

Reincarnated With A Summoning System

Chapter 221

[Area Notification. Nefertiti has obtained a Class designation.]

That's the noise they heard, the unique sound of tinkling bells that is generated when an interface is first created. But it shouldn't be possible. System interfaces rarely activate before puberty, and certainly not to infants who can't sit upright.

But there's no denying that Nefertiti has activated a class. She can even be scanned with everyone's interface.

[Name] Nefertiti

[Race] Demon Queen

[Class] Mimic

[Level] 1

"You gave birth to a Demon Queen? No wonder I couldn't identify her. Nobody ever sees infant royalty before the Royal family can change their true form." The midwife gasps.

"Should we expect trouble then? Is there even a Demon Kingdom around here to be concerned about?" Lickity begs for answers with tears in her eyes.

"They're on the other side of the continent. I don't think they'll trouble you, but if word of a Demon Queen gets around, they might become forceful about trying to adopt her. Born Queens are rare. Usually, the Queen is just the King's wife. But for someone like her, being given command of things will increase her power; it's a racial ability for Demon Nobles and Royals. The more she's in charge of, the more powerful she will become. So she would be the natural choice for a marriage alliance if she agrees."

"And if she doesn't?"

"Then they'll gladly find her another King to marry for their family to gain influence. Remember, she will gain power as she gains authority, so a forced marriage would encourage her to overthrow her husband and make him a Puppet. Which they'd rather see happen to other countries and not their own. They're very nice people; I met them a few years ago when they toured the coast looking for Demonic volunteers to join their Kingdom."

"They wouldn't kill her, right?" Lickity is in full panic mode until Nefertiti laughs, drawing her attention.

"Not if they could in any way avoid it. She's just too valuable to them. Harming her or anyone of her species is a serious crime in their country."

That's a significant relief to the overstressed mother. At least she didn't have to worry about wealthy and powerful demons coming to kill her youngest daughter for what she is.

"What's the Mimic Class?" Cixelcid asks, inspecting his daughter, happily checking the ring she equipped that now adorns her finger.

There's a moment of silence, as nobody knows before Cain comes up with a solution. "Let's ask Arial and Red. They might know, they do run the Skill Book Library."

[Red, do you know what a Mimic Class is?] Cain sends, trying not to give away too many details.

[Oh, Mimics are fun. They're like your Supporters; they take on a specific form or the abilities of a class they've recorded. Once they get a few levels into improving their skill mimicry to include book skills and personal knowledge, they can start taking on other people's forms. Did you meet one? They're hard to pick out because the inspection function will show them as not having a class when they're imitating the look of an average citizen.]

It's a good thing they found out now then, instead of letting her grow up to become a Prankster of some sort, pretending to be something or someone else to mess with people.

[Thanks for the info. I happened to find one that wasn't transformed. I'll come to visit next time I'm back in town.]

Cain turns to Cixelcid when he's finished talking to Red, filling him in on the details. "As we should have guessed, she will be able to shapeshift, but like my Supporters, she will be able to mimic other people's skills. So she will be able to take on almost any role or disguise once she's familiar with them."

Lickity gives a tired laugh, looking at her youngest child. "Why do I see that becoming a serious issue in the future?"

"I'm sure it will be fine. It might be years before she discovers her abilities. If we guide her towards the path of responsibility gently, she will be a sweet and caring young woman, I'm certain of it." Cixelcid reassures her in a gentle voice doing his best to hide the fact he's also concerned about a newborn gaining a class.

The midwife looks like she is going to say something about Demon physiology but censors herself. Opting instead to send Cain a private message. [If she levels up, she will gain intellectual maturity and class abilities instantly, as well as allowing her natural form to grow up by years in only a few days. That's how it is for everyone who gets a class before puberty.]

Cain can tell right away that letting him know that was a mistake. His Companions can see messages sent to him, as the system considers them part of him that way. Their messages are also transmitted through him, being tagged with their name and [Cain's Companion]. Nemu, in particular, has a mischievous look that Cain doesn't trust one little bit.

For the moment, Neffie seems to be quite content in Cain's arms, looking around with great interest, as if her vision isn't that of a newborn at all. She's taking in everything around her with interest, the glow of her golden eyes varying in intensity based on what she's looking at, until her eyes land on Vala. She looks back and forth between Vala and Lickity repeatedly, as if comparing them, which makes her mother laugh.

"I'm a Succubus, and she's a type of Wrath Demon. We might both smell like Demon, but we're not quite the same."

"MauhabggraNommma mu." The tiny Demon nods her head in understanding as if someone should have understood the noises she made, despite them coming out more like a long tonal wail.

"She's smart as well. I think her mind developed well beyond that of an infant before she was born." Mythryll suggests, getting a close look at the golden eyes of Nefertiti.

The Elf gets a bit too close, and with a gleeful giggle, her hair is captured by the tiny Demon, who promptly puts it in her mouth.

"Oh no, you don't. Hair isn't a food product." Cain admonishes before the room suddenly has Razor Grass growing all over the floor.

"So, about her not understanding her abilities for a few years. I think the estimate might have been a little off dear husband." Lickity says with a meaningful glare at Cid as if he can and should fix this.

But really, what can he do? Nefertiti's ability is not hurting anyone; the baby Demon Queen doesn't see anyone here as a threat. She's reaching for the grass, so Cain sits down with her, letting her grab and chew on the long green foliage.

"I have a somewhat radical suggestion. Since she's already using her abilities, why don't we slightly level her up? It will increase her Stats by default, moving her intelligence from toddler to a level more capable of understanding complex issues." Cain suggests, skipping over the part where the midwife said it would make her grow up

in an untimely fashion. A Succubus grows up far more quickly than a human, so her sister won't be too far behind.

"The girl is a Mimic; if she figures out her transformation type ability, she will be able to take on adult forms right away, which would be a disaster if she snuck outside with the IQ of a two-year-old."

"I suppose. Just not too far, alright? I don't want her missing out on the joy of childhood because she's too high level to play with the other kids."

Cain nods his agreement and sends the little Demon Queen a group request, unsure if she will even be able to accept it. Neffie flails all four of her tiny gray arms as if trying to smash the notification blocking her vision before gurgling in joy as it disappears.

[Nefertiti has joined the Raid Group.]

[Class Quest Rewards Calculated. Base Reward 2 Lieutenants, 1 Commander, Known Forms. Additional Completion Award to be collected.] Completion Award 10 skill points.

That's pretty good. Ten levels of skill point just for winning against the man who tried to kill him? The system truly is Benevolent.

[Collect Completion Award now or Spin for a chance of random upgrade?] Y/N

Oh no. Ten skill points are impressive, but some of the things he's gotten from that random spin have been beyond broken and mind-blowing. But is he willing to give up skill points?

[You know you want to. Nobody needs to know what you risked, spin the wheel and say it was the Award all along.]

For a Legendary Demon, the Oath Breaker gives surprisingly good advice. Who else would know that there could have been more to the reward even if he gets a random lousy outcome? He's still getting the Lieutenants he was promised and a Commander, which he assumes is one of the last two skills in the General side of the skill tree.

[Random Completion Award Selected. Good Luck.]

Cain internally bursts into laughter at that. Good luck? That's system speak for 'I'm about to do something strange and unexpected to you.'

He internally laughs even harder when he realizes 9 of every ten spaces on the wheel extending high into the sky in front of him are black forfeit squares, and it is waiting for him to give it a spin. There are spots for S and A-ranked random skills, a Mythic Rank Class-Exclusive skill, a level 7 Bunny Kin Slave, and Unlimited Apples for his life that he can see among the hundreds of other options on this giant wheel.

He gives the wheel a solid spin, wanting to get as many revolutions out of it as possible for a genuinely randomized outcome, and he can hear laughter echoing back at him. Either the system enjoys these spins as much as he does, or he just did something monumentally stupid. Misha will hurt him if he randomly wins a slave girl as a Quest reward.

[You know you want fluffy bunny ears. You can't lie to us.]

Hmm, that's not a bad idea. The thought of Nemu's reaction to her position as the fluffy companion being challenged by a bunny is hilarious.. Cain is so distracted by the thought he doesn't immediately notice when the wheel starts to slow down.

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

Chapter 222 - The Big Spin

[Free Spin] x2

How is that even a spot? A second wheel appears on the other side of Cain, making the Oath Breakers' laughter in his head even louder.

[Double Fisting the reward wheel. Good job.]

[Shut up you. I tell you, he will get the good stuff this time. Bunny Girl. Bunny Girl.]

Cain tunes the demons out and gives both wheels a spin. One clockwise, one counter, but both with a smooth motion that sets them on a blurring pace around their vast circumference.

[Reward Gained: Class-Exclusive Skill Book Noble Command] Requires Duke or Higher. Specified Target will obey a single order for up to 5 minutes. Resistance to Mind Control will shorten the duration or cancel effects. Commands counter to the target's nature gain increased resistance.

[Reward Claimed: Gift of the Avatar] All Summons of one Category may have their numbers multiplied by three. Replaces all Lesser Army-type skills with a species-compatible skill.

[Error generating Gift: Avatar] Incompatible with Species Human. Randomly selecting Compatible Species.

[Species: Ancient] selected

[Lesser Demon Army Removed]

[Gift: Avatar] Gained

[Ability Gained: Ancient Resistance] all summons of one Category may be tripled in numbers. Assume Form that coincides with chosen species.

Assumes a form compatible with the species he has chosen to increase in numbers? Does that mean he would turn himself into a Dragon if he wanted to increase the numbers of them, or a Beastkin if he wished to more Turtles? That could be a different experience, plus a great disguise.

Cain opens his eyes again to see everyone staring at him expectantly. "Sorry about that. Where were we before I got interrupted by the Class Quest Completion?"

"We were at leveling up Nefertiti a little to increase her intelligence. But first, what on earth just happened to you?" Cixelcid demands, trying unsuccessfully to retrieve Neffie, as the Razor Grass starts attacking him when he moves her, stopping when he lets her chew on the grass again.

Letting her magical chew grass seems better than trying to hold a conversation with a crying newborn around anyhow.

"It gave me a new Ability. Ancient Resistance, which lets me increase the number of summons from a single species and replaces Lesser Demon Army. But Humans can't use it, so it changed my species to Ancient."

Cain inspects himself, not seeing or feeling anything out of place. Whatever the Ancients are, it didn't change his appearance an an immediately obvious way.

"Your whole appearance shifted, then settled back to you. Like it couldn't decide what size or species you should be." Misha explains.

That makes sense; it did random roll him a new species. Now he needs to find out if there's anything strange about the one it picked. Maybe for once, the Interface will have answers? At least a species description?

[Name] Cain

[Level] 152

[Class] Puppet Master

[Species] Ancient

[Current Appearance] Human Default

There that's what he needs. Select the species Category and see what comes up.

[Ancients are a long-extinct strain of Primordial beings that gave rise to various humanoids. Their forms are malleable, though one feature will always serve as an identifying mark, following them between states. The Ancients died off during the War Between the Gods, when they were seen as spies and turncoats for their ability to impersonate other species.]

That's more detail than he thought he'd get, but what does he normally look like? If they predate most humanoid species, this current human Cain isn't his natural form anymore. Even the system says it's just his default human transformation.

Why not try to shift into something different? Just a tiny change since he's still got Neffie in his arms while she plays with the Razor Grass.

With a thought, his skin turns the same ash gray as hers, and the little Demon Queen giggles, stopping her play with the grass to poke and then lick him as if his taste might have changed along with his appearance. Satisfied with whatever she discovers, she returns to ignoring him in favor of the grass.

"That is awesome. Can you change your look with a thought? Can you do hair color too? What about the size?" Elmira darts over to express her excitement but stays carefully out of reach of tiny grabbing fingers. Her wings are sensitive, after all.

With a thought, Cain shifts his hair to white and then extends his fingers out to double their average length. Changing the color of his features is easy, but extending just his fingers isn't. It's like he's trying to do something halfway and needs to put a lot of effort into overcoming the resistance and maintain a stable shape.

"Yes, but some things are easier than others."

Neffie has stopped playing with the grass, which suddenly disappeared, and is now snoring quietly, making little noises as she grabs for something in her dreams.

"Alright, mamma, I don't think she will set you on fire now. So you can have your youngest back. I'm not sure what we can do about her level, though."

"Why not a quest? It won't take much to get her a few levels. I'll go grab something from the Town Hall that I can do quickly." Elmira declares, darting out the window. That sounds like the most straightforward way, for sure. Just a tiny level bump from an easy quest, and she will be good to go.

They all leave the room to let Lickity and the kids sleep while the midwife watches over them, and not even ten minutes later, the completion message comes through.

[Quest Complete: Delivery of Herbs to the Alchemist shop]

Cain checks his party roster to see how it worked out. Baby Nefertiti is now level 7. That should be almost perfect. High enough that her Gained Stat points should help her grow past infancy.

"Better drop Neffie from the party before someone accidentally levels her up even more." Cid mock whispers once they're free of the bedroom.

"I hope you're ready for three kids growing at different rates. We looked it up, and a Succubus grows ten years in their first two, then two each year until they stop aging. A Vampire grows like a human until 25 when they stop, but nobody knows how fast a Demon Queen will grow up." Mythryll teases the new dad.

"That might be better than the alternative. Can you imagine teenage triplet years, when they all hate each other and their parents? At least we're not going to get that all at once."

While the group faces parenthood jokes, Cain disbands the raiding party, sending everyone back to solo status while considering the changes brought to him over the last couple of hours. First, a token for a Guaranteed unique class option at level 200, then an advanced Summoning skill that changed his species? Compared to that, the command ability seems anticlimactic.

But as much as it got overshadowed, it's still a fantastic skill. The amount of time it lasts might not be guaranteed, but a Command type ability could be a lot of fun in the future.

Maybe it's the Ancient species talking, but Cain feels like a whole new person. Every bit of insecurity and doubt is melting away, and he feels like he could do anything he wants right now and succeed.

What he most wants after the battle is more power. He's got an advancement token now, so Cain is anxious to reach level 200 and see what fate has in store for him.

Getting the rest of his skills and the increased summons numbers will be an added bonus at this point, knowing there's a unique Class to follow them. After the Quest Reward, he knows one of the skills will be a Commander, whatever that is, some form of upgraded Lieutenant, but the last skill is still unknown.

There's a simple way to find out what a Commander does. Appoint one and see what they get.

"Cid, in honor of your new Daddy status and to recognize all the extra work you'll have to put in both at home and for the Guild to keep things running, I have a Promotion for you. I at this moment do name you Commander Cixelcid." Cain says in a tone full of pomp and ceremony, like he was an actual noble formally bestowing a title.

The ability sinks into him with a slowly fading golden glow, and the big vampire smiles. "Now, I don't feel so bad about not being named a Lieutenant. Do I get the same thing as them?"

"I'm not sure. When I try to see the description, it refers me to the skill tree, but I don't have the skill Unlocked yet. Check your status and let us know."

"Alright, I've Gained [Summon Lesser Golem], [Summon Greater Golem], [Knightly Pride] which increases their damage and durability, [Summon sub Lieutenant], which summons just one Lieutenant, and [Summon Cloning]. Wait, Summon Cloning? Isn't that what Kone got as your appointed Companion that made her so powerful? And now I'll get all those Summons?"

"Su comes from her class skill [Wild Affinity], and her summons are thanks to the shared skills from also being a Companion, but it's similar. You'll get doubled summons numbers, so two dozen Lesser Golems and Sixteen Greater, plus four Epic from Benevolent Leader. It would help if you also got Cloned Lieutenants, though, for mine, it made them look different. That might be because I Appointed an existing person as the Lieutenant first, though."

The girls are all staring at him in expectation now, waiting for Cixelcid to Summon his Lieutenant. Like the Companions, they're permanent, so meeting a new one is a big deal. Cixelcid tries to ignore the begging looks for as long as he can before he caves.

Practice for raising daughters without becoming a pushover.

"Fine, I'll call the Lieutenant now.. But if Lickity yells at me for doing it while she's asleep, it's all your fault."

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

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Cixelcid calls out his Lieutenant right away, and two identical forms begin to appear. The system must restrict the Cloning of living people as Lieutenants due to their permanent nature, but it clearly doesn't restrict Cloning of Summoned ones.

What he gets are two black-haired, pale violet-skinned Succubus Maids. The outfits are black linen with white aprons, just short of knee length with puffy skirts. The white blouses have heart-shaped cutouts to show their cleavage, and a thick leather collar with a fanged mouth emblem in silver adorns their necks.

Most notable, though, are the large black handled swords strapped to their backs. They're not just maids, they're combat maids.

"Greetings, Commander. We are known as Hilda and are here to serve in any way needed." They say in unison, and Cid smiles, seeing the perfect way to play this one off with Lickity. They've got new triplets, and he brought maids. Surely she can't entirely blame his fetishes for this one?

"Welcome, Hilda. I am Cixelcid, newly appointed Commander of the Darklight Host. Welcome to the city of Montauk. My first children were just born so things might be hectic for a while."

"Fear Not. As Succubus Royal Guardians, we have the necessary skills to raise and train powerful noble children." The Hilda twins respond, then give each other a giddy smile and a high five.

A gurgling noise comes from the next room and one maid vanishes, reappearing seconds later with Neffie in her arms.

"How did you do that? Can Royal Guardians teleport?" Cid gasps.

"Oh no, it's a skill called [Unobstructed Tasks]. It just makes us harder to notice when we're working. We love kids, you see, and you've got a baby Demon Queen here for us to play with."

"I'm glad you're enjoying yourself. What other skills did you manifest with?"

"Minor single-target healing, cure poison and cleanse debuffs, and a variety of Succubus developed melee combat styles. We can also use wind and water magic at the cantrip level, but that's mostly only useful for cleaning and keeping drinks hot and cold."

"So you are maids?" Misha asks as Hilda bounces Neffie in her arms.

"Yes and no. While we're often assigned Lady's Maid or Governess type tasks, we're personal Bodyguards. This particular outfit is a form of camouflage in the Succubus Realm since it's so popular."

"Excellent. Lickity will need the help, and the kids will need Guidance. Plus, you've got a powerful Summoning ability as Lieutenants."

Neffie is staring at Cain again with that intense look, and he prepares to grab her if she sets Hilda on fire. But after only a few seconds, she stops and gurgles happily before everyone in the room can feel the magic concentrating in her tiny body.

"Oh no, you don't. No summoning in the house." Hilda says, booping her nose and breaking her concentration.

"How did you know?" Cid asks, perplexed.

"She's a Mimic, focusing on the Puppet Master. The only ability she could use of his at level seven is a Summoning spell. Plus, the feel of the spell is familiar, like the spell that Summoned us."

"Looks like I made you Commander just in time. You'll need a full-time Lieutenant to keep your children out of trouble. But she's growing fast, isn't she? She's bigger than she was fifteen minutes ago."

"I think so too. We should measure her. Do we have a scale?"

"There's a kitchen scale that goes up to ten kilos for measuring ingredients. And we can measure her on the door frame. That's how we always did it when I was young." Char suggests from the kitchen.

"Where do we measure to? The top of the head, the horns or the ears?" Hilda asks, looking down at the baby Demon, who gives up on another attempt to Summon Golems without getting caught.

"Top of the head, I think. That way, kids with spiky horns and small bodies don't look bigger on the recording." Hilda suggests while carrying Neffie to the kitchen door frame.

The infant seems surprisingly compliant, standing quietly as Hilda holds her against the door frame to have her height marked. The little smirk she has lets both Cain and Hilda know that she's up to no good, though.

Precisely what form of no good becomes apparent when two small Clay Golems in blue overalls holding wooden knives appear before her, and the baby Demon Queen begins giggling.

"Clay Golems? Not what I expected at all." Hilda comments while picking one up, much to Neffie's dismay.

"The ability to change their form comes later, the class wasn't intended to be obtained until level 200. That's the only option she's got at level 7."

The assembled Guild leaders watch to see what the baby Demon has in mind with the summons or if she just wanted to see them for herself despite the warnings about Golems in the house.

Hilda moves her to the living room, setting her down so she can sit up in the corner of the couch. That gives Neffie the chance to call her Golems over and pick her up. They're off and running; Neffie held up between them and headed for the stairs.

Giggling fills the house as Hilda chases the runaway infant until she finally corners her at Laura's room. They can't reach the doorknob to get in, and Neffie hasn't thought to put herself down so that one of them can jump, so they're trapped.

"Did you want to play with the Dragon, is that it?"

"Raagh Raagh." Yep, she wants to play with the Dragon. With a demon's sense of smell, there's no way she could mistake the differences between species, though Cain is quite sure she hasn't seen Laura in her Dragon form yet.

Hilda manages to convince her not to bother sleeping Dragons and dismiss the Golems, so she doesn't have to destroy them for being in the house, bringing things back to relative silence for the next few minutes.

It's a good thing that girl will grow up fast because a toddler with a system is utter chaos.

"Now that we've all had our fun. I think it's time I returned to the Castle and revisited the dungeons. It's a wise idea for me to get a lot more levels, now that I know about that Class Quest for Puppet Masters to kill each other. A higher-level Lord Path Puppet Master with close combat skills could be a real threat. We're just lucky this one was an impatient idiot."

"I'll come with you." Mythryll and Misha say at the same moment, while the others nod in agreement that Cain has a point.

"That's 3 of us then. You know where to find us if you need to." Cain informs the Guild, this time bringing all of his Companions with him.

He's planning to farm the Seraphim dungeon until he hits level 180 and gets all of his Summons tripled in numbers. After that, a trip to the continent's western side is in order. Most of the dungeons and wild monsters there are supposed to be between level 200 and 300, so he should be able to make rapid progress both to level 200 where he can pick a Unique advanced class with the token he got, and beyond that, to start getting class skills.

Stepping out into the desert sun makes Cain's whole body feel energized like he's in the middle of a good meal. He removes his shirt as they walk, letting more sun hit his skin, and Misha gasps.

"Have you seen yourself since the change? You look mostly the same, just a little bigger and buffer, but under your shirt, everything is covered in tattoos."

