delay a single moment.

*"Brace yourselves, boss incoming!"*

The entire strike team was already staring either at Jake or the exit of the Prima Vessel, which proved to be a good thing, as Jake had barely gotten out when a head flew out of the doorway that was practically a portal. It extended far out, like that of a hydra, as it moved to attack.

Jake had to quickly dodge to the side as a breath of pure light shot after him, but before the chimera could even fully unleash its attack, it stopped as a swordsman appeared at its side with his sword raised high. He cut down as a curtain of water fell, and blood sprayed into the air as the head was nearly entirely cut off.

Before the swordsman could follow up, a second head poked out before a third also appeared. Everyone began to move as they charged, and Sylphie even managed to fly down and, using the cut left by the Sword Saint, severed the head of the chimera entirely.

Not that this seemed to bother the Prima Guardian much as its entire body soon emerged. It was around fifteen meters long, not counting the heads and tails, and everyone took a second and stopped to observe the beast they were facing, as Carmen couldn't hold herself back.

*"Damn, it's ugly."*

*"Definitely doesn't give off any exalted vibes, that's for sure,"* Caleb agreed, as he lifted his staff and dark lightning began to charge up.

Jake was flying away at full speed as all the melee fighters engaged the Prima Guardian. A few burning arrows struck it in the side as Maria unleashed a barrage, with the Fallen King shooting a golden beam straight at one of the heads.

However, the beam never arrived as a barrier of magic appeared, blocking the blow. The flesh on the severed neck also wriggled as a new head promptly emerged, so fast the Sword Saint barely had time to dodge out of the way and make some distance.

The initial exchange had been brief, and far from everyone had time to even do anything yet. However, they were all aware immediately. This could perhaps have been an easy fight, but Jake just had to go and activate some super-difficulty protocol. This turned the fight from a simple show of force and utter dominance...

Into something that could actually be a bit of fun.

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## **- Chapter 933: Prima Guardian (1)**

### **Chapter 933: Prima Guardian (1)**



Jake took to the air as he made some distance from the Prima Guardian, his boosting skill activating during his ascent. The creature wasn't following him, as it had plenty of other dangerous foes to contend with, all of whom had also activated their own boosting skills, though not at the highest level. They had all felt the aura of the chimera and knew that holding back too much wouldn't end well for them.

Carmen quickly closed in, joined by the Sword Saint and Vesperia who had already entered her warrior form, flanked by her four Queen's Guards. Sylphie and Caleb would adopt a more hit-and-run style, while Maria and Jake would bombard it from range. Casper was more a control and ritual-type fighter, and was working on curses, while the Fallen King used his mid-range attacks, staying semi-melee to step in when needed.

Eron was naturally the healer of the group, and Arnold... well, he was doing stuff Jake was sure.

This was their fundamental strategy for dealing with the Prima Guardian they had discussed during the flight there. The power of the Prima Guardian was perhaps a bit higher than expected, but that didn't really impact how they would handle it at all.

As Carmen and the Sword Saint got close, Jake also finally saw the meaning of those legs on its sides as it attacked with its claws. The three heads also worked in unison as the chimera's flesh rippled and seemed to be in a constant state of change.

Magical barriers sprung up here and there, blocking the attacks of Maria and the Fallen King, but Carmen managed to slip through and land a punch on the newly regenerated head. Another head tried to attack, but four stingers impaled it from different sides as the four Queen's Guards struck, with Vesperia coming in a second later to land the most devastating blow.

The Sword Saint tried to deal with the final head, but a barrage of bone spurs erupted from the chimera's body, pushing him back momentarily. Not that the final head had time to do anything, as a staff slammed into its skull with the sound of thunder as black lightning spread out from the impact. At the same time, a whirlwind of wind tore through the entire creature's body, and hundreds of small cuts were left everywhere.

Yet, even so, the Guardian was undeterred as it struck back.

Dozens of hands growing out its back began to glow with energy as each of them began casting magic. All sorts of magic schools, even ones usually in conflict, were cast once, pushing back all the melee fighters in a giant explosion of pure mana.

Before anyone even had a chance to strike again, the heads were all fully healed, as three breaths were unleashed upon their group, with one of them hitting Caleb mid-retreat, singeing his body. Jake was still flying up but soon stopped as he judged the distance good enough and began his own preparations.

*"This being is utterly overflowing with vital energies, far more than such a vessel can usually inhabit,"* Eron spoke through the Golden Mark to the entire group while already healing Caleb.

*"Its soul is also ridiculously dense and robust, and it appears to be in constant flux,"* the Fallen King also added. *"None of my soul attacks have any effect as of yet... in fact, I feel like striking its soul is counterproductive."*

The conclusion was pretty simple: they would have to kill this Prima Guardian a lot more times than any usual C-grade. This was truly a boss monster, especially in the sense that such a creature usually wouldn't exist in the wild. It was also infused with too much energy for it to handle, but the system allowed it, stabilizing the chimera. The Prima Guardian effectively had several full health pools and likely more mana and stamina, too, making it an incredibly durable and resilient creature.

That wasn't a big problem, though. At least not if they went by what the chimera had shown so far. All it meant was that the fight would take longer.

Jake was already charging his Arcane Powershot with his pre-prepared Protean Arrow as the melee fighters closed in again. The Fallen King joined them, this time fully, as he unleashed his golden claw, tearing up the Guardian's side and sending blood spewing up before switching to his hammers. The others also attacked, landing blow after blow while defending themselves from any counterattack. Any attacks they did fail to fully dodge, Eron quickly healed, allowing them all to stay constantly engaged.

Soon enough, Jake was also ready as he loosed his arrow. A pillar of pure destructive arcane energy descended from above, and for the first time, the Prima attempted to dodge. However, Casper came in clutch as dark chains suddenly appeared all over its body, locking it down in both body and soul for just long enough.

The arrow struck the chimera right in its mid-section and, without stopping, was on track to penetrate straight through. Jake didn't let it, though, as he exploded the Protean Arrow inside of the massive chimera's body. The explosion temporarily lit up its body as beams of light shot out of holes all across its body from the destructive arcane energies burning it from within.

Others also took advantage of this opening, as they attacked all at once. Stingers, wooden stakes, and arrows penetrated, two of the three heads were cut off, and over a dozen arms and hands were torn up, smashed, or severed. Jake also released a follow-up, as he could practically feel the chimera's vital energy being consumed, the creature constantly healing itself.

Then... something unexpected. One of the heads had just regenerated, and the Sword Saint quickly moved to cut it off, but when he swung down his blade, it failed to cut but just slid across the newly formed metallic scales on its neck. As he was taken by

surprise, the old man had the very same head he failed to cut slam into him, sending him reeling back.

Carmen also tried to hit the chimera from below, but as her fist made contact, it simply sank into the Guardian's body as if it were soft clay, trapping her. Maria's flaming allows also suddenly failed to do much damage, as a weird gel-like substance was excreted from its skin, seemingly nullifying the fire damage.

Even Jake experienced something he had never thought he would see. One of the hands that regenerated began to glow in a familiar pink-purple glow as a barrier of stable arcane mana appeared, perfectly blocking his destructive arcane energy.

One of the other heads that had also just regenerated also turned toward Casper, who barely had time to react before a breath of black lightning washed over him. Eron reacted quickly and sent out a healing pulse, only to find himself pushed back with a wave of force tinged with gold.

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Floating far above, Jake opened his eyes wide as he saw all this happen, and pretty much all of them spoke at once through the Golden Mark.

*"It's adapting."*

From being completely on the defensive, the Prima Guardian now attacked, having chosen Eron as its first target. Sound logic, usually. He was the healer of their group, and it was only basic logic to always get rid of the healer first, something even mindless beasts seemed to understand instinctively. And while this chimera had yet to show great signs of intelligence, it was far from a dumb beast.

In this one instance, targeting the healer wasn't the wisest move, though.

Before any of them could help, the Prima Guardian sank its teeth into Eron, tearing his body apart and chomping down his entire upper body. A blast of destructive arcane mana destroyed the rest... only for the man to pop back into existence a few meters away as he raised a hand and unleashed a torrent of white flames.

The chimera roared loudly, as the flames sure seemed to work well. However, the offensive might of Eron wasn't that great, and the Guardian quickly turned and swiped its tail, destroying the man's body again. Right as he regenerated, a blast of golden force shot down from above, but Sylphie arrived just in time and blasted it apart with a gust of wind.

Caleb also struck quickly, smashing through one of the barriers of stable arcane energy on its back and into its soft body that exploded with blood flying everywhere. An arrow

from Jake also arrived, having flown around the barriers to strike one of the tails, easily penetrating before it exploded, blowing off the tail entirely. A second arrow arrived a moment later, striking where Caleb had just shattered a barrier, but this one did far less damage as Jake reached a realization Arnold shared with the group in more detail than Jake would have given.

*“Local adaptation. Particular sections or body parts can adapt to damage taken, as it absorb all we throw at it. However, no defense is absolute... strike where the defenses aren’t made to counter you,”* Arnold sent, standing a good distance away, just holding a tablet and seemingly not part of the fight.

The Sword Saint was the first to take this advice to heart. Carmen, who still had an arm stuck in the creature, tried to free herself as the Sword Saint teleported down and cut upwards. His blade easily tore through the soft flesh made to nullify the blunt fists of Carmen, and the Runemaiden quickly got the gist of it. Once freed, the old man gave her a boost as he launched her toward the head he had failed to cut, only to see Carmen’s fist shatter the tough scales like they were made of glass. Follow current NOVELS ON [novel\\*\\*fire\\*\\*net](#)

Shifting their strategy a bit, their group began to attack different areas, never allowing the Guardian to adapt in time. With so many different forms of attack, it couldn’t keep up in the first place, as it honestly felt like they were just beating up a spikey punching bag, where you only sometimes had to be careful not to punch something sharp on accident. Not that the only person actually punching in their group cared much about the horns or spikes.

Still, it was unquestionable that the Prima Guardian had grown stronger, and with every attack it suffered, it continued to grow. Rather than having any kind of traditional boosting skill, it instead absorbed a bit of energy every time it took damage, growing that way.

As for its adaptability... it was far superior to anything Jake could have expected.

Jake continued bombarding with arrows from above, even switching up his poisons to combat the internal adaptability of the chimera. Right as he was about to loose another arrow, he had to rapidly dodge as an arrow flew up toward him, followed by a dozen more.

From the flesh of the Guardian, hands wielding bows of bone and sinew had grown, with the arrows made of horns or antlers. What’s more, he saw Caleb be pushed back when long tentacle-like arms wielding swords chased after him, as suddenly, the boss was wielding a whole slew of different weapons.

This didn’t mean its usual offenses were gone, as the three heads persisted and caused trouble for everyone. Vesperia managed to land quite a few good hits, especially when

she shifted to her ranged form and shot what looked like a railgun of stingers, penetrating deep into the boss with every shot.

Sadly, this was where they had their first major casualty.

Out of nowhere, a hole opened up in the side of the boss. The inside of the hole glowed golden as a blast erupted straight toward the True Royal faster than she could react. Luckily, one of her Queen's Guards was ready and moved in front of her, getting half its body blown apart in the process but leaving Vesperia unscathed.

Still, the investment in this attack meant the Prima Guardian took many blows in return, including Casper, who had been cooking up a big attack of his own. Nine wooden stakes slammed into the chimera's side, seemingly ignoring the piercing-resistant skin, as they all glowed with scripts of pure death energy. Casper summoned a magic circle beneath himself as the ghost of his girlfriend overlapped with his body as he made some odd seal.

These nine stakes instantly extended, piercing all the way through the chimera, and with another motion of Casper, all sprouted thorns, making them harder to remove, even as they pumped out curse energy. Roaring, the boss tried to attack the Risen, but the Fallen King, Sword Saint, Carmen, Sylphie, Vesperia, and Caleb all got in the way.

The poor boss didn't react properly to the attack from above either. A large ball of stable arcane energy fell toward it, a few bone arrows striking it mid-air... which definitely was a mistake on the Prima Guardian's side. The ball exploded as the liquid within was released.

A large splash of sizzling acid struck the chimera, making its skin bubble and burn, followed by bottles of Heartrot Poison dropping into the newly opened wounds. While it could certainly adapt to his poison, it still had to burn through a shitload of vital energy before doing so.

The melee fighters once more took advantage, and soon, another three heads had been crushed, and not even the tails had time to attack, as Maria managed to blow one of them off, while two Queen's Guards restricted another.

More than thirty tentacles shot out from the Guardian, wielding staves, swords, bows, and wooden stakes as it swung them for the vanguard. The Fallen King raised barriers to one side while Carmen released an explosive fist to the other, allowing everyone else to strike the Prima Guardian freely.

It had begun taking far less damage due to its adaptability, but it was still suffering devastating blow after devastating blow, as its flesh was torn off or exploded repeatedly. By now, it had to have lost its entire mass in flesh and blood a couple of times over, but it showed no signs of weakening in the slightest, continually trying to counterattack. Sometimes, it was even successful, but Eron quickly healed any injuries.

Jake had also switched to Arcane Powershots now, having realized another truth. While the chimera could adapt to attacks to better block them, this could still be overcome by just making the attack powerful enough to break through even what naturally defended against it. His arrows struck one after another, many of them piercing straight through and into the ground below, as Jake was pretty damn sure any normal C-grade would be dead by now.

The fight had entered a standstill that was incredibly advantageous to their strike team. Yet Jake didn't really ever think the Prima Guardian was weak in any way... in fact, it was incredibly powerful. If Jake had to fight it alone, he wouldn't even be sure how to do it, as adapting to a single foe was far easier than around a dozen. They had too many forms of attack for the chimera to properly adapt, too many angles of attack for it to defend, and too many people for the boss to ever properly lock down one target for long enough to do meaningful damage without five other people stepping in.

It was almost an inevitable outcome at this point, yet something still bothered Jake. The Prima Guardian wasn't the smartest, that was certain, but it wasn't stupid either. There had to be a method to the madness he just hadn't figured out yet.

Then, the Prima Guardian finally did something. It began glowing with magic as it exploded, sending out a shockwave of many schools of magic at once, pushing everyone back and deflecting any ranged attacks coming toward it.

And then... then the Guardian ran away.

Straight back into the Prima Vessel, their entire strike team was dumbfounded momentarily before Carmen asked.

*"Do we follow or what?"*

Jake frowned and answered: *"Let's go; it may just be trying to regenerate or something."*

Spoiler... it wasn't "just" trying to regenerate.

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## Chapter 934: Prima Guardian (2)

While the strike team was dealing with the Exalted Prima Guardian, the rest of Earth's fighting force was busy with all the regular Primas that had exited the Prima Vessel and were now attempting to spread across the planet. Also, even if the main boss had



increased in difficulty significantly, the same wasn't true for the hundreds of Primas, which was definitely lucky, as dealing with them all was already extremely difficult as things were.

The Primas tended to be around level 280 to 300, with some going close to 310. They were also powerful variants for their levels, making it difficult even for the elites of Earth to deal with them one-on-one. There were still a few who could, primarily those who had been shortlisted from the strike team.

On the side of the Holy Church, Bertram was a machine, cleaving down several Primas alone while dealing with their armies. All the ones Jacob had arrived with were also some of the best natives of Earth the Church had recruited, providing excellent help.

The same was true for the Risen, led by Priscilla, who by now almost acted toward Casper the same way Miranda worked with Jake. Her plans of seduction had definitely died entirely, as she obviously couldn't compete with a ghost girlfriend. When Casper had been recruited to do Nevermore with the top team of the Risen, she had fully realized he wasn't someone she should try to bring to her side but someone she had to solely function as support for.

Not that she was weak in her own right, as she led the Risen expertly in the war efforts, making their section solidly defended.

Of course, when it came to war, Valhal proved themselves just as competent as one would expect. Sven took the frontlines as he led the group of warriors, and even if they had far fewer fighters than many other factions for the territory they were supposed to defend, not a single Prima managed to slip through. As for the regular monsters that managed to get by them... well, that was why there was a third wall of fighters behind the second vanguard. The most update novels are published on [novel★fire★net](#)

The Noboru Clan also did extremely well, the prowess of the vampires on full display. Reika, the great-granddaughter of the Sword Saint who had gone to the Order of the Malefic Viper, also performed exceptionally as she rained down icy destruction upon large areas.

There were also a few sections where formerly enslaved people and some of those who had arrived due to Jake's Chosen Ceremony defended. These people wouldn't get any benefits from the system event, as this wasn't natively their own planet, but they still chose to fight.

Similar sections, mostly focused around individual factions, covered an entire circle around where the Prima Vessel had touched down, making three defensive barriers. The first was the strike team, then the second barrier with mostly elites, and then the third, which had far more people who were on the weaker end, primarily to deal with the stragglers that got through and to provide support where needed. And, of course, to make sure the second defensive line wasn't attacked from behind.



So far, everything was going pretty smoothly, as the “commander” of this entire war was busy making sure things didn’t fall apart.

Miranda had set up her own small defensive zone, but used most of her time keeping track of everything going on as she stayed in contact with all the local leaders of the defensive sections. Her domains were practically passive at this point, trapping any Prima or monster that dared venture her way in a deadly swamp there was no escape from.

One of the big fears Miranda and others had was the underground, but the sand had proven to be a great boon. Very few Primas naturally lived in sand, and even those specialized in digging soil found themselves severely handicapped. There were still some, but nothing of great concern that a few dedicated earth mages couldn’t handle.

What was a big problem was something they had kind of foreseen but hoped wouldn’t be as big of a problem as it turned out to be: native monsters entering the fight. It was well known the Prima Guardian couldn’t be fought by creatures who had consumed unique system-given items but only really had the choice to sit out or ally with the Primas. With all their efforts to make monsters around the world sit out, they had succeeded in doing so that there were no reported attacks on human settlements yet, and none of her pre-prepared traps or triggers had activated in the area surrounding Haven either.

Still, they ended up struggling with constant attacks on their backline in this fight with the Primas, which should perhaps have been expected, as even if they had another few decades of preparation, they couldn’t have ensured every monster wouldn’t choose badly who to ally with.

*“Attacks from behind section three-four, danger level low, may become intermediate,”* the voice of a leader from the former United Cities Alliance informed her as Miranda quickly picked up her communication device.

*“Noboru squad six, disengage and assist section three-four,”* she quickly sent, getting a confirmation back as another one came.

*“Overwhelming attack on section two-eleven, peak-tier Prima appeared.”*

*“Holstred, go.”*

*“Fast monsters are approaching section eight. Might get through,”* someone from Valhal informed her.

*“Court of Shadows, your neighbors need ranged support,”* Miranda quickly decided as she looked at what was effectively a three-dimensional map in front of her. She barely had time to do any killing herself, as there was always some kind of emergency. Still,

some sections did manage extremely well on their own, and she could almost ignore them.

One such section was the one defended by Vesperia. Sure, she wasn't there herself, but her army of wasps formed a tight wall, led by her Royal Guards in slaughtering and holding back all Primas and monsters that came their way. It did help that they had far more numbers than any other section for the size of their area, which helped their intimidation factor and made some Primas choose to attack another area instead.

A section with the exact opposite situation to the Vespernat Hive's was one with only a few dozen people. It was a section that Miranda honestly had little hope in, as it was the one where they threw all the more... problematic individuals. People who were clearly powerful but sucked at working with others or had some serious issues that made others not trust them.

The clear stand-out here was the newcomer. Someone she hadn't even considered for this fight in the first place, as he had only returned to Earth a single day before the event. It was naturally William, the metal and karma mage, who Miranda truly hadn't known what was capable of.

But now that she saw his performance... she realized the only reason he wasn't part of the strike team was because Jake didn't like him.

A storm of metal wires covered an area of several cubic kilometers, cutting and restraining any living being that dared enter it. Primas could deal with the wires somewhat but still struggled to deal with their limited movement as the metal mage moved to strike them down one after another, as he commanded hundreds of spear-like projectiles to fly all around. He was like a maestro within his own domain of metal death. He proved himself so overwhelming the other people in his section barely had to - or dared to - do anything.

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Everything was indeed going pretty well, even if they certainly did have casualties. Nothing over the expected, though. Looking at the map of battles, Miranda suddenly frowned as she noticed the entire strike team supposed to handle the Prima all fly toward the Prima Vessel before disappearing.

*What the hell are they up to now?*

--

Remember Jake's initial surprise the Prima Vessel was just entirely empty and didn't even have any traps? Well, at least the latter one of those had now been amended. The moment Jake entered the Prima Vessel, he saw Carmen retreat with a metal spike poking out of her shoulder, having managed to penetrate her incredibly resilient body.

Having seen this, none of the others had charged forward either before Jake had time to enter. He was the last one to arrive as he had been the furthest way and had to fly there first. Alright, technically, Arnold was the last one to arrive, but that was because he chose to stay outside, still doing... yeah, definitely doing something.

"Where did the Prima Guardian go?" the Sword Saint asked Jake right after he entered, the old man fully aware of Jake's Sphere of Perception. He would have been very dense if he hadn't realized after decades in Nevermore together.

"It's ahead of us, but not in the same room I released it from," Jake frowned. "The path is shifting."

"What do you mean?" Casper asked, walking up.

"I'm saying the inside of this entire cube is moving around, shuffling giant cubes of near-indestructible metal around," Jake clarified. With great timing, too, as the path in front of them suddenly disappeared as a wall blocked their progress before getting replaced with an entirely different hallway.

"A fucking puzzle labyrinth, really?" Carmen cursed, having just had her shoulder healed by Eron. "This is giving me flashbacks to Nevermore."

"Not really a labyrinth," Jake shook his head. "Just a delay tactic and a way to bait us into traps."

"Sounds like a labyrinth to me," Carmen muttered, dissatisfied.

Through his Pulse – as the Guardian was too far away for his passive sphere to reach – he had spotted the chimera, standing on what looked like a disc of some sort. He could see the movements of energy, too, as it was most definitely doing something. Its shifting flesh and morphing body were further proof.

"Why delay us? To recover?" Caleb asked.

"It's digesting," Jake said with a frown. "Absorbing everything we just threw at it... and evolving again. Alright, probably not an actual evolution, but it's definitely changing. Some form of metamorphosis."

"Doesn't that mean we should hurry?" Vesperia questioned.

"We are already taking the fastest path there," Jake said as he crossed his arms. "Be ready to sprint forward in seven seconds, and watch any traps from the right side."

No one questioned him as they got ready. Seven seconds later, the hallway in front of them was replaced once more, and they all charged in before Jake spoke again as four layers of barriers blocked a barrage of metal spikes from the right.

“Left in four... actually, just follow behind me and keep up. I will warn about traps only.”

It hadn't taken Jake long to see the pattern in how all the cubes moved around. It was very predictable, and he reckoned most people would figure it out easily within half an hour. Now, the traps when they entered every cube did get a little annoying,

Jake estimated these traps were just here to slow them down and try to make them waste resources. This entire Prima Guardian battle had been one of endurance so far, and Jake could see other planets struggle immensely trying to overcome the ludicrous durability of the chimera without running out of mana or stamina.

Adding on this damn Prima Vessel, things only got worse. Jake couldn't tell if the Prima Guardian was actually regenerating its resources or just transforming, but if left alone long enough, it would likely recover. Jake even got the feeling it would have stayed inside the Prima Vessel to recover fully, likely not leaving for many hours to maybe over a full day.

Clearly, they had a choice here. Nothing forced them to chase into the Vessel after the boss and face all these damn trap cubes... but not doing so would be slower. And being slower meant there was a bigger chance others killed the Prima Guardian first. So, was charging into the Vessel really a choice?

“More traps than usual left, magic explosion, to the right, we got metal spikes again. Also, watch the ground here,” Jake repeatedly warned as they went through cube after cube, seemingly moving up and down in a random pattern, getting closer and closer to where the Prima Guardian was. Through his Pulses, he tried to keep an eye on it, and with every snapshot, he saw it change.

However, it had gotten difficult to truly identify its form, as the energy around it was so damn dense it made half the room look like one huge object. One thing he could tell for sure, though: the chimera was growing smaller. A lot smaller.

A good choice by the Prima Guardian.

Having a large body did come with some advantages, especially for a creature like a chimera with ridiculous vital energy. In many instances, having a massive body was even a requirement to house that much vital energy.

However, it also came with the obvious drawbacks of having a large body. There was more surface area to defend, which especially became a problem against multiple opponents who could take advantage. In this fight in particular, the large size of the Prima Guardian had only been a boon to Earth's fighters, as it allowed them all to attack simultaneously without getting in the way of one another.

Then there was, of course, the lower speed that often came as the result of a larger body. This wasn't a universal rule, but it was pretty universal that a larger creature

making itself smaller would help increase its speed as long as it maintained the same general level of power.

As Jake kept warning everyone about potential traps, he split some of his attention to the Golden Mark and informed the others of what he had seen:

*“The Prima Guardian appears to be condensing its body while undergoing some form of change. Be extra careful when we encounter it; I would expect more power and significantly increased speed,”* Jake warned them all.

*“So, a second phase, with this Prima Vessel cube-puzzle being some kind of intermission between phase one and two?”* Casper clarified.

*“Pretty much.”*

It did end up taking them a bit to reach the Prima Guardian, simply due to how the Vessel worked. With how it shuffled, they even had to wait a bit within some of the cubes before moving on. It was even possible to stay within the same cube, and eventually, it would appear right in front of the Prima Guardian. That would be a lot slower than following Jake, but it was an option.

Soon, they were only three more cubes away. Their party wasn't much worse for wear, despite the hundreds of traps they had to deal with, as Jake's warnings and the party's defensive capabilities had made most of what the Prima Vessel could throw at them relatively trivial. Without the element of surprise, most of the traps just sucked.

Passing through the second-to-last cube, the tension of the group rose. When they entered the last one, they were all ready as can be. A few seconds later, the hallway leading to the boss revealed itself as they all went through.

“No traps here,” Jake said as they walked forward. Behind them, all the shuffling suddenly just stopped. The hallways they were in extended backward all the way to the exit, giving them a clear and easy path out of the Prima Vessel once more. It was a long-ass hallway, but at least they didn't have to go through the entire puzzle on their way out again.

A gate and a few dozen meters of hallway were now all that stood between them and the Prima Guardian. The energy within the room ahead had also died down, and the gate slowly began to open in expectation of their arrival.

“It's still fucking ugly,” Carmen muttered as the Prima Guardian was revealed, making Jake nod and frown at the same time.

A humanoid being, only about two and a half meters tall, stood on the platform. It had four human-like arms, wielding different weapons of bone, and on its back, four wings sprung, two with feathers and two reminiscent of Vesperia's.

Its head – if one could truly call it that - did not have a nose or most usual features. Instead, it was just a sphere with dozens of eyes on the top part, going all around, as a large fanged mouth rested beneath. Its body was covered in an odd mixture of scales, skin, feathers, bark-like skin, and even had some metal here and there. The frame of the creature was relatively thin, with its legs an odd merge between gazelle, goat, deer, and human. The feet were entirely human, though, looking very freaky. It also looked like the chimera was sleeping, with its eyes closed, and while it looked humanoid, it definitely also looked distinctively monstrous.

Something else was also monstrous as Jake's frown deepened, and he took a defensive stance and pulled out his katars in preparation. *"Be very careful... it feels a lot more dangerous."*

They all listened, and as if on cue, a familiar voice echoed throughout the Prima Vessel.

**"First Phase: Analysis Stage has been completed. Adaption complete. Initiating Phase Two: Extermination."**

With those words, all the chimera's eyes opened at once, and without further warning, the creature took a step forward and disappeared as Jake felt a familiar ripple in space.

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## Chapter 935: Prima Guardian (3)

Jake was the first to react as a katar shot out right as the Prima Guardian appeared amidst their group. It quickly blocked with one of its bone swords, but Jake's quick movement had awakened everyone to react appropriately, making distance from the chimera.

Following up, Jake released two more blows before retreating, the Sword Saint and Carmen now actively engaging the boss. Its four arms moved unnaturally to defend against them as the formerly large and bulky creature turned agile and flexible, even dodging an attempt from Sylphie.

The creature smiled, showing a maw full of teeth as what looked like hand palms grew on its skin, shooting beams of magic toward the charging Caleb and Fallen King. Both were taken by surprise and had to block, sending them flying back from the impact. Stepping down once more, the chimera teleported after Caleb, but Vesperia had predicted this movement and charged in to defend Jake's brother.

Somehow, the Prima Guardian still dodged the stab of her stinger-like lance and responded with a kick that looked far too short to reach. However, as it raised its leg, the entire thing grew several meters in length and hit Vesperia like a whip, sending her crashing into the wall of the hallway before her Queen's Guard could even react.

Cursing, Jake pulled out his bow and shot a barrage of arrows, joined by Maria doing the same. The eyes on the back of the chimera proved extremely annoying as the damn thing saw everything coming, and two of the eyes even began to glow as a blast of telekinetic force tinged in gold shot through the hallway, repelling some of the arrows.

*"The movement skill it's using-"* Jake began.

*"It's yours,"* the Sword Saint interrupted Jake as he sent a thin stream of water toward the Prima Guardian, making it dodge out of the way and also giving Caleb and Vesperia some time to stabilize.

The old man was entirely correct. The damn Prima Guardian was clearly using his One Step to teleport around, making Jake even more perplexed. Before, he thought it only copied forms of mana... but this was straight-up copying a skill.

That had... a lot of implications.

None of them were good.

They also realized that fighting in this hallway was problematic, as while it did limit the movements of the Prima Guardian, it also boxed in the strike team and made it hard for them to assist one another. This only got worse when the Guardian decided to blast Eron out of the Prima Vessel entirely, as it condensed a golden barrier and pushed it all the way down the hallway with their healer stuck to it.

*"Get out of here!"* Casper yelled telepathically as he knelt down and made the white tiled floor erupt with wooden spikes all around the Prima Guardian, making it dodge back while cutting down the stakes to avoid getting impaled to the ceiling.

Everyone began to move away, and Jake quickly caught Casper by the nape of his neck to toss him away just as a beam of black lightning shot his way from one of the four arms. The Risen threw Jake an offended but thankful look as he ran down the hallway, Jake staying back to make sure they all made it out. Not alone, though, as Sylphie chose to also stay for a moment to keep the Guardian at bay.