Cain can't see all of them, but what he can see is an epic retelling of his past battles. They start just above his elbows; the right arm is a scene from the fight for the troll hill. He looks heroic and mighty with his bow drawn, firing down into the Ogres at the bottom of the stage. His Companions and group surround him, with Dragons flying up by his shoulder, finishing the design.

It's all done in black and gray, but it looks so realistic he can almost imagine it coming to life again.

"I wonder how it chooses? If this manifests your memories, how does it know what will be important to you later? Or maybe it can change when you experience new things?" Misha wonders, examining the back piece that Cain can't currently see for himself.

"I'm just happy I made the cut. See here we all are in the battle against the Pirates with me at the helm." Nila jokes, poking a spot on Cain's side.

"Hey, no, put your shirt back on." Misha suddenly shouts while Nemu begins to laugh.

"Why, what's up? The sun feels good on the skin like I absorb energy from sunlight."

"There's a large nude of Misha, artfully displayed on your left shoulder. You should see the look on her face in the tattoo, pure lust." The Felian teases while Misha covers the offending shoulder with both hands.

"Fine, I'll cover it. You can make that face for me later in private." Cain equips his shirt with a wink at the blushing brunette, her face already bright enough that he can't see a change in reaction to his comment.

"Now, let's get in this dungeon if I can't suntan."

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

Chapter 224

Misha and Mythryll share a bewildered look when Cain steps through the portal, before Misha lets out a long suffering sigh. "Why couldn't he have started like this. The whole handsome, strong and confident thing really does it for me."

"It's not like he's going after anyone else. You worry too much." Mythryll laughs at her overthinking friend.

"True, but I wasted so much time. If I'd known he had it in him to take charge, I would have tried to move things forward before."

"Alright, lovebird. Let's get in that dungeon and get some levels. He's got some plan in mind for after he levels up, I'm certain of it." With that, Mythryll leads Misha into the dungeon, where they face an unexpected sight. Cain is holding a conversation with a transparent image of two small, winged children.

"Good, everyone is here. Since you had such an easy time of it during your last visit, we've changed the dungeon up a little. Welcome to the Historical Battle Simulation dungeon Mark 1." The White-winged girl announces, and both disappear.

[Selecting Scenario from the database.]

[Battle of Fizzboom Defence Force Selected.]

[Dungeon Completion Condition, hold the Fizzboom Air Base for 25 hours until reinforcements arrive.]

"25 hours? That's not a dungeon. That's a marathon." Evangeline grumbles just as the scenery changes to leave them on a hill in a deciduous forest.

There are a collection of stone circles around them that look like helipads to Cain, and one has some sort of hot air balloon with a propeller sitting on it. The south side of the hill has a few small hangers, but no other defensible spot is visible.

"Well, this is a terrible position to defend. Let's see what we've got available for materials. If nothing else, I can have giants pull down the trees and build obstacles."

[Notice: attack commences in 5 minutes]

"Well, no time to explore. I will have earth mages build a wall." Two Dwarven Earth Mages, with assistance from their Golems and a full complement of Epic Granite Elementals, have a crude wall up around the hill in under a minute.

Since the objective is defense, the giant Granite Elementals with near-indestructible bodies seem like the best option to be the Frontline troops today. Misha will undoubtedly choose flame wielding demons, and Mythryll has Haunted trees for crowd control. Lamia Scourge casters again fill the Lesser Golem spot for Cain, as their range makes them an excellent option for fighting from the walls.

Now, he has to choose what to duplicate. With nine copies of Kone, 18 of Su, plus 2 of Laura, Dragons are the immediately obvious choice. The category increase will also triple their Bonded Forces of Drakes, giving the defense team overwhelming air power.

"Has anyone heard of this Battle? What we might be facing?" Cain asks, to be sure.

"I read a little about it in a story I found in Muzz. Two hundred gnomes held off an Ogre invasion for 18 hours, killing tens of thousands before the airbase fell. The story I read was fan fiction, but it has a disclaimer saying they weren't insulting the actual martyrs." It was technically gnome vs. Ogre porn about the aftermath where the Ogres destroyed the stored airships, but it seemed to be based on actual events.

"Good enough for me. We know how to fight Ogres. I will try my new [Ancient Resistance] skill to increase the number of Dragons and Drakes. It says it will change me to a form more suited to the summons, so don't be surprised if the skill turns me on to a Dragon."

"Go, team Dragons!" Laura cheers, and Cain summons all his remaining supporters before activating Ancient Resistance.

He can feel his body shift, and an intuitive knowledge of flying and using Dragon Breath enters his mind. When his eyes open, Misha and Mythryll are far below his sight line, while Laura flaps lazily beside his head.

"This is bullshit. You've been a Dragon for like 3 seconds, and you're huge. I demand justice!" The Opal Prismatic Dragon screams in his face, making Cain laugh.

The rumbling noise travels through his body, gently shaking the ground at his feet. The effect startles him, making Cain look down at himself, finding a thick scaled Golden body nearly twice as large as even Danni was. Laura wasn't exaggerating; this Dragon form is enormous.

"What is a Proto Dragon? That's what it says you're transformed into when I scan you. You almost look like a flying golden dinosaur; look at the spikes on your back and tail. I wonder if that form is the ancestor all Dragon-type creatures evolved from? But more importantly, does it get any cool new attacks?" Mythryll asks, her voice sounding distant from this height.

[Racial Attack Skills]

[Claw] 1400 percent attack power to each target hit.

[Tail Slap] 800 percent of attack power as damage with a high chance to knock down targets hit.

[Fire Breath] 2500 percent spell power per second as fire damage in a cone 50 meters long starting from the nostrils.

The damage is ridiculous, and the range seems to be until Cain realizes it's barely his current body length. But doing a fly-by should incinerate a vast area.

Since he can't triple demons right now, Cain releases the Oath Breakers and calls for a dozen copies of Danni the Legendary Ice Dragon, merging with four of them to increase his abilities.

"Well, hello, Big Gold and Sexy. Oh, Master Cain, I didn't recognize you in that form. I take it you don't need a ride?" Danni jokes, his voice in Dragon form surprisingly similar to his human form.

"Not today. Today we're doing a dungeon defense. A 25-hour endurance Battle." Cain's voice rumbles like his laughter, impossibly deep, with an echo like his vocal cords are at the base of his long, scaled neck.

"That explains all the Dragons. What would even dare to attack this hill with all of them here?"

"Ogres, we think. It's a historical battle reenactment, but we don't know much about the battle of Fizzboom." Misha informs Danni, walking over to see what the golden scales of Cain's belly feel like.

In close, he gives off a pleasant warmth and smells like cinnamon and nutmeg. The scale is glass smooth under her hands, despite the dull finish, so she decides to lean against Cain for the moment, enjoying the warmth.

"I wish I could help, but Gnomish history isn't one of my strong points," Danni says sadly, his Dragon form not giving away any other emotional cues.

The wind shifts slightly, and a foul smell fills the air, a combination of rotted fruit and unwashed armpits. "What in the world is that? That is rancid."

"That would be Ogres. The disadvantage of a Dragon's sense of smell." Danni snarls and all his clones take to the air to join the other Dragons.

"Dragons, Drakes, move out. Find and eliminate the source of that smell." Cain roars, a hint of magical power filling the air and compelling them to obey. A hidden perk of the Proto Dragon form.

"Everyone else, spread out around the hill. Ogres can be decent strategists, and I don't want them finding any weak spots to attack us from."

The Granite Elementals and Lamia spread out, evenly spaced around the walls and joined by Misha's Flame-wielding demons. The rest of the defense force waits scattered around the hill for news to come in from the Dragons about the direction and strength of the attack.

"The First batch of Scouts has been eliminated. Enemies are level 160." Laura reports a few minutes later, coming back to the hill to give her report in person.

"We can live with that. Keep the Dragons on patrol and let us know when more enemies are coming."

"Too late. The other me says we've got large forces from the East and South. Ogres to the East and a mixed army of giants to the south."

"Split up then. Half and half, the Seraphim will join you. I'll deal with anything flying that attacks the hill."

"What could be so important about this hill that so many would attack it?" Mythryll wonders out loud.

"If this is a historical battle, there must have been some reason. There weren't supposed to be many gnomes guarding the place either. Should we check the warehouses?"

"Good idea. Why don't you both go search them and look for underground rooms? There might be more to this place than there seems to be. Like a weapons cache or an experimental device."

Misha and Mythryll hurry off to the nearest warehouse in search of goodies while Cain flies slow circles around the hill, much too large to go indoors in this form. The Companions are all sad they've got to miss out on the treasure hunt, but they don't have to worry about being bored for long.

"Incoming Ogres. North side. Ladies, please keep searching, and we can handle this. Nila, since you can call Dark Fae as your Bonded Forces, get us some Trolls for the front lines. The more heavily armored, the better."

Cain changes one of the two Dwarven Earth Mages he had called to help build defenses for another clone of Kone, giving the base defense force back their ever so helpful healing auras while he decides what to hold back in case of ambush.

"Nemu, have half your assassins guard the hill and the others against sneak attacks and play us something good. I'm thinking an attack bonus with a nice catchy tune."

"Got it boss.. I know just the song for the occasion."

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

- Chapter 225

Chapter 225

To say the Ogres were upset when they came in range of the hill was an understatement. Not only did they find their eternal nemesis the Trolls on defense, but they damnable creatures were also singing and dancing as they waited.

The sight of the carefree Trolls infuriated the Ogre General leading the charge, making him abandon all pretense of following the carefully developed strategy his allies had come up with. But where were they anyhow? He was supposed to be second to arrive, crushing the defenses from the rear while they were occupied. If the others didn't even show up, they have no right to complain if he stops to kill the Trolls.

Satisfied with the genius of his new plan, the General sends everything he has against the Trolls, ignoring the enormous Granite Elementals and the walls lined with Lamia entirely. Vala and her Wrath Bringers dash forward to join Nila's Trolls, letting the front lines of Ogres crash against them.

Cain is able to locate the command section of the Ogres quickly from his vantage above the battlefield and calls for the others to stay back and give him room to fight. Opening his mouth to prepare a wave of fire for the Ogres, Cain marvels at the feeling of wind across these golden scales and the rumbling echo of his roar through the forest.

Being a Dragon is an incredible experience that he can only wish more transfers would experience. Even the Ogre General looks terrified at his presence, ordering his rock throwers to stop pelting the Lamia and turn their attention to the incoming Dragon.

Sure that he is finally in range for a breath attack, Cain releases a wall of flame as he passes over the Ogres, the combination of intense heat and the extra damage granted by Might of Many scorching the path until all that remains is a shallow lake of molten rock. It was everything he had hoped for and more. With a single exhale, everything he passed over was dead. Killed without raising a finger.

As much fun as that was, Cain is still eager to try out an actual attack, so he lands just short of the General, swiping across his chest with a claw, reducing the mighty Ogre to chunks of meat piled unceremoniously on the ground, sizzling in the heat of the lava.

Can swings his head in a lazy Arc, incinerating hundreds of Ogres and expanding his lake of fire. In seconds he's created a massive hellscape of smoke and lava, a sight that brings a bout of spontaneous joy to his Dragon hormone-influenced mind.

"Watch where you point that. The lava isn't a spell effect, and it melts anything it touches." An irate Vala yells at him as he admires his handiwork.

"Sorry, I'll be more careful next time. I didn't get you too badly, did I?"

"I'm fine, but Nemu has some scorched fur. You'll be hearing about that later." Yes, he certainly will. The aroma of burnt fur lingers, and Nemu has a very keen sense of smell.

Most of the Dragons and Seraphim have returned as they argue, so Cain orders Danni to freeze the molten rock and cool the area to a more tolerable level before it gets unreasonably hot out here.

"Is that what they meant by an Ancient Quality Dragon? I always thought it referred to age or a specific Era. But maybe it meant the species. The fire breath is insane." Vala muses, tapping the cooling ground with the toe of her boot.

"Extra damage from a skill shouldn't increase the temperature, so a Golden Proto Dragon would have been able to melt rock with its breath. The Dwarves would love you." Danni agrees with her assessment.

Laura lands beside him to give her a report, concern visible in the tense way she stands. "Both forces are eliminated, but they spoke of themselves as a vanguard force, so more will be coming. Have Misha and Mythryll found anything?"

"We did. And it's bad news. The gnomes were developing a collection of magical bioweapons underground here. The weapon is gone, but they left the development notes." Misha calls from the hill, the voices of the Dragons carrying easily to her ears.

"That explains the intensity of the attack. Did it say who all they were targeting? This Battle should have been long before the war between the races if you read about it in Muzz. Who was targeted who and who supported them might give us an idea of what to expect."

"According to the research, it was supposed to be used to drive the Frost Giants from the Eastern and Central Continents." Did they actually use it then? These days Frost Giants are only found on the Western Continent.

If the enemies are likely to all be Giants and related species, then it is best if they're kept well away from the hill. Their size and weight might damage the underground facilities and cause them to fail the defense and lose out on experience.

Tripled Dragons mean six copies of Su to each of the ten Kone-based supporters and an excessive number of Drakes, enough that they're blocking out the sunlight overhead. But that also means each supporter can lead a patrol with only Danni to accompany them.

"Kone, take your summons, and each of you can fly a patrol pattern around the hill. It's a dungeon, so there shouldn't be any friendly targets. When you find the enemy let everyone know and then do what you can to eliminate them. Danni, have your clones accompany them."

"Got it, boss. We'll clear up this giant infestation in no time at all."

Cain doesn't know how large this dungeon is. Most open-air dungeons offer pretty significant leeway though, being as much as fifty Kilometers across. Most do have visible boundaries though, and his Dragons should have found them already in the space was more limited.

Until they find the boundaries of the rest of the enemies, all he can do is wait.

Making a graceful glide through the air, Cain finds himself a comfortable spot on a landing pad and curls up to relax. Laura promptly wraps herself up beside him with a sigh while the Companions stare at the lazy Dragons.

"You're so warm and suspiciously soft. This is a good form." Laura sighs, snuggling in closer.

"Let's all have a nap then; the summons will wake us up if anything happens. Plus, I've got my assassins stationed inside the underground base to stop infiltration attempts." Nemu suggests, happy for any excuse to sleep somewhere warm, like on top of a non-ice element Dragon.

The position is so comfortable that they end up napping until a system notification comes through.

[Dungeon Clear. All enemies eliminated.]

[Calculating Experience]

"Does this even counts as a dungeon anymore? You can't just send a thousand Dragons out to kill everything while you nap and call it an actual dungeon run." Mythryll points out.

"So next time is Beastkin then?" Misha laughs, stretching in her position under Cain's wing joint.

"Next time, we're limiting total occupants. How are we supposed to create a real reenactment when you do things like that?" An unhappy young voice comes from in front of Cain's face.

"Oh, welcome back, girls. Meet Misha and Mythryll, my Guild members." Cain says to the Seraphim and Fallen Seraphim girls who have returned to yell at him.

"Greetings. But we worked hard at this and you didn't even take it seriously. It was such an epic battle scene too, when the Frost Giants charge the hill. The real defense team only lasted 44 minutes, not 18 hours like the Gnomes insist, before they ran away with the weapon, but still, it was epic."

"We could ban clones next time? That should make it fairer. Golden Proto Dragon form versus Frost Giants was a great call, though.

I'm looking forward to seeing what battle you get next time." Her dark-winged friend laughs before they both disappear and a very annoyed-looking Seraphim in a butler outfit appears.

"You just missed her," Cain tells the man with a nod of his head, and the butler frowns.

"My most sincere apologies for any inconvenience, Ancient." The butler nods back politely. Then, he too vanishes as if he was never there to begin with.

"Do you think they could do it? Ban clones in the dungeon?" Mythryll asks curiously about the abilities of the two mysterious girls.

"The first time I was here, I fought a Synthetic Seraphim they made. This time, they created a historical battle. I'd say they can exert quite a bit of control over the dungeons." Cain shrugs, his massive wings fanning the air. That reminds him to change back and release most of his summons, suddenly finding himself naked except for jewelry in front of everyone.

"Note to self. Dragon form unequips your armor."

Cain puts a pair of faded jeans and a tank top on with a pair of black boots, and Misha runs around behind him to look at the tattoos, probably to see if one of her is covered.

"It's gone. The tattoos have changed." She's right. They run to his wrists but stop low on his shoulders and don't touch his neck this time.

"That's just cool. A new look every time you transform. You still look like you, but you've got a stylish new haircut this time." Mythryll points out.

It seems this ability needs practice unless he's going to look slightly different every time he changes forms.. He wasn't thinking of anything particular when he released the spell, which might be why his appearance changed slightly.

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

Chapter 226 - Leveling Takes Time?

[Experience Calculated]

[Modified Beyond Parameters by Ability]

[Multiple Levels Gained]

That's a new message to Cain. It usually just says Level Up multiple times. But as long as he's getting levels, it can say whatever it pleases.

"How about we do it again? We had a pretty good nap, and it's supposed to be random, so we'll never get bored doing this dungeon."

Mythryll and Misha grab one of his hands, laughing as they skip back to the entrance while the Companions follow behind them. Cain's toe has just touched the portal when it suddenly flashes with a bright Golden light, forcefully pulling them all inside. The Companions rush after the trio, leaping through into a plain white room, with the only exit visible being the open ceiling.

[Welcome to the Seraphim Trials. This is an individual trial and awards Separate personal experience and rewards. Please choose the upper path for flying tests or the lower for flightless challenges.]

[System Note: All learned skills will become unavailable during trials. If reduced to 5HP or less, applicants will be disqualified and removed from the Trial. Proceed when ready.]

"Learned skills. I wonder if that means we can still use innate skills? Like Dragon Breath or regeneration?" Laura wonders out loud.

"And it says unavailable, not inactive, so ones already active might keep going," Vala adds.

"I don't think it involves fighting, though, since we can't use skills. Maybe it's puzzles and challenges?"

"Evangeline, any input from the actual Seraphim?"

"The trials are a Legend. They're supposed to be individually tailored to determine the worthiness of Seraphim looking to advance and mortals looking to join the Heavenly Hosts. It could be anything, but you're right; they usually don't involve much if any combat. But they've usually got an element of morality, a choice or Judgement. That might be the biggest obstacle."

A moral virtue test? He's so screwed. Never in two lifetimes could he pass that.

"Can I go first? I love games and challenges. Plus, of the three of us, I'm most likely to pass the virtues test." Mythryll teases, sticking her tongue out at Misha.

"Have fun. We'll be right behind you, but it sounds like trials are done separately." Misha agrees.

After Mythryll made her declaration, a small door opened along the wall, allowing her to exit. Once she was through, it closed, leaving the others with no idea what she was facing.

Misha smiles and gives Cain a deep and passionate kiss. "I'm off next. Good luck."

The door opens again to let her through, the open space pitch black, showing Cain nothing.

Alone with the Companions, Cain smirks and uses Merger to pull the clones into himself. That gives him the same five innate skills as last time. [Wrath Aura], [Troubadour's Transformation], [Ice Fog Breath], [Water Affinity], and [Grace of the Seraphim]. Then he activates [Ancient Resistance] and selects Seraphim.

His body shifts into a Silver Skinned man 250 cm tall with electric blue hair hanging to his shoulders and six large white-feathered wings. Evangeline whistles and fans herself like the temperature just shot up, and Cain smiles, turning [Grace of the Seraphim] back down.

"You can leave it up. I was just teasing you." The Seraphim laughs.

Cain poses and extends his wings. "Don't lie, you know I look good."

"You look a bit odd. I haven't seen anyone with skin that silver other than a few of the oldest Elders. Plus, blue hair instead of blonde? You look like you're twenty thousand years old."

Ouch, his transformation made him look like a senior citizen of the Immortal Seraphim race. Not exactly what he was going for. Cain briefly considers altering his appearance, but it's just a dungeon; it's OK for now.

"Everyone pick a trial, and let's do this. It should be great fun."

Cain watches everyone else enter their trials before flying up to the roof, his six-winged Seraphim form rocketing through the air at an incredible rate, the acceleration so intense that even his reinforced body struggles with the G force applied to it. He can feel Evangeline's pride in her species and Laura's pure joy of flying for an instant before he reaches the golden glow of the ceiling, and a welcome message pops up.

[Welcome. Calculating Trial]

[Invalid Application. Mortals only.]

[Beginning Transfer]

The view changes to a living room, much like the Darklight Host's Keep. It's all white marble, though, with golden furniture. A dozen six-winged Seraphim, looking much like his current form, are standing around a low table that is divided into a handful of different screens, displaying a variety of different environments.

"Ah, Ancient. Welcome to the control room. Picking a Seraphim form was a great idea. Unfortunately, the Trial has existed a long time, and it's well aware of your species' abilities."

Cain isn't sure who greeted him, as none of the elders looked up, but he can see that the scenes show his friends and their trials.

Cain heads to the viewing table with great interest in how everyone is doing. "How did I end up here? Did the dungeon glitch again?"

"Not exactly. We hijacked it to run the trials. The Dark Gods have taken an interest in your friends, and we were curious why. They don't seem to be corrupted by the influence, which is unusual. Would you care for a drink while we wait? This can take multiple hours to complete."

[That's the Council. You're not in the dungeon anymore; this is the Higher Realm. Whatever you do, don't let them know you brought a Demon with you here.]
Evangeline's voice in his mind sounds panicked, and Cain stops to take in his surroundings. She's right. It doesn't feel like he's in the dungeon anymore.

"A drink would be excellent, thank you. If I might ask, why can't Ancients take the trials?"

One of the elders looks at him with a small smile and laughter in his eyes. "Because they always cheat, of course. You've managed to send five others to complete what should be a once-in-a-lifetime challenge on your behalf, and you haven't even realized you've done anything out of the usual yet."

"They were intended to do it for themselves. I just happen to gain experience from their actions. See how much fun they're having?"

Laura answers trivia questions while flying an obstacle course with a timer counting down. Cain can't hear the questions or the answers, but she's clearly having the time of her life.

"Are you certain this is what fun means?" Another Seraphim Elder asks, pointing to where Vala is viciously beating the referee of her trial.