Magic began to revolve around the Prima Guardian as it raised another arm that rapidly began to morph into the head of a wyvern. Jake didn't let that happen as he teleported forward, punching upwards into the dragon arm and redirecting the beam of energy toward the ceiling.



Sylphie also struck as a massive windstorm hit Jake from behind, not affecting him at all but lifting the Guardian off its feet as it began tumbling backward. It quickly reacted as two of its arms extended and turned into grappling claws that caught onto the walls.

Jake swiftly shot an arrow into one of the arms, making the chimera lose grip and fly down the hallway for a little as he exchanged a glance with Sylphie. Together, they turned heel and talon before sprinting down the lengths of the hallway,

Mana gathered behind them as they ran, forcing them to dodge bolts of all sorts of affinities exploding in their wake. A few moments later, the Prima got return fire, as at the exit of the Prima Vessel, Maria, the Fallen King, and Caleb had stopped and released attacks toward the Guardian, buying Jake and Sylphie a bit more time.

When Jake and Sylphie got close enough to the exit, Maria and the Fallen King exited, with Caleb doing out a moment later alongside Jake and Sylphie. When they got out, they kept flying, and Jake felt the movements of energy both beneath and above them right at the exit.

A second later, the Prima Guardian also flew out. The moment it did, the magical circle above the exit triggered, exploding with cursed energy and sending the Prima Guardian tumbling downwards, followed by Vesperia, Carmen, and the Sword Saint, who released a barrage of attacks.

Massive amounts of sand exploded upwards when the Prima hit the desert with a loud thump. However, while in mid-air, all the sand began to move as it shot up toward Jake and the others, the tips turning into spears of glass. Below, the Prima Guardian erupted upwards, challenging the three melee fighters directly as it wielded a sword, a staff, a wooden stake, and a lance.

Each weapon moved almost independently as they still worked together to push back the Sword Saint and Carmen, but Vesperia managed to land a blow with her longer reach, sending the Guardian spinning. Sylphie also expertly dodged around all the sand spears and collided directly with the chimera, cutting up one of its arms.

Turning in the air, it pointed its staff toward Sylphie as the air mana around Sylphie was infused with energy. A loud screech instantly pushed away the chimera's influence as a barrage of wind bullets was returned. Perhaps the Prima Guardian could mimic many things, but it had a limit... trying to imitate an Authority was certainly one such limit.

During this exchange with Sylphie, the Guardian didn't stop fighting everyone else as it kept manipulating the sand and swinging its other weapons, not to mention the eyes that shot out beams or the magic circles that appeared in the air, shooting out bolts everywhere.

Jake dodged everything and released a few arrows, two of which got blocked before the third one hit the Guardian in the chest, barely penetrating its thick skin. A follow-up

arrow hit right around the same area but was completely repelled, as the skin there had adapted to resist piercing attacks.

Using the skill in a way he rarely did, Jake summoned a Penetrating Arrow instead of infusing it into another skill, shooting it the Prima Guardian's way. As expected, it wanted to repel the blow by blocking it with its strengthened skin, taking it by surprise when the arrow penetrated deeply into its chest.

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That also allowed Jake to confirm something else. This arrow had been coated in his blood, as he wanted to see if the chimera had adapted and mimicked Palate... to which the answer was no. It did still build up resistance to any particular type of poison he used, but Jake could get around that by simply using his blood and changing its variety slightly with each blow.

Nocking another arrow, Jake wanted to do more damage but found himself pushed back by a large gust of wind mixed with a blast of force, just pushing him away without truly doing any damage. A similar blast had hit Maria, Eron, Caleb, and Casper, forcing them back to give the Guardian some space as it disengaged from the specialized melee fighters.

The Fallen King proved to be its next target as the chimera teleported up and appeared right behind the Unique Lifeform. The King responded fast and summoned a barrier along with a golden claw, but the chimera was faster. A staff hit the King in the side, a stake stabbed through his stomach, and a lance penetrated his leg, as finally, the sword tried to cut off his neck. In the final moment, the Fallen King angled his head, making the sword hit his mask, deflecting it at the same time as he released a golden explosion from the claw impacting the Guardian, allowing the King to gain some distance.

Before the Prima Guardian could continue its assault, the Sword Saint and Sylphie arrived, and with the Unique Lifeform, they held on long enough for more assistance to step in. Eron quickly came over and began mending the Fallen King's body, though especially the cursed wooden stake proved difficult to deal with, as the damage simply wouldn't heal properly. Not that the poisoned stinger-like lance that had penetrated straight through his legs did him any good.

This brief exchange with the Fallen King also truly confirmed to them all that this Prima Guardian in its second phase was far more dangerous. A point that got further hammered home when Carmen had to block a heavy blow from a staff wrapped in black lightning, making her forearm crack as a bit of the insidious energy entered her body.

Ranged attacks flew for the Guardian again, as Jake managed to land an arrow on one of the chimera's eyes, and Maria attempted to find a good opening as most of her arrows were deflected, though at least distracting the boss a bit. The smaller form of the

chimera proved challenging, as it was hard to land ranged blows without risking hitting any of the melee fighters, especially when the boss moved around so much. It was incredibly fast, and they had to try and stick semi-close together to not risk getting singled out like the King had.

The only ones comfortable with being singled out were Jake and Eron. One of them because he felt comfortable not getting hit, and the other because he felt comfortable even if he got hit. Based on what the healer said, many of his weaknesses before were now addressed, and he seemed empty of fear of whatever the Prima could throw at him.

Working together, the melee fighters managed to buy good time for Eron to heal the King, and the chimera clearly noticed this standstill was not to its advantage as it switched target, going for Casper instead. It tried to do a repeat of the clash with the Fallen King, but Casper's body turned ethereal right as it was hit, the sword phasing right throw.

With a second swing, this time wrapped in lightning-infused water, Casper did seem to take some minor damage, but Maria had time to help as she released a massive arrow that looked like a bird of flames, forcing the Guardian to defend. Jake also took this chance and landed another two arrows, each exploding with destructive arcane energy.

*My turn now*, Jake thought, as his danger sense warned him right as the Guardian stepped down again. It appeared right behind Jake, who already had both his katars in hand as he ducked under the staff and spun his body around while avoiding the sword. Leaning into the boss, he made it awkward to use the lance, as he only had to sway to dodge the stake as he stabbed the boss with Eternal Hunger.

It didn't even flinch from the blow as its flesh morphed, and two small hands grew out, grasping Jake's forearm right as he penetrated the Guardian's chest. Jake quickly twisted his wrist, getting free and letting go of the cursed weapon as he blocked the wooden stake with his Voidblade. Opening his eyes wide, Jake quickly raised a foot to stop the Guardian from kicking as its entire leg morphed into one massive curved blade.

Jake was hit on the sole of his foot by the sharp blade as he was launched upwards. Not a single drop of blood was spilled, but Jake felt as if something had broken within his boots. As for the boots themselves? Completely unscathed. There naturally wasn't even a small mark on them, as how could something like the Prima Guardian possibly damage his boots?

Vesperia arrived just then, stabbing forward with her lance, making the Guardian parry, only to get struck from above by a descending bird, leaving a cut down its back. Caleb also snuck out of a shadow left by the huge wave of sand still whirling around, striking the Prima on the leg, throwing it off-balance just in time for a golden beam from the Fallen King to nail it, blasting it down back into the dunes.

*“Restrict its movements if possible.”*

The voice came over the Golden Mark, and Jake reacted along with everyone else. A cursed ritual circle appeared, followed by a suppressing golden presence. Sylphie also quickly released a tunnel of wind to push the boss down, as Jake chose to release a wave of powerful destructive arcane mana. Not against the boss itself but against the environment itself, disrupting nearby space and making teleportation harder.

*“Impact in three.”* Original content can be found at [novel●fire●net](http://novel.fire.net)

Even this was not enough to stop it, as the Guardian was about to launch itself upwards. That's when three large wasps appeared from below the sand, all grabbing onto the boss. The Prima Guardian responded by cutting the legs off one and nearly smashing the head of another, but the Queen's Guards refused to let go even if not doing so meant their deaths.

*“Two. Make distance.”*

They did as told, all continuing to keep the Prima Guardian down, as another Queen's Guard died, with the second of the three not long for this world. None of them were giving up, as it appeared Arnold was finally about to make his move, and it had to be a good one with all that build-up, right?

*“One.”*

A second Queen's Guard died, with the third one barely hanging on. Jake kept disrupting space, and he saw the Fallen King and Casper struggle as the Guardian fought back. They were all doing their best, but they didn't have long. That's when Jake saw something out of the corner of his eye breaking through the clouds far above. It looked like a-

In the very next moment, his vision was filled with sand that turned to glass in mid-air from sheer heat as something struck the ground with more force than a dozen fully powered Arcane Powershots combined.

Rods from God.

At least, that was what this weapon was called in the common tongue or among enthusiasts. Arnold preferred simply referring to it as kinetic orbital bombardment. It was a theoretical weapon that had interested Arnold ever since he was a child, and seeing it in action left him pleasantly surprised.

It was perhaps the most simplistic weapon imaginable, at least on paper. It was nothing more than a long metal rod coated in material allowing it space flight and reducing friction. The metal, in this case, was synthesized with inspiration from the staff Jake

carried around for a while with the ability to change its weight based on the mana infused.

From there, all he had to do was attach thrusters and have it speed up while orbiting around Earth a few dozen times before finally using its rudimentary and mostly manual targeting system to strike. A strike that proved most successful, as a shield activated around Arnold, blocking the sand, whipping past him faster than speeding bullets.

This was the primary weapon Arnold had prepared for this Prima Guardian, with the hope that it could slay the event boss in one go. It hadn't been fast enough to arrive for the first phase, but here for the second one. Based on the feedback from one of his skills, the damage done had been utterly tremendous, however...

*Its durability is far above expectations... to think this would barely stop it for a moment.*

As he had that thought, a broken mess of a creature appeared behind Arnold. More than half of its body was gone, with the rest bent and broken in unnatural ways, as it had indeed taken tremendous damage. Without its cheat-like vitality, it would have been dead... but it wasn't.

It wasn't even enough to truly weaken the creature as the Prima Guardian was still more than deadly as its blade descended upon him before the scientist had a chance to react. His defensive barrier was cleaved straight through as Arnold felt the bone sword penetrate through his skull as his entire body was cut cleanly in two.

Arnold's final thoughts as his consciousness faded were filled with nothing but regret...

Regret that he hadn't made a more durable android for this battle.

Alas... it was difficult to add proper defensive capabilities when he also had to make space for all the explosives.

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## Chapter 936: Prima Guardian (4)

Jake was a moment too late as he saw Arnold get attacked. The man had stayed a reasonable distance away and even applied some stealth field around himself during the fight so far. However, when the Prima Guardian - whom Jake could barely believe was still able to move around so fast - teleported behind him, the man had no time to react as the blade fell.

For a brief moment, Jake was filled with panic as he saw the scientist get cleaved in two... until the sky exploded, getting bathed in a blue blast of fire and electricity. Jake momentarily saw a spark before the explosion, as the inside of Arnold's body did not have any flesh and blood to be seen. Instead, it had apparently been all explosives.

*"What the hell just happened!?"* Carmen yelled through her Golden Mark.

*"I just felt the Mark upon the mechanic disappear,"* the Fallen King responded before Jake quickly clarified the situation.

*"It was a robot of some kind; I would assume the real Arnold is fine,"* Jake clarified as he shot out a barrage of arrows almost instinctively while he was in a bit of turmoil internally, trying to figure out how the hell the scientist had pulled this off.

Jake... hadn't noticed it wasn't the real Arnold. He questioned how the hell he hadn't, but he tried to excuse it by never looking that closely at Arnold. Due to how souls worked, the Soulshape was almost just one big entity, and Arnold had looked entirely like a real person to most of his senses. The man had felt "metallic," if that makes sense, but wasn't that also pretty damn normal? That this feel came from his armor or something? Wouldn't it be a normal assumption that the man wasn't actually a robot apparently made up primarily of explosive material?

He also saw what exactly Arnold had hit the boss with. It was a large metal pole, about ten meters in length, now entirely bent and twisted as it lay in a massive crater in the sand, already getting covered as it turned all the sand that was near it liquid simply due to how hot it had been upon impact.

*"Do not let your minds wander. The Guardian is far from defeated,"* the Sword Saint sent through the Golden Mark, making Jake also abandon his silly thoughts as he focused on controlling the arrows he had fired.

The chimera was pushed back as its body was filled with electrical burns and blue fire from Arnold blowing up his "body," and it didn't react in time as the barrage of arrows struck it in the back. Some of them were repelled, but some penetrated where the creature had adapted to deal with Caleb and Carmen's attacks.

Speaking of Caleb, he and Sylphie struck just then, breaking through some of the still-falling glassified sand, landing a hit each as the Guardian only had one functional arm. It also only had one leg, but its flesh was quivering and moving, making Jake and the others certain its heavily damaged state wasn't long for this world.

So they had to take full advantage while they could.

Everyone attacked at once, as the Prima Guardian defended itself primarily with magic. It created barriers of stable arcane energy, golden force, wind, water, and fire, trying to limit any damage it took. While it did help, it was far from enough. Carmen punched it



square in the face with a heavily empowered blow, the Sword Saint cut its stomach, Vesperia pierced it through what was left of its chest, and Sylphie managed to shred the remaining arm, nearly cutting it entirely off. The damage it took from the assault of them all made the creature rapidly grow out a new foot, only to step down and teleport.

Right as it appeared again, a thunderclap sounded out as a dark pillar of black lightning descended, sending the boss reeling back down into the sand. Jake, Maria, and Casper followed up with an Arcane Powershot, a massive fire arrow, and a wooden stake that looked more like a large pillar. These attacks all fell upon the chimera, making the ground explode a mere moment after the boss landed.

*“Don’t give it time to rest,”* Jake quickly said as he continued shooting arrows. Others also threw all they had at the boss while it was crowded, Eron confirming to the group they were doing damage as the chimera just seemed to take the beating for a little while... preparing.

As Jake nocked another arrow, he noticed it had become overcast. He threw a quick glance the way of the Sword Saint, wondering if he had used a skill to make it rain, but the old man looked just as perplexed as Jake. That’s when a raindrop fell on Jake’s arm, and he instantly felt it sizzle and burn his clothes.

*Oh... fuck.*

Jake wasn’t even the one to warn them all first as the Fallen King spoke.

*“Acid rain.”*

However, he did add something: *“Don’t hold anything back anymore... it’s third phase time.”*

Arcane Awakening activated, Jake pushing it all the way as he felt a real sense of danger. Not just from the clouds above, but the Prima below. Everyone had stopped attacking for a moment to deal with the rain that had begun to pour down, as they all fully activated their boosting skills, the sky lighting up from everyone, unleashing their energy. This brief moment of dealing with the rain wasn’t even a full second... but it had been enough for the Prima Guardian as its body exploded with power.

A small shockwave sent sand flying as the chimera shot into the air, burning with power as it revealed its healed form. The four arms had become only two, one of them with a staff and the other not wielding anything. Its legs now just looked like two long, curved, single-edged blades, and on its back, the wings it hadn’t used before had been replaced with four long necks extending out, each with wyvern-like heads. The only thing that remained kind of identical to before was the eye-filled head.

Its entire body also looked far more uniform, no longer a mix of scales, skin, and bark. Now, it only had a single slightly golden tinge to it that Jake recognized immediately...



the runic tattoos also quite the giveaway. It had mimicked something Jake wasn't even sure could even be mimicked: the natural defenses of a Runemaiden.

Except without any of the drawbacks, as mana whirled around the Prima Guardian. It was truly a ridiculous creature that couldn't exist under any normal circumstances. Jake was ready to defend as he felt a gaze land on him. One of the wyvern heads opened its maw and released a ball of fire his way, the other three heads also attacking others.

Jake dodged, nocking an arrow, as the boss suddenly disappeared. There were no ripples in space this time, and Jake's eyes opened wide when he realized what happened, as he felt a slightly familiar form of energy. Caleb had recognized it a moment before Jake and quickly yelled.

*"It's using the sha-"*

However, before Caleb could fully warn them, it was too late.

Casper had been preparing another minor ritual as the Prima Guardian appeared behind him. The overcast skies had made the entire area overcast and unnaturally dark... leading to plenty of shadows for the chimera to travel through.

The Risen tried to react, even turning ethereal, but he wasn't fully in time. A staff slammed into his stomach, an audible crack sounding out as his body turned ghostly. He tried to get away, but the chimera punched with its other hand as it turned golden, unleashing what was effectively a Golden Claw. Jake quickly stepped in before it could land a third attack, making visual contact with the Guardian as it momentarily froze.

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Primal Gaze activated as Jake felt his own soul clash with the monstrosity before him. What he felt was utterly unnatural, a mismatch of pieces that were forcibly held together by a fuckload of system-made duct tape. That's also when Jake knew that the system never planned on having these Prima Guardians rule any planets... because Jake wouldn't even give this chimera a decade before its Truesoul would fall apart. In other words, it wasn't built to last at all and only persisted by the grace of the system's direct interference. For now, it was stable, though, and Jake felt quite the backlash as Primal Gaze nevertheless worked.

Casper exploded with cursed mana, taking the chance as four massive ghostly wooden stakes appeared behind him. With a yell, he shot them all forward, and all four pierced through the body of the Guardian before fading away.

That's also when the Prima could move again, and it tried to strike Casper once more, but the Sword Saint released a piercing stab, making the chimera address him instead. Carmen and Vesperia joined the old man as they faced the Guardian with a united front.

Eron was already flying over and healing Casper, who looked to be in quite a bad state, as the three melee fighters tried to restrain the chimera... and things weren't going super well.

With a kick, the chimera landed a large cut on Vesperia, shattering part of her natural armor, as the Sword Saint was forced to block the staff, smashing him down into the ground. Carmen's fist clashed directly with the Prima's, as she was the one who got pushed back, only to find herself on the receiving end of a wyvern's breath.

Vesperia tried to take advantage, but the chimera dodged her blow expertly, only to counter her instead, sending her reeling back. That's when Sylphie struck, proving once more she was the fastest in their group as she cut off one of the wyvern's necks with a flyby.

Maria also tried to land an arrow, but it was swatted away by the staff. The fire archer was having a harder time than everyone else with the constant acid rain, as not only was the rain aspect bad for her, but the acid also proved very effective against her defensive skill.

Perhaps the Guardian noticed this, as it pointed the staff it had just used to destroy her attack, as the clouds above rumbled. A black lightning strike descended, taking Maria by surprise as she was struck directly. Before she could properly comprehend what had happened, the Guardian appeared right before her, proving it still had One Step available.

Jake had already shot an arrow that he redirected, but the Prima Guardian chose to ignore it and instead attacked. Maria exploded with flames that the chimera just pushed through as it punched her in the chest, its fist piercing straight through, sending blood and bone flying before unnaturally bending, grasping her hair in its hand as it pulled backward. The giant maw on its head then opened as it bit down, with Maria barely forcing her head out of the way in time by burning away her own hair as half her neck and her entire shoulder were torn off, parts of her arm falling toward the ground.

### **“Glimpse of Spring: Stormcut.”**

The Sword Saint appeared below the two of them as he cut upwards, the clouds momentarily parting and the blade sinking into flesh as the arm holding Maria was cut cleanly off. Jake's arrow also arrived, striking the Prima in the head and piercing one of its eyes before exploding, making the Prima stumble a slight bit.

This left Maria with a tiny opening as she kicked off the chimera and turned into a ball of fire that shot away right before one of the wyvern heads could grasp her. It instead chose to just shoot a beam of energy her way that Sylphie flew in front of to redirect with a large blast of wind.

*"I... need to retreat... Its teeth are fucking poisoned and cursed... good luck,"* Maria spoke, shooting into the distance. Perhaps Eron could have healed her and allowed her to keep fighting, but she knew that the current situation wasn't favorable for her, and with her weakened after using her escape skill, she knew her contributions to the fight had ended.

The first of their fighters was officially eliminated – if one didn't count the four Queen's Guards that had all died too. Maybe Arnold was also out of the fight? At least he had lost his robot... but that didn't mean Jake was going to write him off.

Refocusing on the Prima Guardian, it switched its attention to Eron again to stop him from healing Casper as the healer faced the chimera. Waves of white flames washed over the boss as it flashed its blade legs a few times, cutting Eron up. It first tried to cut off his limbs, but Eron responded by blowing up his own body whenever his movement got too impaired, making the chimera switch its strategy slightly. Instead of directly fighting him, it created a tunnel of wind before blasting him away within a bubble of stable arcane energy and golden force, sending him flying all the way to one of the sections where people were fighting the regular Primas.

*"Do not fret,"* Eron spoke while flying away. *"Its power surges as its spark wanes. It's burning through its very own life with every passing moment. Keep going."*

Jake didn't need to be told that twice as he released an Arcane Powershot, blasting the Guardian in the shoulder and sending it spinning, Carmen flying over, her fist burning with power. It appeared as if the Guardian welcomed another clash as it punched toward her while spinning, but the Runemaiden wasn't just throwing a casual punch this time around.

A skill Jake recognized as Fist of Ragnarok roared out as an explosion lit up the sky, the impact sending blood and bone flying everywhere as the Guardian tumbled through the sky, its entire arm broken and twisted. Carmen was also blasted back, her arm bent at an unnatural angle.

She threw Caleb, who was beside her where she stopped, a glance, and he quickly understood as he slammed his staff into her side, pushing the bone back in place as the Runemaiden flinched.

Back at the Guardian, it quickly stopped itself in mid-air, as it cut off its own limb before a new arm regenerated in less than a second, ready to receive the attack of Sylphie and Vesperia while even counterattacking, landing a nasty cut on Vesperia and a wyvern's breath on Sylphie. Fresh chapters posted on *novel●fire●net*

Several more breaths also flew out, aimed at Jake, who dodged, and Casper, who was already struggling due to his previous injuries. The Fallen King stepped in to defend the Risen, but it was clear Casper was overdrawing on his own power to stay in this fight. Still, he looked like he wanted to get in at least one more big contribution.

The fight was at a stage where every moment was perilous. If the Prima Guardian had its way with someone for even a full second, they could take lethal damage easily, while their party just had to slowly land blow after blow, trying to whittle down the chimera's resources. All while dealing with it still adapting to everything they were doing, though to a lesser degree. Oh yeah, and then there was the constant acid rain. While Jake could block it with the passive barrier from Arcane Awakening, and someone like Carmen was entirely unaffected, everyone else had to, at the very least, expend energy to not be negatively affected.

Nevertheless, they held on as they repeatedly clashed with the Prima Guardian over and over, dealing solid damage themselves but also taking quite a beating in return. Casper did manage to get his final attack off as he activated the marks left by the four large stakes earlier, leaving a curse of weakness upon the Prima. It wouldn't last long, but it gave them some reprieve as it slowed down the boss while it was slowly adapting to deal with the curse.

After that, Casper became the second one to exit the fight as he had to retreat. Eron also tried to return to them, but it appeared as if the Prima Guardian did have some level of control over the regular Primas, as a few of them disengaged from their existing fights with the rest of Earth's forces purely to lock down Eron. It was annoying, as without their healer, things became a lot more risky.

Luckily, their core group of melee fighters remained, as Carmen, the Sword Saint, and Vesperia did wonders, keeping the Prima Guardian at bay most of the time. The Fallen King also stayed close to melee, assisting the group with barriers and occasional blasts, while Sylphie and Caleb functioned as a hit-and-run team, both showing off their speed.

As for Jake... well, he was the only one doing any solid damage, as the Prima Guardian was too busy dealing with the other six to handle his curving arrows and powerful Arcane Powershots. The chimera did try to go for Jake a few times, as he was isolated alone, but he proved himself a bad target every single time when he responded by pulling out his katars and engaging it until help arrived, without taking any meaningful injuries in the process. On the contrary, the boss took plenty of damage from this decision, as Prima attacking Jake freed up everyone else to attack.

A tightrope was walked as the fight was barely balanced, with any little thing able to tip it over. Jake felt the words of Eron ring true as the Prima Guardian was burning through its life and resources at an alarming rate, especially as it had to regenerate all the time from the constant damage it took. At the same time, any minor mistake from any of them could result in the balance instantly tipping if another fighter was put out of commission...

Ultimately, it turned out the tipping point didn't come from a mistake any of them made but from a severe miscalculation.

As the Sword Saint managed to land a blow, and Carmen blocked one of the leg-blades, Vesperia was slated to avoid the swing of the staff. She was clearly ready for it and was already retreating slightly away from the swing as suddenly, all of the Prima Guardian's eyes opened wide...

Without any warning, they all morphed into yellow bestial eyes that seemed to stare into your very soul, their gaze freezing not just Vesperia but the Fallen King, Carmen, Sword Saint, and even Caleb, who had just been about to land another sneaky blow from behind.

What happened next was just one brief moment... but that was all it took for the tight balance of the fight to shift entirely.

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## Chapter 937: Prima Guardian (5)

A lot of things happened at once. More than a dozen of the Prima Guardian's eyes exploded as it used Gaze on so many powerful people at once, but that didn't stop it from moving its body. It attacked the five people who weren't able to defend themselves with reckless abandon, Jake, a moment too late to interfere.

Vesperia was struck with its staff on the side of her head, sending blood, bone, and brain matter flying as nearly her entire skull was crushed, and the Sword Saint couldn't dodge as a leg blade swept up, cutting off one of his arms and legs. The Fallen King had the other leg-blade sweep in from the side, trying to cut him in two but only getting around halfway as the Unique Lifeform was nevertheless still left with a nasty injury and a blade stuck in his body.

For Carmen, the chimera chose to only punch her in the chest to send her away, perhaps knowing it couldn't deal meaningful damage with a single blow.

Caleb was a bit further away but was still struck with three breath attacks at the same time. However, luckily, what the Prima Guardian had done wasn't a Primal Gaze, but only a normal Gaze of the Apex Predator, allowing Caleb to partially fade into the shadows, avoiding taking too much damage.

The others had also moved a slight bit right at the end, using their mana, avoiding potential death. But, the Prima Guardian wasn't done. Its maw opened as it mowed to bite down on the Fallen King right as Jake struck.

He attacked with his own Primal Gaze as he made eye contact with some of the remaining glowing eyes. This stopped the Prima Guardian long enough for everyone to retreat slightly, as blood began to roll down Jake's cheeks from using the skill.

This creature's soul was just ridiculous. It hadn't taken any meaningful soul damage even after using Gaze on five extremely powerful people, and if Jake had tried the same thing, he was pretty sure things wouldn't have gone well for him. Still, the Prima had been smart by not using Gaze on Jake. If it had, things wouldn't have gone this well for it. Even so, he knew that the Prima wouldn't be able to use Gaze again. He would make sure of that.

Despite hitting his Primal Gaze, no one could take advantage as Sylphie chose to help evacuate those injured, blasting them all away with a great gust of wind. The Fallen King also took this chance and released a golden explosion, getting himself free as he staggered back. Gritting his teeth, Jake cursed internally at how shitty things were going... as a black line impacted the Guardian, cutting across Jake's vision.

A hole about the size of a fist was left in the chest of the Prima Guardian, as Jake saw its very soul have a part of it sheared right off. He also recognized where it had come from, as Jake couldn't help but flash a brief smile. There was only one person he knew with the power to shoot a goddamn void beam from who-the-fuck-knows-where.

Still, the situation wasn't great, as Jake felt forced to teleport forward as he appeared right in front of the Prima Guardian. Pulling out both his katars – Eternal Hunger easily reclaimed as it was part of his soul even if he had left it within the Prima before – as he entered melee with the boss.

The attack from Arnold had done great damage, but the chimera wasn't a creature that made any sense, and Jake doubted it would stop unless fully killed. Fighting it alone wasn't something Jake felt confident doing, but he felt as if he didn't have any other choice. At least if he was in melee, he could ensure it wasn't going to use Gaze because he fucking dared it to try to use his own skill on him.

He would need to buy some time for the others to at least recover a little. Vesperia didn't look like she could even fly straight, nearly her entire head gone, and the Sword Saint naturally couldn't fight with half his limbs cut off. Carmen and Caleb were still able to fight, though Caleb wasn't in a great state either. The Fallen King would clearly also need a bit, which left only Sylphie, Jake, and Carmen.

Fully focusing, Jake pushed his Arcane Awakening as far it could go – and perhaps a bit further - barely avoiding the attacks of the Prima Guardian. Its leg blades shot up at unpredictable times, bending unnaturally as they moved almost autonomously. All the meanwhile, Jake had to not get caught by the Guardian's punches or the staff, not to mention the occasional magical attack.



At least the wyvern heads on its back didn't attack Jake but went for the others who were dealing with their injuries, with Sylphie protecting them. Not wanting the Guardian to disengage when it realized it couldn't deal any meaningful damage to Jake quickly, he began to go more on the offensive.

Baiting it in, the boss thought it caught Jake in its grasp, only to find the version of Jake it had in its hand dissolve into cursed energy, allowing Jake to land a Piercing Fang with his Voidblade, tearing another hole in the Prima's chest. His opponent responded by releasing a golden explosion of force, making Jake stumble back as the Prima counterattacked instantly, forcing Jake to block the staff as he felt his arms buckle from the impact, his bones cracking.

Luckily, he had bought enough time for Caleb to attack from behind, knocking the boss slightly to the side and buying Jake a moment to stabilize. Carmen also entered the fray to help Jake, as the two of them faced off against the Prima Guardian together.

While Jake managed to avoid nearly all attacks, only taking minor injuries himself, Carmen wasn't the same as she constantly had to take blows directly. Jake noticed how her skin had begun to crack in places, small fractures forming all over her body. He knew she couldn't keep this up forever, but in truth, they didn't really have a choice.