"Possibly. You know how demons are, she might be enjoying the violence, but she might be frustrated. They're almost as irritable as humans." This take on current events is enough to have the Seraphim elders chuckling as they watch the trials.

The trials don't look particularly dangerous, but Cain can see dozens of ways that you could accidentally injure or kill yourself trying to multitask. Especially for the non-flying members. Scenarios involving rescues are a common theme, with some being in high-rise buildings or along cliffs.

Mythryll has found herself in a forest with a group of abandoned children, with no map, no access to her inventory and not enough supplies for everyone. Unable to use skills or spells to help them, she's started trying to come up with the best way to find suitable shelter. The Fallen Warder class has excellent senses for nature, and the innate ability to make plants grow, which she has some hope might still be usable.

"Everyone wait right here, I will circle the area for a moment, and see what I can find. There should be water if we keep heading downhill, plus the forest is full of edible plants." The children aren't happy about it, making her agree to come back every few minutes so they don't feel abandoned again, but huddle up in a group.

Sniffing around, she catches the smell of berries and water. A short jog takes her to a stream with several berry bushes and what she recognizes as edible tubers growing. She rushes back to the children, while trying to recall how she got here. Her memory is fogged; nothing before stumbling across the children is clear. But there's a feeling like she's done this before, Rescued a helpless child from the forest, so Mythryll has decided it must be her duty. She has a great sense for the natural surroundings, so it seems like the sort of thing she would volunteer for.

"Follow me, everyone. I have found food and water not far away. I know you're tired, but if everyone picks up any dry branches and fallen wood you see, we can make a nice warm fire when we get there."

The children, a mix of a dozen different species, are happy to comply. The thought of a warm fire and a full belly is irresistible. As they hike the children fill Mythryll in about the community trip they were on with their parents and friends, how it got attacked by wild monsters and how they've been wandering through the woods for a week until they found each other.

"Are there more of you still missing?" Mythryll asks in a mild panic.

"No, this is everyone. At least, everyone that was still alive." A stout Dwarven girl says, teary-eyed.

"Never fear. I'll keep you safe until we're found. Surely someone else will be looking for you. We only need to be safe until then." Mythryll is confident she can fight off a few wild

Beasts. She's got a very high-quality sword and a vicious-looking staff with her, after all.

Once they reach the stream, she gathers her charges. "Alright. Pile the wood there and make us a ring of rocks in that hollow between the trees. That will be our fire pit. I'll gather us some food and fill the water pouches we have."

Mythryll finds that her plant growth ability works fine on the edible plants, giving her more than enough to feed everyone. It also gives her an idea for shelter, and she grabs a bunch of Vines growing near the river. Planting them between the trees and weaving them around the trunks as they grow makes first a low wall, then a crude domed roof with a vent hole above their fire pit. It's not pretty, but it does keep the wind and most likely the rain as well out.

Roasted yams and fresh berries with assorted tree nuts might not be the most amazing meal ever, but the children go to sleep with full stomachs. They're awoken early in the morning by the sound of hooves along the river bank, splashing and clopping along the rocks. It's a group of centaur warriors, drawn to them by the smell of smoke.

"What are you lot still doing here? Every settlement for a hundred miles was destroyed when the monsters rampaged, and the surviving residents fled to the city. The centaurs and the Druids are the only ones left in this forest."

If that's the case, the refugees are likely in worse shape than her group is. "How did you fare? Are the centaurs intact and safe?"

"You're looking at us. Four men, two women, and five children. That's all that's left."

"Care to join us then? I can make food grow from edible plants, just don't pick them all. We've got water and shelter as well."

"You're not running to the city?" One of the centaur women asks, and Mythryll shakes her head.

"And risk everyone starving to death amongst thousands of refugees? No. I'll explain everything to the children, and we can stay here until things recover. With your help, we can do very well right where we are."

With that, the scenario ends, and Mythryll finds herself in the white room again, a sense of victory filling her at the outcomes of the seven trials she went through as her memory returns.

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

Chapter 227

Misha has stumbled upon a much more difficult moral quandary. Her scenario found her staying with a group of merchants who had paid off an immense debt her family had left her, saving her from debt collectors.

She believes she has been paying them back for over a year now, with many more to go, when a Dark Apostle approaches her with a proposition to change her entire life. This servant of the Dark Gods promises her power and forbidden knowledge that will help her pay off her debts in no time at all. So long as she ditches the merchants and follows the Apostle on a mission. The woman promises it won't be long, but at first, Misha refuses, unwilling to go back on her word.

The Dark Apostle isn't offended, knowing that such a significant action needs appropriate motivation. Instead, she gives Misha a little more knowledge every time she visits the store. The tipping point is when she lets slip what the plan is.

The mission is to gain the favor of the local Lord and influence him to allow the potions made by the Dark Gods to be sold in town. They're mighty, in demand, and expensive but forbidden. In exchange, Misha will get knowledge of their creation and a profit cut, paying her debt off in a single day.

In the control room, Cain wipes tears of laughter from his eyes while the Elders look at him, confused. "Sorry, but she didn't stand a chance. That drawing of the local Lord, is it generated from her repressed memories?"

"Yes, it's supposed to be the most tempting appearance they've ever seen to see if the applicant will abandon duty and reason for a lover and power."

"In that case, I'm flattered. I thought you were using emotional bonds to sway her. You see, that picture is of me in human form."

The Seraphim all smile at the revelation, congratulating Cain on finding such a loyal lover. At the same time, in the Trials, Misha falls into a lust-filled path of wealth and power before being ejected to join Mythryll in the white room. A heavy blush fills her cheeks, and the Elf immediately realizes the Dark Apostle failed the test somehow. Meanwhile, Cain, who was watching from the control room, is making mental notes of all the things Misha likes and her inclination to put her desire to be with him before anything else.

He never knew the lovely Misha had such interesting repressed desires.

Where Human Cain would have been flattered and flustered, Ancient Cain has begun making plans to make her his in a much more permanent way. Now that he knows what

she likes and how to give it to her, he has to help her accept that it's really what she needs in her life. Even without going through the trials, Cain has gained a precious gift today.

Another failure of the exam is Vala. Her trial seemed easy, an obstacle course with multiple choices along the way opening various paths. Easier for correct answers, harder for wrong answers. Unfortunately for her, the one asking the questions holds an open grudge against demons and slides snarky comments and backhanded insults into the questions.

To her credit, she made it halfway through before pummeling him unconscious and taking his remote to open the paths through the maze. It was immensely satisfying but not a successful test of her patience and tolerance levels.

Currently, the entire group is watching Nemu and what is supposed to be a test of her desire to do the right thing by others, even at the risk of harming herself and damaging her reputation. Only she seems to have picked an entirely different option.

She is halfway through the test and has rescued a lost Princess, kidnapped years ago and taken away from her family. The goal is to bring the princess to her father, the King, revealing that the Nemu in this scenario is, in fact, a bandit and relying on the King's mercy to set her free. Instead, they're cuddled up in an abandoned shack in the woods, snacking on wild fruit and playing card games, the Princess having almost forgotten about her desire to go home. They snack, they nap, they style each other's hair, and they share gossip. They're so content where they are that the actual completion of the test is in question.

Nemu still goes out and kills any patrols the enemy kingdom sends for the Princess, keeping her safe and the exam going, but the elders are getting concerned that she will not be returned to her birthright.

"Which is more morally important? Duty to the kingdom or the happiness of others around you? If they decide not to return, is it a fail or a draw? She did choose and manage to rescue the princess successfully, getting full points at the start of the examination." One Elder sighed, looking at the others.

Outside the examinations, only a few hours have passed. Inside the trials it has been most of a week, and everyone is nearly finished. Some with near-perfect scores, while some are coming very close to failing.

The Princess Nemu rescued decides she simply must see her older brother again, and Nemu fulfills her wishes, taking her back to the palace and her rightful place in it. It was an additional week before anyone noticed Nemu's presence; the song she was playing for her princess attracted the attention of the King as he passed by her quarters. The older man chooses to overlook Nemu's past as a bandit in reward for returning his

daughter, and the scenario fades, bringing the Felian back to the white room with a grumpy expression.

"She's so soft, soft as angel wings. Couldn't they have given me one more nap before going?" The Felian complains as she appears back in the starting room, making Mythryll and Misha laugh. Of course, the cat woman is most upset about losing a good sleeping spot.

They all finish their trials, and the old Seraphim turns to Cain, who is still laughing at Laura's insistence she is allowed to fly a little longer.

"You have assembled a fine party, Ancient. One of the best we've seen so far. We have run this examination hundreds of times before, and rarely does more than one member meet the standards to join the Heavenly Host. Over half your group passed, and one only failed out of instinctive loyalty to you. We will be looking forward to your future endeavors."

Done with him, the Seraphim Elders eject Cain back to the waiting room type area of the dungeon to rejoin his group. He appears back in his human form, wearing the same jeans and tank top as he was earlier instead of the armored shorts and shirt he put on to enter the dungeon.

[Current Appearance] Human Trailer Park Thug

The notification startles him. He's still got the same armor equipped, but his appearance has different clothes. He didn't know he could do that; maybe it's a preset form? And who decided he looks like a trailer park gangster?

This must be part of the [Malleable Form] racial passive that Ancients get. The system has no description, but it was a requirement for the new Summoning skill. Cain thought that was all there was to it; changing his looks. The Seraphim changing his appearance has shown him an entirely new way to use the ability. Not just for his features, but how the system displays his equipped gear like clothing.

With a thought, Cain changes his clothing appearance to the black Dark Elven Suit, with the polished black shoes and a gray silk shirt with the sleeves rolled up. The golden necklace, bracelets, and rings he's wearing become visible, and he decides against hiding them, as he likes the look.

With the stylish haircut, trimmed short on the sides, and a deeply tanned skin tone that almost matches Misha, plus a variety of tattoos showing on his chest, down his arms, and onto his hands, Cain decides that this is a good look on him. But how to save it? Focusing on the desire to record the form is all it takes.

[Save Form: Human Mafia Don] Y/N

Yes, this look should serve many purposes. Plus, the outfit is exceptionally comfortable.

[Trial of the Seraphim Complete.]

[Calculating Rewards]

The first to see a change is Evangeline, whose underdeveloped the second set of wings has grown to match her first, bringing a whoop of joy from the Seraphim.

"I did it; I'm a fully-fledged adult now. No more jokes from my kin about being too young for my powers." The little one that was messing with the dungeon only had one set of wings, which confuses Cain until what Evangeline said sinks in. She must have smaller secondary wings because she's young. She was Legendary, so likely six wings in total, but only two that are fully grown.

"It gave me a pink hair ribbon as a consolation award. Bring that insufferable Seraphim back here so I can punch him some more." Vala mutters, making Laura giggle.

"Did anyone get something amazing?" Cain asks, realizing that awards given went straight to his summons instead of ending in his inventory as expected.

"I was given a purification spell that removes corruption from plant life. It's like the one I already had, but with a huge area of effect." Mythryll smiles.

Laura puffs a little dragon breath at the roof. "I learned a new breath trick. I can make the ice in the fog sharp, so it both cuts and freezes."

"Oh, very nice. That will be great when you run into things you can't freeze. Just slice and dice, then let the fog refrigerate the leftovers."

[Experience Calculated]

[Multiple Levels Gained]

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

Chapter 228 - Upgrading Stats Matters

The recent level gains have brought Cain to a nice round level 160. It's well past time to upgrade his base stats, so he opens his interface and looks everything over.

[Name] Cain

[Level] 160

[Class] Puppet Master

[Race] Ancient

[Stats]+130->30

[STR] 175->200

[DEX] 175->200

[CON] 175->200

[INT] 175->200

[HP] 1400->3200

[MP] 1750->4000

Growth Rate 8hp/CON 10mp/INT -> 16HP/CON, 20MP/INT

That's amazing, hitting 200 in their respective stats doubled his HP and MP growth rates, just like hitting 100 did. He's not sure how it will affect his physical damage modifiers, or agility, but he's got an incredible amount of base mana now. Not that he has a wealth of skills that need it.

Misha and Mythryll are also focused on their interfaces, upgrading their Skills instead of their stats.

With a smile Misha returns her focus to reality and calls for a Summon. This isn't one she gained from Cain, but a new Ability she finally had the points for. [Summoned Helper] an Epic Golem, upgraded from Greater by her [Greater Minions] skill. It looks like a baby Record Keeper, a bird kin with a feathery beaked head, clawed feet, blue and purple feathered wings and blue Cleric robes with Gold trim.

It's a bit shorter than she is, but taller than the Elves, and looks up at her with what passes for a smile, the flickering flames from the book in its hands going from black and blue to a gentle pink that just radiates a feeling of happiness.

The Demon makes a happy squawk, like a crow that just got a treat and gives Misha a bow. "Good to meet you too. My name is Misha and I look forward to working with you in the future."

The Demon gives another bow and moves to stand behind her, ready for any instructions it is given.

"I guess she's not talkative? That's alright though, we've got our share of chatterbox types already." Cain teases while Nemu, Laura and Evangeline flip him off at the same time.

Mythryll is finished now as well, and is wondering where the feathery Demon came from until she sees that it Shadows Misha like a lost puppy. It's really quite cute, like it just wants so much to impress her that it can't stand to be anywhere else.

The Elf went for a series of upgrades to her Shadow Damage bonuses and [Corrupted Forest Friends]. She calls them out now, getting four Greater Golem quality bears. They have got glowing red eyes, a dark mist surrounding them and a serious case of mange. The missing fur just makes them even scarier looking, but the feathery Demon seems to like them, coming over to pet their heads.

"They're still Greater Golems, and I couldn't get the last upgrade to their numbers yet, but they should be extremely durable with all the other upgrades finished. I got more upgrades to my Treants as well, both in numbers and in damage."

The bears are a good match for her Demonic Form with the black tree branch hair and Dryad like appearance, but Misha keeps that to herself, in case the Elf thinks the Demonic bears are ugly and takes it as an insult.

While they're busy admiring the new summons, Cain is still deciding what skill to upgrade next. They've all got to be done eventually, but he's got so many summons already that it's getting out of hand. Maybe he should order them to merge more often, instead of just flooding the area with bodies?

The obvious choice seems to be Supporters, so that's where Cain puts his skill points.

Looking at the waiting skills, he's a bit sad he didn't manage to keep the skill points from the quest reward. The reward he got was obviously way better, but still, it would have been nice to have those ten extra points.

With the final upgrade, Cain can now call 18 supporters, assuming he doesn't use Ancient Resistance to triple whatever species he's picked them from. At the current time, one is constantly reserved for the Spider Queen who inhabits the lower levels of the Guild Castle along with her daughter Aramia, but that still leaves him more than enough supporters to work with.

Everyone makes their way out of the dungeon to recover and enjoy the afternoon, having entirely lost track of time. The trials moved at a different time flow than the outside world, and only a few hours have passed since they entered the dungeon a second time, making it early evening in the outside world.

"How about a barbecue first? A quick snack might be just what we need to settle down after that unexpected turn of events."

At just that moment, Sora flies over to them, the Tengu twins from Sunnybrook in tow. "Did we hear barbecue? We'll whip up something amazing for you. These two just discovered a new sauce, created by the Elves of Sunnybrook, and it's great with roasted meat."

As if they'd ever say no to that. "Let's get it going then. Any word on how the first full day with a baby Demon Queen went?"

"She didn't set anyone on fire today. And she's growing really fast. Hilda says she looks like she's almost 3 years old already after her nap. By this time tomorrow she should look old enough to start school. The new Lieutenants are already making a lesson plan. Young Neffie is proving to be very intelligent, and almost as mischievous as I am."

Sora almost sounds proud of that fact, like a prank loving Demon Queen is a good thing. But then, in her eyes, maybe it is. One the other hand, the Tengu twins have almost mastered the art of blending into the background, the direct opposite of the flamboyant Lieutenant.

They've got a fire going in one of the outdoor pits in the park between the keep and the dungeon portals, getting the coals nice and hot for cooking. Despite the late hour, it's still very warm out here in the desert, and the kitchen is on the main floor.

"Did you guys switch out duty stations, or just come to visit?" Cain asks as they set up tables and chairs in the park.

"We've switched for now. Lickity and the kids are back in Sunnybrook, and Neffie is a menace to all forms of wings, so for the sake of our feathers we came here and sent some puppets to help out at the house."

"Symbia sent you fifty more dolls by the way. They've all got two sets of clothes and a set of armor with a sword. She said you'd need some soon." Maggie greets them, coming back from her inspection of the walls. The smell of roasting meat carries, and there isn't much to break up the monotony of her days lately.

So many bandits and small Guilds died in the attack that there's almost no hostile human presence in the desert, and the defenses scare away all the wildlife, so mostly the wall guards just sit in the shade and watch the sand blow around. Sora offered to trade her out so she could do something else, but the serious minded Orc has no intentions of leaving the walls entirely to the Tengu and the puppets, no matter how many guards she could call.

"That should work out well then. We've got plenty of staff for the houses now, it's just a matter of guards. Has Symbia had time to create more of her high level ones for the Castle?"

"The full compliment is standing by underground. The artists have finished the Keep and they're working on the first floor, but they're afraid of the friendly spiders, so they like to keep the guards around to keep the critters from sneaking up on them."

Cain can only imagine how many times that's happened to them already. The little ones are completely silent when running down a web, and don't talk, so you wouldn't get any sort of warning if they were sent to bring you a message.

Cain pulls the puppets from the Guild Bank, finding that they've all been dressed like Hilda, in a maid outfit with armor and a two handed sword. Unlike the Demon though, they don't have any magic of their own, and the sword is a long slender one and not the double sided heavy blade that the Succubus Royal Guards prefer. Still, they will make excellent multi purpose guards.

[Thanks everyone who helped equip the puppets. Fifty matching outfits and sets of equipment couldn't have been easy.] Cain sends in Guild chat.

[No problem Boss. We're training some new smiths and tailors here in Graska, and every successful attempt they made went to a Puppet. It saves on waste, since that stuff usually just gets torn apart or melted down to try again for more crafting skill.]

So that's what they're up to. Cain knew they wouldn't be idle for long, too many members prefer creation to killing monsters. Looking through the Guild Bank they've been busy too. There's all sorts of things in there, almost enough to fill up all 300 spaces it can currently hold.

[How are we on storage? I see the bank is almost full.]

[Carlos is sending out a ship in the next few days to the Eastern Continent to get rid of most of what's in the bank. We've got a bunch in the store rooms still, but we haven't had to start moving things to Fort Darklight Castle yet.]

It looks like things are starting to run smoothly on their own now. That's a load off Cain's mind.. Now he can just focus on leveling up and adventuring.

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

Chapter 229

This is the longest amount time so far that Cain has gotten to spend with Maggie, who, despite her name, doesn't seem to have a particular problem with Elves.

"Orcish Family names only change when you accomplish something great. I was born an Elfsbane, and I'll stay one until I do something great enough to earn a new name. The castle defense was pretty good, but I'd need to hold it alone or something equally memorable to earn that sort of recognition." She explains as they eat.

That's an exciting way of keeping history. You get named after the most remarkable thing someone in your direct lineage has done. "Does that work the other way as well? Do they name people after shameful failures until they've redeemed themselves?"

"Not often, usually Orcs kill cowards, but if the rest of family were important, the community would change their names to shame them until they have atoned or died out trying." Maggie shrugs, unconcerned with the plight of those denounced as cowards and betrayers.

After dinner, they retire back to the keep, Cain carrying the half-asleep Misha to his room and tucking her into bed. Soon, he will move things forward between them. He needs to decide how. He knows she likes the newer, more dominant version of him, but he's unsure how far that desire extends. Should he give her a set of choices? Put everything in the open and let her decide how she wants their relationship to be?

Somehow all the options he's willing to give have the same outcome, just different ways of getting there. Cain doesn't care if she wants to be his advisor, wife, or even his pet, but he will make her officially his.

That thought circulates through his mind until he falls asleep with her in his arms, a deep blissful sleep with the whispering voices of the Merged Companions giving him all sorts of ideas on how to make things work best for him. If he wasn't so tired, he might realize what was going on, but instead he absorbs everything like a hypnosis session.

Nemu whispering in his mind about Pretty collars being the way to a woman's heart slowly imprints itself into his subconscious alongside Vala's requirement that he show strength and Nila's suggestion that a lady loves adventure, so he should bring her new places.

The Oath Breaker only loves killing things. Messing with Cain was secondary. But the Companions see the Merger as a Golden Opportunity to form themselves their perfect master—one who likes exactly what they want.

Cain wakes up after the most strange and intense night of dreams, glad to be back in reality again. Misha is stretched out across his broad chest, and he smiles down at her sleeping form, happy just to hold her for the moment.

"No more spicy barbecue before bed. Those were the weirdest dreams ever. But the one where everyone was naked on a ship still seems like a lot of fun even in the morning light." He thinks, making the Companions giggle.

Misha begins to stir, and Cain grabs her by the backside, pulling her up for a good morning kiss when the door to the bedroom bursts open.

"Come quick, we've got a problem," Maggie announces, grabbing him by the hand, heedless of his state of undress and where she just removed said hand from.

Cain is unceremoniously dragged down the stairs, hastily equipping his gear to return to his Mafia boss persona of the previous evening, only to find a group of low-level Guild members in the front room crying.

"What's wrong? Get me up to date." His voice rumbles with authority as Cain uses [Noble Command] on the nearest Guild member.

"We were upset with how slow Miss Char makes us level up, so we decided to skip to the Beastkin Dungeon for some levels. We can use the Guild Skill when she's not around, and it's not that far above our level, so we thought we would be fine. But when we called them, the Beastkin went crazy and swarmed us and then Sara, Sara she..." That's where the girl trails off and points to the mangled body of a female Orcish warrior, most likely their tank.

Knowing they're facing a time limit, Cain immediately uses [Eternal Solace Denied], bringing the Warrior back to life with a gasp. A half second later, the crying girl who related the series of events that led to her death casts a healing spell on the risen tank.

"This will reset you to level 1 once I release you from being my Puppet. But first, do you even understand what clear and obvious mistake led to your death?"