The Prima Guardian didn't come out of this unscathed either. The Fallen King had recovered enough to protect the injured, allowing Sylphie and Caleb to resume their strikes, though without Jake's constant harassment with arrows, their damage output had been severely reduced. New novel chapters are published on [movel•fire•net](#)

As Jake was struggling, he suddenly saw someone enter his sphere, and a calm aura fell over him. He felt his hurting body begin to mend as healing energy washed over their entire group. Their healer had returned to the battle and went all out as his body began to glow with a powerful healing aura. The Sword Saint, Vesperia, and Fallen King all started to heal in real-time, as even some of the fractures on Carmen healed rapidly.

With a moment to spare, he looked over where Eron had been sealed down by five Primas not even a dozen seconds earlier and saw metal reflecting the sunlight as a single mage faced off against four Primas on his own – the fifth one falling toward the ground, blood trailing its descent.

William held a lot of resentment toward Eversmile for making him miss several system events. He had been convinced that the Treasure Hunt, Myriad Paths, and even C-grade Nevermore weren't things he needed or should do. They were wastes of time for someone like him. To this day, he couldn't understand why his former "master" would even do that. Was he just trying to sabotage William for the fun of it? Trying to hurt his Path? He had lost out on so many titles that would have made him stronger, and he felt so damn far behind.



But... that wasn't going to make him give up. How would he ever get his revenge on the Primordial by giving up?

One thing was for sure, he wasn't going to miss more events. As for this particular system event, he had chosen to just fall in line and do as Ms. Wells told him to. He was fully aware he wasn't in any kind of position to make any demands. It was already lucky they allowed him to take part, and he would do his utmost to be useful.

The section he had been assigned to defend wasn't particularly difficult, and the outcasts he had been grouped with barely had to do anything. Even if it wasn't hard, he was contributing, right? Things had been going smoothly until he suddenly noticed that one of the Primas flying toward his section suddenly changed direction, and not toward another section, but toward where the Prima Guardian was.

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He saw that it was going for the healer from the Dao Sect called Eron, who had been blasted their way by what looked like a giant golden barrier. Other Primas were also flying over, with five in total going for him.

Frowning, William wasn't sure what to do but quickly decided to step in. Especially when he saw these Primas weren't even truly fighting Eron; they were just trying to stop him from returning to the rest of the strike team.

*"You all handle this area; I'll go help the healer,"* William said to his section mates as he shot after the Prima, going toward Eron while retracting his metal wires – the legendary weapon Eversmile had given him. It was one of the many mixed messages his old teacher had sent, where he, on the one hand, helped William a lot and, on the other, actively tried to sabotage him.

Catching up to the charging Prima, William summoned a spear and shot it toward the gorilla-looking thing. It quickly reacted and defended itself, William taking the chance to launch a barrage of ranged attacks toward those bothering Eron.

The healer was defending himself with an ocean of white flames, but the Primas mostly ignored this as they kept pushing Eron further and further away from the strike team. Despite blowing up his body like a balloon of blood several times, the man couldn't get any leeway. With time, he would surely win by burning down the Primas, but would the strike team hold on long enough?

By that, William didn't mean them losing. He couldn't imagine that monstrous hunter truly losing... but he could see a few of the others dying. Best to avoid that, William reckoned, as he finally got close to Eron and decided it was time to unleash his boosting skill.

A silver aura appeared around him as William released a web of strings, instantly forcing two Primas to react. These Primas seemed conflicted for a moment. William understood why, as he saw the almost tangible karmic thread between these Primas and the Prima Guardian look slightly different than usual. The karmic bond was one so strong that William had known from the beginning that these Primas were tied intrinsically to the Guardian. They wouldn't die if the Prima Guardian died, but they would find themselves severely weakened. This also meant that any orders given by the Prima Guardian were absolute, and defending against William likely clashed with their directive to keep the healer busy. This directive was also the cause of change in the karmic bond between these Primas and the Guardian, likely because these five were the only ones carrying out direct orders.

Something William gladly took full advantage of as he decided to make the coming fight a bit easier for himself. While the Primas were still trying to figure out what to do, William summoned a large silver spear that he promptly impaled the gorilla-looking Prima with. It stumbled back as William channeled his energy into the spear, the Prima's body slowly turning to metal as its energies fought against the intrusion.

Which left it distracted when the true attack arrived.

From below, a spinning thin disc of metal shot up, pulled by metal threads, as one of the gorilla's legs was cut off. A second disc struck it right on soon after, but the gorilla caught it with both hands... only to have a third one strike it from behind, blasting it toward the ground with a nasty cut right on its spine.

His attack finally caught the attention of the other four Primas as William worked his karmic magic. He pulled on the threads of karma and began tying them to himself. The resentment born from the attack was enough for him to take the attention of all the Primas as they all turned toward him, and for a moment, he became their main target.

*"Get to the rest of the strike team now; I'll keep these busy,"* William said as he finished temporarily overriding the order the Primas had been given by the Guardian. It wouldn't work for long, as he was effectively just jamming the order while drawing attention to himself.

Luckily, Eron quickly caught on and took the moment William had gifted him to pull out an item from his spatial storage that made space shiver around him for a moment before he picked up speed and began flying back to the strike team at a rapid pace.

William sighed as he cracked his neck with the four Primas now charging for him, the one below also far from dead. He was pretty confident in himself, but dealing with five Primas was perhaps a bit too much, seeing as just killing one was a damn struggle with their overflowing vital energies. *Better kill that Guardian quickly...*

--

With Eron back on the field, the tides of battle began to shift once more. Having a healer just added so much value, and even if the Sword Saint and Vesperia wouldn't be back in action instantly, the simple knowledge that they eventually would be able to contribute again held immense value.

Carmen could also hold on for far longer, as she and Jake kept the Prima Guardian busy, the Fallen King staying on pure defense. The wyvern heads kept shooting attacks toward him, but Sylphie and Caleb helped as they kept attacking from behind, focusing much of their attention on the wyverns.

The acid rain falling upon them was still a problem, but the Sword Saint focused on addressing it as he channeled his own mana to take over the skies. He wasn't strong enough to entirely dispel the acid rain, but he could dilute the rain that fell while ruining the balance of the clouds, making the occasional black lightning strikes stop entirely. Even if he was heavily injured, he still wanted to contribute what he could.

Vesperia also clearly wanted to, and once some of her head was healed and she had one eye to see, she began to provide ranged support, shooting her stingers like a railgun.

Speaking of guns, Arnold had clearly set up somewhere, as the occasional black beam would pierce through the battlefield. His timing was always impeccable, happening just as the Prima Guardian was unable to move or in the middle of an attack.

The Prima Guardian was finally also showing clear signs of weakness. It regenerated slower than before, and while it was still incredibly dangerous, light was now at the end of the tunnel. They were still on a timer, though. They all had their boosting skills fully active, and while some of them had skills that they could keep active for a very long time without any problems, others couldn't. Jake was one of those people who had a boosting skill taking a toll on his body.

His skin had long begun to flay here and there as veins of destructive arcane energy lined his body, wreaking havoc within. Carmen was clearly also struggling, especially with all the hits she kept taking. Eron was doing his best, but there was only so much a healer could do against someone overdrawing their own power. However, no matter what, there was no backing down now... they had to finish it.

Picking up his pace even more, Jake began to take more risks as he landed several blows. He was waiting for the final opening to land a big finisher with the Protean Arrow he had been preparing in his quiver, to be fired alongside all the Hunting Momentum he had built up. It wasn't time yet, though, and Jake had to stay in melee to ensure Gaze wasn't even an option for the boss.

Carmen also got more reckless, with Eron now backing them. She gladly took three hits to land a punch of her own as the Guardian looked more and more beaten and bruised.

Realizing this wasn't working for it, the Prima Guardian switched target and went for Vesperia, who was not yet fully healed, but she still managed to barely block the attack.

Jake quickly followed as the True Royal defended herself. The Sword Saint had a tired look as he nevertheless raised his blade, likely for the final time in this battle. The old man still only had one arm and leg, his aura wavering. Yet, at that very moment, his body burned with power as he prepared to stab forward. Jake knew what he was about to do, and he opened his eyes wide as they flashed.

The pain was instant as Jake used yet another Primal Gaze, and he felt his vision waver as his eyes took severe damage. However, it was good enough. The Sword Saint, Caleb, and Sylphie all took full advantage as three powerful attacks fell upon the boss at once.

**“Glimpse of Spring: Erosion”**

**“Thunderfall of Tenlucis.”**

**“Ree!”**

A thin beam of water blasted off one of the Prima Guardian's arms as Caleb, wrapped in black lightning, descended from above along with Sylphie, both passing straight through the Guardian, roasting it from within and cutting up its body, sending blood flying everywhere. As a pleasant surprise, another void beam also hit the Guardian, taking off a leg.

Carmen and the Fallen King also wanted to join in, but the Prima Guardian exploded with pure mana at that very moment, as all of the wyvern heads self-destructed, pushing everyone back, including Jake. He had to use his scales to block the massive explosion as he saw it had knocked out the Sword Saint, and Vesperia looked much worse for wear, as everyone had taken a good bit of damage from the blast.

Stabilizing, Jake pulled out his bow in preparation to attack as he released a Pulse... and saw that on the back of the Prima Guardian, two wings had appeared. Two very familiar wings.

*No... no fucking way.*

A dark green bubble of poison appeared around the Prima Guardian before Jake or anyone else could strike... and with a single beat of these newly summoned wings, it activated Wings of the Malefic Viper's escape function and disappeared, fleeing the battle.

*Not happening.*

Without even a moment's hesitation, wings also appeared on Jake's back, and his body began to turn dark green. With a wingbeat of his own, he too disappeared in pursuit of the Prima Guardian, fully intent on hunting it down no matter where the bastard tried to escape to.

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## Chapter 938: Prima Guardian (6)

The entire world around Jake began to fade as all concepts in his surroundings were broken down into nothingness, and he shot after the Guardian. When using Wings of the Malefic Viper's escape function, he couldn't really do more than change the general direction he was going in, as he sacrificed all accuracy for pure speed and the ability to break through layers of space and anything else that might impede him.

However, this time, he wasn't just traveling randomly. Instead, he was in hot pursuit of the Prima Guardian as he honed in on the Mark he had left on it. He felt it ahead of him, with the exact distance impossible to determine due to how the skill worked. However, he knew that he wasn't willing to disengage his own use of Wings before he knew the Guardian had also stopped.

This proved... difficult. Jake was already beaten and battered, and as he chased the Prima Guardian, he felt his wings getting burned away, running out of energy. They were taking the brunt of everything, and it was clear the chimera's wings were just tougher than Jake's, likely due to its far higher stats.

Moreover, Jake guessed the Guardian knew he was chasing it. That, or it was just trying to get as far away as it possibly could, likely to recover before returning for a rematch. One that Jake naturally believed they would also win, but he wasn't about to risk it or give the chimera a longer life than absolutely necessary.

Gritting his teeth, Jake saw the world briefly flicker all around him, the escape skill about to come to an end. He would be thrown out into the real world, the Prima Guardian escaping to who-knows-where. Thinking fast about what to do, Jake tried to make his wings last longer. He actively controlled his vital energies as he sent more and more into them, trying to keep them from collapsing, but he was fighting a losing battle.

*Just a bit longer*, Jake thought desperately. One could still barely count the time Jake had been using his escape skill in seconds, but he was at the end of his ropes. Jake thought as quickly as he could, as he tried to think up new ways to make the wings last.

He covered them in a layer of stable arcane energy, and when that wasn't enough, he forcefully poured stable arcane mana into them in heavy supply. This appeared to only speed up their breakdown, but Jake forcefully stabilized all the mana within them, also inadvertently affecting the other energies in the wings. An almost reddish sheen began to cover them as Jake felt a change... one he leaned fully into as he explored it.

The wings had always been considered part of his body, but at the same time also separated due to their phantasmal nature. However, now, he felt a far stronger connection with them, especially when it came to pouring in his arcane energy. Skills had still affected the wings before, such as his boosting skill... yet it felt slightly different now. Like he had unclogged an otherwise blocked vein.

On his back, the reddish sheen finally changed and began to take shape as what looked like scales of arcane energy covered the surface of both wings. The wings also completely "locked" themselves as if they were frozen... but they also remained incredibly stable as Jake continued his pursuit of the Prima Guardian.

A notification popped up in his head, and Jake briefly skimmed it as he dedicated a small part of his consciousness to see what it was about. Especially because with the notification, he felt himself increase in speed ever-so-slightly.

***Skill upgraded (rarity unchanged):[Wings of the Malefic Viper (Legendary)] – Sprout wings and take flight, and as the Malefic Viper, refuse to ever find yourself restrained to circumstances against your will. Allows the Alchemist to summon two phantasmal wings to take flight or fight. While active, you can burn the blood within the wings and release potent toxic fumes. The toxicity and effects of the poison are based on Blood of the Malefic Viper. The wings can also be infused with stable arcane energies, using the wings as a medium to create a powerful defensive barrier, benefitting from both your arcane energies and the properties of an empowered Scales of the Malefic Viper. When infused with stable arcane energies, the wings cannot move. The wings count as a phantasmal part of your body and are incredibly receptive to your arcane energies. Allows the Alchemist to further infuse and sacrifice both wings to create an opportunity to escape if in a perilous situation. Doing this makes resummoning the wings impossible for a variable duration, dependent on Agility and the amount of energy infused into the wings upon the sacrifice. Passively provides 9 Agility per level in Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper (C-grade variant). May the sight of your wings be the harbinger of death, an impenetrable defense, and instruments of escape to feed another day.***

Jake had considered getting a dedicated defensive arcane barrier skill for a long time... and it looked like he had just gotten one. It was pretty much a side-effect of Jake wanting to protect his wings while using the escape function, but he wasn't going to complain. Chances are he had been pretty close to some kind of upgrade with his wings already, and it was only good to get it now, especially with the increased stats.



With this skill upgrade, Jake had bridged the gap between him and the Prima Guardian, as he was able to continue his pursuit. While he didn't have the same raw stats to match the durability of its wings, he now had superior wings in the quality department.

Still, it wasn't like he could keep using the skill forever, and neither could the Prima Guardian. Soon, Jake felt his opponent stop, which also put a stop to Jake dedicating any brainpower to the skill upgrade. Jake disengaged his use of wings a moment later as he emerged in the real world once more, the wings on his back burning away in the process, not to be summoned again for a good while.

He found himself surrounded by darkness, with nothing anywhere close. It wasn't hard to know where he was, either. The Prima Guardian hadn't tried to flee to the other side of the planet or anywhere, really... it had just gone straight up. Straight into the emptiness of space, which was where Jake now found himself, the planet pretty damn far beneath him. It wasn't even like they had flown in the direction of the moon... there was just nothing.

The Prima was a few dozen kilometers away, and Jake saw that it looked just about to enter some form of meditation to recover. However, it immediately noticed his appearance as Jake pulled out a bow and nocked an arrow.

Jake was still on a timer with his boosting skill going strong, but he knew the Prima Guardian wasn't going well either. While it had regenerated its second arm, it still only had one leg, and none of the wyverns on its back looked like they were gonna get healed.

Shooting his arrow, the chimera was struck as it reeled back. For a moment, it looked like it considered running until it stopped itself. On the back of Jake's hand, the key to the Planetary Pylon gave off a faint glow, the Guardian giving off a similar aura. It recognized Jake was the Key Holder... and recognized that this was a golden opportunity for it.

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Never had its objective been to kill every powerful fighter on Earth. Just to obtain the second key held by the World Leader. And now that very same World Leader had isolated himself from all his allies in the middle of space, with no help anywhere to be seen.

The option of fleeing seemed to quickly leave the chimera's mind. It took the staff it had been holding and grasped it with both hands before splitting it in two, the two halves morphing into blades. Likely, it had judged that blunt weapons were no longer optimal for the fight that was to come, and the staff was too cumbersome against Jake.



Jake was also fully aware of the situation he had put himself in. This was indeed the best chance the Prima Guardian would ever get to “beat” Earth. The thing is... as long as its best option included killing Jake, it wouldn’t ever be realistic.

*“What’s happening? I repeat, what’s happening?”* the Fallen King asked through the Golden Mark, seemingly having asked quite a few times before. Likely while Jake was using wings to chase.

*“Fighting the boss in space,”* Jake just answered.

*“Do you need assistance?”* Newest update provided by **novel•fire•net**

*“Yeah,”* Jake answered. *“Send Sandy to pick me up for when I’m done here. I’ll contact you when it’s dead.”*

With that, Jake cut off the connection with the Golden Mark as he had a fight to attend.

Loosing another barrage of arrows, Jake took shots at the Prima as it flew toward him. Most of his arrows were deflected, but he hit a few before Jake dodged to the side as the Guardian stepped down and appeared right in front of him. He swayed out of the way as he decided to meet the boss in melee just like it wanted, taking out both of his katars.

Facing the boss alone was truly the best decision in Jake’s mind. He did have the possibility of summoning the Fallen King... but all that would do was put the Unique Lifeform in a tough spot. While Jake had confidence in keeping himself alive, he wasn’t confident in protecting the Fallen King in the slightest. Besides, if worst came to worst, Jake wanted to be the only one around for the end of the flight.

With no one else around, Jake could also fully focus only on the Prima Guardian. He didn’t have to dedicate even a smidgen of his attention to keeping others safe or consider if his actions would put others in challenging situations. It was just him, the chimera, and a vast open nothingness as far as the eye could see.

Jake gladly fought the Prima Guardian while the chimera’s two blades moved at incredible speeds as Jake dodged and weaved around them, counterattacking whenever possible. He parried and took advantage of its movements, as even if the chimera was adaptable and could move in unnatural ways, it still had patterns, and Jake could still read it.

The two of them flashed through space as they rapidly switched between who was on the offensive, pushing each other back, Jake landing blow after blow as he couldn’t avoid taking some damage himself. Blood began to fill the emptiness of their environment, along with the skin that flayed off Jake’s body as he truly pushed himself beyond his limits.

Even before he chased the Prima Guardian, he had to consume a stamina potion to keep himself from running out, and now his resources were draining even quicker. If the fight dragged on too long, Jake would more than likely be the first one to fall... so he had to be the one to finish the fight.

Eternal Hunger did help a bit to keep Jake in the game, its energy-stealing effect very effective against the monstrous resource pool of the Guardian. He landed several stabs with it, even if the Voidblade did more raw damage. The weapon from Arnold was honestly ridiculous in how good it was at cutting and stabbing, and it was responsible for many of the injuries marring the Prima Guardian's body.

Exchanging dozens of blows a second, Jake was waiting for his chance, as he had a trick up his sleeve he wanted to try. After a clash where Jake got a minor cut on his thigh in trade for a deep stab into the chest of the Prima Guardian, Jake initiated the plan. He instantly charged in again as he released a wave of arcane energy mixed with dark mana toward the boss, causing a giant explosion of destructive black mist.

The Prima kept an eye on Jake throughout as the katar-wielding hunter appeared from within the cloud behind the chimera. It responded quickly, turning around and cutting down with both swords... only to find the version of Jake it attacked, dispersing into a mist of cursed energy.

Rapidly turning around, the Prima Guardian looked for Jake, confused, as it released a shockwave of mana to disperse the black mist around it. As the black mist was pushed away, Jake was still nowhere to be seen, making the Prima Guardian respond by sending out crescent waves of water, cutting through space.

One of these waves suddenly struck something... a seemingly solid mass in the middle of the nothingness. The moment it did, and before the Prima Guardian could fully process that it had hit anything, an explosion of magic was released as an Arcane Powershot tore across space toward the Guardian. It wanted to dodge, but Jake used Primal Gaze one final time.

A Protean Arrow, with all of Jake's Hunting Momentum infused, struck the Prima Guardian right in its chest, piercing deeply into it before exploding. An arm and a leg were shot off into the vastness of space, and the creature was blown apart, blood and gore spread out everywhere.

Jake had done something he had long theorized. Using Eternal Shadow and obscuring the sight of his enemy, he had briefly managed to activate Unseen Hunter in the state where he had to stand still due to the boss losing sight of him. It was an incredibly tight timing, but Jake had a transcendent ability to know when something or someone was looking at him, and the second he noticed the Guardian had shifted its entire attention to the Eternal Shadow, he used the skill and blended into space.

This allowed him to not only buy time to briefly charge an Arcane Powershot using his Protean Arrow but also to benefit from his Stealth Attack skill. If the Prima Guardian hadn't been swift to release a large area of effect attack to sniff him out, he could have charged the arrow for even longer... but this had to be good enough, right? Because Jake wasn't sure he had that much more in the tank.

At the same time as the Prima was blown apart, Jake's eyes cracked, as the irises in both fractured, turning him completely blind. He also felt the impact on his soul, having overdrawn himself far too much, as he felt an insane headache. His consciousness wavered... as something appeared behind him.

With nothing but a small part of its upper body, head, and one arm barely attached to its shoulder, the Prima Guardian had teleported behind Jake. The sword in its hand was gone, but it still struck forward, its hand glowing with the familiar aura of Carmen's most powerful strike: Fist of Ragnarok.

Jake didn't have time to think. Instinctively, he began to turn as the fist closed in on his head. Both katars appeared in Jake's hands as he roared while stabbing forward, the fist growing nearer... as time slowed down. Moment of activated, as Jake's katars were both giving off the aura of Piercing Fang, one aimed for what remained of the Guardian's chest and the other for the head.

With time on his side, Jake's attacks would arrive first... a strike that would no doubt be deadly toward the Guardian on its last legs. And in that final moment, the chimera tried to adapt one last time. Time began to bend around it as its own version of Moment of activated.

Jake felt his own heartbeat. A single thump of indignance... as the Prima Guardian just stopped. Its glowing fist lost all power, and white glowing fractures covered what was left of its body. The chimera's skin turned gray and wrinkly before its entire body turned to ashes before Jake's attack could even land. Time returned to normal, as all that remained was drifting dust that also soon disappeared into nothingness.

Instinctively, he knew... the Prima Guardian had tried to do something it simply shouldn't and couldn't do. It had simply faced the consequences of trying to overreach and escape the concept of time for even a moment. Well, the consequences if you didn't have an overpowered Bloodline, that is.

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## Chapter 939: Prima Guardian Aftermath

Not far from the Prima Vessel, most of the strike team had gathered after Jake and the Prima Guardian disappeared. Eron was busy healing those injured, as Sylphie had taken off to help deal with some of the regular Primas, having taken the least damage of them all. Well, not counting Eron, who seemed impervious to getting killed over and over again. But no one really counted him.

“Think he’ll be okay?” Carmen asked, a bit worried as they waited to hear something – anything – about what was going on far above them in space. Jake had cut off all communication as he focused on the fight, and no one could really fault her for not feeling entirely certain Jake would be fine. He was facing a peak creature at level 349, all alone. A creature that all of them had struggled against.

*“He sounded confident,” the Fallen King said. “I find it difficult to imagine a scenario where he doesn’t win.”*

“I think a bigger concern is how long it’ll take to fetch him,” Caleb said as he massaged his shoulder, addressing the swelling from overusing his boosting skill earlier.

“Sandy has been informed and is on their way,” the Sword Saint said, sitting in a chair he had taken out of his spatial storage.

“Right,” Carmen nodded as she sighed.

To say they didn’t all feel a bit conflicted that Jake was going to finish this fight alone was an understatement. However, they also recognized that Jake was the only one capable of chasing the chimera, and even the Fallen King knew that while he could be summoned to Jake’s side, he would likely be more of a burden than a boon.

Out of them all, Jake was the strongest in a regular fight; no one disagreed with that. Especially when facing off against a foe many levels higher than himself, he truly stood out. He walked a Path all about killing that which was stronger, making him incredibly suited for doing so. Unless the Sword Saint fully used his Transcendent skill, he wasn’t at all confident about fighting Jake. Not during the Treasure Hunt, and not now.

As they were all sitting there, they all suddenly felt the change. The Prima Vessel behind them began to glow as a beam of light shot toward the sky, and a new opening appeared on it. It wasn’t difficult to figure out what had happened... especially not when she saw the system message that arrived alongside this change.

***You have slain [Exalted Prima Guardian – lvl 349] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level***

“Well, I guess I shouldn’t have worried,” Carmen smiled.

“About us not getting any experience because they both ran the fuck away?” Caleb asked a bit cheekily.

“Oh, that too,” Carmen agreed.

“Did have me worried for a second,” the Sword Saint said with a sigh.

*“In case anyone cares, Jake has confirmed the Prima Guardian is indeed dead and that he still lives,” the Fallen King shared. “But yes, it is good we didn’t miss out on the experience, as that would indicate our contributions weren’t recognized, which would prove detrimental to our Records and the overall rewards from this event.”*

Truly, they were all focusing on what was most important.

--

Miranda was sweating despite not doing anything physically strenuous. She had just been forced to focus a bit too much for a prolonged period as she kept directing the flow of the battle while maintaining the domain in her own defended section. The incredibly durable Primas resulted in it taking way too long to kill each one, and alongside their damn armies, she felt like they needed way more fighters.

Then again, this definitely wasn’t how this system event was meant to be beaten. One was meant to fight the Primas one by one after they spread out, killing them to weaken the Prima Guardian before finishing off the big bad boss.

They were effectively doing this boss on hard mode, using a strategy that made it even harder. In other words... the highest difficulty with speedrun tactics.

She wasn’t sure what to think when she got the report that the Prima Guardian had fled the battlefield using some form of emergency escape skill... nor if it was a good or bad thing that Jake had chased without even hesitating. Probably good, right? Seeing as it was Jake who chose to chase.

Continuing to deal with all of the reports she got, Miranda kept sending reinforcements where needed. Lillian had formed a second strike team of sorts to quickly travel around and help where needed. Neil was even part of this team and served as their mode of travel as he rapidly took them around the battlefield using his space magic.

*“Arrived at section nine and engaging the Prima... priority on suppressing it over killing,”* Lillian reported as one of the stronger Primas had been causing trouble.

*“Keep safe for now; once section eight is secured, I’ll send more assistance,”* Miranda answered, turning her attention elsewhere.

Similar reports came in from all around as Miranda felt the pressure mounting. Many sections were still doing fine, but far more were struggling. Even the section William had been expertly handling was now a bit of a shitshow, as the ones there couldn’t work together to save their lives, and William himself had to deal with five Primas as he had

gone to assist the Prima Guardian strike team indirectly. Was this going against his orders and their agreement? Yes. Was Miranda going to make a stink about it? No.

Sylphie going to help them was great, but she was still only one hawk. While she could certainly kill a few Primas, in the grand scheme of things, all she could do was lighten the load on a few sections. The same was true for the assistance Arnold had begun to provide, though based on what the scientist said, his contributions would be limited as he had spent quite a few resources already dealing with the Guardian.

All of this isn't to say that Earth was losing. The fight was just taking longer than Miranda had hoped, and they would incur more casualties than was optimal. Especially now that many were beginning to run out of mana and stamina.

However, suddenly, things changed. She saw the pillar of light that erupted from the Prima Vessel, and for a moment, all the Primas stopped. Hundreds of screeches and roars sounded out from all over the battlefield as Miranda saw the Primas shaking as something seemed to be leaving them. Some of them lost a bit in bulk, their injuries worsened, and their auras became far less imposing.

The author's narrative has been misappropriated; report any instances of this story on Amazon.

*"The Prima has weakened significantly,"* Lillian informed Miranda right then, telling the witch something she already knew, courtesy of the fifty or so other reports she got at the same time. Sending a message to everyone at once, she held up the phone provided by Arnold.

*"The Prima Guardian has been slain. I repeat, Prima Guardian is dead. However, don't lose focus, but make this cleanup smooth,"* Miranda said, as she suddenly got a message and smiled. *"Oh, and if you are feeling tired, retreat. Reinforcements are incoming."*

The system message for this event had said that beasts couldn't participate in fighting against the Prima Guardian if they consumed system-given unique items... but now there was no Prima Guardian. It was still a bit of a gamble if they could now participate, but the Sky Whale informed Miranda he felt like he could. So, with that in mind, he and an entire army of beasts and monsters arrived through the teleportation circle behind the backline.

Taking his true form, the massive whale took to the skies, as the frost wyvern Miranda remembered Jake mentioning also ventured forth, releasing its breath on the weakened Primas. Thousands of powerful beasts, all mid-tier C-grade or above, entered the battlefield, as this was indeed nothing more but a cleanup.

Many of the beasts that had arrived with the Primas began to flee, with a few of them even trying to surrender. The vast majority still fought alongside their Prima as they



faced death together. Noble, perhaps, but Miranda didn't really want to think too much about stuff like that.

She was already looking forward to what came next. The Prima Guardian Alliance, the intergalactic politics, and the inevitable clash with Ell'Hakan and those who served or worked alongside him... there was still much to do in regards to this event.

Of course, before they could really do anything like that, they needed to claim the Planetary Pylon. And for that, they needed their World Leader, who was still floating somewhere in space, waiting for his giant space worm taxi to arrive.

Everything hurt, and Jake wasn't a big fan. After he deactivated his boosting skill with the confirmed death of the Prima Guardian, the pain really came rushing in. He was pretty much out of skin on his body at this point, and his internals looked like several bombs had gone off inside him.

But he lived, and at least his body was strong enough to survive outer space even when Jake was in his severely weakened post-Arcane Awakening state. That didn't mean he felt any less like shit, though, as he waited for Sandy to arrive. The Fallen King had already at least confirmed that the worm was on its way, so Jake wouldn't have to fly all the way down there himself. Something he really didn't do, and it wasn't like his wings would be available any time soon for an expedient return. The skill wasn't meant to be used for that kind of travel anyway, and chances are Jake would end up just appearing halfway inside the planet or still far away from it due to the severe lack of accuracy.

Still... it was a good upgrade, and without it, he wouldn't have caught the Prima Guardian. Stressful situations were truly the best time to upgrade skills. Also, while Jake was complaining, he was totally okay with having a moment to himself to properly digest the fight he had just been in.

Going back a bit to when the Prima Guardian died, Jake had honestly been perplexed what the hell had happened. Everything was still a bit blurry, and all he remembered was that he tried to stab the damn thing with time slowed, and right as the Guardian tried to also slow down, it just fucking died. Jake knew his Moment of was special, but not to the level of it being deadly for the chimera to try and mimic it.