The Orc shakes her head sadly, not knowing where they went wrong. "No, sir. One minute everything was fine; the next, we were being swarmed. I don't understand; the group that are 5 levels above us do it without the summons and survive just fine."

Char storms in with a positively furious look on her face. "Did you think to ask that group what I taught them about the Beastkin Dungeon? Or did you charge in blindly?"

"Well, they're only a few levels above us; it shouldn't have been so hard." One of the human mages complains.

"What they learned, that you should have before entering, is that the Beastkin can smell demons, and it enrages them. Let me guess; you called out Wrath Bringers to be just like me, right?" They cringe at Cain's angry voice but nod in agreement.

"Alright, you miscreants. You're lucky you found Cain in time. One or two more minutes and your foolishness would have gotten your friend killed permanently. Now follow me, and I'll decide your punishment." The icy tone the Shaman uses has them all panicked, fearing for their fate.

"Guild Master, can't you keep me with you? Punish me here as your Puppet or whatever this state is?" Sara begs.

"Puppets don't have free will. Are you sure that's what you want?"

"Please, you don't understand. She's so mean and bossy, always telling us what to do." Sara is nearly in tears again.

"I'll help you understand. Strip off your armor; you don't deserve to be wearing it now. Then Kneel and kiss Char's feet while you beg forgiveness for insulting her."

"But I'm" That's as much as she gets out before her body reflexively responds, leaving her in her underwear before she drops to her knees and begins begging.

"Miss Char, I'm so sorry I doubted you and called you a tyrant. Please forgive this unworthy Orc." The others stare in shock, unable to accept that the proud warrior followed such a demand without hesitation.

"You can stop kissing her feet now and pay attention to me instead. That's what it means to have no free will. You will do exactly what I say when I say it, no matter how much you don't want to. Now answer, do you want to remain a Puppet or restart at level 1 and accept her punishment?"

Sara sits up on her knees, trying to cover herself with both hands, a horrified look on her face. "Please, no. I'll be good. Just release me, and I'll work my way back up from level 1."

"That's what I thought. Just so everyone understands, I would never take that ability too far, but nothing stops me from doing so. You don't want to end up in her position, or even worse. So listen well to the ones with experience, and don't jump into the unknown without at least doing basic research. If you'd even bothered to ask the most simple questions first, all of this could have been avoided. Instead, Sara is paying for your mistakes and nearly paid with her life."

That's enough scolding, and they all begin to follow Char downstairs to the portal except Sara. She tried but found she hadn't been permitted to move.

"I'm going to release you now. Get dressed and follow Char home. I hope this little lesson was enough to teach you to value your life." Cain says, patting the Orc on the head.

The spell is released, and the girl equips plain clothes before looking down at the door and bowing. "Thank you for saving my life. I know it didn't come without a cost, but still, thank you."

"Be careful on your way home. At level 1, you'll be very weak and squishy. You might want to keep a few increased HP items on until you get used to your demotion or regain some levels." Cain shoos her off after the group and turns to where Misha and Mythryll are standing, looking sadly at the departed Guild Members.

"They won't forget that anytime soon. Not that Char would let them even if they tried." Mythryll says.

Misha shakes her head and sighs. "Imagine losing everything to start over at level 1 because your group got impatient. And to save what? A month or two at the very most?"

"Enough with the sad thoughts. Everything is sorted, and their story should keep others from doing anything so reckless. At least they made it out with only one group member dead. If they had been truly unlucky, none of us would ever know what happened to them."

"How about another dungeon after breakfast? One where I can fly around all day. With an obstacle course." Laura suggests. Does she think they'll find another obstacle course? The one he's merged with seems to think so.. Or at least desperately hopes so.

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

Chapter 230

The next dungeon of the morning turns out to be the exact opposite of what Laura hoped for. An underground cavern system filled with Kobold miners. On the bright side, there are plenty of natural resources available.

[Scenario: Fall of the Kobold Mines] attacker selected, adjusting the difficulty.

[Target Level 189 Selected]

[System Notification: Area limited to 25 Group Members]

"So they weren't joking about limiting the dungeons to stop you from breaking them? We might have to do stuff ourselves. Plus, it will kill the experience gain." Mythryll complains.

"Give me a moment to try something," Cain calls his Oath Breakers but merged into two bodies.

Then the same with a pair of Wrath Bringers and Lamia Scourge Casters. If the limit counted total summons, they would have been locked out, but they're still under 25 actual bodies, with most of the army already here. He calls a dozen copies of Mythryll in two bodies and four of Kone to take care of healing duty, also merged into a single pair including their copies of Su.

"There, that's most of them. Companions, merge with your Bonded Forces, my skill should still count them for experience sake, but the dungeon doesn't count them against our 25 body limit."

"Why me this time?" Mythryll asks trading pokes with herself.

"Underground your Vines should be extra effective, reaching around corners and able to blanket rooms. So, with them merged, we should be able to keep the Kobold forces from circling us or running away to fight later."

As they move into the caverns, they cross multiple choke points, low areas with narrow passages designed to keep large enemies out. Cain dismisses the Wrath Bringers for them and calls them again on the other side, but the Oath Breakers prefer to run on their lower four arms and their legs, head dangling upside down with their top arms forward to attack. The effect terrifies the Kobolds, and they're often fleeing even before restraining Vines can be cast to catch them.

[Scenario Clear: Defenders Routed]

[Restrictions Lifted]

[Level Up]

"Excellent. Now I can call the puppets to mine this place empty. There's so much good stuff in here." Cain rubs his hands in anticipation of the Smithy Shop's response to the influx of materials.

With eighty level 16 Puppets at work, the extraction goes smoothly back to the mine entrance where they started. They collected a small mountain of material, primarily ordinary metals, but they also got a massive collection of Jade and gems from various levels.

The furniture makers are over the moon with joy. Jade furniture crafted by Dwarves is one of the most prized items in most noble households. It's hard to get enough matching material to make an entire set, but with all of this, they can make dozens. Not to mention the fist-sized rubies and emeralds.

[I would say we're rich, but we already were.] Cixelcid jokes when he sees all the material passing through the Guild Bank and to their crafters.

[It only counts after you craft and sell it. Until then, we're just rock collectors.] Dimnys jokes, looking over the assortment of Mythril weapons and Legendary Armor she has created lately. Sold, it's worth hundreds of thousands of Gold. But until then, it's just filling up her storage room.

"I must say, that went particularly well. But I do feel we're working entirely too hard lately. I know you said you needed to get some levels in a hurry to avoid assassination attempts, but multiple dungeons a day is a lot of effort." Mythryll gripes as they finish transferring material to the Guild bank.

"I know it's a lot to ask, but you can ditch if you like. There's no immediate need for everyone to level up. Even afterward, if you want to accompany me to the western side of the continent, there's no need to be higher level at first. With the summons involved, we've got the upper hand on anything that isn't too far above my level."

"It's not like I'm that far behind anymore. After that dungeon full of level 189 Kobolds, my level skyrocketed. At this rate, I'll get to all the good skills in only a few more days of hard work."

Nila smiles as she gets an idea. "How about a nice vacation cruise once we're done? There are many great vacation spots down the coast if we head east then south. We will be able to visit the Landis Kingdom, then the Elves in the far south, both of which have amazing tropical beaches, before crossing over and seeing what is going on beyond the central mountains. We heard in Assah that the whole side of the continent is in chaos and civil war so we could find the situation to be almost anything."

"How long of a sail is that?" Mythryll asks, excited about the idea of a vacation at sea. And it should be a real vacation since they can use summons to crew the ship.

"If we go all the way around, roughly three months? We could do it in one, but then we'd have no time to stop and see the sights or trade goods."

"Excellent idea Nila. How about I try to get close to level 180 before we set out? We're bound to find something along the way to earn some experience. But at level 180, I will have all my basic summons tripled, which might give me an additional skill. There was a hidden one when I got all of them doubled." Cain lays out his plan.

Misha leans up against his side with a soft smile. "Works for me. Another dungeon then?"

Mythryll is happy to see the pair finally being publicly affectionate. It might be baby steps, but she did promise to help her friend with moving her relationship forward. She hasn't had to do much, lately Cain has become more assertive, and he's beginning to take charge himself, just like Misha hoped.

The Puppet Master didn't say anything about his trials earlier, but maybe the Seraphim helped him adapt to his new species or gave him relationship advice?

The Elf is still thinking about that when they head back into the dungeon, getting an unusual notification.

[Battle of Vermont Selected] Choose a side to determine restrictions.

None of them have ever heard of the place before, much less the battle. At least, not in this world. That makes picking a side somewhat tricky, as they don't know what restrictions they will face.

"I say we attack. We don't know what we will be restricted to, but I'll adapt once we see them." Cain says decisively, and the others see no reason to disagree.

[Attacker Chosen] Winning Conditions: Human and Demon forms only. Numbers unlimited. Twelve hours they are allowed to capture Vermont before reinforcements arrive. The battle begins in 2 minutes.

"We can work with that. Fortunately for us, Mythryll can take Demon form with no breaks. I'll merge with most of the Companions and release Vala to fight." When Mythryll transforms, and the non-Demon Companions are merged, the barrier between them and the dungeon begins to shine with a green light.

"Mythryll, call your trees, see if they violate the restriction." They don't, nor do the Vines; the light is still green.

Cain calls for Lamia, Wrath Bringers, Oath Breakers, then Plague Mages as his Sorcerer type summons and Demonic Spiders as his Agility type Bodyguards, a form learned from defeating Gillibrand. The spiders are really rather cute. The size of an elephant and furry like a tarantula with dozens of red glowing eyes, their pink and gold coloration still makes them look somehow non-threatening.

Misha calls her [Summoned Helper], which the Interface calls a Herald, the human-sized bird-headed Demon with the blue wings and a flaming book. She then chooses to merge with her pair of Record Keepers and call out Lamia and Wrath Bringers as the summons she is granted as a Lieutenant. They're Greater and Epic in Quality, the same as the ones Cain calls, so it only made sense to expand the numbers.

Now all that's left is for Cain to triple their numbers and see what sort of form Ancient Resistance gives him by default for demons.

The Proto Dragon was pretty awesome, though the Seraphim looked ancient. It's not like they show it in their faces or body, but their coloration has changed over time.

Cain selects the ability with his eyes closed, wanting his new form to be a surprise to himself. He can feel his entire body changing and wings forming on his back as the ability takes effect. The feeling is unnerving like something is crawling beneath his skin, making subtle changes instead of the massive expansion of the Dragon.

He can hear clapping begin as the transformation ends, so it must be an impressive one.. Cain slowly opens his eyes and looks down at himself, thinking he's ready for anything.

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

Chapter 231

What Cain wasn't ready for was just how normal he looked. It's an Incubus outfit like he's worn many times before, leather pants, and boots with many spikes and bits of chain mail. He's not wearing a shirt or jacket, and his burnished Bronze skin, with the usual zero percent body fat type heavily muscled physique of a Demon is showing. He flaps the wings he can feel, finding six jet-black and feathered appendages on his back.

Between the wings and the 250cm height, Cain suspects he is a Fallen Seraphim or something similar. Checking his interface shows that his current form is called [Demon Progenitor Default], so maybe he is in the form of a Fallen Seraphim. In the myths of his home world the first Demon was a Fallen Angel.

"Looking good this time. You should pick that form more often, use it to scare the children." Vala laughs, walking a circle around him.

"You'd give them Nightmares for weeks. The Progenitors are a sort of evil that makes us all seem like model citizens." The Oath Breaker agrees, clearly eager to see that in person.

"Alright then. We've got under a minute to go until the fight starts. Oath Breakers will scout the area until they find the defenders. The battle name doesn't give us any clues, but it sounds like a city, so they've likely got scouts out to warn them of incoming attacks. Eliminate all that you see and report back."

The Oath Breakers rush off the moment the command is given while the rest of the army waits patiently. It's only a few minutes before reports start coming in. Scouts in the open grassland beyond the forests. They're staying out in the open where they can't be ambushed and within sight of each other.

Then more reports, it is indeed a city, open plan, no walls, no barriers. The defenders are Gnomes and Goblins. Level 235. That last bit could be an issue. Cain is level 160, Misha is a bit behind him, and damage against monsters scales, unlike damage between transfers.

They're 75 levels above him, so he can still do damage, but there will be a lot of reduction.

"We'll need to be very careful with Mythryll this run. With the level advantage, they'll be doing a lot of damage. Unless you want to be a Lieutenant?"

Mythryll shakes her head. "Cloning them is a better use of the skill, I think. They're going to be all spread out between the Guild Houses with responsibilities and such. That's not for me."

"Your choice. We will keep you hidden in the shadows and the trees then, out of the line of sight, while we attack the city. If none of us go into the open, they'll think it's all one big army advancing through the woods."

The Oath Breakers have returned with a detailed outline of the defended areas. The city doesn't seem to be prepared for an invasion, or perhaps they're planning on guerilla warfare in the streets once the army breaks through their first lines of defense. They've got artillery scattered all through the city, making it much harder to eliminate than organized ranks and a standing army on what the demons refer to as Mole Dogs that is roughly five thousand strong.

Cain isn't sure quite what to call for his Supporters, as they need to be human or Demon, and all his usual choices are neither. He doesn't know an excellent human Summoner he can use, does he? Going through the options gained from Gillibrand, he finds a human necromancer among the possibilities. That should work out well, as long as it lets him call his undead. Continuing the search, he finds a unique one—a Pestilence Demon with a class known as a Plague Mother. The description says her class can Summon Plague Demons, which Cain knows will be acceptable.

His companion choices tripled after his level 160 upgrades and only the Spider Queen active; he calls an even dozen of them out onto the battlefield, along with four more copies of Misha for healing.

"Hello." The Plague mother drawls, her words gurgling in the throat like her lungs are full of fluid. She's tall at nearly 180cm but so slender he could close one of his Demonic

hands around her waist. Her pale green skin and stringy black hair make her look like she drowned in a vat of poison, but her plain black robes are clean and dry.

"Welcome. We need demons for this attack. Call what you can, and we'll get ready to charge." Cain smiles at the Demon, who repeatedly nods before her and her clones call on eight Lords of Decay and Twelve Blighted Paladins each.

"There's so many of them. We shall rule the world!" Her laughter makes it sound like the Plague Mother is drowning before she stops and spits out a mouthful of nasty green phlegm.

"Sorry about that. It builds up." Now her voice is closer to pleasantly human, with just a little gurgle to the tone.

"This will be rough; they're pretty high level. So just do what you can, and I'll keep Summoning you back if you die." Cain explains, and the demons bow low in acceptance.

"Anything for the Progenitors."

"The south side is weakest. There are a lot of forces there, but the roads are wide and branch off to give easy access to most of the city. The west looks much more undefended, but there is a canal inside the city that they've dropped all the bridges across, and the roads are narrow and winding, reducing line of sight."

"We've got some pretty big troops; it might be best to go with the wide streets unless one side has large yards and low houses we can simply trample over?"

"The East is the noble district. They've got walls around the communities, but they're low and weak. There are many guards on the patrol in the East, but they're private guards and not military, so guessing their skill level is impossible in a dungeon where everyone is the same level."

"Alright, here's the plan then. The palace is in the middle of the city, on an island. Taking it would take the city. But if we crush the commercial district in the south and the Nobles in the East first, resistance should be minimal at the palace. Form up, and let's get into position."

Cain places almost everyone in the south, with only two Plague Mothers and Four Oath Breakers attacking the city's Eastside as a diversion. One on one, their enemies will likely be more powerful than most of the summons, but the Lord of Decay is very durable, and the Oath Breaker is a master of ambush, with incredible damage output.

There are signs that the scouts have noticed them before they begin to charge, mostly gnomes running for the city and shouting. Either something has limited their magical

communication, or this Battle happened before the system existed, and they couldn't communicate directly with the other Guards.

Cain signals the charge when he sees the first guards running with warnings, sending forth a wave of demons while the three of them, plus a copy of Vala and the two Demonic spiders, wait in the trees. He's got his interface open to show him the state of his summons, so he can call them as they fall, giving the impression that more and more forces are coming from the same direction.

The Lamia and Wrath Bringers were the first ones into the enemy lines, with the Oath Breakers teleporting behind them to attack the supply lines and artillery pieces before they could fire more than a few rounds.

It's a slaughter, the Gnomes and Goblins might be high level, but they're lousy fighters compared to the demons. The area healing, buffed by the presence of the Lord of Decay, is enough to keep most of the demons alive, while the defense forces lack any form of spell casters during the first engagement.

Once they start falling, reinforcements start flooding the main streets, then suddenly come to a screeching halt, with a full third peeling off to the East, where the diversion has begun slaughtering the Nobles. That's better than Cain had hoped for. Not only are the Nobles not sending anyone to help, but they've also pulled a good portion of the reinforcements away.

Three of the Plague Mothers in the south have fallen, so Cain sends them all back at once, their Summoned forces getting the attention of the artillery in the city, which begin shelling the open fields as the Plague Demons charge. Right behind them, Cain sends a wave of Wrath Bringers and Lamia, most of whom were destroyed in the initial engagements.

More screaming and shouting spread through the ranks as the Gnome's heavy forces, chicken-like magical constructs two meters tall, and the Mole Dog elites of the Goblins reach the battle. They've begun to rally the defenders, the mounted Goblins viciously attacking every Demon they see.

The constructs don't fare as well, being larger and slower. Against a more human army, they might be incredible, but the Lord of Decay is a genuinely skilled baseball player. With heavy swings of a pilfered artillery piece, the giant demons are crushing the constructs in seconds.

The battle had begun moving into the city streets a mere five minutes in to the fighting when a series of horns rang from the palace, and a three-meter tall Goblin General in polished silver armor charged down the main street to join the battle, along with a dozen golden armored Mole Dog Riders that the system identifies as Red Goblin Dragoons.

Cain realizes they're about to face the first boss of this dungeon, and he's not sure the Summons can actually win the fight without help.

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

Chapter 232

The Goblin General has no problem holding his own against the bloated and monstrous forms of the Lord of Decay, crushing them as fast as they can disengage from battle and reach him.

He's smart as well, heading for the Plague Mothers, eliminating the source of the Demonic reinforcements. Cain keeps sending more and more to replace what has fallen before ordering the Oath Breakers to focus on one the General instead of searching the city to destroy artillery.

The rate of ranged fire is already way down, enough that the demons are reaching the city without issue, but if they can't control that General, they are in danger of being pushed back.

Outnumbered by Legendary Demons, the General is hard-pressed, taking a lot of damage, but able to heal or be healed enough to hold on for now. The horns of the palace sound again, and he increases his attacks, desperately holding the Oath Breakers in combat while the next wave of forces charges.

Only, they're not coming. They've turned East to reinforce the Noble District, all three hundred highly equipped Mole Dog Riders. Even from this distance, Cain is sure he can see the General's heart break as he is abandoned. But still, he fights on, rallying the troops behind him and limiting casualties at the cost of a good portion of the southern city.

Cain doesn't see any civilians, so either they've all been drafted, or they've fled well in advance of the battle.

The attempt to limit casualties is working, the force led by the General isn't shrinking by much, but they're losing a lot of ground, the demons leveling the city around them to give more room to fight. No more mortars are firing at the troops pouring into the city from where Cain and the others are hiding, so he diverts a few more of the Plague Mothers to the East Side to keep the reinforcements away from the army.

Half of the Oath Breakers have joined them, leaving only two in the south who aren't devoted to keeping the Goblin General at bay. It is slowing the advance, but again when

the horns sound, the troops go East and not South. These are infantry and look much less polished than the last batch. The palace must have sent out all their Elite forces in the first wave.

The third time the horns sound, a wave of militia joins the southern battle. They're a ragtag bunch with mismatched weapons and little armor, but there are a lot of them. That only speeds their demise, though. Between Vala and the Lords of Decay, [Pestilence] is spreading from everywhere. They don't have much if any resistance to it, and even with the devoted healing from their Clerics, they're slowly losing health without anyone hitting them.

[The East is Clear] comes the message from the Oath Breakers.

[Charge the palace. Everywhere else has been abandoned in favor of defending the Nobles. Don't bother crushing all the houses; the important occupants must be in the Palace.]

The sight of the demons skittering up the walls with their long-clawed fingers sends screams of terror through the palace guards for the few seconds they live. Seconds later, the screams are followed by the booming crash of the Eastern Draw Bridges being dropped open for the other forces to enter.

The forces led by the General are retreating more quickly now, calling commands in Goblin that aren't being answered. The Oath Breakers have already made it to the South Gates and killed the guards working the doors, making a furious stand to keep the palace from letting the General in while the Plague Mothers rampage in the Eastern Gardens, facing off against whatever defenders they've found.

"We need to move closer. The city has mostly fallen, and it's taking too long to get new demons to the fight from way back here in the trees. Spiders, keep Mythryll safe at all costs."

Cain leads the charge towards the city, his black wings carrying him across the distance with Misha in his arms in mere seconds. The sight has drawn the attention of the General, who roars in frustration. Dozens of horns sound at the sight of Cain, the Gnomes finally identifying the enemy General. The tone doesn't sound like a victory to Cain as he lands among his Oath Breakers inside the south Palace Gates. They sound of desperation and fear.

Two more Goblin Generals charge out of the main palace towards him, and Cain lifts his spear in a challenge. It has grown to match his form, twice as long as when he was a human, and the Pestilent Scimitar is now large enough to be called a great sword in the hands of a human.

Cain takes to the air using [Cloud Dancing], finding that the skill is almost unnecessary with the mobility afforded by the wings of his Demonic Form. His agility and movement

speed are quite noticeably higher than before the skill point increase, and his blade is a blur as he fends off the first attacks of the two Generals.

Everything else in the area quickly backs away, not wanting to get caught up in this vicious engagement between Commanders, despite the commands to kill him at all costs that are being screamed from the balcony.

The Gnomish King must not understand military strategy because he's clearly visible, shouting orders at his overwhelmed castle guards while the Nobles try to flee out the far gate.

There's no need to stop them yet, the victory conditions didn't specify annihilation, so Cain orders the summons to let them flee. The sight should help break what little morale the troops do still have.

Minutes pass as Cain squares off against the Generals, periodically refreshing summons that Misha calls out as getting low. He's taken and done some damage, but nothing significant, and both he and the Generals are still near full health.

They're so strong on defense that even the boost from [Might of Many] isn't enough with his low hit success rate to whittle away through their healing. That changes instantly when a Lamia manages to wrap both ankles of one General just as Cain is striking, pulling him off balance and sending Cain's Spear deep into his belly.

The added damage effect from the Spear activates at that moment, along with a full dose of [Might of Many], sending dozens of defenders to an untimely death, single blows from the attacking demons being enough to kill the brave Goblins.

Cain no longer sees any Gnomes. Even the King has disappeared from his balcony. All that's left are a handful of Goblin Dragoons with a few surviving Mole Dog mounts and the two Generals.

Cain pushes the attack, inflicting a flurry of brutal strikes against the wounded General that ends with a [Decapitating Blow]. Now alone, the last General is in a tight spot, pushed into an ever closing circle with his remaining few loyal warriors. It's only a matter of minutes until they fall when a single lonesome horn sounds in the distance.

The General knocks Cain back with a shoulder charge before retreating to disengage and stab his blade into the earth. "Vermont has fallen, and the King has fled. Do you offer terms Demon Progenitor?"

Cain can see that every one of the remaining Goblins is terrified but determined to fight to the very last, should it be necessary.

[Dungeon Compete: Mission Successful]

[Calculating Experience]

"Go and live to fight another day. Take your men with you." Cain decrees, pointing at the back gate of the palace, the direction the Gnomish Nobles fled.

"The Goblin Kingdoms are that way." The General points out the main gate, clearly meaning that he no longer serves the Gnomish King.

"This doesn't make us friends, Demon, but we will take your mercy."

"I look forward to seeing you in battle again one day." Cain agrees, and the last handful of defenders leave the Palace in defeat. That was a brutal fight, and as close as Cain can guess, under a hundred Gnomes escaped, fewer than fifty Goblins survived. Plus, however many civilians might be hiding in the city.

Having these historical battles available is a lot of fun, certainly much more fun than simply grinding the same ones repeatedly for the experience. Cain hopes the experience is worth it; that battle was brutal.

[Original outcome: Attack Failed. 300,000 demons dead. 13,000 defenders dead.]

[Current Outcome: Attack Successful. 84,000 demons dead. 29,000 defenders dead.]

[Awarding bonus experience]

Was the battle that much more difficult the first time? They must not have had anything like the Oath Breakers who could get into the artillery. That or they were spotted on the way in and didn't understand the danger posed by the magical mortar launchers.

[Mercy Bonus: Gnomish Monarchy was overthrown. Goblin Monarchy restored.]

So they were more than just allies; the Gnomes controlled the Goblin Kingdom. If they're going to start doing more of these dungeons, Cain needs to read a few history books.

[Special Supporter Form Gained: Gilly, Knight Commander of the Goblin Royal Guard]

[Special Legendary Summon Form Gained: Crown Prince Mark, Lord General of the Goblin Dragoons.]

That's pretty awesome.. Typically dungeon mobs would only record by class or type, but these are explicitly recorded by name.

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

Chapter 233 - All The Levels

"Do you think this will give us a lot of experience? I've noticed that the historical dungeons don't give anything until the end."

Cain smiles at the nervous branch-haired form of Mythryll in her Demonic transformation. "I would say so. With a bonus for the underdog win and then another for setting the Goblins free, I think it will award us very well. Plus, it's a full 75 levels higher than I am and had over twenty thousand monsters in it. Even without bonuses, it should be incredible."

[Experience Calculated]

[Modified Beyond Parameters by Ability]

[Level Up]x20

[Experience Cap Reached]

Cain wonders how the cap is determined; he's seen some ridiculous level gains in a single shot when power leveling newbies. But then again, this one is much higher level; what they've received in one go would move a level 1 recruit to well over level 100. From fresh transfer to First Advancement in one quest, the reward would be a logical spot for the system to cap experience, at least on this side of the central continent.

That's another hundred Stat points, and Cain decides to allocate them first, so he doesn't forget in the excitement of upgrading his skills.

[Name] Cain

[Level] 180

[Class] Puppet Master

[Race] Ancient

[Stats]+130->30

[STR] 200->225

[DEX] 200->225

[CON] 200->225

[INT] 200->225

[HP] 3200->3600

[MP] 4000->4500

That last 30 points can sit for now; at level 200 he's likely to need to tweak one stat category to get the class upgrade he wants, so having a few unassigned points will come in handy.

The best part comes next. Level 180 is where he can triple his Lesser and Greater Golems, see the final two skills, and maybe even get a bonus skill from the Lord Commander designation. It's like his birthday, Christmas, and surprise wake-up sex all in one level.

His twenty points vanish instantly, and Cain moves to a total of 36 Lesser Golems and 24 Greater Golems available for Summoning before using [Ancient Resistance] to triple anything. As he hoped, that also unlocked a second hidden skill.

[Lord Captains] Lieutenants and Commanders are granted the Baron Rank and associated benefits.

[Baron Rank Skill: Retinue] Bodyguards and Sorcerors become Greater Golems. Grants 2 of each if the skill is not already known.

Now the Lieutenants and Cid will be able to call Agility and Caster type Greater Golems to their side. Four more Greater Golems might not be game-changing, but having them around has allowed him to send everything else out on attack without worrying about the group's safety.

The Final two skills of his Tree are now visible.

[Commander] Summon or Appoint 1 Commander. They may Summon 1 Sub Lieutenant and gain the benefit of the Puppet Master's Golem Enhancing abilities. Commanders may use the [Summon Lesser Golem] and [Summon Greater Golem] skills.

[General Staff] Grants Puppets intellect equivalent to the average of the Puppet Master's Species. Puppets may be fully autonomous after being given initial instructions.

Commander, he already knows about, but that [General Staff] ability thoroughly explains how Gillibrand was able to have his puppets run a city. With that skill, they're essentially androids, capable of living their own lives but not of disobeying their directives.

Both skills are ten points each, bringing him to level 200, where the token will grant him a chance at a unique class upgrade. Hopefully, he meets the requirements for something extraordinary.

"I think that's enough dungeon for one day, right? Let's relax in the shade and drink something nice and cold."

When they exit the dungeon, they're greeted by a welcoming committee of low-level Guild Members. Char is showing them around the castle and just happened to be passing by the portals when they walked out. The Shaman stops and stares in amazement, seeing their levels have increased so much, as well as Cain and Mythryll's current Demonic Forms.

"Oh, right. We forgot to change back." The Elf laughs, shifting back to her normal appearance, the leathers and bark of her Dryad type Demonic Form giving way to soft Elven skin and an elegant silk dress.

"I think I look pretty good, though. Just a bit too tall." Cain jokes, shifting back to what the system dubbed his Mafia Don appearance.

Char gives him an appreciative look and a wink. "Looking more stylish by the day, Guild Master. Got a hot date tonight?"

Cain wraps his arm around Misha and grins back. "She's hot alright, but I'm not sure we're going on a date tonight."

The new members, primarily youths in their early teens, all laugh at that, a few making jokes about how their parents do things like that. Cain enjoys making Misha blush, so he keeps his arm around her, squeezing her backside.

"We're going to grab some drinks and sit in the park. Feel free to join us when you're done. That goes for all of you."

Char ushers them away, headed towards Maggie, intent on introducing them to the Orcish Lieutenant that runs the castle defense on a day to day basis.

Cain decides to switch things up a little with his Merger, releasing all the Companions and Summoning four Seraphim Inquisitors, which uses one of his two spots for Epic summons, increased to Legendary [Glory of the Mark].

He can still Summon the other and triple his Seraphim in case of trouble, giving him twenty more possible Inquisitors not merged with him, but he's not entirely sure what their abilities are.

They fly, obviously, and have a giant sword, but he was too busy to watch them fight.

[Merger Complete: Skills Gained]

[Terror of the Seraphim] Aura ability. Reduces enemy attack speed by 30 percent

[Judgement] Call Divine Judgement down upon the Guilty for 800 percent Spell Power as holy damage and upon the Righteous for 800 percent Spell Power as healing. Range 5 meters from targeted point. 100MP per use.

Did he get the ability to Smite his enemies with holy fire?

[No. With Sanctifying Holy Light. The Proper way to cleanse the unworthy life from Sinners and Heretics.]

[I like how you think. Got any dating advice?] Cain jokes back.

[Pat her head and stroke her wings when she does right. Spank her bottom when she doesn't. Seraphim don't feel lust, so the courting process is very open and honest. We tell them we want them as mates and see if they agree.]

Maybe Cain and this Seraphim are going to get along just fine. His advice is strangely enticing.

As they relax in the shade, Cain starts thinking up ways to phrase what he wishes to say to Misha. He's not great with relationships or romance and he doesn't want to mess it up.

The Seraphim might not be the perfect option for dating advice, but with the whispers that Nemu and the Oath Breaker have been implanting in his subconscious, it's a pretty good balance.

There seems to be a common theme of headpats, though. Both the Seraphim and the Felian are big fans, and it's throwing him off. Do you even pat humans? Would she get mad for messing up her hair? He's pretty sure they weren't a thing in his previous life.

While Cain is thinking, Sora comes over with a message. Cixelcid wants to borrow Misha for the evening to make a surprise for Lickity. But not until after the kids and the Succubus have gone to sleep for the evening.

Misha looks up at the sky, checking the time of day before answering the Tengu. "Of course, I'm happy to help. I can come by just after dark; they should be exhausted by then."

The Lieutenant races away to let Cid know she's passed on the message, leaving everyone shaking their heads at her energy level.

"Cid and Lickity are such a cute pair; it's great that they managed to find each other," Mythryll says wistfully, looking off at something in the distance. Misha follows her gaze, but she only sees the Nila clones practicing their sword techniques, so she must be looking into space, lost in a thought.

When she turns her head, Cain leans forward to whisper in her ear. "I'm glad I've found you too. I want to talk more about that when you get back tomorrow."

His warm breath and then his soft lips against her ear send a pleasant shudder down her spine, but before she can come up with a response, Cain leans back and raises his voice a little so that Mythryll can hear.

"It gets dark earlier in Sunnybrook than it does here by about an hour. If you want to be there just after sunset, that's only a few minutes away."

Inside, Misha is conflicted. She knows what Cain wants to talk about, and she wants him too, but she's not sure that Girlfriend, wife, or companion is the right word for the relationship she wants.. The time with Cid making his surprise for Lickity is just the time she needs to make her final decision.

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

Chapter 234

After Misha took off for Sunnybrook, Nila came over to say hello on her way to the baths. According to her, the Flame Sisters have added them to their patrol route, reheating them twice an hour with fire magic.

That sounds like an excellent idea to everyone, and they're split into three large separate areas, so privacy isn't a concern. Cain follows the convoy to the baths, lost in thought and ends up having to stop to get his bearings when he arrives, before finally noticing that they've been labeled. Men, Women, and Open. Since he's the only man usually staying here, he's surprised they bothered to label them, but with Guild Members able to drop by so quickly, the massive baths might be more popular than he thought. It could be just that his schedule is strange, so he never sees them in use.

After a quick wash, he sinks into the herb-scented water, wondering what to do tomorrow. Maybe take a trip to the library and work on getting his Inscription skills up to an acceptable standard. There's no point in knowing Inscription if he's not good enough to make skill books people will want to use.

He's so lost in thought that he didn't even notice Evangeline enter until her wing blocked his vision. "Want to help with my wings? It's very relaxing; I do it whenever I have important things to think about."

She's brought a floating basket of brushes, oils, soaps, and lotions with her into the bath, few of which Cain knows the proper use for. The Seraphim Inquisitors fill him in on the intended use and technique, and Cain smiles at the Seraphim girl, knowing she's doing her best to help him.

"Sure. I've never brushed wings before, so let me know if I'm making a mistake. All I know comes from the Inquisitors."

"You merged with them? I heard they're incredibly uptight zealots. Hopefully, you're not taking too much advice from them."

[Remember what we said about when they're not good? This is the time.] Their joking voice makes Cain stifle a snort of laughter.

"What's so funny?"

"They said I should spank you for speaking about them like that." Cain laughs and Evangeline hides her bottom with both hands and four wings.

"See what I mean? They treat everyone like little children. They'd do it too; the Inquisition is scary."

"Do they spank that hard?" Cain asks, enjoying teasing the Seraphim.

"Not only that, they'll do it in public. It's humiliating."

[I heard some of the humans actually like such things. Be careful with your disciplinary methods when applying them to other species.]

Cain lets that one slide and turns Evangeline around so he can start on her wings, following the directions the Inquisitors are giving him.

Evangeline was right; this is therapeutic.

"Where did you learn that? Your technique is amazing. Are you sure you've never done this before?" She sighs as Cain reaches the tip of the second wing.

"I ignored your warnings and took their advice. We should do this more often; it's relaxing. Pass me the conditioner?"

By the time he's done, Evangeline is so relaxed; she's almost a liquid. "I need to tell Sora about this; that's too good to keep to yourself."

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself. It really helped clear my mind." Once he says it, Cain realizes it's true; all his concerns have faded. Whatever answer Misha gives, he's ready to hear it.

He carries the Seraphim to bed, since she fell asleep on the floor after Cain finished brushing her wings, not even bothering to dry herself first. Once she's dry and safely in bed, Cain retires to the big bedroom upstairs in the keep. One day he will get around to personalizing this room. Maybe something colorful, like the one in Graska, but without a hot tub. It's a short walk to the baths anyhow.

First thing in the morning after breakfast, Cain calls a single Oath Breaker and heads into Muzz to sneak off with one of the inscription desks. The books they make don't last long and take an incredible amount of mana, but he's aiming to increase his skill, not create anything for the Guild Library today.

They're heading on a long journey soon, and he will have time to make permanent books then if the Guild can get him copies to work from or wants ones he already knows. But first, he needs the skill to make them.

The Oath Breaker teleports him in and past the Dark Elven exploration team that is making an inventory of a section of the ruins so that he can sneak into the library. There's no sign anyone has been here, all the wards are still up, and the doors are locked. He gathers an intact desk from the ones piled in the corner where nobody will miss it and quietly makes his way back out.

Task accomplished, he's headed to the Library in Assah with a copy of Evangeline and Vala. The others all had little to no interest in the library, but these two love reading, and skill books aren't the only ones available.

Once they arrive, the girls split off to find new reading material, and Cain goes looking for one of the Dragons, finding Red waiting in the lobby, watching for interesting people. "Hey Red, I've got a dilemma you might be able to help me solve. I'm on a mission to improve my Inscription skills. Got any suggestions on where to start?"

"That depends how bad you are right now. There's a bunch of low-material-cost books in here."

"I just reached Advanced level Inscription. So I'm not terrible, but not nearly good enough to reliably make the sort of high-level books the Guild needs. We're slowly building our library so the new members can get skills direct from the Guild."

"Not a bad plan. You'll be able to stockpile essential skills to be sure every member gets what they need to fill their role instead of just picking ones they like based on what they can afford. Will, you have enough materials to level up, though?"

"Never fear. I've got a magical Inscription desk. I'll just need a spot to work with a high output mana totem nearby. Because I have a feeling that this is going to get very mana intensive as I get better and need higher quality materials."

Red leads him to a back VIP room usually reserved for the Nobles to work in that has a permanent mana regeneration totem. The Dragon removes the desk in there and waits expectantly for Cain to place his own. The second he does, the curious dragon is all over it, searching every surface and making various intrigued noises.

"It looks like a Gnomish invention, but Dark Elven Runecraft is all over it. I've never seen anything like it; this artifact is a priceless ancient antique. How did you acquire it?"

"It was buried in the desert, inside a sealed ruin from the Schaub Empire. Not much else survived, but I'm sure this one's still functional. I didn't see any damage to it."

"Excellent. I want to see it in action. Give me a moment, and I'll find you the perfect book to practice with."

Red rushes out of the room, returning only a few minutes later with a thick black tome in his hands. "This, my friend, is a true treasure—the Landis book of camping. Once you know this ability, you can create an entire camp just by spending mana. Tents, bedding, everything. The ingredients are essentially impossible to source, but if you can copy it, you'll be rich."

"I'm pretty sure I won't get rich. The created books aren't permanent. You're intended to use them right after creation. But I'm sure I could make one or two. You know, to help a friend with outfitting for his upcoming camping trip."

Red claps his hands in excitement and places the tome on the surface.

[Analyzing Materials needed]

[MP cost 3500 per attempt]

"This had better be a perfect mana totem because making that book will take 3500 MP a try, and I don't know yet how good my chances are."

"If the attempt takes you an hour, the totem should be good enough. If you're faster than that, we might need to find a Shaman."

[Inscription Insufficient 40 Percent chance of Success]

That's one high-level camping technique. But Cain's determined to make it work. "Come on mighty System, bless my Inscription chances."

It's well over an hour before he's done with that big skill book, and his hand is already beginning to cramp.

[Inscription has improved]

[Book Created: Landis Campsite] Unranked. Usable by All Classes. Creates Traditional Royal travel camp of the Landis Kingdom. MP cost varies per item made. Available items. Pole Tent, hammock, mattress, blankets, cookware, table, chair, fire pit, grill, plates, pavilion, carpets, cushions, storage box. Created items last 10 hours.

[Skill Learned: Landis Campsite]

"Ah, no fair. You learned the first copy before I could examine it." The distraught Red Dragon complains.

"Don't worry; I'll let you examine yours as long as you like. Just don't blame me if it vanishes while you're admiring it."

It takes three tries and over 5 hours to make Red his copy, and the Dragon is overjoyed. He examines every square inch of the book, comparing it to the ancient manuscript it duplicated before learning it.

"You have no idea how long I've waited to make that book. Their beach gazebo is so amazing, all Royal Blue and Gold. Now I have one too." Beach gazebo? He must mean the Pavilion with the sides rolled up.. But he's happy, and that's the part that matters.

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

Chapter 235

After all that Inscription, it's time to eat, so Cain leads Vala and Evangeline to a wharf front restaurant to try their fish fry. He also needs to check over the Queen Rose today and make sure everything is in good order since he'll be heading out soon, so eating by the water saves an extra trip.

"Welcome, Sir Cain. It's good to have you at our establishment. I can find you a booth if you would prefer more privacy." The manager greets them once they find a seat at a table in the crowded restaurant.

"No need, wings and booths don't mix well. But we'll get the daily special and a round of ale."

"Have you been playing up the Mafia thing when we weren't around? Everyone has been bowing to you, and the shopkeeper is way too nice." Evangeline says quietly, and the sailor at the table beside theirs laughs.

"Guess you wouldn't recognize them. They're from the non-Guild members your boss released after the castle battle. The docks were the only work most could get. Kill a couple of thousand people in a day, and nobody would want to get on your bad side either, Missie."

Vala laughs at that, and the man gives her a grin, missing half these teeth. "She was there. She is just bad with faces. You've probably heard more about the battle than we have at this point, but Evangeline here is the Commander of the Darklight Host's Seraphim."

That comment made the room fall silent as everyone turned to look at them. Very few recognized Evangeline, despite having seen the Seraphim. Her youthful look made them think she was just another Guild Member or associate of Cain's.

"Shouldn't she be wearing the red bracelet as well? Surely someone that terrifying isn't under level 200 in power?" One of the locals says, pointing to the warning label of a city entry pass he wears. Cain has gotten used to keeping his on like a piece of jewelry, totally forgetting that they serve a functional purpose.

"We will go update our rankings today. Since we have a house here, we haven't had to update our entry passes." Cain explains.

That makes sense to the locals; when you live here, you don't often go through the city gates or the customs dock. Even if you head out to do a dungeon, your resident pass is good for six months before it needs renewal. Many stories have been going around about how fast Cain and his Guild have grown in power and influence, leading others to think they've got an experience-based Guild Skill.

Other than Cain himself and a few others, they've just been very organized about their grinding. Maximizing benefit with organized groups while pushing hard daily instead of slacking. They've also got the money to keep buying high-end gear made by the Guild Artisans to equip the lower levels instead of having the higher level crafters sell it on the open market. It makes a huge difference to the advancement of their newer members.

Where most succumb to greed, in the Darklight Host the combat types farm the materials for the crafters to use while the higher-level members pay for anything else they need out of the windfall wealth they've gotten from various dungeons.

They are an oddity among Guild structures, with almost every other Guild being focused on a level range and area, with members coming and going as they level.

After an hour of trading stories with the sailors, the locals have finished lunch and gotten back to work and Cain decides it's time to get productive. He pays the bill and brings Vala and Evangeline to the customs dock to update their score.

"Greetings, gentlemen. Our scores have gotten a bit outdated, so we will need to update our city passes." He greets the two uniformed guards.

"Certainly, sir. I see you're a red pass already, so I'll have to call for a manager if you can wait just a moment." He activates a token dangling from his pocket and speaks into it, explaining the situation and whoever is on the other end. They promise to send someone right away, and the pass goes dark again just as the sound of jogging feet comes from the pier.

"Great timing. We were inspecting the pier structure, so we're here to help." Earl RhickJaymz calls when he comes into sight, Arial at his side.

"Perfect, that saves me coming to see you. I had a chance to catch up with Red earlier at the library."

Arial begins to laugh at that. "Yes, we heard. He's gone down the coast to try out his new camping equipment already, and it's barely lunchtime."

The customs officers have gotten the equipment all set up for the measurement, which attracts a small crowd of curious onlookers and former bandits who are now working the docks.

"First up, we'll start with the young angel. If you place your hand here, Miss, we can begin." The Customs official says with a big smile. RhickJaymz is about to stop him, as he knows they're Summoned Helpers and not transfers, but Cain waves him off, letting the locals enjoy the show.

"There we are; I'll take the reading now. Evangeline, your average level equivalent is 217. You'll need a red pass, please keep it on your wrist while inside the city."

Evangeline smiles at the young Officer, and turns her Aura up a notch, making him blush before Vala softly flicks the back of her head. And steps forward for her measurement.