Ultimately, the chimera effectively killing itself didn't change much. Jake's attack would have killed the Prima if it hadn't been able to use a skill like Moment anyway; it just sped up the process by half a second. From the looks of it, it wasn't like it hurt Jake's experience gained from the fight, either.

Oh yeah, and something Jake hadn't noticed earlier either... as always, with a skill upgrade to his Malefic Viper Legacy skills, there also came a nice reward of experience points, giving Jake even more levels.



***'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 276 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points***

...

***'DING!' Profession: [Heretic-Chosen Alchemist of the Malefic Viper] has reached level 278 - Stat points allocated, +35 Free Points***

Three levels from upgrading his Wings of the Malefic Viper was more than he expected but not really more than he usually got. It was also a while since he last upgraded one of his Legacy skills, so perhaps that played into him getting more experience than usual. In either case, more levels were great, putting him closer to level 300.

Having killed the Prima Guardian, there was naturally also plenty of class experience to be gained.

***You have slain [Exalted Prima Guardian – lvl 349] – Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level***

***'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 290 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points***

...

***'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 292 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points***

Alright, Jake said plenty, but in his opinion, 3 levels as someone who was nearly high-tier C-grade was a lot. Now, Jake would definitely have gotten a fuckload more if he had done this entire fight alone, but that was never going to happen. Jake also seriously doubted he could have beaten the chimera alone... though it was hard to say.

Its ability to adapt still confused him. He still wasn't sure if it could only use skills it had seen or if it could just use all sorts of skills based on the people it fought. Perhaps a combination of the two... or had they just all been scanned when they entered the Prima Vessel or something?

Perhaps if Jake had been the one to fight it alone, it wouldn't have been able to copy from anyone else but only him. That would have made it weaker, yes, but Jake wasn't sure by how much or if it would have copied more from him. Though, even if it had... Jake would have loved to see it try and copy him if Jake pulled out some Jake Juice, especially after what happened to it from trying to copy Moment.

Oh well, the thing was dead, so it didn't really matter anymore. It was not like Jake was ever going to encounter a similar creature, as the chimera wouldn't have been able to exist in the wild. It was purely an event boss created by the system to test Earth.

As a final thing in regards to levels, Jake had naturally also gained 3 race levels.

**'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 283 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points**

... Official source is **novel** ♦ **fire** ♦ **net**

**'DING!' Race: [Human (C)] has reached level 285 - Stat points allocated, +45 Free Points**

Thinking about it, Jake getting 3 levels from this fight was 2% of all the levels he needed for C-grade, and all done in less than a day... so as long as Jake could find another Prima Guardian and convince everyone to fight it tomorrow, Jake could reach B-grade within a month easily! They could even take a few weekend breaks.

Joking aside, it didn't seem like much, but it was honest work.

After the Prima Guardian had truly died, Jake also saw that a second symbol had appeared on the back of his hand, signifying he now had both keys to the barrier around the Planetary Pylon. As long as he got back, it was ripe for the taking, and they would finally lay claim to the planet once and for all.

The second key was, sadly, the only loot Jake got from the boss. He didn't know if it was because of the way it died or because it was a system entity, but it left nothing behind. The Fallen King did mention that the Prima Vessel had opened up a new entrance back on Earth that none of them could enter due to a barrier. It was kind of assumed Jake would be able to go in, though, so maybe there was loot in there? One can only hope.

Entering meditation, Jake focused on healing for the next good while, as he at least wanted his body to stop hurting a little before he moved on to the next task. Because while Jake had "only" gained three levels, those three had made him pass an important threshold when he got to level 290 in his class.

That's right: it was time for a skill selection!

And, to make things things even better, while waiting for Sandy to arrive, Jake had plenty of time to painstakingly go over every single skill choice in excruciating detail as Jake opened up the system menu once he felt well enough to think clearly.

***Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge class skills available***

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## Chapter 940: Level 290 Hunter Skill Selection

Most of the time, Jake felt like skill selections only really had one, maybe two, valid options. Other times, none of the skills were any good, such as Jake's last skill selection for his class where he had gone back to pick Penetrating Arrow. Sure, the skill he had gained was great, but he had only chosen it because nothing better had been offered.

However... this time around, Jake didn't find himself with a list like usual. He didn't instantly see three options he wanted to write off. Instead, he saw a list of five pretty fucking awesome skills, all of high rarity and all with their own great aspects.

To set the stage, the very first skill offered was ancient rarity and looked incredibly useful.

***[Disruptive Arrow of Arcane Shadows (Ancient)] – With a single arrow, cover the skies in arcane shadows as you fade into nothingness. Allows the hunter to shoot an arrow infused with arcane shadow energy, creating a large cloud of arcane shadows upon destruction. This arcane shadow cloud will obscure all senses, allowing none inside to look out or those outside to look in. Due to the disruptive nature of the arrow, many forms of magic are weakened or entirely nullified within. This effect is primarily focused on disrupting detection skills. The level of obscuration created by the shadow cloud is based on the disparity between your Perception and the targets. For a short period after shooting the arrow, the hunter can more easily activate any stealth skill as long as the target fully loses sight of him. Adds a bonus to the effects of Perception, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Agility when using Disruptive Arrow of Arcane Shadows.***

So, to summarize... it was an arrow that messed with magic, messed with people's Perception, and allowed Jake to more easily enter stealth, all while scaling incredibly well with Perception. The only downside was that the Cloud of Arcane Shadows, as the skill called it, couldn't be looked inside easily... which was entirely counteracted by Jake's insane Perception.

Even if it wasn't, Hunter's Mark would still allow him to locate people. Oh yeah, and if that also failed, he had his damn Sphere of Perception. Hell, he could even see the skill being used to enhance his melee fighting style. Imagine it, a cloud of shadows with Jake stalking around within, striking from out of nowhere repeatedly. It sure gave Umbra vibes from the duel in the Colosseum of Mortals.

Then there was the awesome effect of allowing him to more easily enter stealth after using it. This skill was effectively what Jake had done against the Prima Guardian, except far more effectively. If he had this skill, then chances are he could have charged his Arcane Powershot for longer and killed the Guardian with his final Protean Arrow alone.

The benefits if he used this skill alongside Eternal Shadow were also easy to imagine... he could maybe enter his Unseen Hunter state several times throughout a fight. Sure, it would have the highest chance of working the first time around, but compared to now, he could see a world where it could work multiple times.

No matter what, he would have to take inspiration from this skill for some free-form magic. Maybe he could even design a Protean Arrow with these effects? Honestly, if this was the skill Jake had to pick, he would have been all fine and dandy. It was great... but the next skill looked at least as good. If for nothing else but its rarity, better.

Because, already at his second choice, he was offered a legendary skill, which truly boded well for the three final ones. Not to say this wouldn't be the one, as he really liked what he saw.

***[Stealth Attack of the Unseen Arcane Hunter (Legendary)] - The strongest blow is one unseen before it's too late. Massively increase the power of the first attack made on an otherwise unaware foe, and any damage bonuses from Perception-scaling skills are significantly increased for a short duration after landing a successful Stealth Attack. If this attack is used in conjunction with Unseen Arcane Hunter, the attack will benefit from the effects of your stealth skill and be hidden from your foe's spectrum of Perception. Even if your Stealth attack is noticed before it lands, it retains all effects as long as it was made while unseen. Adds a stat bonus to the effects of Stealth Attack of the Unseen Arcane Hunter dependent on the nature of the attack. This effect is further improved by the level of Unseen Arcane Hunter.***

***WARNING: This skill is unlocked by and will serve as an upgrade to your existing Superior Stealth Attack, resulting in the loss of the skill.***

Stealth Attack was one of those skills Jake constantly reminded himself he had to remember to upgrade, but kept forgetting about actually upgrading. Much of the groundwork was definitely already laid, and this skill was built partly on top of that.

Jake's goal had always been to integrate it with Unseen Arcane Hunter somehow... and this was pretty much it. Exactly what he had been imagining and wanted. It would make his opening attack when he struck from stealth far more powerful than before and even allow him to deal bonus damage with all his bow-related skills – seeing as they all scaled with Perception – for a short time after hitting an arrow.

Oh yeah... and it would turn his attack invisible. Or, at the very least, it would make it so his target wouldn't be able to notice his arrow before it was too late. Trying to hide a massive Arcane Powershot barreling toward someone was pretty difficult, but from the looks of it, this skill could make it happen.

As with the skill prior, Jake would definitely need to take heavy inspiration from this one if he didn't end up picking it. It was a bit different from the one prior in one huge way, though: it was a skill upgrade. A skill upgrade meant he would lose a skill slot... but this

was one of those situations where the upgrade was so massive it was worth considering. He would go from a rare to a legendary skill in one go.

Jake could only imagine getting both this skill and the Arrow of Arcane Shadows... the combination would be insane. Alas, he would have to pick only one – assuming he even picked any of them. Because the next option was also incredibly spicy.

Or, maybe he should call it cursed.

***[Gluttunous Fangs of Eternal Hunger (Legendary)] – Your hunger remains eternal as you seek to consume any who dare enter the striking distance of your fangs. Allows the hunter to passively channel cursed energy from the mythical artifact Eternal Hunger into every strike made with melee weapons, allowing you to benefit from all its on-hit effects. Every strike made using this effect will help feed the artifact, growing the power of the Sin Curse. Significantly increases the offensive effects of the Sin Curse of Hunger. Increases restorative powers of the Sin Curse of Hunger. Every strike made with Eternal Hunger or any weapon benefitting from this skill will leave lingering curse energy for far longer, dealing continuous damage. All effects of this skill are dependent on the power of Eternal Hunger. As the Sin Curse grows, so does the requirement of your ability to keep it at bay.***

***WARNING: Should Eternal Hunger be lost, this skill will mutate or disappear entirely.***

It really shouldn't come as a surprise Jake would get more skills related to the mythical weapon he had created. Especially seeing as how it had been tied even more deeply to him with the integration of Sim-Jake. The Sin Curse was now totally a part of him and his Path, and he recognized that.

He also recognized he had been shit at actually utilizing the curse energy he housed within his Soulspace. Eternal Hunger could definitely do a lot more than just be a durable and sharp weapon he liked to stab people with – something he had been exploring with his alchemy a bit. He had just never really explored any of the things he could make it do when it came to combat. Part of it was because Jake didn't want to force himself too far down a Path where he focused on curses over stuff like his arcane affinity, and part of it was that Jake had a hard time imagining exactly what to do.

Now, this skill wasn't really doing anything "new" per-se. It was effectively just a damage and energy-steal effect getting added to Jake's melee fighting style while allowing Eternal Hunger to absorb more energy and thus also upgrade itself faster. He did like that he could make his Voidblade – or any other melee weapon - essentially into another Eternal Hunger. Seeing as it used the word Fangs, there was perhaps even some synergy going on with Fangs of Man and Fangs of the Malefic Viper. It did suck that the skill didn't work with ranged attacks, but it would also be kind of weird if it had.

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Jake didn't really put much stock in the warnings on the skill, either. He knew that dealing with cursed stuff was dangerous, and he didn't have any plans of losing Eternal Hunger. If he did, his Eternal Shadow skill would also be fucked.

To conclude, this skill was great and would instantly make Jake quite a bit stronger. There wasn't much to learn from it he didn't already know, but it was probably still worth keeping what it did in mind when exploring opportunities to use Eternal Hunger in the future. As with the two prior skills, if Jake was forced to pick this, he would have been a-okay.

Who would ever be unhappy about getting a legendary skill that just made something you already did strictly better? Well... maybe you would if it meant passing up another legendary skill that made other things you already did strictly better.

***[Lone Hunter of Horizon's Edge (Legendary)] – Hunting is a lonely endeavor, yet one best enjoyed alone, as there is only the hunter and his prey. As a Lone Hunter, you prefer the solitude found in a good hunt, and you specialize in facing your prey alone. Allows the hunter to gain certain benefits when hunting alone, but will have no effect if you work alongside others. Significantly increases all bonuses granted by your Big Game Hunter skill when hunting alone. When Lone Hunter of Horizon's Edge is active, all stealth-related skills are more effective. When hunting alone, Hunting Momentum is accumulated from Relentless Hunt of the Avaricious Arcane Hunter far faster, and less is lost when the hunter takes damage. As you walk down the Path of a Lone Hunter, more benefits may follow. Increases all experience gained from successful lone hunts. May you strike fear into the hearts of all who find themselves marked as the prey of the Lone Hunter of Horizon's Edge.***

***WARNING: This skill is exclusive and cannot be taken alongside Huntmaster of Horizon's Edge.***

This was the second legendary skill directly related to his class Jake had been offered.

Lone Hunter of Horizon's Edge was clearly one well-suited to who he was. Reading it carefully, it did become clear pretty quickly that, on its own, the skill didn't really do anything. The only real benefit it gave on its lonesome was the increased experience gained when hunting alone.

The rest of it was all about making his other skills better. Relentless Hunt, all stealth skills, and from the looks of it, especially Big Game Hunter, would be strictly improved if he had this skill. Of course, it would only work if he was hunting alone.



Jake had very much expected the skill to then also come with a massive downside if he was fighting with others, but from the looks of it, the only downside was that the skill wouldn't do anything. That was... massive. While it was true Jake did hunt solo a lot, he also teamed up with others here and there. This Prima Guardian fight and much of Nevermore was proof of that. So to have a skill that would make him weaker when fighting with others would have sucked and been one he had to avoid.

Before Jake continued considering this skill more in-depth, he decided that doing it in conjunction with the last one was probably better. Because the warning of the skill also served as the prelude to the final skill offered... the counterpart to Lone Hunter and one mutually exclusive with it.

***[Huntmaster of Horizon's Edge (Legendary)] – To hunt is a task for the many, as you successfully lead your hunting party to slay any prey you mark for death. As a Huntmaster, you are a hunter specialized in hunting with a team of peers, allowing them to benefit from your expertise and skills as a hunter as long as they join your Hunting Party. Allows allies part of your Hunting Party to benefit from all effects of your Mark of the Horizon-Chasing Arcane Hunter. Any damage your Hunting Party does helps build your Hunting Momentum from Relentless Hunt of the Avaricious Arcane Hunter. When facing higher-level foes, all members of your Hunting Party benefit from a lesser version of your Big Game Hunter skill. As you walk down the Path of a Huntmaster, more benefits may follow. You can have a total of 9 members in your Hunting Party (not including yourself). May your Hunting Party strike fear in the hearts of all who find themselves marked as prey by the Huntmaster of Horizon's Edge.***

***WARNING: This skill is exclusive and cannot be taken alongside Lone Hunter of Horizon's Edge.***

If Lone Hunter made Jake the king of soloing, this skill made him everyone's favorite party member. Reading through the skill, the benefits were pretty damn good. Giving everyone a lesser version of Big Game Hunter meant they would just be straight-up stronger when facing opponents above their level while also providing them the passive presence resistance.

Then there was the fact it would help Jake build Hunting Momentum by just having his party members land hits. That in itself was pretty damn great. The biggest risk with Relentless Hunt had always been that he wouldn't be able to accumulate as much Hunting Momentum when he had to take hits during fights. However, with this skill, he could just outsource building his momentum to his party members. Especially seeing as it didn't mention him losing anything if they got hit.

Finally, the greatest part of this skill was allowing others to benefit from Hunter's Mark. Not just because of all the extra damage it would add to everyone's damage but because of an aspect of the skill he was certain would make him a top-rated party member: Increased experience gained.



This part of the skill wasn't one Jake really thought about much, as he always just marked targets, but he was certain others would be more than happy to get some extra experience. While Jake wasn't sure how much of an increase Hunter's Mark even gave, this was the kind of concept that could only be found in system-granted skills and considered pretty rare.

Considering the skill more deeply, it wasn't difficult to imagine the fighting style this skill catered to. It was one where Jake stood back and attacked without ever getting hit, thus never losing any Hunting Momentum. He would be the director of the battle, firing the occasional powerful blow with all the Hunting Momentum he constantly built up until, finally, the prey was dead. At which point, everyone would get more experience because the target had a Hunter's Mark and come pat their awesome Huntmaster on the back for another successful hunt.

Like the Lone Hunter skill, this one didn't have any downsides either, and it wasn't like it would make him incapable of solo hunting. Just better when doing it with a group. The only real negative to picking it was that he couldn't also pick Lone Hunter. Well, Lone Hunter or any of the other solid options he had been offered, but Lone Hunter would be permanently unavailable.

Having gone over both Lone Hunter and Huntmaster, he had to admit that on the surface, from a more objective perspective, Huntmaster was probably the better skill. At least, if he was asked which one of them was closest to being a mythical rarity skill, he would say Huntmaster. Both of them were awesome, though, and almost seemed like mini-classes or something.

Perhaps this assessment wasn't entirely incorrect either... because Jake had a feeling this decision would prove quite important for his Path. Their mutual exclusivity outlined this as a choice about what kind of hunter Jake wanted to be. It even pretty much said so with:

***“As you walk down the Path of a Huntmaster/Lone Hunter, more benefits may follow.”***

Jake couldn't help but wonder... perhaps this choice had even been triggered by Jake kind of sending mixed messages about his own Path.

After the system arrived, Jake had primarily been a solo hunter. He was alone during the Tutorial, quickly abandoning his former colleagues. After returning to Earth, he kept hunting alone, only briefly teaming up with Hawkie for some flight lessons and elemental hunting. Outside of that, he was pretty much on his own all throughout E-grade.

D-grade wasn't that much different. Sure, Jake did a dungeon with Draskil and the others from the Order, but that was, again, only a brief interlude. All his greatest achievements in combat had been him fighting alone.

However, here in C-grade, things had been very different. He had done Nevermore with a party of five, and now this Prima Guardian event with a large group. He hadn't faced any strong opponents alone for a long time outside of a bit within some Challenge Dungeons. Nearly all his big fights in C-grade had been with a group: Minaga, the Twinhead Emperor, and the Prima Guardian. For solo fights, the only big one was Valdemar in the Colosseum, and that one had been under very odd circumstances, and he didn't even have his class during the fight.

Really thinking about everything, it wouldn't be wrong to say Jake was acting more like a Huntmaster rather than a Lone Hunter recently, and if he recalled the last few decades of his life, Huntmaster would definitely have been the most useful of the two. This wasn't a skill about the past, though.

It was about the kind of hunter Jake wanted to be in the future... and could Jake really know what the future would bring? Because while he could definitely see himself embracing the life of a Lone Hunter, he could also see himself adventuring plenty with Sylphie, Carmen, the Sword Saint, and all the others.

Of course, there was also another option: to not pick either of these two but just go with one of the two other legendary skills Jake had been offered. To simply not lock him into any kind of Path in the future and perhaps get offered a version of the skill that was a mix between Huntmaster and Lone Hunter, though he had a feeling that wasn't gonna happen, as the trade-off with these skills seemed to be that he had to pick one or the other.

Honestly, out of every class skill selection, this was perhaps the hardest. But Jake had to make a choice, and the question now was... what skill should he pick? Because he low-key wanted all of them... well, alright, he could be reasonable and not too greedy. Just getting four of them was also an acceptable outcome, as two were mutually exclusive.

Alas, he was forced to choose, and he could only be happy that he had plenty of time to decide, with Sandy still nowhere to be seen.

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## Chapter 941: Most Challenging Skill Selection Yet

Jake had never been a massive fan of fully committing to something, especially not if that decision would have permanent consequences. At least, he wasn't when it came to defining his Path. He still felt as if he was barely getting started exploring the system

and his Path despite having spent well over a century with the system, if one counted time dilation.

He did commit sometimes. Arcane Supremacy had been a big commitment and "locked" him into his arcane affinity for good. There was no going back from that one, with his body permanently altered to better fit his affinity while making any other weaker in combat. However, that one didn't feel like that big of a commitment. Jake's arcane affinity was *his* affinity, so it was just confirming it did indeed belong to him and was optimal for his Path.

This entire skill selection felt different, though. Outside of the two first skills – Disruptive Arrow of Arcane Shadows and Stealth Attack of the Unseen Arcane Hunter – the other three were very much permanent decisions. Even the Gluttunous Fangs skill was a very permanent decision.

Passive skills tended to be, and the curse skill had a whole bunch of passive effects. It would link Jake far more closely with the Sin Curse that made up Eternal Hunger, and while it wasn't quite an attunement skill, it would tie Eternal Hunger and the Path of curses even more closely to Jake... and he still wasn't completely certain he wanted that.

Sure, Jake did want to use curses, but he didn't want it to be *too* big of a part of his Path. He still wanted to primarily be an arcane hunter first and foremost. There was also the fact that Gluttunous Fangs of Eternal Hunger only worked on melee weapons and melee attacks.

Jake had made considerations about integrating Eternal Hunger into ranged combat for a while. More accurately, he had considered if he could use the mythical weapon in conjunction with Protean Arrow. If he could design an arrow using Eternal Hunger as its base, shooting it more like a spear. Seeing as he could always retrieve the weapon as it was bound to his soul, this idea was quite appealing, even if there were still a few snags.

Nothing said the skill would mess up that plan. In fact, it was even possible that Gluttunous Fangs would make this idea even better, but Jake was still a bit doubtful. Honestly, a lot of what made Jake apprehensive about this skill was pure speculation... and the fact that he kind of liked Lone Hunter and Huntmaster more simply because of the future potential he saw in both of them.

Also, both had "hunter" in the name... alright, one had Huntmaster, but a Huntmaster was also a kind of hunter, so it counted. They were also both related to his class, so that was an extra bonus point, once more due to the future potential. He could see this choice unlocking another greater one once he reached level 320, where he would get the final skill selection of C-grade... and the final skill selections tended to have an extra good skill. For reference, E-grade he got Arrow of the Ambitious Hunter – now Protean

Arrow - and in D-grade, he got Relentless Hunt and the entire concept of Hunting Momentum.

Who knows, chances are it would even help define his B-grade class evolution, making him lean further into either the Path of a Huntmaster or a Lone Hunter.

The big question was... which one fit Jake better? Going by recent happenings, Huntmaster probably did. It also had a lot of pros. As mentioned, Jake believed it was a slightly higher rarity skill than Lone Hunter, thus making it closer to mythical. In a fight like the Prima Guardian he had just gone through, it would definitely have been great with no real downsides. All it would have done was make everyone else a little bit stronger and help Jake build up some Hunting Momentum for a few more big arrows.

Not to say Lone Hunter wouldn't have been helpful. Here, in the final parts of the fight in space, it would probably have worked, right? Seeing as he was alone, that is. This also raised some questions about when Jake was truly "alone" or fighting with others, but knowing the system, it tended to be pretty smart about things like that, such as how Big Game Hunter worked even before Jake technically entered a fight with a more powerful foe, simply due to his intent to attack. So there was a good chance Lone Hunter would work as long as Jake "felt" as if he was fighting alone.

That was actually one of the big differences between the two: Jake getting stronger. Huntmaster didn't buff Jake at all; it only made everyone else stronger. Meanwhile, Lone Hunter only worked on Jake... and Jake guessed it would work quite well.

All the effects of Lone Hunter were great. It buffed his stealth skills passively, made his Relentless Hunter better, and even gave him more stats from Big Game Hunter. It was just a straight-up buff when fighting alone.

Huntmaster relied on other people and only ever worked when he was with others. The buffs it gave them were great and numerous, but, in general, Jake wasn't a huge fan of relying on other people, even if he had a lot of reliable ones around him.

But... could Jake guarantee they would actually fight alongside him? The only reason everyone had been here for the Prima Guardian was because of the system event. What would happen after the event was over? Could he seriously expect a full party to just stick around and level with him? And level with him when he wanted to go hunting? There would definitely have to go a whole lot of scheduling and planning into making it work...

Everyone simply had their own things to deal with and their own Paths.

Finally... Jake couldn't help but remember a conversation he had with the Viper a long time ago. He had always described the Path to godhood as a lonely one. Even if Jake could assume others were willing to walk alongside him for Huntmaster, would they be able to? Right now, they were still only C-grade, and while he didn't doubt most of the

people on Earth he usually fought alongside could reach B-grade, he wasn't really that certain how long they could keep going.

Nor how fast they would be.

One of the reasons they had all kind of kept pace for now was due to the peculiar circumstances of a new universe getting integrated. The sheer flood of Records allowed everyone to level a fair deal, but as the system events slowed down and everyone began to do their own things, it wasn't hard to imagine their leveling paces would also start to differentiate significantly.

Not to mention that they all had their own matters to deal with. The Fallen King had to manage those who served him, and Jake didn't doubt he wanted to expand his influence. Caleb was a Judge in the Court of Shadows and had their family to take care of, while Carmen was a Runemaiden of Valhal. Even if she decided to fight in a group, it wouldn't be with him but with others from Valhal.

Casper was the same, belonging to the Risen. All the humans he knew belonged somewhere, except maybe the Sword Saint, but Jake was fully aware he and the old man couldn't be attached to the hip all of their lives. He had his own Path to travel as he pursued the peak of swordsmanship.

So... who could Jake even have in this Huntin Party on a consistent basis? Sylphie, perhaps? Sandy wasn't a fighter and didn't count, and Vesperia would definitely not be out running after Jake and hunting. She was a True Royal Hive Queen, and even participating directly in a fight against the Prima Guardian was a big deal.

Finally... there was one big reason why Huntmaster made him hesitate: Jake genuinely preferred to fight alone.

Not just because he was a selfish asshole who didn't want other people around him but because he didn't like the loss of control when other people got involved. Jake felt like he could ensure his own safety and the flow of the battle for the most part. When others got involved... not so much.

He always had to split a part of his focus to watch out for his allies. When Jake saw Vesperia nearly have her entire head crushed by the Prima Guardian, his heart skipped a beat. When Sylphie was about to get crushed by the Twinhead Emperor, Jake couldn't even think clearly. He knew that they were both strong in their own right, but he also knew that he was stronger than both of them... and if Jake wanted to truly push himself, he would have to fight more challenging and formidable foes in the future. He wasn't even sure he wanted to drag Sylphie or Vesperia around for things like that if it was an option.

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Because... no matter how reliable others could be, they would never be able to measure up Jake's trust in his own abilities. He could always rely on himself, no matter the situation. He was the only person Jake could one-hundred percent always rely on and the only person who never had any scheduling conflicts for when hunting would be a good time.

Jake also couldn't be forced into a situation where he couldn't rely on himself either, while it was more than possible someone like Ell'Hakan could isolate Jake from his allies. If that happened and he had Huntmaster... yeah, that would suck. Not to mention, Jake doubted Ell'Hakan or anyone like that would even try to fight Jake unless they could ensure they would fight him alone under favorable circumstances.

As Jake was still wracking his brain, he got a message through the Golden Mark.

*"The cosmic worm will be arriving at your location in around fifteen minutes,"* the Fallen King informed him.

Hearing the King gave Jake an idea, as he asked. *"Alright, thanks. Say, what do you plan on doing after dealing with all of the Prima Guardians and the event concludes?"* NEW NOVEL CHAPTERS ARE PUBLISHED ON [novel•fire•net](http://novel.fire.net)

*"That is an odd question that came out of nowhere... but if you wish to know, then I shall seek a way to separate myself from you in earnest. My soul remains tethered to yours, but I have been researching methods to sever that connection for good to fully reclaim my life as my own,"* the Fallen King answered honestly.

*"A good goal,"* Jake genuinely agreed. He kind of forgot they were connected most of the time, and he didn't want to lose his cool mask... but he also didn't want to keep the Fallen King tied to him against the Unique Lifeform's will. *"Let's assume you succeed. Would you ever be interested in going hunting together?"*

*"Knowing you and what hunting entails, no. I do not see the purpose in taking tremendous risks and facing more powerful foes than myself repeatedly,"* the King answered, seemingly not even taking his question that seriously.

*"Alright,"* Jake said, as he decided to quickly reach out to some of the others. Before he made his decision he at least wanted to probe what kind of response he would get if he did end up with Huntmaster. The message he sent didn't explain what kind of skill he had been offered but just asked in general if people wanted to form a hypothetical "hunting party" with him, and the responses were kind of predictable.

*"Not gonna say no to a bit of adventuring once in a while if I got the time, but to make an entire thing out of it? Nah, no thanks,"* Carmen answered casually.



*"Go hunting with you on a consistent basis? My boss and my wife would both kill me. Even if they don't, the paperwork when I return from an adventurer definitely would,"* Caleb shut the idea down.

*"While I would love the occasional excursion with Sire, I would find it difficult to commit to anything... and do be aware that should we go hunting outside of the ninety-third universe, or should the universe open up, I do have protectors assigned to me while outside the Heartlands,"* Vesperia also made it clear she wouldn't be able to hunt much and would be a sucky hunting partner as Jake didn't want a bunch of hidden gods keeping watch at all times. It would ruin the experience and the Records of it all.

*"I don't need you to be a third wheel during my leveling... it's pretty much the only time me and Lyra can just be the two of us,"* Casper also shut Jake down, preferring dates with his ghost girlfriend.

*"Ree, ree, ree,"* Sylphie explained, being the most agreeable of everyone... though even she had the "sometimes" part. Apparently, Stormild had actually been a useful Patron and given Sylphie some advice to strike out on her own more and explore herself and not be shackled down. That, as a part-elemental of the wind affinity, her Path was one of freedom and impulsivity, and she should take the time to just be her flighty self and let the wind take her wherever it blows. Doing anything else could hurt her Records... something Jake definitely didn't want to risk doing.

However, out of everyone, the one who seemed to understand the most what Jake was asking and what he meant with his question was the Sword Saint, who also gave the longest answer.

*"Rather than merely giving you a yes or a no, let me explain a bit about my own approach to this topic. Hunting with others isn't something I do out of personal preference but out of necessity or when it's proven the superior option. If given the choice, I would face all fights on my lonesome. This is not because i dislike fighting with you, but because of the Path I walk. Fighting alongside others makes you adopt certain habits, and I fear that I may develop a form of swordsmanship reliant on others... which could prove fatal when I find myself alone. Also, I initially picked up the sword for sport and to duel with others. I prefer a good bout against a single foe to see who is superior, not who can overwhelm the other with numbers first."*

Jake listened as the old man shared his thought process on the matter quite in-depth, likely seeing the true reason why Jake asked what he asked.

*"I have been on the battlefield many times, but before and after the system arrived. Having comrades you can trust fully is a beautiful thing... but I also know the pain of losing those comrades. Even if you trust them, that doesn't make them fully reliable, and should they fall, you are back to relying on yourself once more. What I'm saying is I wouldn't make any decisions that rely on the whims or abilities of others. I have skipped skills that would have helped us fight as a group for more selfish options, as, ultimately,*



*I'm selfish. And I know that so are you. A certain egotistical mindset is required to try and reach the lofty goals we both aspire toward, and I'm not even going into how big egos tend to clash. Let me finish rambling and just say I would recommend that you embrace your selfishness... assuming it doesn't mean you are no longer able to fight alongside others when the preferred option. Limiting yourself also doesn't sound like a smart choice, but choosing your own Path is naturally entirely up to you. I just shared my own selfish desire to not lose a valuable – occasional – comrade in arms."*

Much of what the Sword Saint said echoed Jake's own thoughts, and while he didn't say it directly, he also made it pretty clear he wouldn't be a member of Jake's hunting party. It did validate quite a few of Jake's thoughts and confirm his doubt if being a Huntmaster was even a viable Path for him.

Jake could see it work way better for weaker people. The problem was all the peers of Jake were supremely talented individuals themselves. Would they even be willing to effectively work under a Huntmaster? Jake knew he wouldn't...

If Jake was weaker, he could more easily find people to join his Hunting Party. Jake didn't think that this Hunting Party was a permanent thing, but one where he could switch out members or even the entire party for every hunt. If it was possible to recruit just ten regular elites for this, it would be far more valuable, but for Jake, it would just end up being him effectively running a boosting service.

Yeah... it wasn't that Huntmaster was bad, but that it didn't really work properly. To put it simply, Jake was too strong to try and assemble a proper Hunting Party:

Better to just become a one-man hunting party instead.

He didn't ask Arnold about his opinion as the scientist didn't have a Golden Mark, but Jake also knew there was no reason to. Even if he had the choice, Jake didn't want to go hunting with Arnold. The dude would probably turn everything into an experiment or never actually go himself, but just send different test robots or some shit. No, best to keep him as Jake's favorite crafter buddy.

Maria also wasn't asked, simply because Jake didn't really want to form a hunting party with her either. Firstly, they were both archers and secondly, because of what Jake had just gone over: She just wasn't strong enough. Oh, and third, he didn't really know or trust her that much. Eron was also in the camp of people he didn't really know and trust well enough to be a hunting partner. Jake was also sure he would say no.

Sighing, Jake kept staring at the five skill option in front of him. This was definitely the most excruciating skill selection he ever had, and he low-key wanted all of them. The thought of not picking Lone Hunter or Huntmaster also struck him, as it was possible to wait and see if he could get a "merged" version of the two down the line... but that would cut him off from any potential skills picking it now could unlock when he reached level 320.

Also, nothing said he couldn't upgrade Lone Hunter to still have some effect while fighting in a group. The fact that it didn't have any drawbacks meant that it likely wouldn't develop any either... and if it did, he could just choose not to go down that Path.

Jake had always been strongest when alone... and in the end, he ended up doubling down on that to become even stronger as a Lone Hunter. He genuinely believed it was the best choice for him.

Besides, he doubted it would have been easy to find anyone willing to go on a hunting spree for gods while still a mortal.

Right as he felt Sandy approach, Jake finally made the most challenging skill choice he had to so far as he picked Lone Hunter.

***Skill Gained: [Lone Hunter of Horizon's Edge (Legendary)] – Hunting is a lonely endeavor, yet one best enjoyed alone, as there is only the hunter and his prey. As a Lone Hunter, you prefer the solitude found in a good hunt, and you specialize in facing your prey alone. Allows the hunter to gain certain benefits when hunting alone, but will have no effect if you work alongside others. Significantly increases all bonuses granted by your Big Game Hunter skill when hunting alone. When Lone Hunter of Horizon's Edge is active, all stealth-related skills are more effective. When hunting alone, Hunting Momentum is accumulated from Relentless Hunt of the Avaricious Arcane Hunter far faster, and less is lost when the hunter takes damage. As you walk down the Path of a Lone Hunter, more benefits may follow. Increases all experience gained from successful lone hunts. May you strike fear into the hearts of all who find themselves marked as the prey of the Lone Hunter of Horizon's Edge.***

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## Chapter 942: Within the Prima Vessel

Likely due to the passive nature of the Lone Hunter, Jake didn't really feel anything different after getting it. He considered testing out the one aspect he could right now, namely the improved effectiveness of stealth, but he reckoned there would come a better time after returning to Earth. Right now, all it could potentially do was make it harder for Sandy to find him. Besides, there would definitely be many chances for Lone Hunting around during what was to come with the Prima Guardian Alliance.

As Jake had felt, Sandy appeared not long after, popping out of what looked like a hole in space. Jake regarded the worm, and once more, he could only be happy to have a living spaceship available. If not, it would have taken annoyingly long to fly back to Earth, especially with his Wings of the Malefic Viper unavailable.

*"Couldn't even have begun flying to meet me halfway?"* the giant space worm asked in an admonishing tone.

"Shouldn't expect an injured patient to move around too much," Jake responded.

*"Always with the excuses... now get in here,"* Sandy said while opening their maw. Jake felt the suction and didn't resist as he was eaten.

He appeared in a pretty familiar-looking room as he raised his eyebrows. "You made a new alchemy lab for me?"

*"I didn't make it; the people at the Order did. Try not to make me break everything again by making me face another B-grade, alright?"* Sandy said semi-jokingly.

"Now that you mentioned it, we could check out what's going on with Mars..." Jake said, for a split second seriously considering it, before shaking his head. "Next time, that is. For now, let's get back to Earth. Good suggestion, though, maybe there's also a few B-grades on other planets." This update is available on *novel•fire•net*

*"Sure, sure, let's also go see some of the solar systems closer to the core of the galaxy! Maybe we can even find a few A- or even an S-grade or two there! Great thinking, Jake!"* Sandy said, not super receptive to Jake's great suggestion.

*"That definitely does sound like something we should do down the line! Imagine what kind of treasures they're hiding; it's gonna be awesome!"* Jake kept the gag going... though he not joking at all. But, again, all of that was for later.

Nothing in his Lone Hunter skill said anything about using a taxi service either, and seeing as Sandy wasn't a fighter at all, Jake believed it should be possible to have Lone Hunter be active even while traveling with the worm. It was not like Sandy would ever get involved in any kind of fighting if the worm could avoid it.

Sandy didn't give any response but was too busy entering subspace, or Sandy's Sand World, as they called it, to speed up their return trip. Jake got the hint and entered meditation to try and fully recover by the time they got back. He had already healed a fair deal during his skill evaluation time, but he was far from in top form.

The space voyage ended up being relatively uneventful, taking only about four hours in total, Sandy having gotten even faster since their moon journey despite literally dying. Jake healed up as well as he could during this time, with the only communication

happening during this time being Miranda sending him updates about how everything was going and the Fallen King asking once when Jake and Sandy would be back.

Jake learned from Miranda that things were going pretty damn well. It was just a cleanup of Primas, with everyone able to assist in killing the many enemy monsters doing their utmost. Earth did still take quite a few losses, but not a single person Jake knew the name of died.

After Eron had dealt with healing the strike team, he began to help kill regular Primas, with others also following suit when able. Miranda even praised William a fair deal, calling him a "valuable asset," with Jake not socially inept enough to not know what she meant by that.

She wanted to make use of William. Even if Jake didn't like him, he could recognize William could be of great assistance in certain matters. Karma mages were one of the rarest types of mages around, primarily because learning about karmic magic without a teacher was incredibly difficult, and it was easy to form wrong conclusions that could make you screwed down the line. Shit, Jake would probably suck quite a bit at karma magic due to his overly simplistic view of karma. Even if it wasn't inaccurate, he just viewed karma as some kind of connection between people and other people or things. This wasn't wrong... but too simplistic to work with to achieve anything substantial. So, to conclude, karmic magic wasn't anything Jake wanted to learn about actively.

William, on the other hand, had learned the Legacy of Eversmile, the foremost expert in karmic magic in the entire multiverse. Eversmile hadn't taught him anything fake either, but his genuine Legacy. From what Jake understood, William was even pretty damn talented in karmic magic. In fact, he seemed pretty talented in all forms of magic and mana manipulation as a whole. He truly was a genius in his own right... but that didn't mean Jake liked him.

Perhaps he could tolerate him, though. If Miranda wanted to make use of the mage, Jake could at least put his personal feelings aside as long as he didn't have to play too nice with the guy. He also knew that Casper had steered very clear of William for a good reason, as he was partly responsible for Casper having a ghost girlfriend and not a regular living girlfriend.

Actually... Casper wouldn't even have become a Risen if not for William, would he? He also wasn't sure if Jacob would have ever become an Augur. Who knows... the gods were clearly playing quite a few games during the Tutorial, and Jake really didn't want to uselessly dwell on the past. Suffice it to say, what William had done hadn't made him the most popular of sorts, but if someone like Casper could resist killing the guy on sight, so could Jake allow Miranda to make use of him.

And, no, Jake wasn't afraid of William taking advantage of Miranda or messing with her using karmic magic. He had personally seen all the damn magic she constantly deployed to defend herself, especially against any form of mental influence, and there

was no way William could get through that. If he did manage to, Jake also felt confident he or someone else would notice. Finally... William could be bold, yes, but Jake really hoped he wasn't dumb enough to start shit, or they could have a repeat of the Tutorial, and this time there would be no Eversmile with a Golden Leaf of Yggdrasil.

These were just some of the things Jake considered on the way back, as he honestly didn't have anything better to do while recovering. Once they broke through the final layer of clouds, and he could fully see the desert below, he returned his attention to the outside world and the huge metal egg-shaped thing still nested within its crater.

He could see a bit of fighting still taking far away at a few of the defensive sections, but the Primas really were just about wiped out. At the Prima Vessel, he saw the strike team gathered once more, most of them never having left as they were recovering. Even if they had healed their bodies, prolonged use of boosting skills really wasn't healthy.

*"Sandy Express arriving at Prima Vessel Station now. All passengers, please depart now or be thrown out forcefully and get a mouthful of sand,"* Sandy said in a very professional tone as Jake felt the space around his body quiver a bit.

Not resisting, Jake was spit out as he appeared floating a bit above the sand, not far from the rest of the strike team. Oh, and by the rest of the strike team, Jake only meant those who didn't have to disengage. Maria and Casper were still nowhere to be seen, likely recovering on their own somewhere else. Arnold was back with the group, though, and he looked quite curious to see what was going on with the Prima Vessel.

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Jacob had also appeared. It wasn't like he was of much help in the cleanup battle anyway, but he wanted to be there for this Prima Vessel exploration. Jake could perhaps have said no and rejected him, but he didn't care enough to. The more the merrier to check out what was up with the giant egg-like metal meteor.

"About bloody time," Carmen said when she saw Jake had returned. "Just how far up did you chase that damn chimera?"

"Quite far, obviously," Jake answered with a smile. "My escape skill has been put on a ridiculously long cooldown, that's for sure."

*"Stop delaying and get us into the Prima Vessel already,"* the Fallen King said, having no patience for chit-chat.

Jake had already spotted the new opening, which had a white barrier blocking it. Not even Jake could see through it, but when he laid eyes on it, he faintly felt a response from the key imprinted on the back of his hand.

"Alright, alright," Jake said as he floated up, the others naturally following along curiously, with Sandy deciding this wasn't anything they bothered to get involved in as the worm took off once more. Reaching the barrier, Jake simply reached out, and the moment he touched it with the hand holding the key, it disappeared, leaving an opening about three meters wide and four meters tall. It led straight into a hallway, and to Jake's surprise, there was no spatial expansion going on.

He did notice whatever was there had been "generated" by the system after the Prima Guardian had died, as the entire section of the Prima Vessel he now saw hadn't been present before.

Entering the hallway, the others followed as Jake kept a lookout for traps, but he didn't feel anything dangerous anywhere. The hallway led to a cross-section not soon after, with a room to each side and one straight ahead. Two of the rooms were blocked by barriers, each with the same key symbol as the one on Jake's hand. The last one had both Jake's key symbol and a number that currently displayed "31" before dropping to "30" while they were looking. Jake quickly guessed this was the number of surviving Primas and that this one would only open after the last one was dead. What lay beyond this barrier was quite interesting, too, because there wasn't anything on the other side.

Not as in there being a big empty room, but that the entire space just didn't exist. It looked like the inside of a lockbox that hadn't been opened yet... making Jake guess this room could effectively be a giant lockbox. That was pretty exciting to think about, but he was more interested in the two other rooms first. The room off to the other side had what looked like teleportation platforms within, and Jake was very curious to discover where they led.

The first room he chose to enter was the one straight ahead, though. Because Jake could see what that was before he even opened the barrier: a control room.

Holding up his hand with the seal on it, the barrier quickly melded away as Jake and the others entered.

"The interior is reminiscent of the Seat of the Exalted Prima," the Sword Saint commented, everyone nodding in agreement.

There was definitely a high magical tech vibe to the entire place. The silvery surfaces definitely helped set the mood, and as Jake approached what he assumed to be the main console, he saw what looked like a steel ball half-inserted into the dashboard. It reminded him of an old upside-down ball mouse.

"Pretty sure you're the only one who can operate stuff," Carmen said after she had haphazardly tried to press down on the surface of the dashboard several times.



"Very likely," Jake nodded as he reached out and touched the embedded steel ball. The second his hand laid upon it, the entire control room came to life, and a giant screen appeared in front of them all, showing a massive map of something quite familiar.

"The Milky Way Galaxy," Arnold noted as small flag-like markers began appearing all over the map. "And these markers appear to show planets certain planets."

Jake counted thousands of markers in total and noted how they all had three different colors. One color was red, which was displayed on most planets. Another was blue, which was showing on hundreds of others. Finally, there were green flags... three in total.

Focusing on the different colors, Jake quickly came to know that the red flags marked planets with an ongoing Prima Guardian conflict, but only those not part of the alliance. The blue markers were all the planets part of the alliance also with unkilld Prima Guardians, while finally, the green markers were the planets that had killed their Prima Guardian.

"Three planets have managed to take down their Prima Guardian?" Jake questioned out loud. "One of them is us, I bet Ell'Hakan is another... but who is the third one?"

No one said anything, seemingly as puzzled as Jake. He had nearly expected Vesperia to speak up that it was some insect hive or that Arnold would jump in and inform him it was another follower of some Void God, but nope, no one seemed to know.

There was also one other big question...

"If three planets cleared the Prima Guardian already, who did it first?" Caleb questioned.

"It should be us, right?" Carmen said, sounding pretty sure.

"Very likely," Arnold weighed in. "Even if we were not, I'm uncertain as to its significance if we were first. The Prima Guardian we killed was an outlier and likely the only one of its kind, so in some ways, it can assumed we would have gotten the first kill on our kind of Prima Guardian no matter how long it would have taken us."

*"Dwelling on it is useless,"* the Fallen King added as he regarded Jake. *"What more are you capable of doing with this Prima Vessel?"*

"Good question," Jake said as he placed his hand back on the metal ball again. He connected to the Prima Vessel more than before, and quickly, information entered his mind. He saw an interior map of the entire Prima Vessel and what it could do... which wasn't a super lot. But it did have some functions, one of which he wanted to try pretty quickly.



"Hang on, people," Jake said, and without any warning, activated the teleportation function.

Turns out there was no reason for Jake to tell anyone to hang on, as no one inside the Prima Vessel felt a thing, as from the outside, the entire metal egg teleported away in the blink of an eye... to reappear again deep beneath the surface of the planet.

"What did you do?" Caleb asked.

"Teleported us close to the Planetary Pylon," Jake commented. "We're right now at the core of the planet."

"... I assume you can teleport us back again?" the Sword Saint asked with a raised eyebrow.

Jake just smiled and changed the topic, as the teleportation feature was entirely gone from the options he had available. "Oh, look at that on the map!"

He had activated some more features as information began to appear around the blue flags – the planets part of the Prima Guardian Alliance. It provided some basic information about the planet, such as its general core affinities and whatnot, and Jake saw quite a mix. Some planets had overwhelming water affinity, others were planets of rock and magma, while one was primarily wind affinity... yeah, they should definitely try to send Sylphie there to have some fun.

Jake's plan had been to distract everyone from the fact he may have fucked up with the teleport, and it had worked wonders, as Jake had even forgotten his own fuck-up as he noticed something else.

Right around the center of the galaxy, in an area dense with countless stars, there weren't any planets with flags showing Prima Guardians despite the density of stars, but a new marker appeared when Jake activated a function. A larger-than-average golden flag popped up, marking not the location of any Prima Guardian... but perhaps what this entire system event was all leading up to.

The Seat of the Eternal Prima.

And when Jake focused on it even more... he made a new screen pop up for them all to see.

### **Seat of the Exalted Prima**

**This marks the location of the Seat of the Exalted Prima within the Milky Way Galaxy. Currently, the Seat is being controlled and taken care of by a temporary administrator while the Administrator Selection is in progress. Should an individual be named the new Administrator of the Seat of the Exalted Prima, they**

**will gain full control of it and be one step closer to controlling the true World Wonder known as the [Redacted].**

**Performance during this Prima Guardian event will heavily impact the rankings of all Administrator Candidates. Given a sufficiently satisfactory performance, full graduation to Administrator during this event is possible.**

They all read this, as nothing was really surprising there. They had always known that the Seat of the Exalted Prima was just one part of what was some great World Wonder. A branch of sorts. Still... taking control of it was an interesting prospect, and Jake was sure Miranda would be more than happy to have Jake unload all responsibility on her if he did end up taking control of it.

"What can the Seat even do if you take control of it?" Carmen questioned. "Maybe something to do with that Myriad Paths event we did there?"

"Perhaps," Jake shrugged, truly not knowing. Nor did he care. "This isn't really as much about me wanting to take control of it, but to make sure someone like Ell'Hakan doesn't."

"Fair," Carmen shrugged. "Can you see the rankings anywhere?"

"Let me see... oh, here we go," Jake said as he made a ranking pop up over the golden flag, displaying three names.

**Current Administrator Candidate Rankings (subject to change):**

**1: Jake Thayne**

**2: Ell'Hakan**

**3: I**

Seeing himself at the top over Ell'Hakan was nice... but...

"Who the fuck is called I?" Jake questioned, confused... though he had a strong feeling he would come to learn who – or what – they were during this event.

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## **Chapter 943: Planetary Pylon**

"This makes little sense," the Sword Saint frowned. "The Milky Way is only that big, how could a third being roughly on the level of you and Ell'Hakan have appeared?"

Jake could only remain silent, as he truly had no idea. This made the old man sigh as he continued. "If it was someone from Earth or related to us, it would make more sense... do you think this individual may have some kind of connection to Ell'Hakan?"

"No way to know," Jake shrugged. "But I somehow doubt it. Either way, chances are we will end up meeting this person at some point, and we can learn the details then. If it's another enemy, fine. If it's an ally, even better. For now, who cares? I think we got plenty of other matters to deal with."

The Fallen King looked at Jake, who expected what he was about to say to be about this "I" individual, but instead, he reminded Jake of something quite important.

*"Seeing as we're now close to the Planetary Pylon, perhaps going to claim it would be an idea? Possibly, there are bonuses to doing that first,"* he reminded Jake.

"Oh, fuck," Jake realized. "Be right back." Google search **novel** **fire** **net**

With those words, Jake stormed back down the hallway to exit the Prima Vessel, leaving the rest to enjoy staring at the pretty map of the galaxy. It was finally time to lay claim to his planet for good.

Ell'Hakan clenched his newly regenerated fist, recognizing that the Prima Guardian had been more powerful than expected. In the end, he even had to give up one of his arms to strike it down for good. The losses they had taken also weren't insignificant, and the Chosen had to recognize that these "helpers" he had chosen left much to be desired. At times, he regretted getting rid of the Ashen Devourer, but he also knew that keeping the Unique Lifeform under control wouldn't have been feasible.

Nevertheless, this hadn't been something Ell'Hakan couldn't handle with his most trusted aides, and he made sure all who died were those he didn't view as essential. It did help a good amount to have the powerful "champions" of other planets die, as they would make them more reliant on Ell'Hakan going forward, but he also couldn't overdo it. No, ultimately, it was far better to simply turn those champions into his own aides.

The Prima Guardian they faced had been an odd creature. It was some form of chimera that, after a bit of fighting, had morphed and transformed into a creature reminiscent of a large stone elemental, just with a bit of the stone replaced by biological parts. With its level at 345, it had nearly reached peak C-grade, far above what most of the people present could handle.

Its primary abilities seemed to have been to absorb all forms of energy attacks thrown at it while at the same time taking in the atmospheric mana and using that to create an optimal form for itself. An interesting and tricky opponent, for sure.

The assistance of the many regular Primas had naturally also been a problem, but they'd handled it pretty well. Sure, a few tens of thousands had died, but they were all from the more problematic camps. Meanwhile, the ones from the greater factions had done quite splendidly. The armies from the Holy Church, as one example, had done exemplary.

Which perhaps shouldn't be surprising considering they controlled so many of the planets part of the alliance and were more than willing contributors to his cause. Striking a close relationship had been one of the best decisions Ell'Hakan had made.

With the Prima Guardian slain, he proceeded into the Prima Vessel and headed straight for what he recognized as the control room. A few of his most loyal aides went along with him, studying the Prima Vessel.

Laying his hand on the dashboard, the map of the galaxy appeared. His eyes opened wide, when he saw it display not just the planets part of the alliance, but all of them. Knowing the exact location of a planet held a lot of value... far more than most recognized. Having everyone know where his own homeworld wasn't particularly pleasant either.

Manipulating the map a bit, he finally had the rankings appear.

His face fell as he stared at the list. The Chosen of the Malefic One being in the first spot on the list to become an Administrator of the Seat of the Exalted Prima was not something he liked to see, but it also wasn't unexpected. It could be worked with, at the very least.

However... the third individual... someone simply named "I," a single letter...

Ell'Hakan truly had no idea how that had happened or who it could be. He had no intelligence from his god or any of the other gods who worked with Yip of Yore either.

Sighing, Ell'Hakan wasn't a fan of this development.

The situation and event overall were already complicated enough as is, and he didn't need some other unknown factor to mess things up further.

**You have claimed a Planetary Pylon.**

**By controlling the Pylon, you have claimed ownership over the planet known as Earth. Your aura seeps into the planet itself, marking it as your own. While on your own planet, all energy regeneration is increased. Protect the planet, expand your empire, and walk the Path of Kings. Note that contrary to Pylon's of Civilization, a Planetary Pylon cannot be taken from you unless you are slain.**

**Having claimed the Planetary Pylon, so have you claimed every Pylon of Civilization on the planet. All City Lords will remain unaffected unless actions are taken to make it otherwise.**

**Bonuses to all citizens on your planet:**

**Increases all experience earned while within the domain by a minor amount for all non-combat-related activities.**

Jake stood in front of a large all-black core that looked like it was made out of pure carbon. He had his hand on it, and despite the blistering heat of the Core Room, Jake didn't feel a thing as an aura expanded from the Planetary Pylon.

The genuine version of this novel can be found on another site. Support the author by reading it there.

He had finally fully laid claim to Earth, and he felt his energy spread out through the mantle of the planet. Every single part of it was marked as his territory, and Jake faintly felt the slightly increased energy regeneration. It was incredibly minor and didn't really matter in the grand scheme of things – neither did the extra experience points for doing non-combat stuff – but it was all just good bonuses to get.

These were also the exact same bonuses the Pylon of Civilization gave. In fact, one could view this as Jake having just claimed a Pylon of Civilization that covered the entire planet. It was all his now... or, more accurately, it was all Miranda's to deal with now.

Having claimed the Pylon, Jake also got a small bonus of his own, though it wasn't really anything he cared much about.

**Congratulations! For being one of the first people to claim a Planetary Pylon in your universe, your nobility title has been upgraded!**

**Titled Upgraded: [Nobility: Marquess] --> [Nobility: Duke]**

**[Nobility: Duke] – A noble who has been voted World Leader and finally fully claimed his planet as one of the first in his universe. Allows you to control several Planetary Pylons. Grants access to certain events and opportunities exclusive to nobles. Opens many new paths to power**

Now, calling himself a Duke was maybe a bit cool at times, but the title was really wasted on Jake. He was perhaps one of the people in the multiverse who made the least use of his nobility title, as he'd actively avoided ever picking any skills or classes reliant on or using his nobility status. But it wasn't like having a high nobility title had any downsides, so Jake didn't really care.

Scanning the core room that now had a big metal egg sitting in it right beneath the core, Jake couldn't help but admire the size of the place. It was a huge circular cavern surrounded by magma and rocks. A few streams of lava floated as if there was no gravity from the bottom to the top or vice-versa in several areas, and Jake reckoned that the area alone would kill most early-tier C-grades. From ceiling to floor, there had to be nearly a hundred kilometers, and the mana density in the room was quite frankly insane.

Staring at the Planetary Pylon itself, Jake also had to admit that it was quite something... mainly in the sense that it felt so damn dense not even a B-grade could break it easily. The energy it contained was also through the roof. As a Planetary Core, it also had the ability to create new mana, not unlike that of a soul. It was what regulated and created most of the environmental mana on the planet, and in some ways, it was in a feedback loop with the planet itself.

It would absorb the Records of those on the planet, making itself grow. At the same time, it would spread those Records back into the planet, allowing those on it to grow. This effect was very minor, though, and it was generally recognized that there was a slight decay over time. Especially when people left the planet after having absorbed a lot of the Records provided to them.

When it came to pure energy, the Planetary Core was nearly inexhaustible. This was also the reason why Jake was certain Miranda was gonna use it to strengthen Earth's defenses. Pretty much all barriers that protected planets relied on the Planetary Core to power themselves, as there rarely were any better power sources. While using a Planetary Core to set up a barrier was quite difficult, it was far different if one had a Planetary Pylon.

Quick thing to add here... all Planetary Pylons were Planetary Cores, but not all Planetary Cores were Pylons. This was something Jake had asked Villy about a while back, as Jake wondered why people spoke about some planets with cores and some with Planetary Pylons. It turns out that Planetary Pylons are just transformed Planetary Cores.

In a new universe, the system was behind this transformation, but in the rest of the multiverse, one would never find something like Pylons of Civilization or Planetary Pylons in the wild. They were all created using certain skills and crafting methods. It also took heavy investment to turn a Core into a Pylon, so most factions only bothered with the "important" planets.

So, yeah, having a Planetary Pylon was just another gift to the newly initiated universe.

*"I see you've finally claimed the Pylon,"* Miranda sent to Jake a few seconds later after he'd taken the Pylon.

*"Sure have. I assume you can see it on your end? Is there a lot to deal with?"* Jake asked.

*"A lot is an understatement. I have just been granted dominion over every single Pylon on the planet, all the statistics that come with that, as well as far more control than I could imagine... I believe I will find myself quite busy in the near future. I hope you didn't count on me going hunting on other planets for this Prima Guardian Alliance,"* Miranda quickly explained.

*"Nah, I think you're good,"* Jake answered, shaking his head despite knowing no one was around to see it. *"By the way, do you need me to give you more permissions or something?"*

*"No, it doesn't look like it,"* Miranda answered. *"Also... I got my nobility title upgraded. You're now speaking with a Marquis."*

*"I see, I see... must be an honor for a lowly Marquis to be allowed to speak with an honorable Duke,"* Jake joked.

*"Damn, that title is wasted on you... and here I thought I had finally caught up when it came to my nobility title. Gained a few upgrades here and there, such as when we made the World Council. Oh well, I'm at least confident in making it to Queen first, as I'm not even sure where you would get more free upgrades from,"* Miranda said, only sounding a little bit frustrated.

*"You never know. Maybe I end up taking control of the entire galaxy by accident, turning myself into an emperor,"* Jake joked.

*"Wouldn't even be surprised at this point. Anyway, you should look into coming topside once more. The Prima cleanup is finished, and we're waiting for you and the others to discuss our next plan of action."*

*"Alright, see you soon. Now I just gotta figure out a way to do so fast..."* Jake muttered as he turned around and flew back toward the Prima Vessel. With the planet claimed, that was one other matter handled. Miranda had also mentioned that the Prima cleanup was just about done... and releasing a Pulse, he saw the inside of the Prima Vessel, including a few people standing in front of the barrier that Jake theorized would contain loot.

*Guess it's finally time to see if this damn event has some proper loot to offer.*

The cracked, gray ground stretched out as far as the eye could see. The land was entirely dead, with not a single plant growing anywhere... yet this place was far from empty.

Tens of millions of figures were lying on the ground, their bodies perfectly preserved. Below them all, odd scripture marred the ground, signifying something grand had happened here. Something that had taken the life of every being on the entire planet, as there was no sign of life to be found on the entire celestial body.



The only movements to be seen were the ground dust that floated everywhere, originating not from the corpses of those who had once called the planet home but that which had arrived not long ago.

A large metal egg-like object sat not far away. Its surface was no longer blank and shiny but had an odd, almost rusted color in many places. The creatures that had emerged from this thing were now naught but the dust that made up the atmosphere of this dead world.

Yet, just then, there was movement.

A wizened hand raised itself from the ground as a creature crawled out. Dragging along with it, the giant corpse of what had once been a Prima Guardian began to turn to dust as it held it, a golden key-like symbol glowing on the creature's hand.

Within seconds, the entire corpse of the Prima Guardian had become dust, and the world turned fully monochrome again.

**Congratulations on becoming a potential Administrator Candidate for the Seat of the Exalted Prima.**

**You do not currently possess a name to display. Please choose your display name (this will also appear on your official status) or choose to remain anonymous.**

This notification appeared in front of the creature. Words it couldn't read but faintly understood.

"I... am... I..." a hoarse voice came out, as the gray dust shuddered before all fell silent once more, and the creature turned its attention toward the giant metal vessel.