"Vala, average level equivalent is also 217. Please wear the red bracelet at all times within city limits."

Arial is studying Evangeline with interest, getting close to sniffing at the Seraphim.

"Might I ask what you're doing?" She giggles when the Dragon's breath ruffles the feathers of her wings.

"I wanted to know if it was a skill you're using or a natural pheromone that is getting the poor official all flustered. You don't smell like an aphrodisiac, so it must be a skill."

"It's called [Grace of the Seraphim], an always active innate skill that makes people like us. Don't worry; it's quite harmless." Evangeline explains, and Arial nods in acceptance.

"Next up, Duke Cain. We've got most of your information on file already, so we need to update your average level equivalent, and we will be good to go."

"You'll need to update the species section as well. A new Skill changed me from Human to Ancient, as you'll see when I activate the globe."

"We could skip it and give you the hazard striped bracelet now? I'm well aware that your reading will be deceptive at best, given your exploits." RhickJaymz suggests.

"Get it ready anyhow. How high can this thing read?" Cain laughs, pointing at the measurement device.

"It's calibrated up to level 300. Do you think you'll be beyond that?" The Customs official asks incredulously, having just measured his Companions.

"I've gained a lot of levels recently, plus some high-ranked skills. So I wouldn't be surprised."

"That's fine; if we see over level on the reading, we'll just give you the striped hazard bracelet and call it good." The young man agrees.

Cain reaches out and places his hand on the device, immediately making it flash red and yellow instead of the glowing red that the others turned it.

"Over 300 for sure, but that's expected. We created these new striped bracelets for folks like you and the Knight Commander of Landis, who score so high that the red bracelet is an understatement. A few high-level ship Captains might get one, but we don't get many visitors that high level; our market prices aren't high enough." Arial explains, and Cain realizes that he's still got four Legendary Seraphim Inquisitors merged with him.

Forget staying under level 300 equivalent; he was likely close to that even without the Mergers.

"Here is your new bracelet, please take care of it, as it is no more durable than the old one. Have an excellent day, Duke, Ladies." The official politely bowed and returned to his work, leaving them with Arial and RhickJaymz.

"Big plans for today? I haven't seen you at the docks since you got back, but I've been checking up on your ship regularly." The Black Dragon looks very eager to get fresh

gossip; things must have been dull here. Or she's tired of getting it all secondhand from the people he sent away from the castle with empty pockets and no gear.

"I've built up a pretty significant defense force for the Castle and the Guild Houses, so I'm going to be taking a few members with me on vacation. We're thinking of sailing down through Landis and on to the Sarrah Woods in the far south to visit the Elves and on to the western side of the continent for a little adventure."

"Will the castle be fine with you gone so long? Seeing you sail away might encourage the disgruntled to attack again." RhickJaymz says softly, to not be overheard.

"If they need, the defense force can call dozens of Epic Elementals, plus hundreds of Spiders and a Thousand Seraphim defense force. And that's before any extra Guild Members show up to help out. They should be fine, I think." Cain says it louder so curious ears can hear, and Arial smirks at his tactic.

"As long as I don't need to worry about you going on a rampage when you return, it's enough for me. I don't recall spiders in the stories of the attack, though."

Vala answers before Cain can come up with a good story. "They're assigned to the inside of the castle grounds. Nobody made it over the walls last time, so they didn't get a chance to meet the Spider Queen and her brood. They're into the thousands now, if you count all the swarm-type spiders. They're low level, but with so many of them and the poison, they can be a real menace."

When the Spider Queen was level 105, and they first arrived in the desert, the little ones were just squishy nuisances to most desert bandits.. But now that she's level 180, they're a legitimate threat to many transfers in the early stages of the First Advancement.

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

Chapter 236

Accompanying the Earl and Arial, they head down the pier to take a good look at Queen Rose, making sure nothing looks damaged or out of place. It all appears to be immaculate from the outside, so Cain heads below to inventory what they have and make a list of what they'll need for a long sea voyage.

Sure, they can get some things from the Guild Bank, but he's not counting on that entirely, and there are no provisions on board. Or at least there weren't. There's

currently a bunch of bananas and a large bag of potato chips on the counter in the galley and a book on the table.

"It's a good spot to hide from paperwork, so I like to come in here and snack." Arial explains without shame.

"I don't blame you; I can't stand paperwork either. It looks like we've got everything as far as equipment, Nila did all that before we left Behar, and we gained even more when those Pirates attacked. There's a bunch of Rum and preserved food in the hold. Things we didn't move into our storage. We just need to add to that for the journey."

"There's a provisioner on the shore specializing in exactly that. For a fee, he double-checks what a crew has and what they're looking to add against what the old salt knows they'll need. It's not expensive, mostly a service he provides to customers since his shop sells half of what they will be buying anyhow."

Life is always best when they hire a professional to take care of things, so Cain readily agrees, and they turn back to the shore, Arial grabbing her snacks on the way out.

The provisioner, a Gnome well into his senior years with a bald head and substantial bushy eyebrows, even has premade lists based on how many people are going, the destination, and the type of journey. Merchant ships and fishing vessels stock very different necessities than personal yachts or military vessels.

"Make it provisions for fifteen, in case we add a few extra hands to the journey, for an adventure that's more of a pleasure cruise. We're planning to stop at any attractions we find down the coast. Also, if you know more good places to restock with fresh supplies, I'd appreciate it." Cain explains.

"Not a problem, I know just what you need. You'll want to stock up heavily here since fresh fruits and such are hard to find everywhere in the desert, but as soon as you cross into Landis, there's a resort town you should visit. They've got massive orchards outside the city for exotic fruit they trade up the coast; most of what I have came from them.

If you stop at these three spots in the desert, you'll find great beaches and friendly people. Then there are eight more spots, including the Capital, that you should stop in Landis for at least a day. There's a year-round carnival in the Capital with nightly fireworks that is widely considered one of the modern wonders, a bucket list item for the world's travelers." The gnome speaks at such a fast pace that Cain can barely keep up, but the diminutive provisioner has marked every one of them on a large nautical chart that has water depths and obstacles marked on it as well.

It's a ploy to get him to buy the expensive and detailed chart, but one more map aboard the ship is never a bad thing.

"That sounds great to me. Grab us everything on your inventory list there plus the chart, and I'll come to double-check it tomorrow before we set sail. Arial here has been keeping an eye on the ship for me, so let her know if you have any troubles getting everything put away."

That covers what they came here to do, though he didn't get much actual Inscription practice. Learning a trade skill is a slow process, but he at least has a chance to create the good stuff. If they find more books later, he will copy them using the desk and have the group members use the copy so the original can go to the Guild Library.

It's the best compromise he can come up with at the moment since the books the desk creates can't be put in inventory.

"Why don't we go check on Neffie? If she's growing as fast as we heard, she must miss us by now." Cain suggests to the others, and Evangeline immediately folds her wings.

"Cid and Misha were up all night making Lickity a surprise, so the family is probably busy today." The Seraphim points out.

[What's everyone up to today?] Cain sends in Guild chat, looking for something fun to do.

[Most everyone's busy, Char has been on a discipline rampage lately, getting everyone in line after that group got their tank killed. She's pulled most of us in to help her give the lower level members an examination.] Misaki sends back.

[Can you bring us Gumbo from Behar? Or even from Assah is fine. I'm craving seafood.] Kone suggests. That's not a bad idea. Cain wonders how the Gumbo is here in Assah, as he hasn't tried it yet.

"Hey Arial, is there a good spot for Gumbo? I've got Guild members craving it, and Behar is a long flight away." Well, it's only a few hours, but still, a long way to get lunch.

"Do we have it? Better than that slop in Behar." A nearby merchant announces proudly.

"It's a local specialty, but more popular with the families of sailors from the East, so you've got to look a little to get through the variety of tourist restaurants. The Crab Shack in Behar is seen as a challenge by the local seafood places." The Dragon laughs, leading them off the docks and into a working-class residential area near the shore.

The restaurant she leads him to is hidden in an alley between apartment buildings, not somewhere Cain would have found and not intended to be easily found by outsiders, but they know Arial and they're happy to see new customers once they learn that Cain has a house in town.

Cain explains his issue, the need for a large amount of Gumbo to go, and the cook is happy to oblige. They keep a large pot on the go and dish Cain up twenty servings into a large metal bowl with a locking lid and add a bag full of biscuits.

With his goodbyes said and a promise to be back soon to visit before leaving on the trip, Cain is off to Montauk to bring everyone their dinner.

"Best Guild Master Ever!" Kone cheers as Cain brings the Gumbo to a dining room full of people. All the Sculptors are here, plus Kone and a pair of young Gnomish Warlocks. Those two are still in the low 80s for level, but going by the slippers and robes, they've either chosen to live here, or they're originally from Montauk. Cain had been busy with so many things lately that he hadn't kept track of who all had been recruited, trusting the others to take care of everything.

"What is that amazing smell? You said soup, but that doesn't smell like soup." The male gnome says curiously, standing on his chair to get a better look.

"It is a form of soup. One from the coast, made with seafood and all the good stuff. Trust me; nobody doesn't like Gumbo." Cain insists, placing the pot on the table.

[We've got our final results for today's examination. As we hoped, everyone passed.]

Char's announcement makes everyone grin.

It's like a school event, announcing the honor roll students. The thought makes Cain wonder if this is what it's like in the academies that many youngsters go through in this world? Do they do dungeons and grade the students this way? Is it all classroom work or against dummies? He should find out. A private academy might be a good description of how the training regimen is going.

"Did you two go through Char's training as well?" Cain asks the Warlocks, who look at each other with a long-suffering grimace.

"From level 10. We were in the first batch she started teaching, and we did so well that she let us do harder dungeons and use the Guild Skill Summons earlier than usual to get a lot of levels in only a few months. After we reach level 80, it's all self-directed. I'd say we graduated, but she still checks in on how we're doing even more often than our moms. That's why we moved here to Montauk, less supervision."

That's a feeling Cain can relate to. Teachers breathing over your shoulder every day was never for him. Going solo was a much better choice, in his opinion.

"We've been running dungeons together lately to help them get to the first advancement. With my summons, plus Su and her healing, they'll be up there in no time at all. We're doing the Elven dungeon in the castle tomorrow. It's a lot longer than when we went with you, but it's forty levels higher than them, so they'll level up in a hurry. A

week or two at the most, and we'll have another pair of graduates from the valley." Kone informs them proudly, her mouth full of biscuits.

They joke and chat until dark before Cain heads back home to the Castle, wondering and worrying what to say to Misha about their relationship now that he has run out of distractions.

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

Chapter 237 - Misha's Confession

Cain walks into his bedroom, still thinking about all the changes that have been happening to his personality. Perhaps it's from being merged with the Oath Breaker for so long, or perhaps from the shift to an Ancient, but he's noticing that he's become much more assertive lately.

Even Nila made a point to mention how he's finally 'grown the balls to take charge.' In the past, he's always gone with the flow, just letting things happen around him. It was the most comfortable way to live without causing conflict.

Lately, though, he's begun feeling the need to control. To be indeed in charge of his life. To be respected as a true leader. It's a strange feeling to him, but a good one.

He even told Misha he wants changes in their relationship and has worked out what he hopes is the right way to explain what he wants. For her to completely and openly be his and not this nameless friend with benefits thing that they've gotten so comfortable with.

She seemed slightly shocked by the change in him but didn't reject him. Instead she took the day he offered to get her mind in order and decide on her answer.

[You finally grew up enough to take what you want. Like you should have done all along.] The voice of the Merged summons that has slowly become Cain's conscience congratulates him like a proud parent.

Tired from the day and looking forward to an evening with Misha's soft body against his, he almost regretted forcing a choice upon her but reconsidered that notion immediately. It was necessary.

She's his and no one else's, and it's past time they started being open about it.

But what he finds upon entering his bedroom in the keep is a much different scene than the sparsely decorated white and gold marble room he was expecting.

The White marble walls have been covered with luxurious black velvet curtains, the plain bed that was in the center of the room has been removed, and closer to the door in the corner of the room where Cain is standing, it has been exchanged for one much like the large four poster that was originally in his room in Montauk, the one with the suggestive eyelets in the posts and end boards.

Only this one is even more extravagant, having a roof height headboard that serves as a partial room divider when viewed from the door, engraved with designs of many different creatures. A nod to his Summoning abilities, perhaps? The solid black oak footboard is topped with three round openings, each elegantly decorated with a design of a Dragon in the silver inlay. The top portion of the footboard seems to be removable as one long piece, and there is a set of drawers taking up the entire length of the sides of the bed underneath a thick and soft-looking mattress.

A black and white tiger fur rug sits at the foot of the bed, giving a less spartan and more furnished look to the area in Cain's astonished eyes.

A couch and two chairs in matching black leather have been placed in the back left corner of the room furthest from the door, with a low round table in between them, containing a pole that extends to the stone ceiling and looks securely mounted. Beside them, but out of sight due to the oversized headboard, should be the door that leads to the shower and the walk-in closets.

To Cain's right and past the bed, in what was formerly just empty space, stands a large oak desk facing the door with a comfortable-looking leather office chair behind it. There's not much paperwork to do in this world, and the bedroom might be massive, but it's a strange spot for an office. However, the thought of Misha bent over that desk, with her skirts flipped up, or under it, while he works on his Inscription, comes unbidden to his mind and makes Cain extremely loathe to remove it from the bedroom.

These intrusive thoughts have been coming more and more often lately. Still, they're always such great ideas that Cain doesn't mind the distraction, even if a few of them have previously left Misha exhausted and sleeping well into the morning, disrupting the day's plans.

With the walls draped in black velvet and the thick rugs contrasted against the white and gold marble floors, the bedroom is no longer so bright. The light from the setting sun coming through the scene of Dragons at war that makes up the stained glass of the room's only window gives a soft tone to the gold and black bedding and black leather furniture, making the room feel comforting and homey.

The bedroom feels much more lived in and personal than it did before, like the Guild Master suite in Graska. But with a more modern elegance than the Arabian harem theme in the Dwarven capital.

Cain finally steps inside, closing and locking the door behind him, a shimmer of magic filling the air as the soundproof enchantment engages, leaving only the sound of his soft footsteps as he removes his slippers and his shirt at the door, leaving him in just his black pants. Cain is confident Misha should be in here, but he's entirely distracted by the changes in the room.

Is this decor part of her answer or unrelated to the thoughts plaguing his mind?

Taking in his new surroundings, Cain turns and walks past the bed, finding a kneeling Misha, fully nude and framed by a thick golden carpet behind the enormous black oak headboard, previously blocked from sight by the oversized bed itself.

Cain knows he should say something, anything, but the sight of her kneeling there, hands on her toned thighs, and that longing look she's giving him have driven all thoughts except her from his mind.

"Please, before you say anything, hear me out. I have been feeling this way for a long time now, but I could never find the words for what I needed until you said them yourself." Misha's soft tone and her demure look, head tilted down with her soft brown hair falling to partially cover her face while she looks up at him through her lashes, causes Cain's heart to flutter.

They've been naked together many, many times before, but this feels so much more intimate, her sense of vulnerability making Cain's manhood twitch as arousal replaces shock in his mind.

"I want to be yours. Wholly yours and nothing else. Not as your Lieutenant, or girlfriend, or wife. Just yours." Misha loses her nerve at that point, gathering her thoughts as she takes in Cain's casually worn black slacks, hoping she's not making the biggest mistake of her life and causing him to reject her.

Cain walks silently towards her kneeling form, his eyes unreadable, and her heart begins pounding wildly in trepidation until he stops in front of her, his black pants and bare feet filling her vision.

Cain places a finger under Misha's chin and tilts her head back to look straight up at him. Silence sits heavy in the air as she awaits his response, looking deeply into his eyes. They're a gray-blue today; she's noticed the color changes frequently since his species was changed to Ancient.

Despite his recent confidence, Cain has never before honestly confessed his feelings for anyone, and he must admit, this isn't how he expected it to go. But with Misha kneeling there at his feet, there is no question that this moment is everything he could have ever hoped for. The woman he loves wants nothing more than him.

His extended silence worries Misha; only the look of pure joy on his face keeps her calm, letting her know that his thoughts are not far from her own.

Cain produces a golden box from his inventory, taking a step back and holding it out at her chest level, leaning forward slightly to loom over her with a kind smile.

"Misha, will you be mine and only mine, now and forever? Once this goes on, it will never come off you again. Reminding you every second of the day that you belong to me." The golden box opens when she takes it in her trembling hands, and a System notification fills her vision.

[Succubus Devotion Ring] Legendary Item. Unique-Equipped, only one may be worn. Must be freely worn but may only ever be removed by the [Owner] of the item. [Wearer] becomes subject to [Owner]'s Command type abilities at no mana cost, with no resistances applied and immune to all other mind control type effects. [Owner] may freely change appearance settings for this item.

What is this? Misha is stunned at the description. It's clearly a cursed item, but the way it's described brings an exciting warmth to her core. Just seeing Cain described as Owner triggers something inside her that she didn't expect to be so very intense. She will be his. Not his Companion or anything else, just his.

Exactly what she asked for, but not how she expected.

The Devotion Ring was a drop in the Demon Dungeon, one Cain tucked away in his inventory, hoping that one day he'd have the courage and the chance to use it. The item effect description is odd, but a Devotion Ring is a Devotion Ring, right?

[Equip Item] Y/N

"Yes, a thousand times yes," Misha says, happy tears filling her eyes as she equips the ring.

A series of light weights burden her wrists and ankles as a gentle pressure encircles her neck. It's not a ring at all, but a collar. There is a mirror to her right just out of sight, and Misha is about to run over to see how it looks and what has appeared on her limbs, but Cain stops her with a word. The look he's giving her is both startled and aroused with a hint of amusement.

"No. Look at me, focus on my face. Good Girl." The command is subtle, but she can't do anything to disobey. His face fills her vision as she feels his hand stroke her head gently, calming her nerves and assuring her that she made the right choice.

"You're so beautiful," Cain whispers, leaning close to her ear, his warm breath sending a pleasant shudder down her spine.

The Devotion Ring was not what he thought it was, though he should have suspected that, given the word Succubus in the description. Cain is thoroughly pleased with this outcome now that the initial shock has passed, and intends to make very good use of the possibilities this item offers, for both of their benefit.

Misha's thoughts were a jumble of emotion. Was she ready for this, to become his in such a final and complete fashion? Yes, she was. Misha trusts Cain would never intentionally hurt her, at least not beyond her limits.

Cain moves a gentle hand down to grasp something on her collar, lifting slightly in a signal to stand. Misha gracefully lifts herself to her feet, closing her eyes to calm her self-doubt and growing nervousness.

"Eyes open, love. Keep them looking straight forward." Misha knows he is intimately familiar with what she looks like, but this time, it means something more. Something that makes her needy for his touch. A caress, a kiss, anything.

When she opens her eyes, Cain is gone from her vision, moved away, and Misha struggles against her instincts to look for him.

The anticipation is too much, Misha is ready to beg him for relief when a pair of thick arms reach around from behind her, and calloused fingers explore her skin as a strong embrace presses his warm chest to her back.

"You've given so much to me; how could I be done with you? Patience, my love. Good girls get what they need." Those words, Good Girl. His Good Girl. Misha struggles not to squirm as his fingers explore her body while she stands naked and firmly pressed against him.

"Not only can I make it visible or invisible, but I can also change the shape. You will never need to take it off, and it can match any outfit." Cain says as she reaches up to touch the collar on her neck.

"Follow me," Cain says, giving a soft tug on the front of her collar and leading her to the mirror.

At the moment, it's a plain black ring of metal, with a loop hanging from the front, but at Cain's command, it changes to a thick leather collar, then an elegant golden necklace and back before vanishing entirely. She can still feel it on her neck and under her fingers when she touches it, but in the mirror, it has disappeared as if it never existed.

She finally managed to express to him what she truly needed. The mere thought makes her mind fuzzy with happiness, and she nuzzles her face into his muscular chest.

"You are mine now, every part of you. I will hold you, love you, dress you up and show you off. Would you like that?"

A wave of anticipation sends shivers through her body. Could he know of her fantasies of showing her body for others to admire? Since when has he known? Since the start of their time together and the hot springs? Only now will it be him showing her off. The thought is beautiful in the mind of Misha.

"Oh, you would love that very much. Don't worry; I know just how to keep you happy."

Looking in the mirror, lost in her own little world, she can see he's got something in his hand—a hair tie.

"We don't want your hair to get tangled, now do we?" He says with a smile, making a braid from her soft curls.

Cain takes her almost constantly for the next eight hours in every way they can think of, needing only a few minutes to recover in between rounds. That level of stamina leaves Misha a panting wreck by the end, barely conscious. Between exhausted breaths, she manages to curl up against him, thumping her fist against his chest in mock dismay.

"Changing your form is entirely unfair."

Yes, it is, but oh, was it worth it.

Cain smiles down at his handiwork, the flushed face, the glistening skin, and her heart-shaped bottom nestled against him. It's a fantastic feeling; all the nervousness has faded from his body, leaving only complete comfort in her presence as they drift off into an exhausted trance, coming down from their high.

"Feeling better, love?" He asks some time later when she begins to stir again, her motion breaking him from his euphoric stupor.

"Mhm." The simple noise is all she can manage, and Cain laughs before turning her to face him and lifting her to give her a long deep kiss.

"Good Girl. Now, let's get you cleaned up and off to sleep.. You've got a long day ahead of you tomorrow."

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

Chapter 238 - Setting Sail

It's nearly noon when Cain and Misha come downstairs hand in hand. Despite having just left the shower with freshly styled hair and dressed in a cute outfit of a black skirt

and pink blouse, the Dark Apostle still looks somehow flustered and disheveled, as if the chaos in her mind has taken on a physical appearance.

Beside her, Cain is in casual shorts and a tank top with deck shoes on, the collection of tattoos on his form visible. These don't seem to be battle scenes, and they must not be of Misha since she's okay with them, so Nila looks more closely, finding that his colorful upper arms are covered in a nautical theme today. Koi and Dragons playing in the water. The tattoos on his lower arms are faded to black and gray, showing a variety of land-based monsters.