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Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

## **Chapter 944: Prima Guardian Loot & Teleporter**

Back in the Prima Vessel, Jake headed straight for where most of the strike team had already gathered. The barrier that had been sealed not only due to the lack of a key but also surviving Primas now only had the key symbol left, signifying every single Prima was indeed dead.

“Good for you to rejoin us,” Caleb said with a smile as he poked the barrier. “Need the Keymaster.”

“Eh, does anyone really care about opening it?” Jake asked casually. “It’s just the loot room. Who has time for the loot room?”

“Just open the damn thing already,” Carmen sighed. “Let’s not act like we’re expecting anything good. The real reward is supposed to come after the system event is fully concluded.”

“Who knows, maybe we get a pleasant surprise,” Jake said as he didn’t delay but walked over and placed a hand on the barrier. The moment he did, it naturally faded away, revealing what looked like a large storeroom. Large and pretty much completely empty.

“Unsurprisingly disappointing,” the Sword Saint said, shaking his head.

“It’s not completely empty,” Jake said as he walked into the room. The walls were lined with shelves that were all empty except for one spot where a shoebox-sized container sat. Jake had naturally seen this box from far away, especially because of what was inside:

More boxes. Lockboxes, to be more accurate. Each of them was a black void inside, meaning no items had spawned yet, which effectively made it into a shoebox-sized loot box for their group.

Opening the box in front of all the others, the conclusion of what the reward would be was pretty obvious.

“Rings for everyone, huh?” Carmen commented.

“Three of the boxes are of slightly different size,” Caleb pointed out.

*“And one of the ring-sized ones looks different from the rest, and based on the key-symbol... I believe that is the one given to the new owner of the planet,”* the Fallen King said, also looking down into the box.

“Well, it only seems fair I get my own special boy reward,” Jake grinned, teasing the others a bit that he would get his own unique reward.

Getting to their loot opening, Jake decided to be nice and let the others go first. Counting the boxes, it nearly lined up perfectly with the people who took part in the strike team. There were even boxes for Maria and Casper, who had to abandon the fight. Jake said it nearly lined up perfectly, because there was one too many, but Eron had a good idea who that belonged to.

“The karmic mage did contribute to the fight, if only by a little,” Eron said. “Perhaps just enough to qualify based on the system’s assessment.”

“I guess,” Jake muttered, not really sure who else it could be.

Without further delay, they opened the first of the “regular” ring boxes, Jake wasn’t sure what he should have expected, but based on the reactions of everyone, the reward definitely exceeded expectations. Even if the item looked a little bit confusing.

**[Band of the Exalted Prima Guardian Slayer (Legendary)] – A ring worn by one who has managed to slay not just a Prima Guardian but an Exalted Prima Guardian. The Records of the Exalted Prima Guardian seeps through the ring, granting it powers. This allows you to mimic a part of the Exalted Prima Guardian’s powers, giving you adaptable stats. These stats will apply dependent on your situation and your actions. These stats can exceed the stat cap provided by equipment by up to 5% or 2500 stats, whichever is lowest. Enchantments: +10000 Adaptive Stats. Adaptive Stat Amplification. This ring may be upgraded further at the end of the Prima Guardian event.**

**Requirements: Slayer of the Exalted Prima Guardian**

Jake had never even seen an item like this before. It reminded him a bit of his Altmar Signet, except just way fucking better in every way. From how Jake understood it – and with confirmation from the others soon after – the ring functioned just like regular equipment when it came to giving stats, except the 10000 stats the ring provided didn’t allocate themselves before it was needed.

So, as an example, when Caleb swung his staff while wearing the ring, his Agility, Strength, and Intelligence all increased by quite an amount. The Judge from the Court of Shadows wasn’t fully capped out in stats he could get from equipment, so the adaptive stats capped him out on both Strength and Agility and even gave a bit extra.

The Sword Saint also tried the ring, and Jake was very interested to see how it would work for him. One had to remember that the Sword Saint was always capped out on stats he could receive from equipment while wielding a sword due to one of his skills. Yet when he used the ring, he still benefitted. His Strength, Agility, Perception, Endurance, and Vitality all increased as he swung his sword, all up to the “cap” of the extra 5% above the stat cap he could get.

This was just a few thousand extra stats... and that was for someone who was already capped out on what he could receive from equipment.

Arnold also quickly clarified the ring even worked while crafting, giving stats where relevant. Carmen even decided to go as far as to punch Eron to confirm the ring would grant defensive stats. Something it indeed did in reaction to the attack.

“Isn’t this ring completely overpowered?” Jake muttered in disbelief.

“I’m not sure I would classify it as such... but it certainly is one of the best rings I have seen,” the Sword Saint said. “It’s also not something I think anyone can really craft that easily. The touch of the system is all over it.”

“I think it’s pretty fucking overpowered,” Carmen chimed up in agreement with Jake’s assessment. “Not to mention that last part... it can be upgraded to be even more overpowered at the end of this event.”

“Glad we’re all in agreement regarding its overpoweredness,” Jake said with a smile. He also looked forward more than ever to seeing his own special ring... perhaps it was even better than this. For now, he had to show patience, though.

The three rings belonging to William, Maria, and Casper were all taken by the Sword Saint, who promised to hand them out later. Jake gladly had the old man do it as he really didn’t want to go and give William a cool legendary ring himself.

As for Sylphie, the Fallen King, and Vesperia, they naturally couldn’t get rings on account of them being monsters and unable to use equipment. However, the system hadn’t forgotten them but provided them with three small boxes of their own. Opening them, each contained a small multi-colored bead within, and using Identify, Jake reckoned they were pretty damn valuable.

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**[Bead of the Exalted Prima Guardian (Legendary)] – A bead containing some of the power and Records of the Exalted Prima Guardian. This energy is primed to be easily absorbable by any monster and will adapt to suit the one who consumes it perfectly. This item may be upgraded further at the end of the Prima Guardian event.**

**Requirements: Slayer of the Exalted Prima Guardian**

Like with the rings, these beads could also be upgraded at the end of the system event. A bit cruel to force Sylphie to wait with a tasty snack right in front of her, but Jake was sure she could handle it.

He had been a bit worried it wouldn’t really be of any help to Vesperia considering the flood of resources she already got from the Endless Empire, but she seemed incredibly intrigued by the item, and when Jake mentally poked her, he got an expectedly scary answer as to what she planned.

*“I believe I could use this item as a catalyst when creating a Hive Queen... though I am unsure if I can create one suitable for reproduction. I may be forced to create a Warrior*

*Queen instead, but it's too early to tell. Only at the end of the event shall the final form of the item be revealed... and if worst comes to worst, it does look quite appetizing."*

So, yeah, Vesperia could potentially create some Hive Queen with Records of the Exalted Prima Guardian. Definitely scary True Royal stuff.

Everyone seemed happy with their loot so far, which left only one person to open his box. With all eyes on him and a smile on his lips, Jake opened the special final ring box. When he did so, a beautiful ring was revealed, looking very similar to the ones granted to the others. However, it somehow looked even more expensive, with a key-like symbol on the face.

With a big smile, Jake used Identify on the ring and-

**[Seal of the Exalted Prima (Unique)] – Proof that you are an Administrator Candidate for the Seat of the Exalted Prima. Grants certain privileges during the Prima Guardian event. This item's true power is currently sealed and will only be unlocked after the final Prima Guardian has been slain, and will be upgraded accordingly to your performance during the event.**

**Requirements: Jake Thayne**

"... what the fuck is this?" Jake asked out loud as he stared at the ring.

The others had also used Identify, and Carmen couldn't help but chuckle. "Hey, maybe it's just a grower, not a shower. Does say it can also be upgraded." This content belongs to **novel·fire·net**

"Very funny," Jake muttered as he threw the Sword Saint a look. "Say, wasn't there an extra ring available?"

"The one we agreed to give to the metal mage?" the old man asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Wow, Jake is trying to steal loot from others," Carmen said, shaking her head. "You already received a ring, haven't you?"

"May as well not have," Jake muttered.

*"Perhaps it shall turn great once upgraded post-event,"* the Fallen King commented.

"Maybe, but then it would feel like I didn't get any reward until then. Can you imagine how that would-"

The Fallen King flashed the bead, Jake shutting up.

“Fine... but at least you have the option of eating it here and now, even if that would be dumb...” Jake relented as he picked up the ring and put it away.

With all the shitty loot distributed – save for what had to be given to those who weren’t there – the hunting gang went toward the final unexplored room of the Prima Vessel. While one had housed the control room and one the loot and storeroom, the final one was perhaps the most interesting.

Unlocking the barrier and heading inside, Jake and company found themselves in a large room with a teleportation circle covering most of the floor on a raised platform in the middle. Several instruments lined the walls, with the far end having a big screen that mirrored the one in the control room. Heading inside to explore the room further, Arnold went straight to the control panel and quickly understood what it was for.

“This teleportation circle is linked to every single Prima Vessel but only established pathways to those who are part of the alliance,” the scientist shared.

“Does that mean we will be teleported directly into other Prima Vessels if we use it?” Jake questioned.

“No, they appear to link up with other teleportation circles on each planet,” Arnold shook his head.

“When entering the Prima Guardian Alliance, the system would grant the planets a blueprint to a special teleportation circle linking them to other planets part of the alliance,” Caleb shared, naturally having some insight as a Judge of the Court of Shadows. “That’s how most did all their preparations before this event and met up beforehand.”

“Can anyone teleport to this circle here on Earth now that we entered the alliance?” Vesperia questioned with some concern.

“Yes, but only those who have used it to travel in the past,” Arnold said as he kept scanning the circle and the documentation provided by the system. “That is to say, if you use this to teleport to another planet, you can use it to teleport back again. Even if you teleport to other planets from the original one, as long as you use this teleportation circle to leave Earth in the first place, you can always return again. I will warn you that I can find nothing about bringing others back with you, though. So that may be a potential danger.”

“Do the planets part of the alliance have no say if we teleport there?” Jake asked, frowning a bit.

“They do,” Arnold said. “They can block anyone from teleporting to them or only give certain planets permission. I also see some have messages attached to who they wish

to come help. Not all of them are part of Ell'Hakan's group, but the vast majority most certainly are."

"I see," Jake nodded. Before they decided to teleport anywhere, they still had to get topside and meet Miranda to plan out what they planned to do. He just hoped he could teleport the entire Prima Vessel back up to the surface again because trying to dig and fly the entire way seemed like a pain.

"I'll go check if we can teleport back up again so we can have a meeting about our plans," Jake said as he turned to go toward the control room. However, a question from the Fallen King stopped him in his tracks.

*"Can we use this circle to also teleport to the Prima Vessels on the planets not part of the alliance?"* the Unique Lifeform questioned.

"Or, at the very least, use the connection this Vessel had with theirs to create our own method of transportation. Because if not, won't we have to wait till every single planet has dealt with its own Prima Guardian before the event concludes? That could turn into quite the wait," Caleb quickly recognized as he followed up.

That... was something Jake hadn't really considered. He remembered that unless triggered on purpose, the Prima Guardian would only be released from the Prima Vessel in a thousand days or so under natural circumstances. Based on their estimates, this was how most planets would handle their Prima Guardians.

They would spend the next nearly three years hunting down regular Primas all over their planets to weaken the Prima Guardian. Then, once free, they would face the Guardian if they felt ready. Considering they then had five years to beat it... that meant Jake could potentially be stuck with his shitty un-upgraded ring for several years.

Jake was already cursing this system event as Arnold looked deep in thought before he spoke, sparking hope in Jake's eyes.

"It shouldn't be impossible. Perhaps we cannot use this teleporter, but it should be possible to use the map to roughly estimate the spatial coordinates of all the other marked planets in relation to ours. Using this, we can teleport, at the very least, to the vicinity of the planets with Prima Vessels on them," the void scientist said. "However, we will need skilled space mages, and it will take a while to ensure we will not teleport people into the middle of nowhere. Focusing on the other planets that are part of the alliance should be our primary objective for now."

Just hearing it was a possibility, Jake was in a lot better mood as he headed back to the main control room. He knew he still had a lot more features of the Prima Vessel to explore, and instinctively, he also recognized that the entire thing pretty much belonged to him now. He was the only one who could control it, and if he wanted to, he could even reestablish the different barriers.



In the core room, Jake also luckily discovered that the teleportation feature worked again. With relief, he quickly activated it, and in a flash, they teleported from right next to the Planetary Core all the way back to the desert.

*“Hey, Miranda, I think we may as well hold our meeting within the Prima Vessel. Just enter through the door toward the top of the egg,”* Jake sent to Miranda after a bit, as he was joined by the Sword Saint and Fallen King in the control room.

“Are you prepared for what’s to come?” the old man asked. “You will soon be face to face with quite a few people who may or may not be big fans of you.”

*“And servants of the Chosen of Yip. Individuals with warped emotions and unnatural loyalty toward a sworn enemy,”* the Fallen King added.

“Ready as can be,” Jake shrugged. “I’m more worried about who we should even send off-planet to go help the alliance... but we’ll talk about that when the others get here.”

As he said this, he also got a response from Miranda. *“I’m gathering those relevant. Some may join only as projections. See you in a few.”*

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## Chapter 945: A Galaxy To Explore

It hadn’t even been a full day since the Prima Guardian arrived, but they were all gathered once more to discuss the future of the Prima Guardian event. The venue had changed, though, and it now took place within the Prima Vessel, more accurately, the control room with the large map also there, serving as a nice reference.

Arthur and several others joined the meeting as projections as they were far away from the frontline. However, the majority were present in person, as they had also taken part in the battle.

The meeting started out with Miranda congratulating everyone, but also taking a moment to go over the losses. Even if the event had gone exceptionally well so far, they had still lost a lot of people. Jake knew that Miranda and the rest of the World Council had set up different programs to help the families of the killed, but it naturally couldn’t replace those who had died. They had all known some casualties were inevitable, and the losses had been less than estimated, but the many deaths still put a dampener on the celebrations.

But they had to move forward. The event was far from over.

Maria and Casper had also both returned for this meeting, both looking a bit worse for wear and clearly still recovering. Maria definitely looked the worst of the two of them, her escape skill incredibly potent but also with quite the backlash afterward. Still, having them there was good for morale and just to see them again.

It was one thing they all took solace in: no one from the strike team had died. That meant the strongest people on Earth were all alive and kicking, the planet as a whole not really having lost much fighting power should things go south during this Prima Alliance event. There was still a sneaking fear some had that this event would devolve into a big conflict with many other planets, and honestly, Jake couldn't rule that out entirely. Especially not considering some of the plans he had. The latest\_episodes are on the **novel\*fire\*net**

On a side note, the ring situation was also sorted out with everyone gathered.

Jake had also low-key hoped that William couldn't wear the ring so Jake could get it. It had totally been a possibility that due to William only really fighting the Prima Guardian indirectly using his karmic magic, he wouldn't meet the requirements to wear the ring. Also, was it really out of the question that the system had actually wanted to give Jake two rings due to how good he was?

Well... two things. Firstly, William did qualify to wear the ring. So that sucked. Secondly, Jake did convince the group to at least let him see if he could use one of the rings, but he hit a snag of compatibility. If he had the shitty ring that gave no stats bound to himself, Jake couldn't bind one of the awesome many-stat-giving rings. Too similar items, especially jewelry, tended to not be useable together, as an example, Jake couldn't wear two Altmar Signets if the two rings effectively did the exact same thing. Actually, the signet was a bad example, as pure stat sticks tended to be compatible... anyway.

This did suck, but it also indicated that once unsealed and upgraded, Jake's special ring would be similar to the cool rings everyone else got. Sadly, Jake had to wait, and not keeping the new ring bound to him seemed like a dumb idea due to it talking about giving Jake certain privileges during the event. Exactly what these privileges were, Jake naturally still had no idea, but he didn't want to risk it being something he would miss out on.

Anyhow, with the meeting beginning in earnest after going over how the Primas and Prima Guardian had been dealt with and the losses they had taken, it quickly became clear many people and factions already had their own agendas to deal with and places to be.

As was already touched upon, Caleb had to go help the Court of Shadows, and Carmen had to go assist Valhal. Vesperia had also voiced her intent to go assist a few planets

where it looked like the humanoid side was gonna lose and the Endless Empire would take over.

Now, Jake did recognize that this was perhaps a bit fucked up. He was sure that in the eyes of many, the army of underground insects would be considered the bad guys, while the weak humanoid faction getting suppressed would be the underdog good guys.

However, wasn't it also a bit messed up to just wipe out all the ectognamorphs just to make room for the humanoids? Also, this was a quest to kill the Prima Guardians. If things were allowed to run their natural course, these planets would be wiped out after the Guardian was released, if not before, with all the Primas roaming about.

Based on what Vesperia said, these were planets where the humanoids were reduced to nearly nothing, more often than not from internal strife or the majority having abandoned the planet already. Not even Ell'hakan cared about these planets, as they were now too weak to contribute anything.

What would likely happen if Vesperia or someone else didn't stop by was that the ectognamorphs would just wait for the Prima Guardian to naturally die after it claimed the Planetary Core and then emerge to claim the entire planet as their own. They naturally couldn't fight the Prima Guardian themselves as they had most certainly consumed many system-given unique items. As for if they decided to join the Prima Guardian... well, it would only speed up the annihilation of the humanoids.

Thinking about it, it was a better situation for the humanoids if Vesperia went and killed the Prima Guardian. If she took over, the humanoids at least had a chance of surviving and maybe even leaving the planet to go elsewhere. While Vesperia did view humanoids as potential resources – to be read as food – she didn't see their value as that big, and was okay with just letting them go as long as they didn't make any problems.

Vesperia was also only really focused on eight planets total in their galaxy, only three of which had joined the Prima Guardian Alliance. From how Jake understood it, this wasn't because the people on the remaining five had confidence in beating back the Primas themselves, but because their World Leader had either been incredibly incompetent, the planet was fucked over after the World Leader was elected, or the leader literally wanted them to die and had abandoned the planet long ago after agreeing to fight the Prima Guardian.

So, it definitely sounded like Vesperia was going to be busy, and she was also very interested in the project of making their own teleporter to get to planets that hadn't joined the alliance. While the Endless Empire winning on most of these planets was pretty much a given, Vesperia still wanted to speed up matters and officially link up with the different Hives before it was time for her to head back to the heartlands of the Endless Empire.

When it came to the Risen, the situation was a bit more complicated. Primarily because they were also on Earth to establish a permanent presence once more. For that, there were quite a few details to discuss, such as what area the Risen would be given. Sure, they could just give them back their old territory, but seeing as they had now claimed the entire planet, there had to be somewhere better for them to settle down while ensuring they wouldn't be bothered. Jake wasn't that invested in where they would live as everyone would just get there through teleportation anyway, but he knew many cared.

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No one had any illusions that the Risen would be welcomed by everyone with open arms. They were still a very controversial faction, and despite Arthur trying quite a lot to improve their reputation, people just had a strong innate dislike of the undead. Perhaps it was entirely natural for life-based entities to dislike those rooted in death, but Jake still wanted to allow the Risen to live on his planet, even if a lot disagreed. It did sound like they were gonna be thrown onto their own island, though, but that didn't seem to bother Casper or Priscilla particularly much.

Casper also mentioned that even if their primary objective was to establish a small base on Earth, they also wanted to provide assistance to other Risen in the galaxy. Not that there were a lot. In fact, there was only one planet ruled by Risen in the entire Milky Way. The rest had either been wiped out by the other natives, or there hadn't been any in the first place.

There even being one was honestly a surprise. Most Risen in all universes tended to be gathered in the same areas. Even in the ninety-third universe, entire galaxies existed filled with undead and Risen. Ones where the living were heavily outnumbered, and death ruled supreme. Entire areas of a universe could be dominated by death and quite unwelcoming of the living.

Jacob, who had been uncharacteristically silent all while wandering the Prima Vessel – perhaps because he hadn't really been part of the Guardian fight – also explained that all those from the Holy Church were expected to go assist the rest of their faction. In fact, even coming to Earth had been considered a special privilege, and Jacob had only sold them going by promising to try and establish an outpost on the planet. Something he knew wasn't going to happen, but the higher-ups had humored him nevertheless.

His talking about helping the Holy Church did bring up one pretty big concern, though.

“Isn't the Holy Church actively working with Eil'Hakan?” Jake questioned after the Augur began to explain their plans. “Won't that mean you going to help the Holy Church from here means that you're going directly to his side?”

“That... I cannot rule out,” Jacob said with a sigh. “The higher-ups are quite insistent on providing him with all the aid we can.”

“Why the hell are they even sucking up to him so hard?” Jake said, exasperated. “Do they really want his creepy-ass Bloodline that badly?”

“Yes,” Jacob just said in a matter-of-fact tone. “Yes, they do want his Bloodline that badly. It holds extreme value to them. I have already tried to voice my dissent toward working with the Chosen of Yip of Yore, but it was quickly made apparent I had no say in the matter. This is from very high up, and even if they value me as an Augur, the potential value Ell'Hakan can provide exceeds my existence manifold.”

Jake opened his mouth for a moment before closing it again, not saying what he was about to say. He wanted to trust Jacob. He really did. But Jake knew he couldn't. While the Augur could keep some secrets, if the information was too important for the Holy Church to know, he would share it. No, some things were best kept in his heart or only spoken between himself and those he knew he could fully trust.

There was no reason to tell Jacob that there was no fucking way he was going to let Ell'Hakan live long enough to make a bunch of brain-washing babies for the Holy Church. Nor, that should he make some... Jake was going to make sure they were unmade. Sure, one could argue about the immorality of sins of the father and whatnot, but Jake, quite frankly, didn't give a shit about any of these things. Ell'Hakan and his entire lineage would be wiped out. Of that there was no question.

For now, it was best to not say any of these things, though. In fact, it was better to communicate the opposite outwardly to make Ell'Hakan and the Church believe there was a world where Jake wasn't going to hunt down the other Chosen to the ends of existence. Thus, Jake just sighed as if relenting. “I am not a fan of you or the Holy Church working with him, but I'm not your boss. Just watch out and keep a cool head, alright?”

“I appreciate the understanding,” Jacob nodded. All around the room, those who knew Jake's feelings kept a pretty straight face despite knowing Jake was far more than “not just a fan.”

The meeting proceeded, and people began to split up into groups based on where they needed to go or wanted to do. Jake had expected Eron to have some plans, but there was apparently not anywhere he had to be. In fact, he didn't seem interested in going anywhere whatsoever.

Maria ended up talking to Caleb and would head off with him to help the Court of Shadows. Being a mercenary through and through, she would happily go assist wherever she was paid to be.

Sylphie and the Fallen King surprised Jake a bit by joining up with Vesperia. He was pretty happy to see the three of them go together, though, as he doubted there were many forces in the multiverse who could handle all three.

Arnold would remain on Earth to work on the teleportation circle with assistance from Miranda and others. William even volunteered to stay behind and help with this teleporter, too, when Arnold pointed out that a karma mage could prove useful when more accurately pinpointing the location of each planet. Arnold sounded confident, so Jake had hope that soon they would have access to far more Prima Guardians than just those in the alliance... along with the planets that were part of the alliance but had blocked off teleportation access.

The primary reason for this discussion about where people would go was to ensure they didn't get in the way of one another while traveling the galaxy. Most of the factions on Earth already had somewhere they needed to go, which really only left two people without any particular plans: Jake and the Sword Saint.

Neither of them belonged to any faction who had to go help elsewhere in the galaxy, nor with a need to assist any of the others. Sure, Jake could have stuck to Vesperia and the others... but he wanted to go have some alone time.

He'd just gotten Lone Hunter, after all. It was only proper to put it to a good test. The Sword Saint also sounded like he wanted to head off alone for a bit to practice his swordsmanship. Totally understandable.

With most things planned out, Miranda addressed the group of those who would leave with a final small speech.

"Before everyone heads off to make the galaxy a safer place, I think we should all agree on a few things," Miranda said, addressing the room. "This is something I know quite a few have already discussed before the event began, but we believe that keeping the fact we all come from Earth a secret would be counterproductive. Flaunt your origins. Let everyone know you come from Earth and spread the word of our presence. However, do try to avoid ascribing any specific values to the planet. Just leave it there as a fact Earth is where you come from."

Jake did remember Miranda talking about this prior, and he kept quiet as she continued.

"There have been certain individuals who have sought to villainize Earth and those from here. Trying to actively argue against this may only reinforce this belief, while should we all just act normal and be helpful, we will naturally spawn doubt about the lies of Earth. Of course, should people cause problems, feel free to clap back, but don't make it about protecting Earth's honor, only your own. We are a planet of individuals, not one massive, cohesive faction, even if we may sometimes be united toward the same goal."



Everyone slowly nodded along, as Jake hadn't really ever considered standing up for "Earth's honor" or whatever.

"Well then," Miranda smiled. "I guess I can only wish you all a happy hunt. Let's see if we can make the Milky Way galaxy not just have the best planet in the universe but also the fastest time in clearing this event."

With that, they all headed off toward the large teleporter, and Jake felt excited to go on a bit of solo hunting. He was also excited to see what other kinds of worlds the Milky Way had to show for itself as he had an entire galaxy to explore. Oh yeah, and potentially saving a few civilizations along the way was also pretty cool.

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## **Chapter 946: The Commander, the Mage, & the Savior**

"The barrier won't hold for that long," the exasperated elven mage said to the heavily armored warrior – a rare Path for elves, but some had to take the frontline in these wars. The warrior was lacking an arm, and a healer was desperately trying to heal him enough for the man to be able to engage in combat again. For now, he would be stuck in this tent for a little while, though.

"It will have to," the armored warrior said. "A small temporary reinforcement force should arrive by the end of tomorrow. The attacks on the eastern borders were more extensive than the general first predicted."

"Even if we manage to hold on till tomorrow, how many are even coming? A few hundred fighters? Commander, we need to seriously consider evacuation," the mage said in a stern voice.

"Evacuation would mean the fall of the entire northern border, and what about the civilians?" the commander shot back. "It's not an option. Our potion supply should be enough to tide us over until the main force can arrive, it-"

"It won't!" the mage slammed his hand on the table. "Eleven Primas are baring down on us, more than ten thousand beasts at their side! The barrier will not hold for more than half a day if this keeps up."

"The strain will be lessened once I move out again," the commander tried to argue.



“So you can extend the barrier’s lifetime by half an hour if you get lucky... it’s still not enough. We underestimated the Primas and how many would attack, pure and simple. Take the loss, and let’s get out of here while we still can. If we bunker down in the capital,” the mage argued.

“Have faith. We should be able to survive and hold on until the Prima Guardian Alliance comes and helps us,” the commander tried.

The mage just looked at the commander for a moment before he sighed and shook his head. “We both know they aren’t coming.”

“Stop... just stop,” the commander said, as the healer at his side looked confused at the mage’s words.

“How long are you going to keep pretending?” the mage scoffed. “Her majesty, in all her wisdom, rejected the leader of the alliance quite openly. Talked about mental manipulation or some shit. We are last on the list of planets that’ll get a hand. The most they’ll give us is a memorial.”

The commander clenched his fist as the silence hung in the air. He knew the mage was speaking the truth. Their planet had never been particularly powerful, and things had only gotten worse after two large factions emerged post-Tutorials. A war broke out soon after, leaving most of those with talent either dead or displaced. Many of the talented ones had even left the universe for good to join divine factions. Nevermore had been the killing blow, as most of those who went just never came back home.

When the Prima Guardian Alliance was proposed, they saw hope... but the queen was wary. She spoke of manipulation from the leader of the alliance and refused to work closely with the largest coalition. In the eyes of the mage, she was a moron, and usually, the commander would punish the man for treason... but what even was the point?

“No matter what you say, we will fight. We must fight, there is no other choice,” the commander said with a resolute voice. “However, I will allow you to begin initial preparations for retreat. Attempt to at least get most of the mages who run out of energy back to the capital... they will need them there.”

“Thank you for seeing reason,” the mage said, relieved. “We have enough materials to teleport at least a few hundred back to safety. Not like we’re gonna use the crystals to receive any reinforcements.”

“I already told you to begin preparations; don’t waste your time being a-“

“Commander!” a young-looking elven woman wearing a cloak said as she rushed into the tent. “A report has arrived that help is coming from the Prima Guardian Alliance!”

The commander's eyes opened wide. "Truly?"

Equally surprised, the mage also couldn't help but quickly ask for details. "How many? Where are they from, and what made them change their mind?"

"They are from a planet that hasn't taken part in any of the prior Alliance meetings," the scout said. "As for the numbers, I'm only being told now that... that..."

"What's happening?" the commander asked in a stern tone.

"One... I... they say they're sending one person..." the scout stammered out.

"You gotta be fucking kidding me!" the mage practically screamed before he began laughing. "What a joke..."

"Why would they even..." the commander muttered with a downcast expression.

It felt like a dumb prank had been played on them. To give them the hope of reinforcements only to take it away mere moments after. Even if someone at the level of the general arrived, what could they do? They faced nearly a dozen Primas on this battlefield. Even the general could at most handle three of them at once, and even that assumed they weren't the most powerful variants.

"I don't know... but he's arriving now," the scout said, looking as confused and deflated as the mage and commander.

"Great! Just great... let's go see our great savior, then," the mage said in a mocking tone as he walked out of the tent. The commander also stood up despite the healer's protests as he went toward the middle of the camp where the teleporter stood.

Looking over the cliffside to the battlefield, the commander frowned even more deeply. A constant battle was ongoing, with the only reprieve that the elven side had a large barrier to hide behind when things got too tough. However, with nearly a dozen Primas attacking the barrier and fewer and fewer fighters to keep them occupied, things were rapidly going downhill.

It was all just one cruel joke to send a single person to this lost battlefield.

Arriving at the teleporter, it soon spun to life. The runes began to glow as the commander saw far more of the mana gems break than he expected. The more powerful the person using the teleporter was, the more would break... but this was far more than he could have anticipated. The mage also seemed to notice this, as a figure soon appeared on the platform.

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The first thing that struck the commander was how small he looked. As elves, they tended to be naturally skinnier than humans... yet the human that had just appeared looked even thinner than them. What's more was the sparse gray hair on his head and his simple-looking robe. Having been part of one of the Prima Guardian Alliance meetings, the commander had seen many humans before but never one that looked this positively ancient. He looked almost halfway to being undead.