"Good of you two to join us. The provisioner got a hold of Arial; everything is packed and ready, along with some spare parts he thought we needed. We couldn't contact either of you, but fortunately, the Companions can answer your messages." Nila greets the pair as they come down the stairs.

All the Companions are there, as well as Mythryll, who is giving Misha a curious look. Her friend said they would talk about their relationship last night, but it must have gone unexpectedly well if she's still jelly legged and flustered at noon. But the details can wait until later; that's not the breakfast table, or lunch table, in this case, talk.

"Sorry for the delay; we had a bit of a late night. Have we all got what we need?" Cain answers with a smile.

"All ready and raring to go. A long sea voyage is my time to shine." Nila confirms, and Vala gives her a dirty look.

"We couldn't be behind schedule if we tried. That salt-loving Elf has checked our preparations at least ten times since midnight." The Demon grumbles. Nila must have interrupted her reading.

"Sorry to keep everyone waiting. But now that we're all here let's get fed and get going." Cain cuts off Vala's grumbling before it becomes an argument between the Companions.

Lunch is a rushed process of sandwiches and coffee, as Nila did her best to run everyone out the door so they could get to the sailing part of the day already. As they're coming out of the Assah Beach house, though, Cain notices that there are quite a few of them going. It's just him, Misha, and Mythryll, but with twelve additional Companions, as Evangeline has released all her clones created by the belt he wears.

"Alright, first up. Everyone but Nila, please merge. I'm not going to make you sail the ship, and we don't need a dozen bodies for everyone to enjoy the trip. Nila, I will make you sail the ship, and I'll Summon you a few crew members once we're at the Queen Rose."

That brings their party size back under control at nine members. Both the provisioner and Ariel are waiting for them when they arrive at the pier, the Dragon holding a parcel with a small tag on it.

"Since you're stopping in at the Capital in Landis, I'll send this with you. It's for their youngest Princess, who will be having her coming of age birthday in just a few months. Show your Duke Title, and they should let you in with a plus one and no complaints, but if they don't, you can give it to the Knight Commander." Ariel instructs, passing over the parcel.

"That works for me. The Capital sounded like a great place, so we planned to stay there a while. Thanks for all the hard work, both of you. But we're running behind since I slept in, so I hope you understand if we don't make this a long goodbye."

With a round of hugs for Ariel and a shake of hands, and the payment for the provisioner, they turn and board the Queen Rose, ignoring the scattered commentary by other crews about her appearance. Cain calls for the First Mate and the Wind Mage from the Wave Rider Crew that they sailed with in Behar and was about to call for some random crew when he decided to use Puppets instead.

They're level 18 now, sturdy and fast enough to work the sails, and they don't need to be dismissed if he needs summons for other purposes. He brings out four of them in somewhat regular clothing and signals for Nila to start giving orders. The Puppets obey instantly, able to understand the intentions and not just the Captain's words as fellow summons of Cain's. They push the ship free of the pier after releasing the lines and hoist the sails with relative grace.

It's not as smooth as having high-level agility type summons or ones with advanced actual sailing skills, but their Apprentice 1 skill gets the sails up in order and trimmed adequately with minimal shouting from the helm. The First Mate thinks it's hilarious, calling out corrections when their lack of skill hinders them, while the wind mage keeps silent until it's time to begin channeling her spells.

They're soon underway, with steady winds and a following wave sending them silently gliding along.

"It's incredible. Nothing but open ocean as far as I can see." Misha sighs, snuggling into Cain's arms as he stands by the helm wheel.

"We will be headed further out this time since we're not stopping at Behar. I want to get well wide of any possible shoreline ambushes since we've got a faster ship than anyone but another Wind Rider, and they shouldn't attack us." Nila says, indicating a path to the Northeast and away from shore.

"It's all you, captain. You know where we're going, and it's going to be a few days before we get to our first stop." Cain gives Nila a nod and moves to sit on the curved bench with their casters.

"Big plans for the day, Mythryll?" Misha asks with a smile at the Elf, who is pulling out a large towel from her inventory.

"Yes, I'm going to lay right here, on the sunny side of the mast and work on my tan. I spent a long time finding just the right outfits for this trip, and I'm not letting a single one go to waste." The right outfit turns out to be a dark green string bikini, which she changes into before stretching out in the sun with a sigh.

"We're in the middle of the ocean, nobody to bother us, and nothing to do but relax. Welcome to day one of our vacations." Cain agrees, pulling out a hammock to string between the masts. It's bound to be more comfortable than the deck, and his tan doesn't matter; he can alter his skin tone with a thought.

While most of the Companions head below decks, Misha joins Mythryll in her tanning spot, giving the Elf a perfect chance to ask questions without being overheard.

"Did you guys talk? How did it go?" Mythryll whispers.

"Amazing, incredible, better than I could have ever hoped," Misha whispers back, showing off a pair of thin gold bracelets in the shape of a serpent biting its tail. The eyes are rubies, and the word 'Cain' in a heart is carved behind the heads.

"I'm so glad for you. Those are beautiful. I know this world doesn't do wedding rings, but something to show your bond is important." If only she knew how ironic her words were, as these bracelets are part of the set of jewelry Misha accepted from Cain last night and can change forms to be precisely that, though Cain preferred them to be decorative jewelry.

The rest of the [Succubus Devotion Ring] is currently hidden, invisible to the eye, but Misha can still feel its presence.

Misha changes into a small black bathing suit similar to what Mythryll is wearing, and Cain looks over from his hammock with a hungry look in his eye.

"Need a hand doing your back?" He asks in a suggestive voice, and Misha giggles.

"I would love it. But maybe you should do Mythryll first; she's so fair that she's likely to burn before I'm all lotioned up."

"Allow me to lend a hand then. Avoiding sunburn is important." Comes a gentle voice from the back of the ship. The second copy of Nila has come down from the mast now that they're away from the rocks and has a bottle of suntan lotion with her.

The way she is rubbing the suntan lotion into Mythryll's skin is very similar to the sensual way Cain is applying it to Misha. The latter isn't sure if it's intentional mimicry but has to turn her head to hide her smirk when the Elf gives a soft moan before catching herself and turning it into a cough. For her part, Misha does her best to hide any noise she might be making as Cain massages the lotion on.

At this rate, it will be a very long trip in only the very best ways.

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

Chapter 239

The sky begins to cloud just as night falls, dropping the temperature enough that bikinis are no longer the deck wear of choice. So far, the sail has gone exactly to plan, the spells smooth, the weather just right, and the puppets competent enough to handle the sail without needing to use up the summons.

He can call nine different supporters now, with two spots currently occupied by the pairs of Sailors and a spot by the Spider Queen. Having two water and two wind-type casters works out very well for them. They can push their speed a little, knowing that they've got a backup, and they can swap out when they get bored.

Cain decides to pull a pair of maid-type puppets out of his inventory before dinner, having them prepare and plate everything. They've got ready-made meals in their inventory still, expecting some busy days without time to cook, and since they got started late, Cain decides this is one of them.

Down below the ship has a a unique sort of table, one that tilts to remain mostly level as you're sailing, with a tall lip around the edge to keep things from sliding off. The spell casters make the journey pretty smooth, but it's not an exact science. Once they've got the premade meal portioned out, Cain has the maids call everyone down to eat, with Vala cracking jokes about ostentatious luxury and Misha teasing Mythryll about maid costumes.

The puppets are all female Elves because that's what Symbia stocks, and they do look somewhat similar to Mythryll if you're not looking at the faces.

"Every man loves maids. I tell you, borrow one of the costumes from Cain next time you're trying to land one, and you're guaranteed victory." Misha jokes.

"Forget that; he'd likely pick the Puppet." Mythryll laughs back, sliding onto the bench that wraps most of the way around the table.

Nila slides in beside her, grabbing a hand full of grapes and feeding one to Mythryll.

"Puppets lack personality. Just wait; we'll show you when we get to Landis. It's supposed to be huge, and nobody will know you there, so fresh slate."

They're joking over dinner when a warning call comes from the deck. Sea Monsters have been sighted on the horizon. Evangeline immediately puts a shield around the ship's hull, one of her specialties usually used on the Tank type summons, and they all rush up top to see what is coming.

They're baby Kraken, or [Giant Armored Octopus], at level 27. They're at least ten meters long and could easily sink a small fishing vessel. Cain quickly records their form and calculates that the ship won't be getting much nearer to them on the track they're currently traveling.

They're the first Sea Monsters the Guild has ever seen. Nila recalls many of them, but that's part of the innate memories granted to high-quality Summons; this is the first she's seen as a Companion.

Not long after they pass by, the lookout spots the reason why they've surfaced: a gigantic Deep Shark, an entirely black carnivore, and level 100 is patrolling the area. The two juvenile octopuses don't stand much chance if it gets a bite of them, but at the surface, the shark is limited in the directions it can attack them from.

It too is added to the list of summons, which Cain notes is seriously lacking in Sea creatures. What did Gillibrand do with his time that he amassed so few records? Did he farm one dungeon his entire second advancement?

The Deep Shark charges the ship, intent on getting some type of food out of the day, and Cain decides to even the playing field. The Giant Armored Octopus is a Greater Golem level Summon, so Cain calls his full compliment of two dozen to clear the area.

At level 180, they are terrifying, a hundred meters long if you count the tentacles, with a beaked maw wide enough to swallow a human whole and containing rows of sharp teeth inside. The tentacles are thicker than Cain's torso, with claws at the end and beaks in the suckers. All in all, a living nightmare of the Deepsea. Even the body has enormous white armor plates, making it difficult to seriously injure.

The Deep Shark begins to flee when they appear, and Cain sets his summons on a search and destroys mission. They're incredibly fast in the water, leaving the ship in their wake and quickly closing the distance to the Shark. It dives down to evade the pursuit; the very lowest depths of the ocean are its safe space, as the name Deep Shark implies. Most creatures do well near the surface or far below it, but rarely both. The Deep Shark is one of the exceptions.

It is not far enough, though, and only a few minutes later, the Giant Armored Octopus brings back is a corpse, much to the delight of Nila and Vala.

"Shark fin soup and fried Deep Shark for breakfast? If we start the stew now, it should have an incredible flavor by morning." The Dark Elf recommends.

Vala gives her a toothy grin and drags the corpse further on board, rubbing the head of the Octopus that delivered it to them. "I'll start the oil to fry Shark for a midnight snack."

"Fry some for the Octopus too. They look hungry. They can have the remainder of the corpse when you're done." The Octopus is very excited to hear that, giving Cain affectionate rubs with the soft side of their tentacles.

They have no problems keeping up, so Nila doesn't slow the ship while the midnight snack is prepared, brisket-sized fried fish portions being thrown to the Octopus before platters of smaller pieces are brought up by the maids.

[Now, this is living the good life.] The Seraphim Cain is merged with declares after Cain leans back against the bench, belly full of Shark. Vala has tossed the corpse to the swarm of Octopus and rinsed off the deck, the puppets scrubbing it back to what they deemed a tolerable level of clean at Nila's command.

[This is what you were after? Just a full stomach and a soft cushion?]

[It helps that your Companions smell good, but do you need more out of life?]

That normally intense and borderline fanatical Inquisitor makes a good point. If you don't want much, you can appreciate the little things.

Thinking of little things, Cain pulls Misha into his lap, dozing off with her in his arms. They awaken as the sun comes up, shining in their eyes, and realize that at some point, someone covered them with a blanket, though they're still sitting upright on the bench.

"Morning, boss. No further danger to report from the evening. We've cleared the Eastern point and begin to turn south. By tonight we can be in the first planned stop along the desert coast. A resort called Pampa. White sand beaches, coconut trees, and not much else, but it's a good spot to stop and stretch your legs. There's a dungeon there too, though a bit low level for you."

Mythryll comes up on deck dressed in a green sundress the same dark shade as her bikini. "A few days on the beach sounds like a good time. Let's check it out. It would be terrible if everyone got sick of sailing before we got to our destination."

"Just let me wash up and change before we get there. I don't want people thinking we're a Guild of hobos." Misha insists, getting up to walk to the head. The ship doesn't have a

proper shower, but with water mages on board, it's easy enough to create freshwater or even a makeshift shower if necessary.

"Are you going to wash up too? You smell like saltwater and Misha's perfume." Vala points out.

"No need. If I do this..." Cain unequips all his clothing, shifting between forms and then back before getting dressed.

"All clean instantly, and it even applies a hint of cologne. Very nice." Mythryll whistles, smelling the musky, manly scent.

"That's not cologne; it's just what Ancients smell like. Clean humans don't have much of a scent to most species, so it's more noticeable when he's first changed into one." Nemu laughs before sniffing at Cain.

"It's a good smell, though. Like Forest and wet rocks with a hint of animal."

That's news to him. As they say, you never smell your scent until it's awful.

Everyone is back on deck, dressed to play on the beach when Pampa comes into view on the horizon. It doesn't have a pier big enough for their vessel; everything seaworthy is anchored offshore, but that's great for them. It's quiet out here without the noises of civilization they'd all gotten used to.

Once the anchor is set, and they're almost ready to lower the dinghy and go ashore, a small sailing vessel full of uniformed officials comes their way. "Welcome to Pampa. Entry fee is one Gold each daily, including food and drink."

So it's something like an all-inclusive resort? Cain heard about those in his previous life, but this is the first time he's ever been to one.. This is going to be great.

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

Chapter 240

With their fees paid, Cain rows them to shore, leaving the puppets and Supporters to watch the ship. If anything goes wrong, they can be back in seconds, but it would take a lot of bravery or stupidity to try to steal a boat in such a crowded area. Unlike the Wave Riders, most desert cities execute Pirates if they're caught.

Pampa has a vast market just off the beach, with nearly a hundred caravans set up to peddle their wares. But other than that and a bunch of taverns, hotels, and restaurants, there isn't much other than the beach with a collection of bands playing. It makes Pampa feel like a music festival instead of a typical resort.

The ladies find an available table by the boardwalk, and Cain brings them a jug full of the local special, an icy beverage made of coconut milk and Rum. A few drinks in, they decide to check out the market. For some reason, Cain gets a bad feeling about today but isn't sure why yet.

He searches the area for a while, not seeing anything threatening at first until the Seraphim Inquisitor catches it.

[There are no women here that aren't working except on the beach]

That's right. Women rarely travel the desert except the few in bandit groups. Having an assortment of beautiful women with him gives the area a jealous vibe, which was what he picked up on.

"Let's go, but stick together. I don't want anyone to be alone in case someone tries something stupid. I've got the feeling there's a lot of lonely guys around here." His decision makes Nila chuckle before she offers Mythryll her arm, like a gentleman offering to escort a lady.

"How about two groups? Vala and Evangeline can come with us while you get Nemu and Laura?"

"That works for me. Meet you back here in an hour? If that's not enough time, we can look at the good stuff together afterward."

The first place Laura insists they go is predictably a candy shop. The shopkeeper takes the transformed Dragon for a type of Pixie and is thrilled to have her as a customer. She loads up the counter with cakes, puddings, and a form of saltwater toffee that they've never tried before. A variety pack of everything she offers, for Laura to choose from.

After that they're off to the stalls selling multi-colored silk clothing. The area's fashion is striking, with brightly colored silks and jewelry. Nemu's belly dancer-style outfit is the closest to blending in, but even she is rather bland in comparison to most of the locals.

The next hour is spent on bikinis, sarongs, wraps, sundresses and finally, a few colorful outfits for Cain, including the brightly colored head wraps that are the signature of the desert living men.

The dungeon turns out to be right on the edge of the market, an open world dungeon full of level 102 human bandits. A total bust as far as trying to get new forms, but if he

was looking to farm one for experience just after First Advancement this would have been great.

Cain calls a half dozen copies of Kone and all the Dragons, then transforms into the Golden Proto Dragon again, making Laura swear at him for getting to be huge without her.

"All aboard everyone. Unless you prefer to fly yourself. Trust me, it's awesome up here."

They don't do any actual fighting, leaving that to the supporters and all the other Dragons, instead they simply play about in the air with Laura for ten minutes before the dungeon is empty. A nice relaxing flight about the desert posing as a dungeon. It's just a shame the level is so low.

Mythryll and her group are at the meeting point when they arrive, looking exhausted from the heat and excitement, and Cain waves them over to where he's standing in the shade. "No problems, I hope? I would hate to ruin a vacation dealing with stupid people."

The merchant whose stall they enjoy the shade of snorts in amusement and hands over small samples of the preserved fruit he sells. "They would have to be especially stupid. Stories of the massacre at Blood Sands Castle have already spread all down the desert coast. They say fewer than one in a hundred escaped after the battle."

Blood Sands Castle? That's a much more epic name than he came up with. If it sticks, Cain decides he will change the official name of their Guild Castle.

"One in a hundred is a bit low. At least twice that many left in their undergarments."

"Is it true that you called a thousand Seraphim to aid you? I thought it was a lie, but there's a real live one here with you." A boy who stopped to eavesdrop cuts in.

Evangeline ruffles his hair. "Close to that, but the Dragons are the terrifying ones. Seraphim are very friendly."

Laura, piling up preserved fruit, stops to stick out her tongue at the Seraphim. "You say Dragons are the mean ones, but who ate the last pancake this morning?"

The merchants, who think she's a type of Pixie, all laugh at her priorities, and Laura brings the bag of fruit to Cain. "Put this in your inventory. Elmira and Kone aren't answering, and my inventory is full of candy."

"Do you seriously make them hold your snacks?"

"It's a sharing system. We ask for a flavor, and whoever has it trades it over to the hungry person." The Dragon says proudly.

"Plus, they claimed a storage room in Montauk just for nonperishable candy," Vala adds. Hopefully, their respective species don't get diabetes; that's a lot of candy.

A swim is next on the list, but with the limited appearance options of the Companions, this proves to be a somewhat difficult situation. They can't swim nude in public, but if they equip anything, it becomes their default armor appearance. They're about to declare it a bust and save the swimming for when they're in a private area when Cain comes up with the long overlooked and simplest solution.

They could be using Nemu's [Troubadour's Transformation] skill to give them all appearances that can wear a bathing suit. While Nemu constantly uses it on herself, she can also use the skill on the rest of her group members for a party wide disguise.

Sure, the only option she has is Beastkin, but becoming a group of catgirls is deemed better than not swimming. Misha and Mythryll donate a collection of casual wear and swimsuits to the cause, and the group finds a restaurant bathroom to change in while Cain buys ice Cream.

What comes back out are seven Felian girls in their younger teens, all in casual dresses and sandals or deck shoes. "All of you? Let me guess, nobody wanted to be left out?"

"Exactly. And in fully furred, less endowed forms, we shouldn't get hit on as much. You might not be aware, but the more human-looking species are quite popular among the men." Nemu gives him a look that clearly says she expects to be praised for her genius and sees no potential issues with her choices, so Cain gives in and pets her head until the Felian begins to purr.

They finish their ice cream cones on the way to the beach and pass Cain their shoes the moment they reach the shore. "Last one in pays for dinner."

The white sand gives way to pleasantly warm and crystal clear water, so clean you can see the bottom even where it's five meters deep. Perfect for swimming, tag games, and using Cain as a diving board, climbing on to his shoulders to jump into the water. They play until Misha and Mythryll are exhausted, needing Cain to carry them back up to dinner, much to the amusement of the crowd of vacationers.

The change in appearance seems to have relaxed everyone. Knowing that their names and actual looks are hidden, they let loose, joking, playing pranks, and laughing until it starts getting dark and it's time to head back to the ship. Before they leave Cain stocks up on the fruity drinks everyone liked best, knowing they'll be in demand again soon.

Plus, you can't have a tropical vacation without fruit and Rum; it just doesn't work.

The guards at the dock give Cain a strange look, recalling him coming ashore with a very different group of ladies. Still, they're well paid not to ask unnecessary questions about what the wealthy vacationers are into, so they make sure everyone gets in the small boat safely and then return to their posts.

"This form is nice; I've never had a tail before." Misha giggles, more than a bit drunk from the combination of sun and Rum heavy fruit slush drinks.

Cain snickers and pets her from her head to the top of her tail, making her wiggle in delight.

"Again, again. How does Nemu ever get anything done? I would want someone to pet me all day." She sighs, leaning against his side.

Vala and Laura take over rowing so Cain can have his hands free to pet, sharing a knowing smirk at the dirty look Cain is getting from the vessels they pass. His reputation will have hit rock bottom by morning, not that it was far from it to begin with.

"Nila, let's set sail. I think everyone had enough fun here that we can head to the next stop on your map." Cain instructs as he carries Misha to bed, still in the Felian transformation.

Evangeline uses a light spell from the crow's nest to light the way out of the harbor, helping them avoid shallow spots and underwater hazards until they're in deeper water. The ship gets up to cruising speed just in time for Cain to drift off to sleep with the ball of fur that is Misha passed out beside him.

Whatever they put in those drinks is something else for her to get this drunk at such a high level.. He'll have to pick up more of it later.

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

Chapter 241

The following day Cain wakes up with a small furry body wrapped around him; Misha must have woken up enough to cuddle, but not enough to bother changing back to human.

It's not a bad experience, like having a big house cat, so Cain gently pets her fur, sending her back into a deep slumber as the ship splashes through the natural waves. The water magic evens most of the crashing through waves out, but for mana

conservation, they don't alter the bigger swells out of existence, leaving the ship to gently rock and sway as it races through the water.

They don't get to sleep much longer before Nemu comes to wake them up for breakfast, smiling at the fact that Misha is still a Felian. She has changed to the cream haired Neko form she's become fond of lately, abandoning her fully furred appearance in favor of the feeling of sunshine on her skin and the ability to change clothes.

"Arms up. Now equip that, and let's go eat." Cain instructs Misha, using [Noble Command] to get the sleepy Dark Apostle to comply.

Cain smiles at her half conscious reactions while putting her in a light yellow sundress that compliments her current tawny fur and carrying her out of the cabin to the table. He's fed her an entire bowl of oatmeal and is pouring her second cup of coffee before she wakes up enough to realize what's going on.