"You must be the commander," the newly arrived human said in a calm yet strong tone.

"Yes, I'm in charge of this battlefield," the commander said as he stood straight.

"I would ask you about the situation, but I've already gotten a good grasp myself," the human said, and only now did the commander notice the sword at his waist. That's when the swordsman asked something preposterous. "Could you have all your soldiers retreat behind the barrier? Oh, and make sure to keep it empowered; it may be struck during the battle."

"If they all retreat and those monsters are allowed to roam free, the barrier won't even last an hour," the mage spoke up in protest.

"That's fine; it won't need to," the swordsman said with a calm smile. "I don't intend on spending that long here. I have other places to be later today, so please do not delay me any further than absolutely necessary."

"Are you serious?" the barrier mage questioned loudly. "Other places to be? There are eleven Primas out there!"

"Yes, only eleven," the old swordsman kept his casual demeanor. "And they all appear quite a bit weaker than the ones on my planet."

"I will make the soldiers retreat," the commander said, not thinking about the matter any further. He had been on many battlefields, both now and during the civil war... and standing before this man, he felt like he stood before someone even the general would only salute in respect. A true man of the battlefield.

"You are listening to this madman?" the mage exclaimed.

The commander just ignored the mage as he quickly sent the order. He got many confused answers from the squad leaders, but they all did as they were told. As they all retreated, the Primas and thousands of monsters began moving to attack the barrier.

At the same time, the swordsman moved. He gave a thankful nod to the commander before he disappeared from where he stood, only to appear close to the barrier soon after. Already impressed by such speed... the commander wasn't ready for what came next.

Raindrops began to fall from a cloudless sky. Yet when the commander looked up, he now saw large rainclouds covering everything as far as the eye could see. The old swordsman walked through the barrier as if he was out on a stroll, and not just the commander but thousands of soldiers looked on, confused as the solitary man faced an army.

"He's going to die like a moron," the mage said with his arms crossed.

"Just shut up already," the commander said annoyedly.

Being outside the barrier, the swordsman naturally attracted some attention. Several large four-legged monsters with large maws and scaled bodies attacked him right away, these beasts serving as the vanguard due to their high durability.

All the commander saw was a flash before the swordsman now held his blade in his hand, and the four monsters that were upon him split in two. Another flash later, and crescent waves of water shot out, cutting through the battlefield and killing dozens on their path.

The mage had finally shut up as he just looked on while the swordsman went on a rampage amidst the falling rain. All of the monsters attacking the barrier soon began to gather around him as the eleven Primas, who usually took a more careful approach, also made their way over when it looked as if the old human couldn't keep up with the onslaught.

It was then the commander realized... the swordsman had been baiting them in. Once they were all soaked by the rain, the human suddenly stopped as he took a step back. He lowered his blade, and for a moment, time itself seemed to freeze as he spoke:

**"Rain of Time: Reversal."**

With that, the commander saw power beyond what a C-grade should be capable of displaying. With a single raised blade, the world was torn asunder. The follow-up attacks only further cemented this sentiment as the elven Primas were slaughtered one by one, two of them already falling in the opening move.

Less than ten minutes later, the rainfall stopped, and the old human walked back through the barrier, not even looking tired as he returned to the commander.

"That should be this area dealt with... I believe you should be able to hold on should any stragglers arrive," the swordsman said in his usual relaxed tone.

"Why... why are you even helping us?" the barrier mage said, his tone of arrogance entirely gone by now, having been replaced by pure confusion.

“Due to an agreement. Once I’ve dealt with the most troubled battlefields, your queen has promised me the Prima Guardian,” the man said. “That will make life for you easier, too. Once the Guardian dies, all the regular Primas are weakened.”

“How do you know that? Wait, have you already...?” the mage continued.

“Yes, but not alone. Not to fret, based on what I’ve seen here thus far, the Prima Guardian should be something I can handle on my own,” the swordsman said with confidence.

The mage looked like he wanted to comment, but he just shut up and kept silent, as the commander couldn’t help but ask:

“I cannot even begin to express but gratitude... if possible, may I know what our savior is called?”

The swordsman looked at the commander for a moment before answering. “I usually go by the name of Sword Saint.”

“Sword Saint... what does such a title mean?” the commander asked in awe.

The man who called himself the Sword Saint smiled as he looked upon the battlefield one final time. “It’s an oath and a Path. What I strive to be... and in my arrogance, a name I have dared to claim before I am worthy.”

They were all silent for a moment after he said this before the Sword Saint spoke again. “I should get moving. I have a few other places to stop by before it’s time to tackle the Guardian.”

“I wish you godspeed, Sword Saint,” the commander saluted the human who’d saved them. Who it appeared was on a quest to save their entire planet.

After he stepped onto the teleporter, the commander noticed the mage looked deep in thought, and the commander couldn’t help himself but ask:

“What? No objections when he said he planned on beating the Prima Guardian?”

The mage continued to look like he was thinking before he suddenly seemed to realize as he pulled out a list from his spatial storage. He quickly looked at it as his eyes opened wide. “I was right...”

“What?” the commander asked.

“The Nevermore Leaderboards,” the mage muttered.

Frowning, the commander wondered what the guy was talking about. As someone who had gone to Nevermore, he knew about these Leaderboards, but it hadn't been something he had really looked at or cared about. Why would he? He wasn't someone that would ever appear on it. That list was reserved for the absolute pinnacle of their entire universe. Complete monsters that couldn't be compared to people like... *wait...*

"You don't mean he-"

The mage turned the list around, with the name Sword Saint written right there on the top ten for the entire universe. That's when the commander realized something else as he recalled things he heard while at Nevermore...

This Sword Saint had been from a party with the one who took the top spot - from the same planet as many others who had placed toward the top. That meant... this was the galaxy that housed the Chosen of the Malefic Viper... how had he never realized?

He'd known about Ell'Hakan, but it had never been anything publicly advertised that the Chosen of Yip of Yore and the Chosen of the Malefic Viper hailed from even the same galaxy. Realizing this, the commander felt a shiver run down his spine... questioning if their small planet would truly be fine when caught in such a massive conflict. THIS

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Yet, at the same time, he couldn't help but question what kind of monsters could even compare to the swordsman they had just seen... because the commander just couldn't imagine how anyone could rival such an entity.

He also began to question what was going on elsewhere in the galaxy and just how much change those from the planet of the Sword Saint could enact upon the galaxy.

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## Chapter 947: How the Alliance Works & A Synergistic Society

The Prima Guardian Alliance was both a simple and a complex setup by the system. The purpose of it couldn't be any simpler: to allow different planets to team up and face Primas together. However, the way this was done had become relatively complex, especially when one considered the automatic enrollment of the planets who had already successfully dealt with their own Prima Guardian.

Initially, when one joined the alliance, the World Leader would be granted a blueprint to make a special teleportation circle alongside documentation of how the circle would work. These teleportation circles were linked to every other circle similar to themselves on other planets and would allow cheap travel across the Milky Way – though there was some cost that the planet receiving people would have to bear.

Partly due to this, the teleportation circles wouldn't automatically just accept anyone who wanted to teleport to a planet. By default, someone with authority granted by the World Leader would have to approve the teleportation before it would go through. The teleportation could also be programmed, though, and be set to automatically just accept anyone trying to use it. This could further be customized to only accept people from certain planets or even by excluding some planets.

No one in the entire galaxy had their circles set to fully open teleportation.

Through the interface provided by the system alongside the enrollment in the Prima Guardian Alliance, the World Leader or those granted authority could also write a brief description about their own planet and those they wanted assistance from. Some of the information in this section would be automatically generated by the system, such as the general ecology of the planet, as well as what affinities dominated and whatnot. These parts could not be hidden even if the person wanted to. Neither could they hide the population numbers of the planet... making it quite apparent which planets were more fucked than others.

Most planets had set all this up many years ago while still waiting for the Prima Guardian to arrive, with nearly all planets only having one of these cross-galaxy teleporters present. These were also primarily placed in capitals, and were then connected to the rest of the planet's teleportation network from there.

To clarify, Earth did not have any of these teleportation circles. Earth only had the teleporter found within the Prima Vessel, which was an entirely different kind compared to those established by the planets themselves. This teleporter didn't have the same possibility of allowing certain people to come and go as they pleased from different planets. It effectively only allowed people to teleport out and return again. In other words, it was a teleporter only for the natives of a planet to go help other places. At least, that's how Miranda and Arnold concluded the teleporter worked after their initial investigation.

Upon the defeat of their Prima Guardian, Earth had also been granted the other type of teleportation circle, but so far, there had been no interest in establishing it. The primary purpose of the provided circle was to allow others to teleport and help a planet... something Earth naturally didn't need. Having it was only viewed as a potential weakness, should they be tricked to allow someone to teleport to the planet they shouldn't have.



Of course, the chances of this happening were minuscule, considering only Jake and Miranda had the authority to view the blueprint of the provided teleportation circle and manage its permissions. With Jake more likely having failed to realize he now had this blueprint, only Miranda was a potential source of failure... and she concluded they didn't need the teleporter.

The only thing they would use the blueprint for was to study it, as Arnold theorized it held clues on how to make a teleportation circle capable of taking them close to any other planet marked by the map in the entire Milky Way.

Either way... Jake and all the others heard this explanation of how the teleporters worked before they headed off into the galaxy. The number of planets they could actually teleport to was relatively limited due to how the teleporters worked, especially as most had set their teleportation circles to only accept certain planets while requiring manual permission if anyone else wanted to come.

Many planets were naturally wary when someone wanted to teleport to their planet... especially because of the "someone" part. Like, who would have one person teleport? Sure, if it was some diplomat or something like that, it could make sense, but the people from Earth weren't trying to travel around the galaxy for peaceful purposes. They were there to slaughter Prima Guardians and get loot.

Those with factions they went to assist naturally didn't face this problem...but Jake and the Sword Saint, who wanted to go alone to help planets, found it quite challenging to get accepted. At least Miranda assumed they both would face difficulties... but the Sword Saint was gone nearly instantly, leaving only Jake behind, trying to find a planet willing to accept him, complaining under his breath.

"Why the hell are they being selective when they're so clearly fucked..." Jake muttered as he tried to teleport to a struggling planet, yet the one in charge of the planet still rejected him.

"Exactly what are you saying to them?" Miranda ended up questioning Jake. When one applied, a message could be attached. An application of sorts.

"Just the truth," Jake said, annoyed.

"... and what is the truth?" Miranda asked, and annoyed, Jake gave her permission to see the message he sent alongside his teleportation request, and...

**"Hunter here. Will kill Prima Guardian quickly for free."**

"Jake, have you considered you may need to include more information to make you look less like a delusional idiot?" Miranda asked in a curt tone.

“Why should I?” Jake crossed his arms. “I’m the one offering them help, not the other way around. Why would I waste my time trying to convince them I’m worthy of saving their asses? If they don’t accept, they just aren’t desperate enough. I’ve already sent more job applications in my life than I wanted to. No way I’m gonna write a damn essay about my strengths and weaknesses when I’m the one offering assistance. Free assistance, even.”

“There are plenty of reasons why they would be apprehensive about allowing someone random to teleport to their planet... and it isn’t helping that you are marked by the system as a World Leader when you try to go somewhere,” Miranda sighed. “A solitary World Leader wanting to go to another planet less than a day after the Prima Guardian event fully began is incredibly suspicious.”

Jake looked about to say something as he grinned. “And yet, some are willing to take the gamble.”

Miranda saw a happy Jake jump onto the teleportation circle before it promptly activated, and she couldn’t help but wonder just how desperate you had to be to allow him to teleport there with that kind of message while also considering his status as World Leader. Sighing, she turned to the last three people who were about to leave but had waited because Vesperia insisted Jake should be the first to go out of politeness.

“Does Her Majesty already have a planet in mind?” the witch asked, knowing Vesperia did have a few targets in mind.

“I do indeed, one that should be relatively simple to handle. I confirmed beforehand with a Hive Queen that the humanoid population is already de facto under their control,” Vesperia answered. “Seeing as the hive cannot fight the Prima Guardian or even the regular Primas, they naturally need assistance, or the dwarves will simply be slaughtered.”

“In that case, I wish you a pleasant and fruitful journey,” Miranda bowed her head slightly.

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In her mind, it only made sense to remain as polite as possible in front of the True Royal, even more so than perhaps anyone else on the planet. This sentiment was also echoed by her Patrons, who had told Miranda to treat Vesperia more like she would treat another god than a mortal. Considering how scary the True Royal could be, that wasn’t super difficult to do.

“Let us go, and thank you two for your assistance,” Vesperia said to the Fallen King and Sylphie, who would go with her.

*"Hunting down Primas and convincing planets to allow me to face the Guardian would prove difficult alone, while I believe going with you will provide ample opportunities,"* the Fallen King answered honestly.

"Ree," Sylphie screeched, making it clear she just thought it would be boring to go alone.

Without further ado, the bird flew over to the teleporter as the hawk disappeared when it activated. Vesperia and the Fallen King looked taken aback for a moment that she had gone ahead alone, but didn't immediately make any moves to follow.

"We will return here after we have slain the Prima Guardian," Vesperia said. "I hope for good news regarding finding a method to teleport even to planets that are not part of the alliance."

"And I hope I will be able to provide that upon your return," Miranda said, keeping a neutral tone as the True Royal nodded before stepping toward the teleportation circle. The Fallen King floated after her, and a few moments later, they, too, were gone.

Miranda took a deep breath with everyone having now headed out all over the galaxy. Arnold was busy inside the control room analyzing the map as well as the blueprint to the alliance teleporter, with William having set up some kind of ritual circle of his own to "read the karmic pathways" or something. Miranda wasn't even going to pretend to understand karmic magic. Sure, some of her magic was equally weird and difficult to understand, but karma magic just still didn't make much sense to her.

She herself would also stay on Earth as there was still plenty to do. They now owned the entire planet, and Miranda now had far more control than before due to the Planetary Pylon getting claimed. It also wasn't like all the beasts on Earth could go around and help the rest of the galaxy. The current working theory was that they would also be suppressed on other planets, and sending them would simply be too risky for little gain. No, better to let Jake and friends handle the other Prima Guardians.

All Miranda could hope was that they would do a good job and succeed safely. That... and hopefully, not end up somehow making enemies.

"Ya sure this isn't just a waste of time?" the old dwarf said as he stared at the teleportation circle within the chamber. Latest content published on *novel*\*\*

"The queen sure didn't seem like it would be... in fact, I've never seen any of those Hive Queens more stressed than they've been over these past few months," a younger female dwarf answered while stroking her beard.

"Why are they stressing? It ain't like they're at risk of getting wiped out by these Prima things," the older dwarf sighed.

“Something about who will visit. Apparently, it’s some big shot who will help us deal with the Primas and even the Prima Guardian,” the female dwarf explained. “I hope they’re right.”

“So do I,” the old dwarf nodded as he kept looking at the inert teleportation circle, waiting for a request to come in.

These dwarves had always been a subterranean race, primarily due to the harsh environments on the surface of their planet. Even before the system, they very rarely ventured topside. Harsh acid rains and large storms ravaged the world above, leaving no space for life anywhere, and only while wearing protective suits could they sometimes head up there to look for resources. However, this turmoil on the surface did lead to a very vibrant and healthy world underground, with plenty of space and opportunity for life to flourish.

Before the system, these dwarves had already established a relatively large country, spanning a huge area of the underworld. There had been about five million of them total when the integration appeared, and while a few had died during the Tutorial and the times that followed, more than four million still lived there to this day.

Unlike many other planets, they never had any big internal conflicts... but they also never truly grew much. Even now, the number of C-grade dwarves numbered less than fifty, with only three people having even gone to Nevermore. To put it in other words... a dozen Primas could likely wipe out this entire dwarven faction.

They had just never been fighters. They never had to fight, and it was not part of their culture... in fact, they hadn’t even known about most of the usual weapons people used before the Tutorials. While these dwarves did have a certain level of technology, instead of weaponry and war, they had primarily expanded by working closely alongside the other lifeforms beneath the ground. Their closest companions had been a unique species of large ants that were all roughly the sizes of rats, with the queens comparable to medium-sized dogs. That was before the system, mind you.

The dwarves had cultivated these ants and used them to expand and even as a defense against some of the more dangerous beasts that lived close to their borders. In return, the dwarves fed and helped the ant colony flourish by providing them with food and even helping design the hives. They put in plumbing to ensure the ants always had water and even farmed certain grubs they knew the ants liked to eat. Some of them had even worked within the hatcheries to take care of the newborn.

It was a truly synergistic relationship.

And then... then the system arrived.

While gone in the Tutorials, the ant colony that surrounded their country expanded and grew. Hive Queens were born with intelligence rivaling that of the dwarves themselves

and power far surpassing them. The most powerful Hive Queens were forced to seek deeper and couldn't approach the area controlled by the dwarves anymore, but they could still send messages.

It was an odd situation... but even after the integration, the ants were not antagonistic toward the dwarves. They still remembered the relationship their two races had before and continued to find value in it, even if a disparity of power was readily apparent.

In some ways, the ants taking care and defending the dwarves also ended up becoming a problem. The dwarves simply weren't able to level enough as there was nothing to hunt, allowing only the crafters to progress. By the time the ants and dwarves both noticed this glaring issue, it was already too late, and news of the Prima Guardian event was upon them.

Without help, the dwarves would definitely be wiped out. Even if all the Hive Queens and high-ranking ectognamorphs had been given permission by the current World Leader dwarf, they couldn't fight the Primas off. All they had been able to do was help create physical barriers to try and keep the Primas at bay as long as possible.

The old dwarf in charge of the teleportation circle was reflecting on all this as he waited for something to happen. He knew there were seven Hive Queens not too far away, making preparations for the arrival of this VIP.

"You think they'll come today? The Prima Guardian thing only just arrived, and I don't think we are in that big of a rush.. these Primas landed on the other side of the planet and on the surface. Should take them at least a week to get to us," the female dwarf said, her tone sounding like she was calming herself down more than anything.

"it will likely be today," the older dwarf shrugged. "But there is really no way to-"

Just then, he got a system message, and his eyes opened wide. He only skimmed the request and saw it was from the planet that had been mentioned to him, and without delay, he accepted it.

A message was instantly sent out to the Hive Queens, and within less than five seconds, seven Hive Queens appeared in humanoid form within the chamber. They all stared expectantly at the center of the teleportation circle as it glowed... the light faded soon after, and the dwarf just looked confused at what he saw.

In the center of the circle, a small creature appeared. One that looked different to something the male dwarf had ever seen before. It was small and green and did not look like an ectognamorph at all.

"Ree," the creature let out a screech, the dwarf throwing a confused gaze at the Hive Queens, who looked equally perplexed.

“... are you related to her Majesty of the Vespernat Lineage?” the leader of the Hive Queens – a late-tier C-grade – asked.

“Ree,” the creature simply let out a screech again as it began to waddle forward, the Hive Queens clearly unaware of what was happening.

*“Is it wearing a vest?”* the female dwarf asked telepathically.

*“I think so...”* the male dwarf responded, his level of confusion only growing by the moment.

With everyone just staring confused at the small beast, a second application to travel to the planet suddenly came in. The dwarf quickly confirmed this was also from the right planet and approved it as the teleportation circle spun to life for a second time.

This time, what appeared made a lot more sense. Two large creatures were teleported in, towering over the dwarves and even the Hive Queens, whose humanoid forms also resembled dwarves. One of the newcomers looked like a large root creature of sorts and was floating slightly above the ground. The other one was a large woman with distinct insect-like features, making the dwarf quickly realize this was the one they had been waiting on. If nothing else, the response of the Hive Queens that followed made it absolutely clear as they all fell to their knees and spoke in unison.

“We greet the Vespernat True Royal,” they said, the two dwarves also quickly following along and kneeling. The male dwarf felt the aura of these two new creatures... and as a noble himself, he especially felt the presence of the wood-like being. A king... a true system-recognized king.

Perhaps it was fitting... for a Hive Queen above Hive Queens to appear together with a true king. It did still leave him questioning, though... why was the small green creature also there? And why was it currently trying to get into his backpack in the corner where he kept his dried worm snacks?

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## Chapter 948: Assistance Has Arrived

“It’s truly an honor to finally lay my eyes on a True Royal,” the dwarf wearing a stupidly large and decorated hat said as he kneeled in front of Vesperia. “And it’s an even greater honor that Her Majesty decided to assist our small country.”

Vesperia regarded the dwarf as she nodded. "Your kin has worked alongside the hive here for many years, and they have vouched for your usefulness. If they consider you part of their hive, I shall respect their assessment and assist you. Now, the three of us have little interest in wasting more time here than necessary. We shall hunt down a number of Primas and then proceed to engage the Prima Guardian."

"I have already been informed of Her Majesty's plan," the dwarven leader said with a nod.

*"Hand us all the information you have regarding the location of the Prima Vessel, along with where you believe most Primas have gathered,"* the Fallen King added.

"Naturally," the dwarf kept nodding, not daring to show any disrespect to the Unique Lifeform either. Motioning to one of his aides, another dwarf walked forward and displayed a projection of the planet. On it, the location of the Prima Vessel was marked, along with areas colored in with assumptions about how many Primas would be there.

"Ree?" Sylphie asked after seeing the map. Vesperia concurred with her assessment and nodded.

"Yes, I also don't see a need for us to engage with any of the Primas beneath the ground. It would be faster to go to the surface immediately. Considering the barren landscape, we will stand out and easily attract the Primas, and at the same time, the Primas will not be able to hide from us," Vesperia said.

*"Preferable to hunting down an army of elusive creatures beneath the ground for sure,"* the King said.

"If... if I may..." the dwarven leader said with some hesitation. "Each of these Primas are incredibly powerful in their own right, and we believe there are hundreds up there. Not to mention the Prima Guardian itself... is it safe for Her Majesty to engage them all with only two allies?"

Instantly, the dwarf had more than half a dozen Hive Queens from the ant hive staring him down, making the man try to instantly elaborate. "I do not doubt the capabilities of a True Royal! However, I'm unaware of the power of your companions, and I am merely veering on the side of caution..."

"Your worry is entirely misplaced," Vesperia said, shaking her head.

*"I find the notion that I'm inferior insulting,"* the Fallen King also scoffed.

"Ree," Sylphie just said, not really seeming to care that much. She was way too busy dragging around a small bag of dried worm snacks to bother with any of that stuff.



After a bit more talking, the three of them were finally led toward the fastest way to reach the surface. As they had also been informed, the path upwards was entirely blocked, the dwarves and ant hive having worked together to create several natural barriers and gates.

While the ants couldn't fight the Primas or the Prima Guardian, they had been able to help with these preparations. It wasn't like filling a hole with soil and rock was considered fighting against the Primas, nor was it considering fighting to create extremely durable gates and handing control to the dwarves.

This did mean getting topside took a while, as Sylphie, Vesperia, and the Fallen King had to break through several barriers that the dwarves couldn't easily unblock for them. Luckily, this planet was quite a lot smaller than Earth, making the distance they had to cover not as significant.

The Hive Queens wanted to follow them all the way, but they had to stop in order to not risk engaging any Primas. This left only a small squad of dwarves with Vesperia and the others as they finally reached the surface of the planet, most of which had to leave soon as they wouldn't be any help in the upcoming fights.

*"Not the most pleasant of worlds,"* the Fallen King said the moment they appeared up there.

The sky was tinged orange, with toxic gasses filling the air. In the distance, they saw some oddly colored clouds raining down acid rain while a constant wind buffeted them. At least it did so for a mere moment before the wind in their vicinity entirely stopped, surprising the dwarves.

Sylphie had naturally been the one who'd stopped the annoying wind. Even if the wind was infused with many different concepts, it was still ultimately considered wind and thus within her Authority. If she didn't want it to blow, it wouldn't.

As they looked around, they soon spotted their first prey. Or, more accurately, a collection of prey. Several elementals had embedded themselves within some of the rainclouds, a few Primas included.

"Far fewer regular monsters here than on Earth," Vesperia noted.

*"Likely due to the environment. From what I was told, most monsters that appeared on Earth were transformed from regular animals. Considering the state of this planet, I doubt there were many living things in the first place,"* the Fallen King voiced his opinion.

"His Highness is correct," one of the few C-grade dwarves of the world said with a nod. "There never was much life here, even below the ground. Also, the Prima Vessel is in that direction... when it comes to the exact distance, I'm not sure."

"It does not matter, as long as you have the teleportation disc ready for when we get there. Till then, stay in the background for safety," Vesperia said to the dwarf, who quickly nodded.

In order to open the Prima Vessel, they needed the World Leader of the planet. That is to say, they needed the dwarven leader, who was still back in the dwarven country. This dwarf leader was, to put it bluntly, entirely useless in battle and was entirely specialized in administrative tasks.

Bringing him along would more likely than not result in him getting killed. That was why they had brought along the most competent of the dwarves. Someone who called himself a hunter, even if he left much to be desired compared to what the three monsters were used to when they heard that term. Either way, the dwarf had some good stealth skills, and he was one of the few people who had even gone to Nevermore, so he was at least a mid-tier C-grade.

The stealth skills were the most important, though, as the dwarf's only function was to set up a teleportation disc prepared by the Hive Queens that would allow the dwarven leader to teleport to the Prima Vessel and back again after unlocking it and activating the Prima Guardian.

"Ree?" Sylphie screeched after they had just been floating in the air for a bit.

"Yes, let's go," Vesperia nodded, Sylphie taking the go-ahead and running with it.

The air around them exploded as Sylphie shot forward, going straight for the cloud of Primas. A massive windstorm followed in her wake, and the moment she arrived at her targets, the entire cloud was blown apart along with several of the regular weaker elementals.

The story has been taken without consent; if you see it on Amazon, report the incident.

Usually, a destructive environment would be detrimental, but for Sylphie, these harmful winds only served as her weapon.

The dwarven "hunter" could only stare as Sylphie tore apart two Primas, proving her own power while also making it very clear the average level of these Primas was quite pathetic compared to what they faced on Earth.

Not wanting to get too far behind, the Fallen King and Vesperia also got moving. Having lost her Queen's Guards against the Prima Guardian on Earth, Vesperia was still working on spawning new ones, but the regular Royal Guards and soldiers were good enough to deal with many of the regular monsters they faced.

Days quickly passed as they made their way across the surface of the planet, slaughtering Primas on the way. The larger movements they made and the more energy

they released, the more attention their group of three attracted, making many of the Primas come to them as they sent shockwaves echoing across the surface.

While each individual Prima wasn't any problem, there was still a lot of them, each having that extra infusion of vital energy, making them annoying to kill quickly. Nevertheless, they were three creatures at the apex of power in the multiverse for their level, and many of the Primas barely broke level 250, with some not even mid-tier C-grade.

Eleven days after arriving on the planet and hundreds of dead Primas later, they finally found themselves before the Prima Vessel. The dwarven hunter – who was honestly more like a scout hiding in stealth all the time – quickly set up the pre-prepared teleportation circle and activated it.

Soon after, the dwarven leader came out and, as agreed upon, opened the Prima Vessel and went inside, carrying several dozen defensive items to make sure he would make it safely out again. A few minutes after going into the Vessel, the dwarven leader stormed out of it, looking frightened as hell while running for the teleportation circle to get the hell out of there.

He barely managed to activate the teleporter, getting swept away as a creature exited the Prima Vessel. It was a large, mostly elemental-looking monster. Its body was bulky, with stone-like growths everywhere and even a few traits reminiscent of the ants that lived with the dwarves.

*"Still some form of chimera,"* the Fallen King quickly concluded.

"Yes, but clearly quite different from the one on Earth. As if this one is just incomplete and half-baked," Vesperia said, shaking her head.

"Ree?" Sylphie asked, seemingly confused as to why this chimera looked so boring compared to the one they had killed less than two weeks prior.

Looking at the Prima Guardian using Identify, it was also quite clear it couldn't hold a candle to the Exalted Prima Guardian had faced. The name of this one also differed.

### **[Honored Prima Guardian – lvl 317]**

Jake mentioned that the Prima Guardian on Earth was originally called a Revered Prima Guardian before it reached its maximum level of power. This one was called Honored, which Vesperia quickly concluded had to at least be beneath Revered. If it was one or two levels below, there was no way to know... and it ultimately didn't matter.

The Prima Guardian had also noticed the three of them the moment it appeared. Perhaps it also saw the dwarven scout who was running away with a part of the

teleportation circle, but it clearly didn't care as it focused on the three monsters who were the true threat.

Without further ado, it attacked. After spending quite a few days on the planet, facing weak Primas that were nothing more than high-health weaklings, the three finally got a good fight. Sure, the Prima Guardian couldn't hold a candle to the one on Earth, but it was still pretty powerful.

The fight ended up having only two phases, with it never going back into the Prima Vessel at any point. It just morphed and ended up adopting a far larger form than the one it started with, turning into what was effectively a giant living mountain.

Vesperia did lose a few more Royal Guards, and the Fallen King and Sylphie burned through the majority of their resources simply due to the sheer durability of the Guardian, but they were never truly in any danger. In fact, chances are any one of them could have taken on the Prima Guardian on their own, though it would have made the fight even longer and more annoying. Perhaps even a bit dangerous.

With the Prima Guardian dead, the dwarven scout returned and they summoned the dwarven leader once more, who looked utterly surprised they had managed to take down the Prima Guardian. Entering the Prima Vessel with newfound respect and the three monsters that had slain the Guardian, they went to claim the Planetary Core, the same as on Earth.

Returning to the dwarven country from there, Vesperia made sure to praise the Hive Queens there, and the dwarven leader effectively handed over all the powers of a planetary leader to the hive. While the power balance before the system had clearly been in the favor of the dwarves, now it was clear they were subordinate to the ant hive.

Also, even if the dwarven leader had tried to hold onto whatever feeble power he had, all that would have awaited him was a swift death from the giant hive that surrounded the entire dwarven country. He was wise enough to not try anything. Plus, it was now up to the hive to get rid of the rest of the Primas, as there was no way Vesperia and the two others would stay around for that, so making the hive angry would just be dumb.

And just like that, Vesperia, Sylphie, and the Fallen King laid claim to their first planet as helpers from Earth... though they weren't even the first "group" to have done so.

In fact, they had been quite a lot slower than someone summoned to a planet with even more... let's just say, questionable circumstances.

Jake was happy that at least some people weren't being selective assholes when it came to getting help with saving their planets. Now, granted, perhaps Jake should have considered why the planet was so desperate to get help in the first place. Maybe he could even have browsed for a bit longer to see the details of the planets he applied to.

You know, done any research whatsoever and not just tried to shoot his shot with anyone who would have him.

Because it turns out that a planet that would accept an application like the one Jake sent out did so for a reason. The reason, in this instance, was absolute desperation because they had fucked up, and they'd fucked up badly.

Jake found himself teleported into what looked like a small base camp, surrounded by people running everywhere. Several more individuals teleported in all around him, many of them with desperate looks on their faces as if they'd also been fleeing from somewhere.

"Everyone! Go to-"

"The western front-"

"It's coming toward the-"

"I come seeking refuge!"

Everyone was yelling as Jake just stood there, trying to figure out what exactly was happening. Releasing a Pulse of Perception, he saw tens of thousands running around like headless chickens, many of them entering circular towers with teleportation circles within.

If Jake was being perfectly honest, he had expected some kind of welcome when he went to another planet for the first time. Instead, he got a clusterfuck of panic, with a single guy standing on top of two boxes trying to yell at the people who just kept teleporting in all around Jake. It was pretty fucking clear they just accepted everyone who applied, especially when Jake even saw someone barely in C-grade appear.

Deciding to get a grasp of things, Jake began to walk forward, pushing through the crowd quite easily. He went straight to the yelling guy on top of the boxes and stopped in front of it. His deliberate movements caught the attention of the guy, who looked down at Jake and quickly tried to be helpful.

"Go to the tent over there and-"

"Hey! Where is the way to the capital city!" another guy pushed through the crowd, interrupting the box guy.

"No one is allowed to-" the box man tried to answer but didn't get far.

"Where is the refuge camp!?" some woman ran up; Jake getting really tired as he sighed out loud. He saw no reason to waste more time than necessary dealing with this, so he decided to calm things down a bit.

Jake activated Pride of the Malefic Viper, further infused with his own aura as he blanketed the entire area with his presence. The effect was instantaneous as people stopped in their tracks, the woman that had pushed herself up to stand beside Jake throwing him a look of utter horror.

From one moment to another, the panicked basecamp had become still as everyone froze, giving Jake plenty of time to ask the box guy what he wanted to ask. This text is hosted at *novel·fire·net*

"What exactly happened on this planet?" Jake asked in a relaxed tone.

The box guy stared at Jake only for a moment before he gathered himself and answered.

"There... the World Leader decided to free the Prima Guardian with her party and all the elites she could gather. It was a disaster; nearly all of them died, and the Primas and Guardian are now running rampant, trying to chase down our World Leader, so-"

"Where is the Guardian?" Jake followed up, not wanting to traumatize the crowd with his presence for longer than necessary.

"The... the tower over there should take you close..." the box man said, pointing toward one of the teleportation towers.

"Thank you," Jake nodded, as he turned toward the tower and deactivated Pride and reined in his presence.

Yet even after he stopped the skill, everyone stood still and stared after him as Jake casually walked to the tower, quite happy with what he'd just heard. In fact, he could barely believe how lucky he'd gotten, not even having to convince the local World Leader to release the Prima Guardian, as they'd been nice enough to do so before he even arrived.

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## Chapter 949: Heavenly Tribulation

Overconfidence was the downfall of many who thought themselves geniuses and darlings of the multiverse. Rapid progress could lead to feelings of absolute power like there was nothing in the world that could stop you. This was more often than not seen

with people from worlds that had little interaction with the rest of the multiverse, and in this particular case, the main cause had been the powerup from Nevermore.

Leaving for only a few years in Realtime, only to return with more than sixty levels under your belt, so easily led to this phenomenon. Especially when the planet itself didn't progress as much during this time. The wildlife remained as strong – or weak - as before, with many of the dangerous beast lords none dared to engage before now viewed as nothing but easy prey.

This was the folly the World Leader, Olliandra, had fallen for. Despite having agreed to enter the Prima Guardian Alliance and the fact that everyone during the final World Congress had been on the same page that facing the Guardian alone would be stupid, her thoughts changed after her return from Nevermore.

As a party of five, they had gone there and done way better than expected. They had gained so many levels and with the rapid progress one experienced after hitting a new grade, all got stronger incredibly fast. It was so fast, and they got so strong that when they returned from Nevermore and after hunting down all the so-called "unbeatable" beasts, how couldn't they believe the Prima Guardian would also be easily overcome?

Why would they possibly need some stupid alliance?

Well... Olliandra and her party, as well as all the other elite parties, soon learned they most definitely did need this alliance.

She had entered the Prima Vessel shortly after it landed on her planet to activate the boss and just get the event over with. When she also considered how they had barely killed any Primas during the first part of this Prima Event, with only her and one other having gone to the Seat of the Eternal Prima, she believed the system wouldn't throw too hard of a challenge at them. At least not one they couldn't handle post-Nevermore with all their newfound power.

Olliandra had been so wrong. It didn't take her more than a few moments to realize just how badly she had fucked up after freeing the Prima Guardian. It had chased her out of the Prima Vessel, and in the ensuing battle, thirty-four of the fifty-seven people who had gone to fight the Guardian died. No... they were slaughtered.

Without any hesitation, she had done the only thing she could... and ran. Her one surviving party member helped her, a space mage, who managed to teleport them some distance away. However, that's when she realized that there was no escape. As the World Leader, she was the living objective of the Prima Guardian. No matter what she did, it would keep chasing her, and to make matters worse, she discovered she couldn't activate the teleporter to take her to another planet that was part of the Prima Guardian Alliance. At least not while the Prima Guardian of her world still lived and roamed free. Chapters first released on **novel♦fire♦net**



Wracking her brain, Olliandra tried to send a distress signal to other members of the Prima Guardian Alliance but got no response. So, she decided to try the absolutely desperate strategy of just opening up the teleporter to anyone who wanted to come. The chances of anyone capable of offering assistance actually choosing to help were incredibly slim, but it was all she could do before she took off and ran once more. With Prima Guardian on her heels and nearly a thousand Primas ravaging the planet, the defenses they had prepared were far from enough... but what choice did she have but to flee?

Over the next many hours, all she could do was run desperately. Her space mage companion tried to teleport them over and over again to make distance from the far faster monster, but it began to adapt. It, too, began to use space magic to follow them through the ripples of space, giving them less and less leeway between every teleport.

They were running out of time... and Olliandra knew it was all down to her own stupidity. In the end, she chose to stop running, knowing they would eventually just be caught, as she sought out the Northern Keep. It was the most isolated of the defensive bases they possessed and the place where she would make her final stand.

Olliandra had already sent messages to the mages there to prepare for her arrival, and the second she arrived, they put up the full defensive barrier.

"My Queen, you shouldn't stay," the mage said in a worried tone after they had a moment. "If I and the others try and delay it here, and you try once more, surely the Celestial Child will hear our pleas and-"

"The alliance has abandoned us, and only I am to blame," Olliandra sighed as a magic circle appeared beneath her, and she began to use enhancement magic on herself. Due to the space mage standing for all the travel, she had nearly fully recovered and was ready to fight again. She just hoped the Guardian was also at least a little tired now.

"It isn't all you... we agreed to face the Guardian. We believed we could," the space mage sighed.

"The responsibility still falls with me," Olliandra sighed, continuing her buffing routine.

As she prepared herself, the final help also arrived. All of those who had fought – and survived - the Prima Guardian the first time arrived teleported in, now having recovered somewhat for a second round. Their faces didn't look good, and Olliandra felt much guilt seeing how none had chosen to abandon her or their world.

With resolve, Olliandra lifted her spear as her aura grew, and she addressed the crowd. "This may be our final battle together, our downfall caused by my own hubris... but do me this final honor, and help me at the very least take down this monster. Let our ends pave a future for our world. And know that even in death, I shall hold no regret, having died alongside the most valiant of warriors."

She barely believed her own words, as she, deep inside, wanted to just run... but she didn't have a choice. She would make her last stand and stay true to her word by at least trying to kill the monster.

"It's here," the space mage said, his face haggard from his low resources and spent mental energy.

On cue, space rippled as the Prima Guardian appeared. It was a creature about four meters tall, with a hunched-over humanoid form, its entire body seemingly made of bone, even if it wasn't undead. On its hands, it had long claws that could extend and retract, while on its back, several spikes poked out, and from the prior fight, they knew these could be released as devastating projectiles at any point. The breath of cold flames it released also wasn't to be trifled with and had been the death of many brave warriors.

At least the damage they did during their first encounter hadn't healed, and several cracks still marred its body, along with dozens of small holes here and there, most of them left by fighters making their final desperate attacks, trading their lives for a small nick. Overall, though...

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*It doesn't look tired at all*, Olliandra sighed internally while outwardly displaying courage by pointing her spear toward the Guardian.

"Hold nothing back!"

A dozen spells lit up the air as they all attacked the Prima Guardian at once. The creature easily avoided most of them, but a few explosions managed to scratch it. If it did any damage, there was no way to tell, but the Guardian quickly counterattacked as it released its breath upon the barrier protecting the keep.

The inferno of white flames seemed to consume the entire fort as the mages struggled to keep the barrier intact, many of them falling to their knees, blood dripping from their eyes and ears. Gritting her teeth, Olliandra commanded them all to release another barrage of attacks, hoping to at least do a bit of damage before they had to engage the Guardian in melee.

This continued for a few more times, with the Prima Guardian slowly tearing down the barrier while taking a few ranged attacks in return. Clearly, the Guardian wasn't in a hurry either and was happy with its prey trapped. Perhaps Olliandra's hope that it was at least a little tired was even true... though she doubted it.

Minutes passed, but soon, the barrier began to show cracks. Looking up at the Prima Guardian, Olliandra prepared herself as she used Identify one final time. The response in no way helped ease her mind.

### **[Honored Prima Guardian – lvl 319]**

With the barrier just about to fall, Olliandra pushed her boosting skill beyond full power, further improved by all her enhancement spells, not caring that the backlash, should she somehow survive, would be devastating. She felt the toll on her body but didn't let it show as her body began glowing with power.

"Brave warriors... charge!"

As one, they all took to the air, and flew through the barrier protecting the fort just before it shattered entirely, many of the mages below already dead.

Twenty-three fighters faced off against the Prima Guardian for a second time, Olliandra at the front wielding a spear wrapped in deep red flames. The boss regarded them with no fear as it met their charge with its indestructible claws.

No one held back in the slightest, and even the space mage, who'd been exhausted, did his best to assist. Less than ten seconds into the battle, the first person fell as the Guardian cut him into six pieces with a swipe of its claws. A second fighter fell another eight seconds later, her body shattering to pieces after a breath of white icy flames.

Olliandra's attacks became more and more desperate as her comrades fell one by one. Her spear repeatedly stabbed into the body of the Guardian, leaving small holes but failing to truly penetrate. Many others also managed to land their own blows, but they could only do so much. Their opponent was simply too durable and powerful for them to handle.

More and more died, and soon, they were down to only ten people, with the Prima Guardian not that much worse off than when the fight began. Desperation was building, but soon, they all had to accept that none of them were leaving this battle alive. One person, the one closest to her of everyone there, also realized this.

"*My Queen...*" the voice of the space mage echoed in Olliandra's head.

She understood immediately and sent a telepathic nod and a smile his way. He also gave her a smile before his body erupted with more power than he could handle.

The Prima Guardian looked surprised for a moment and couldn't react in time as dozens of rings made of pure space energy encircled it and held it still. Every surviving member of the group attacked, and Olliandra also pushed herself to release her most powerful attack.

Wings that seemed to be made up of patches of fire appeared on her back as she pointed her spear toward the Prima Guardian and spoke the Words of Power.

### **"Trail of Undying Embers."**

She flew forward, propelled by an unseen force. Her spear, wrapped in deep red embers, struck the Prima Guardian in the chest... and for the first time, it struck true.

Her spear penetrated deep into the Prima Guardian, piercing out the other side of the large creature and leaving a large burning hole. For a moment, Olliandra smiled, but it was quickly wiped away when the Prima Guardian simply looked down on her.

She tried to retreat, but it was too late. Even after she let go of her spear and tried to shoot back, the claw caught her forearm, forcing Olliandra to take swift and decisive action. Without any hesitation, her arm exploded, releasing a rain of embers on the boss and launching her back. While flying back, she saw the space mage falling toward the ground, unconscious and bleeding from every orifice. Spikes had also shot out of the boss, killing another two of her comrades during their assault.

Olliandra looked at the boss with listless eyes as the smoke cleared, revealing the Prima Guardian still alive and well. It pulled out her spear, the hole in its body healing with visible speed... showing the only reason it hadn't healed the wounds they had caused prior was that they hadn't mattered enough for it to bother to. She saw its almost taunting gaze look back at her, Olliandra barely able to lift her one remaining arm. The Prima Guardian knew it had won, and tha-

The Prima Guardian disappeared from her vision, replaced with a trail of energy that seemed to tear apart space itself.

Then, the shockwave hit her.

Olliandra was sent flying back, as her vision was filled with an odd pinkish-purple hue from a massive explosion. She didn't know what was happening... but she knew something had struck the Prima Guardian from above. Something neither she nor it had seen before it was too late.

Directly below where the Prima Guardian had been, a giant impact crater had formed in an instant, soil and rock still filling the air as it was disintegrated in real-time by the odd destructive energies dominating the area from the explosion. She couldn't help but stare at the crater, unable to collect her thoughts for long enough to do anything else.

For a moment, she caught a glimpse of the Prima Guardian amongst the destructive energies in the midst of the crater. Its entire left side was torn apart, its arm nowhere to be seen. It tried to stand up... and then another attack fell.

This time, she saw what it was. It looked like an arrow, wrapped and trailed by powerful energies Olliandra couldn't even begin to understand.

This second attack struck the Prima Guardian, releasing a second blastwave, as Olliandra and everyone else who'd survived thus far were pushed even further back. Before she had a chance to see anything else, a third strike fell, followed by a fourth soon after.

It was as if the gods themselves had chosen to deliver death upon the Prima Guardian. None dared to even try and do anything, and no one even spoke using telepathy. They simply stood frozen as the attacks kept striking down like heavenly tribulation, and the aura of the Prima Guardian kept weakening with every explosion of pure destruction.

Then... a final flash of light, and all became still, as a notification appeared before Olliandra and everyone else who'd participated in the battle.

***You have slain [Honored Prima Guardian – lvl 319]– Bonus experience earned for killing an enemy above your level***

--

Jake, floating dozens of kilometers above the newly formed crater, had another arrow nocked, and Arcane Powershot charging but stopped as he dispelled the arrow and stopped the attack.

*Pretty durable... but not super fast without its space magic. Good idea to make the first arrow disrupt the space mana,* Jake quickly nodded to himself as he saw the kill notification as well as the level gained.

***'DING!' Class: [Arcane Hunter of Horizon's Edge] has reached level 293 - Stat points allocated, +50 Free Points***

Looking down at the battlefield, he confirmed the survivors. He knew quite a few had died because he didn't attack earlier, but honestly... he'd wanted to see what they were capable of. Jake had wanted to respect their final stand, and only when the result was absolutely clear he attacked. Well, alright, he had only really delayed his attack half a minute, as he had arrived a bit late and had to do all his prep work, but he could have struck earlier, saving a few of them.

Seeing the World Leader fight so valiantly against the Prima Guardian, along with all her allies, was honestly... underwhelming. It wasn't even as if her level was that low. In fact, she nearly matched Jake himself, being only three levels lower.

**[Human – lvl 282]**

Jake was thrown out of his thoughts when he felt a few gazes on him, the people below having spotted him. Seeing no reason not to at least introduce himself to another World Leader – and because he knew Miranda wanted him to play nice with galactic politics - he began floating down, descending using the remnants of the trails left by his Arcane Powershots.

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## Chapter 950: Jake & Covert Galaxy Politicking

While floating down to meet the battered and beaten World Leader and other survivors, Jake couldn't help but reflect a bit on the fight. More accurately, one aspect of the fight.

It had come as a bit of a surprise, but despite the Prima Guardian being in the middle of a battle against other people, Jake had fully benefitted from Lone Hunter throughout everything. It had been active from the moment Jake decided to kill the Prima Guardian, even as it was actively fighting several others.

This didn't make much sense to Jake. How was it considered a solo hunt with so many people involved? However, when he considered it a bit more... why wouldn't Lone Hunter have been active?

Jake was hunting alone.

He wasn't allied with the World Leader or anyone else on this planet. They were just there. Background noise to his own hunt and – to put it bluntly – just part of the environment. It was no different from if Jake stalked two beasts fighting and decided to get involved in the middle of it to take them both down. If Lone Hunter didn't work in a situation like that, Jake would have found it weird.

Perhaps it also played a role that these people simply weren't strong enough to ever qualify as hunting companions. The final strike of the World Leader had been okay-ish but pretty damn telegraphed, and when Jake held it up against something like the Sword Saint's Glimpse of Spring: Erosion... yeah, it was like comparing stabbing someone with a spear or a toothpick.

Returning his focus to the real world, Jake kept descending as everyone who'd survived just stared at him. It was moments like these he was happy to be wearing a mask, as he would have felt pretty damn awkward without it.

In their gazes, he saw a lot of different emotions, but none seemed outright hostile. One could argue that Jake should have stepped in earlier to see if he could save more of them... but why would he have? He'd only gotten involved once it was absolutely certain they would lose. In his mind, getting involved before that may have been a disservice more than anything.

Scenarios where talents face death were multiversally also recognized as opportunities for tremendous growth. Many of Jake's skill upgrades had come in moments where things weren't looking good, which was far from rare. Jake choosing to attack the Prima earlier may have potentially robbed the World Leader and others of such an opportunity, something he himself would hate others doing to him.

Besides, if he'd really wanted to be fully selfish, he would have waited for the Prima Guardian to kill everyone before attacking. As things were, he barely delayed getting involved as most of the time he'd spent waiting had been prep time for his opening strike.

Anyway, Jake took his time floating down to meet everyone, primarily to give them all a bit of time to gather themselves. Miranda had also talked to Jake about the importance of theatrics at times to leave a more lasting impression. Even Villy was a fan of showing off, though his reasoning was more about the importance of looking cool while doing something.

Some of the survivors had gone to help their more injured comrades, and Jake saw that the space mage had survived. Despite having been close to the epicenter of the crater, he had barely taken any damage but had only been blasted away. Jake's destructive arcane energies had been focused on killing the Prima, meaning he had been spared for the most part, and with some healing, he should be okay.

Probably.

Arriving at the same height as the World Leader, she seemed to finally snap out of her stupor as she bowed her head. "Thank you for saving us. I am Olliandra, the World Leader of this planet. May I know the identity of our savior?"

Jake felt a sense of caution even as she asked, which gave Jake a more positive impression of her. Even under these circumstances, she was level-headed enough to question who or what Jake was, as well as his intentions for helping them. Also, he could admit it was a bit weird for a guy to show up and just kill the Prima Guardian without further elaborating.

"Thayne," Jake just answered, choosing to go with his last name. "World Leader of the planet Earth."

The woman looked like she was searching her memory about who he could be, but she seemed to come up blank. One of the reasons Jake had chosen to not go with his identity as the Chosen of the Malefic Viper was to see if people even knew his name.



He had been told that Ell'Hakan had spread some information about Jake but clearly hadn't gone as far as to use his actual name... though he would come to learn in not that long that his brilliant ruse of only using his last name was kind of moronic.

Anyway, Ell'Hakan using Jake's title over his name made sense. From the beginning, he had been trying to frame Jake as more of a symbol rather than a person. Only using his title would help accomplish that.

"I apologize; I do not believe I have heard of you," the World Leader called Olliandra said, keeping her very polite tone. Despite her state, she also tried to keep an aura of dignity, which was pretty hard considering her missing arm and overall bloody appearance.

Jake decided to also be a bit polite as he took a quick look around. "Rather than speak here, you should gather your allies and attend to the wounded. We shouldn't waste more time than needed either. You have a Planetary Core to claim and an army of Primas to address."

Olliandra quickly nodded. "Thank you... would you be willing to follow me to our capital city?"

"Sure," Jake agreed. He was a bit interested in seeing what the other planets of their galaxy looked like, and this one had been pretty average so far. It looked a lot like Earth, except the plants were quite a lot different, and the rocks all had a yellowish tinge to them.

It didn't take those able to move about long to gather the survivors and prepare to head back to the capital. Contrary to before the system, unless people were fully dead, chances are they would naturally stabilize themselves if left alone for a bit. There were circumstances where injuries could be bad enough to still lead to death, but unless harmful energies had been infused into the blows and lingered, this was rare. Okay, if poison was involved, dying after the fact was also pretty normal, but the Prima Guardian hadn't used any poison.

With everyone gathered, Jake saw Olliandra look toward the crater as Jake shook his head.

"The Prima Guardians do not leave anything behind. Any rewards are inside the Prima Vessel and only become available after all the regular Primas are also dead," Jake quickly explained.

She looked at him weirdly for a moment before she cautiously asked to clarify: "Has your planet already killed its Prima Guardian and all Primas?"

"Of course," Jake just said.

"How... how powerful was it compared to this one?" she asked hesitantly. It wasn't a secret that the Prima Guardians scaled based on the planet, and it wasn't a reach either to assume that the one Jake had faced had been quite a bit different. Fresh chapters posted on novel•

"I see little meaning in comparing them," Jake simply shook his head. The levels and the sheer difference in power between the two variants did make them difficult to compare. In fact, the only real thing they had in common was their durability and their ability to somewhat adapt, though the level of adaption of the Exalted Prima Guardian had been insane. This one seemed to just absorb some magical concepts from others.

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Which proved to be a good thing, as it had no counters to when Jake struck. It had also helped a bit that it was already damaged and had spent a fair amount of energy. Of course, the primary reason it had been so easy to kill was due to Jake landing a Protean Arrow from stealth. With Lone Hunter improving the effects of Stealth Skills further, along with his Big Game Hunter, it felt like the skill gave double the benefits when using Stealth Attack.

"I see," Olliandra just nodded, not pressing further. From the look in her eyes, she seemed to get what Jake was getting at, though.

Their group flew down toward the small ruined fort, where a teleportation circle remained intact. Jake saw Olliandra clearly struggling just moving around, her boosting skill having done quite a number on her internals. Still, she hadn't asked anyone for help, so neither would Jake offer. It wouldn't look good for her either if another World Leader assisted her just with walking.

Returning to the capital city through the teleportation circle, Jake found himself within a massive and pretty damn impressive city. Tall and mostly rectangular towers were erected everywhere, the yellow-tinged stone really shining through. Quite literally, as the stone apparently became golden and reflective when polished.

Technology-wise, Jake guessed this planet had been pretty medieval pre-system. It was a bit weird how most planets seemed to have been, considering how quickly civilizations usually developed, but perhaps Earth had just been weird in that regard. Thinking on it further, the benefits of having been technologically advanced before the system were pretty much non-existent, while if you lived in a medieval world where things like swords and spears were normal, you would have an advantage.

The World Leader quickly escorted Jake to a large cathedral-looking building, which Jake later came to learn also served as the royal palace. Scouting the capital city, it was quite clear no Primas had reached it yet, but people were on high alert, and there weren't as many around as Jake would expect.

After quickly cleaning herself up to look somewhat representable, Olliandra went to meet Jake, who hadn't bothered staying in the proposed meeting room but had gone to the clocktower that overlooked the city. He saw that she was joined by the space mage who'd recovered enough to walk, though, from his aura, it was clear he could do little more than walk around. Jake guessed he'd only joined out of worry for his World Leader.

"I apologize for making you wait," Olliandra said as she joined Jake, taking out two chairs for her and the mage to sit alongside Jake.

"I was the one who proposed postponing our talk," Jake said. It was already enough that she prioritized meeting with him over going to claim the Planetary Pylon. Then again, maybe she was unsure if Jake truly would allow her to claim it.

"And for that, I thank you," she bowed her head, something the space mage clearly didn't like, but he tried to not let it show. He was pretty bad at being sneaky, though. Jake would really recommend the guy to buy a mask, they did wonders at hiding your actual emotions.

"If I may," the space mage began. "You are from the Prima Guardian Alliance, correct?"

"Technically, everyone who can teleport here from other planets is," Jake answered. "But I guess that isn't what you are asking."

"Were you sent here by them?" he followed up, his eyes glowing with reverence for a moment. "Did the Celestial Child not turn his back on us after all?"

Jake would lie if he said the question surprised him. He would also lie if he said it didn't offend him.

"Celestial Child, huh," Jake said, smiling beneath his mask. "What makes you think someone like him could order me to go anywhere?"

He wanted to call Ell'Hakan something far worse but restrained himself. Being openly hostile toward the orange fuck would only play into the guy's plans. Better to just take the approach of finding it offensive that Ell'Hakan even dared try to compare himself to Jake.

"I thought he was the leader of the Prima Guardian Alliance?" Olliandra asked, a bit confused. "He is the Chosen of Yip of Yore, a god comparable or even superior to the twelve Primordials. If he didn't send you... why did you come here?"

"I came here to hunt down the Prima Guardian," Jake answered. "As for the other nonsense you said... let me just give you some kind advice: don't believe everything you hear, especially not when it comes out of the mouth of someone like Ell'Hakan."

"What do you mean by that?" the space mage asked in an offended tone, not even trying to hide it anywhere.

"Exactly what I said," Jake answered. "I'm not even telling you to trust me either. Just to show caution and to watch yourselves. Ell'Hakan can manipulate the emotions of others, often without them even noticing. Simply being aware of this is the best defense and you should continually question yourselves while in his presence if what you are feeling is genuine. That's the only advice regarding him I'm going to give you."

"Could you elaborate on what you mean by manipulating emotions?" Olliandra asked skeptically. "I'm confident I would have noticed if he ever did anything. Most World Leaders or politically inclined would, considering the plethora of skills we have to defend against or at least detect such things."

"Skills can't block Bloodlines," Jake just shook his head.

Olliandra looked like she was about to say something but stopped herself as she looked deep in thought. The space mage also kept quiet, as he seemed to have some internal debate going on.

After a few seconds of silence, the other World Leader seemed to have reached some conclusion as she bowed once more. "I thank you for your warning, Lord Thayne. It has given me much food for thought. We haven't had many interactions with the Celestial Child, and I do not believe we are in his good graces in the first place after we didn't go along with his plan for this event."

"What did you just call him?" the space mage asked as his head perked up.

Olliandra gave the mage a look of disapproval due to his sudden outburst. He didn't even seem to notice, though, as he just stared at Jake.

"You... you're the Chosen of the Malefic Viper?"

See, this was why calling himself Thayne was a pretty damn useless and dumb thing to do if he didn't want people to instantly recognize who he was, considering there was a Leaderboard available with his full name at the top, placed right at the entrance to the most visited World Wonder in the multiverse.

With the cat out of the bag, Jake nodded. "Among other things, yes."

The mood in the clocktower changed as Olliandra now stared at Jake with much concern... proving that the propaganda from Ell'Hakan definitely had hurt his reputation. Or maybe the Viper's reputation had hurt his reputation. Either way, her knowing he was the Chosen of the Malefic Viper didn't seem to give her a more positive impression.

"I... I fail to understand why the Chosen of the Malefic Viper has decided to visit this planet," Olliandra said after a bit.

"To kill your Prima Guardian," Jake just answered, not changing his own tone. "The system event will give rewards based on your overall performance during the entire event. This includes what you do on other planets."

"But... why here?" she continued questioning.

"You were the first planet to accept my application," Jake responded in a deadpan tone.

"That can't have been the only reason..."

"Turns out it can," Jake shook his head and couldn't help but smile. "That truly is the only reason I came here. You were the first planet to accept my request, and I only came here to kill the Prima Guardian. Everything happening now is just me trying to be polite as a fellow World Leader."

"Is it true you are in a conflict with the Celestial Child?" the space mage finally also asked, his look quite complicated.

"That is what people say," Jake just answered. "Personally, I feel like he's a far more significant threat to the ones who sided with him in the Prima Guardian Alliance than he is a problem for me."

The clocktower was silent once more as the two of them digested Jake's answer. In the end, Jake was the one who broke the silence.

"Well, I guess I have lingered here long enough," Jake sighed as he stood up. "I also believe you have plenty of matters to attend to, including claiming your Planetary Pylons and handling the Primas still roaming your world."

Olliandra looked at Jake a bit weirdly, as she couldn't help but ask. "What happens from here? What is expected of us?"

"Haven't I told you already? I came here to kill the Prima Guardian. That's done. I didn't come here expecting anything. With that, I'm not saying you can't reach out to Earth for diplomatic purposes. Just that there are no requirements for you to do so."

The other World Leader still seemed doubtful about Jake's words, but he didn't try to convince her further. Trying to prove he didn't have some ulterior motive was borderline impossible, as proving a negative wasn't a thing. Besides, he did kind of have an ulterior motive for coming, in wanting to at least mess with Ell'Hakan's plans a little.

"Anyway, it was a pleasure to meet you, Olliandra. I wish you a happy hunt of the remaining Primas. I myself have more Guardians to slay and will not stick around longer than necessary," Jake said as he prepared to leave.

"One last time, thank you for saving not just my life but likely this entire planet," Olliandra bowed deeply. "I hope to repay such favor one day."

Jake just smiled as he stood at the edge of the tower, but before he teleported, he turned for one last comment.

"Actually, I will say one more thing regarding the Ell'Hakan matter. Say there was a conflict between us, one leading to outright hostilities. If I were you, I would heavily consider where you would wish to stand in such a conflict. Because if it becomes a battle with only one side left standing at the end... I don't think I need to elaborate further."

With that, Jake stepped down and teleported away from the clock tower, preparing to head back to Earth.

*Second Prima Guardian down... and hopefully, some good politicking done, too.*

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