"When were you guys going to point out that I was still a cat?" She asks, flustered.

"We weren't. You looked so happy being spoon-fed oatmeal that we thought you could stay that way a while." Mythryll teases her from where she's stretched out in a hammock with a book.

"At least put my bikini back on next time." She grumbles, equipping it under the dress Cain put on her but not changing back to human.

There's not much to do but relax the morning away, so Cain decides to return to a hammock on deck to watch the ocean and sip on a fruity concoction with a heavy dose of Rum. The mid-afternoon brings the only excitement of their day, the sight of merchant vessel sails on the horizon.

The ship changes course to come near them for a conversation, a custom between merchants when they have or need news, Nila informs them.

They drop sails and release their spells, coming to a halt within talking distance of each other, and the other Captain hails them with a friendly wave. "Well met, Queen Rose. We just came from the Port of Bursa, and a battle has broken out for the city. You don't want to be anywhere near there, as both the Pirates and the Navy are seizing cargo for the war effort."

"Much appreciated. We came from a long stay in Assah, with an afternoon stop in Pampa. Everything is calm there, and we didn't see any other vessels taking the offshore route yesterday." Nila responds, and the first mate of the other ship takes notes.

With a hearty goodbye and an exchange of Northern Rum for Southern Fruit wine, the two ships go their separate ways.

"If there's fighting, it will have spread to much of the desert coast. Do you want to go to the deep sea and then cut back straight to the Capital city of Landis? There's an island port that is famously neutral. We could stop in there and have some fun."

"I see no good reason why not. We had a pretty good time in the last port."

Nila changes course, headed east into deeper waters and further from the coast. According to the map she's following, there may be monsters here, so Cain calls out the Giant Armored Octopus as his Greater Golems and has them escort the ship.

Pure numbers should keep most of the resident monsters away, and at the very least, it will keep anything from sneaking upon them.

Honestly, the chance of seeing monsters twice in one trip is pretty low; most vessels only see them once or twice a year and get attacked even less frequently. But it's better to be safe since Cain's luck runs both to insane benefits and increased danger chances.

The Port they're headed for has been affectionately named Tortuga by the transfers who settled it. By the standards of the mainland, it's a Pirate Port. But in reality, it's much more like the early days of Las Vegas. Liquor, Gambling, and black-market goods are all overseen by a group of strong organizations that sees it in their best interest that visitors return.

They plan to pose as rogue merchants, stopping in to have a little fun on their way, using the convenient excuse of the battles near the desert. Disguised, nobody will recognize them on land later in their journey, even though they'll surely recognize the ship.

Supposedly it's not a crime to visit, but Cain prefers to keep his group anonymous when he can to avoid hostage situations should he upset even more people.

Plus, Misha is adorable as a Felian. Their joints and bodies work differently than humans, making stretching out on almost any flat surface an enjoyable experience, and she's taking full advantage of it, laid out on a mat next to where Mythryll is tanning.

The Elf has made it her mission to get a proper tan before they reach Landis, even buying one of the specialty coconut-based tanning oils from Pampa. It's fast acting, giving even fair Elven skin the beginnings of a lovely bronzed glow after a day in the sun. It supposedly also prevents sunburn, but they'll have to see tonight if that's true.

Nila has done the same, her ashen gray skin beginning to pick up a bit of a blue tone, like the other Wave Riders they've seen. Good timing, too, because in a Port full of Pirates and other Sailors, a Wave Rider without a tan would stand out like a sore thumb.

They sail for three gloriously peaceful and sunny days before the island comes into sight. There's a large volcano in the middle, explaining to Cain's mind why such a place exists in the middle of an ocean, and many ships are anchored near the city.

"Alright, who wants to go as themselves and who wants a disguise?" Nemu asks happily.

"I'll take one for sure." Evangeline raises her hand with a rueful grin. Seraphim here would stand out; they tend to be pretty strict with morality.

"I'll be me." Laura decides, landing on Vala's shoulder as the Demon waves off Nemu's disguise offer.

The Seraphim whispers something in Nemu's ear, and the Felian giggles before changing her into a tall, buff Tigerkin man, with mostly bright orange fur but black and white stripes.

"Oh, I didn't know you could do that. That is awesome. But I'll stay as me." Nila smiles, looking over the burly form the Seraphim has taken.

"Do me too. Maybe a Lion man with a long shining mane." Mythryll suggests, getting her wish.

"Okay, that's strange. Does it always swing like that?" Mythryll asks, swaying her hips in the loose pants she put on before transforming.

"Not always, but most of the time." Cain jokes, making the girls snicker as Mythryll realizes that she just said that out loud.

"Hmph. Jokes on you, I'll take this sexy little Elf ashore." She teases in a deep, growling voice before wrapping an arm around Nila.

With two Beastkin men plus Cain, their group looks much more normal now, compared to the other crews they've seen. Nemu decides to go as herself, but in her armored outfit, as the notes included with their chart informed them that it's customary to go ashore armed in such places.

Again they'll be leaving the casters and Puppets on board to look after the ship while everyone else explores. The Supporters don't mind, knowing they'll be able to chat with nearby crews, and they'll need to do some maintenance and supervise the Puppets while they clean the boat anyhow.

The bay is a solid volcanic rock bottom, no good for anchoring, but they've drilled moorings attached to thick chains into the seabed. Available for a nominal fee, of course.

They also offer a complimentary shuttle that runs a loop through the bay every twenty minutes, both to make sure nobody is moored without paying and to deliver crews and goods.

The Vampire currently piloting the vessel is a friendly sort, so old his fangs are almost the only teeth he has left, and he's got a list of goods in demand and ones in high supply, so crews know what to bring what to save for another port.

They're desperately short on arms and armor, the war effort having diverted or bought them out. They only want level 100 or higher items, but the Darklight Host has plenty of them in stock, made mainly by Dimnys and Lickity.

Once they finish basic training, Cid and Char intend to power level the crafters, but without Cain, it will still take them a while to reach the first advancement.

"Tell me, ferryman, is there a good buyer for armors here? Or would I do better to set up a stall myself?" Cain asks, and the Vampire gives him a toothless grin.

"For the eminently reasonable price of only fifteen percent, the local Armory Association will gladly buy any suitable items you have. They even pay the premium rate for Legendary items of all levels." That settles it then. No need to operate a booth; they can move a load of goods in a hurry here.. Including ones that were nearly impossible to sell on the mainland.

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

Chapter 242

The shuttle pilot leaves them with a crude map of the city, including the location of the Armory Association, where he recommended they sell their goods. It's a large stone building, built of the nearly black local volcanic rock, as most buildings in the city are, but it has a pair of swords crossed over a shield carved into every wall. Somewhat hard to miss.

"Buying, selling, or here for the special items auction?" The door greeter welcomes them.

"Selling, and if it's not too late, I might have some items for the auction."

There are several very good legendary items in his inventory, mostly made by the Guild. He's also got a level 235 Legendary Amulet that will let an Arch Paladin transform into an Avatar of Devotion for 5 minutes once a day. The effect should be close to merging with a Legendary Summon and worthy of a piece at auction.

He also got the plan to create them, which he's waiting to give to Dimnys as a level birthday present. It's a bit specific, as it's only a single second advancement class that can use it, but with so many Paladins in the world, it should be one of the more common Tank Classes in the higher levels.

"Level and quality of the potential auction item?"

"Level 235 Legendary Item. Class-Exclusive." Cain answers, and the greeter's attitude goes from professionally polite to eager to please.

"Right this way. We've got a private room for booking high-value items."

She escorts the group through a set of doors off the main room that leads down a hallway, past several entries marked as appraisal rooms, and into a luxurious sitting room. Waiting for them there is a man in a black suit, his tattoos and tanned skin making him look a lot like Cain's current form, at least in fashion sense.

"Duke Cain of Blood Sands Castle. It's a pleasure to meet you. My name is Sergio Valparaiso, the head of the auction. My employee tells me you've got something extraordinary to offer." Again with the Blood Sands Castle. Just how far has the story spread? Perhaps Gillibrand, or his wife, is doing it to save face?

"It's a pleasure to meet you as well, Mr. Valparaiso. I've got a unique Amulet that I'm certain your auction could find a suitable buyer for. I've got several other Legendary items made by my Guild, but this one, as I'm sure you will agree, is special."

Cain takes the item out and places it on the appraisal table between them, the item description coming up the moment he removes his hand. A soft glow passes over the item, and a green light shines on the auctioneer's bracelet.

"The item is verified authentic. Now, let's take a look. A level 235 Legendary Transformation for an Arch Paladin with no drawbacks? That is rare. They often have a high cost or period of weakness afterward. I do believe this will be a highlight of the night. Our employee mentioned you might have a few more items as well?"

Cain takes out a set of Mythril Plate Armor, A Shield with perfect damage reduction and matching boots, helm, and gloves that give a set effect of increased stamina and damage reduction when worn with the armor. They're Dimnys' pride and joy among the items for sale. Some of the most impressive items she has made that don't have a home, and they're all Legendary Quality.

"I brought a set of armor as well. Not as high level, but crafted in-house by our resident Dwarven Blacksmiths. If these sell well, I will have more business for you in the future." The two men share a knowing smile as the table scans the items and brings up their effects.

"I don't think I've ever seen that much damage reduction before. It would be like trying to chop down a mountain." The greeter says quietly, reading over the shoulder of the auctioneer.

"Yes, this will go all as one set. I don't suppose you have a weapon to match? We've got some Royalty visiting, and this suit of armor is fit for a small country's National Treasury. With a matching weapon, it would be complete."

Cain consults with Dimnys and decides that what it needs is a [Hammer of the Thunder Gods]. The one remaining is a reject, a few points from perfect, so she saved it instead of giving it to Char. It does have damage reduction, though, where the one Char got had an added lightning spell damage affix. It's an axe on one side, hammer on the other, crackling with lightning, and meant to be wielded one-handed.

"Oh yes, that is perfect. It is Legendary, of course, but it also looks like the part with options for both cutting and blunt damage. You really know the way to an auctioneer's heart."

"Bring the Big Boss here. We can't bring these out to the auction without additional security." Sergio informs the attendant, who looks pale but rushes out to do as instructed.

Once she's gone, a contract is produced, itemizing the auction listing, and presenting a reserve price higher than the cost of building a castle in the middle of Assah. "That's just the guaranteed price, you understand. If it doesn't make that, the items will be returned. We take our fifteen percent fee from the final price."

"That's acceptable," Cain says, finishing reading the contract and signing his name at the bottom.

Moments later, a short but muscular man enters with a dozen Bodyguards. "This had better be good. You know I don't like being disturbed before the auction."

He stops at that, looking at the description of the items on the table, then the Amulet. "I take that back. Good job, Sergio. Is the contract already signed?"

"It is, boss. Did you have a buyer in mind?"

"The Crown Prince of Kallen is an Arch Paladin. He's over level 300 now, but that Amulet is incredible. There's no telling who will want it for one of their Commanders."

The big boss, Vito by name, goes silent a moment while he sends a message. "There, I've invited five buyers from the Eastern Kingdoms who might be interested. They all have houses with portals here, so it shouldn't be an issue sending a buyer on their behalf."

"What about the armor?"

"We will put that in as a surprise highlight since we've got everyone gathered, along with those Nobles from the North and Landis."

Nobles from Landis? Hopefully, he doesn't run into that son of the Knight Commander here. That was a big hassle even when he wasn't trying to sell Legendary Armor.

"How would you like to join the VIP merchants balcony tonight? There will be a few other groups there to watch their items sell, and it's shielded from the sight of the General population." Sergio offers.

"That sounds perfect. So long as the size of my group won't be an issue?"

"Of course not. We allow up to ten Companions and guards to accompany our VIP sellers for their safety and comfort. Here is an entry pass; enter through the side door of the building and show that to the guards; they'll see you to your seats."

Cain shakes hands with Sergio and Vito before the greeter escorts them back to the front of the room. "Your items will be ready at the arranged time this evening. Thank you for your patronage."

She gives a deep bow and waves them on their way; the generic phrase intended to indicate to the guards that he's a client but not give away too much about it.

The guards watch until he's out of sight while the others check out the nearby shops. There's an excellent smelling soap shop nearby that they've all wandered into, attracted by exotic fragrances. The Werewolf clerk keeps trying to sell Mythryll a very manly scented fur shampoo, much to Evangeline's amusement. The girl is taken with what she thinks is a fine specimen of male Lionkin but still trying to make a sale while flirting.

Misha has moved to the corner to check on the vanilla-scented section when a hooded figure manages to move in front of her, making strange hand gestures.

"Tell me, what did your master buy little Felian." The woman says softly.

"From here? Nothing yet." Misha's answer isn't particularly quiet, and it attracts the clerk's attention, who makes a hand signal out the door that Cain interprets as trouble. Either for them or for whoever is talking to Misha.

The woman talking to Misha makes the gesture again. "No, at the auction market, what did he buy from the Armory?"

"Why would I tell you that?" Misha asks loudly, making Cain snicker and move to her side, realizing this person is trying to interrogate what she took as a Beastkin youth.

"Sorry, Miss, my Misha is one hundred percent loyal. You picked the wrong person to try to hypnotize." Cain informs her, his smile turning to an evil grin.

But before he can do anything, a pair of guards step silently in the door, and the woman tries to bolt. She makes it all of two steps before meeting Vala's blade, stopping her in her tracks until the two men with Armory Association logos on their uniforms get a hold of her.

"Our apologies. This sort are the modern pickpockets, using hypnosis abilities to mug their targets and not get caught. There's a steep penalty for being caught stealing here, and we'll be taking her back to the boss since she's past the first advancement."

They don't even wait for a response before knocking her unconscious with a short club and carrying her away, impressing everyone but the staff with their efficiency.

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

Chapter 243 - The Auction

Everyone picks a few scents out that they like and drops them into a toiletries bag, before handing out to Cain. The bag is enchanted only to take up one of the two hundred spaces in your inventory, no matter what you fit inside of it. They were for sale at the soap shop, not cheap and not particularly large, but when it's got seven women's worth of soaps in it, with room for more, it was well worth the price.

The fact they're making Cain carry it either means they've got a lot more shopping in mind, or they filled up their inventories with clothes, drinks, and snacks at the last stop. They don't have much time left, though. The auction starts in a little over an hour, and the streets are getting crowded.

"Why didn't mind control work?" Mythryll whispers to Misha.

"Likely because I'm merged with Record Keepers. You get a portion of their resistances, so with two of them, I should be almost immune to it." Misha uses the resistances from the summons as a cover so she doesn't have to mention that the Succubus Devotion Ring makes her immune to mind control skills.

"Maybe there is something to be said for walking the path of the overpowered. That much more durable and immune to mind control would be amazing." Mythryll sighs.

"We'll convert you eventually. Just give it time." Nila laughs, slapping Mythryll's burly Lion kin form on the backside and making her jump in surprise. A few surrounding auction goers chuckle at the interaction, seeing them as a well bonded crew of Sailors enjoying their time ashore.

They're an eclectic bunch, but that's not uncommon. Only military vessels are routinely filled with a single species. Even the mostly human nations merchants will usually take on other species to fill out the crew of the ships since the work is challenging and dangerous.

Cain leads them to the side door, picking up Misha to carry her through the building. Not because it's necessary, just because her reactions are so cute when he's affectionate in public. The Felian ears make it impossible for her to hide her reactions; she doesn't have the experience to control them. He hands the token to the guard, who nods and leads them through the halls and up to the third floor without a word.

Once they're on the third floor and the door is closed, he begins to speak. "Welcome Sirs and Madams to the Armory Auction. In front of you is the Sellers lounge for our most valued clients. Food and refreshments are available at your request, as well as along the side table. If you need anything else, please feel free to ask the attendants inside."

With that, he turns and leaves, locking the door behind him. It can be opened from this side without issue, but unauthorized visitors will be kept away from the sellers.

The moment they step inside the room, a curious furry head pops over the back of a chair, smiling at Cain and Misha.

"Ambrosia, please sit. I know you don't like the auction, but I have business here today." An older Beastkin with round ears covered in dark fur says sternly to the similar looking girl in her late teens.

"But Daddy, there are other ladies, not just stuffy old guys. Can I say hello?"

Misha bites Cain's ear when he pinches her bottom and laughs. "Of course, you can. My name is Cain, and these are Misha, Vala, Nila, and Laura. I'm sure you ladies will have a wonderful time."

Mythryll and Evangeline look a bit upset about being left out, but if they're going to play the part of big burly Bodyguards, introducing them to random strangers' daughters might not go over well.

"Thank you, Cain. I'm Donovan, third Prince of Hanna on the Eastern Continent."

"Duke Cain of Blood Sands Castle in the northern Desert of the Central Continent," Cain tells him with a slight bow.

"So you're not a myth then. The battle has been the gossip of the seas lately since the survivors fled anywhere they could. But it's the Queen of Gillibrand spreading it the most. I hear you crippled her husband and let that woman take over?" He phrases the last as a question with a hint of distaste.

"There were complications during his resurrection. A lingering debuff caused an unexpected result. I'm sure with time; he'll be fine. Assuming he ever manages to overcome her authority. Honestly, I'm not sure how he was in charge to begin with."

The Prince and his group of guards snicker, and a human in the front row tries to hide his laughter with a cough. He seems to be here alone until Cain notices he's got a woman sleeping in his lap under a blanket.

"Duke Cain, I'm Lukas, Master Smith to the Royal family of Landis." The human introduces himself, ignoring the seemingly sleeping woman with her head on his lap.

"Pleasure to meet you." Cain picks a seat near the end of the row, where the ladies are drinking wine and eating cakes from the side table. He knows how his group gets; it's best not to let any of them get too out of hand.

They've all gotten comfortable in their seats with fresh drinks when the lights dim and the auctioneer takes the stage. The attendants move to the front of the room in case anyone here wants to place a bid, and the building falls silent.

"Welcome everyone to today's auction. As those who follow the postings have surely noticed, we have several precious items for you. We have an [Ægis shield] which absorbs damage taken, an item many of you are already familiar with in less pleasant ways.

We also have an entire case of 6 [Class Change] potions that will randomly change a basic class. For you Nobles with children who did not get lucky with their initial class options or made a mistake, these are a once-in-a-lifetime chance to try again.

Finally, we have a particularly unique Amulet. Stay and wait for it; you won't want to miss the special ability."

The tension in the building is palpable, but up in the VIP room, the atmosphere is much different. The crowd below is incredibly worked up, which means that they will be very, very wealthy men tomorrow. It gives the room a relaxed and happy atmosphere in stark contrast to the intensity of the bidders area.

Not that they're ever going to admit that they were today's sellers to others. The items they've presented, or created, are too fantastic. It would only bring them trouble.

A few initial treasures not specialized or out of reach for the main room clientele start the auction then comes the specialty shield presumably made by the Royal Smith from Landis. Cain recognizes this item; he cleaved its twin in half on the beach in Assah.

"Had to make a new one for the Knight Commander?" Cain asks pleasantly.

"I should hate him for the amount of work he made me do, but it worked out in my favor. I got two Legendary shields from the materials provided." His grin says the kingdom has no idea that he or the extra shield are here at the auction.

The bids are getting higher and higher to the point Cain needs to consult his interface to understand the currency being used. Platinum coins are worth a hundred gold, and a bar of either is worth five hundred coins in that denomination. One Mythril coin is worth one platinum bar.

"Sold for nine platinum bars and four gold bars." The Smith gives a sour look, then shrugs and takes another drink from the attendant.

"A little more than a bar over the reserve, but not terrible, I suppose, even after the Auction fee." He explains, and the other two men nod in understanding.

The auction goes smoothly for a half-hour, selling a variety of interesting items with prices from a thousand to a hundred thousand gold before the Auctioneer wheels out a small chest draped in cloth.

"This, my friends, is one of the highlights of our night. An Avatar Transformation Amulet for Arch Paladins. Five entire minutes in duration with no drawbacks. It's a level 235 Legendary Item, and you all know what that means for the Avatar Form." The crowd goes insane, and Cain can hear a heated argument between Nobles in the second-floor balconies.

It sounds like things will get violent for a moment before the Auctioneer brings things back under control. The opening bid is one platinum bar. Who will open on this Legendary Item?"

"Here"

"Two," "Three," "Seven," "Eight"

As they bid and shout irrational insults, Donovan looks over at Cain, shaking his head. "I thought my offering would cause chaos, but you, Sir have stolen my Thunder. No fewer than six kings and a dozen Knight Commanders that I know of are Arch Paladins. A Legendary Transformation on that level is an ultimate weapon that could form a myth as unbelievable as your own."

"That's the less outrageous offering I placed up for auction today. If your kingdoms want something incredible, wait for the hidden item to come up." That has their attention, and now Prince Donovan looks like he's considering bidding on the Amulet.

"Nineteen Platinum and Thirty Gold bars are going once." Is called in the auctioneer's voice, and Donovan shakes his head as if coming to his senses.

"Father would never forgive me for spending that much. We're not a rich kingdom."

"Sold to the Crown Prince of Kallen. Thank you all for remaining civil. Now for our next item..."

The items are getting better and better as they go, and soon it's time for the potions.. The auctioneer doesn't even get a chance to finish the description when the first bid comes in, the entire crowd seems eager to get their hands on this item.

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

Chapter 244

"Ten Platinum" comes a familiar booming voice from down in the Noble balconies.

"His oldest son awakened his class as a young child and became a basic warrior; he's been looking for a way to change it ever since. The boy is completely unsuited to close combat." Lukas explains.

"The boy's a half-wit. Even more of a pompous idiot than his father." Donovan laughs.

"How'd he even manage to break that shield anyhow?" Ambrosia asks curiously.

"Wait, is that Lancelot?" Misha gasps, and both other men turn their attention to her.

"You know the Knight Commander of Landis?" Lukas asks, startled.

"Uh, a little? I was in Assah when his shield was broken after all." Misha answers, unsure how much is commonly known about the event.

"Oh, this I must hear. Landis told everyone that it was destroyed in noble battle against a fearsome monster that threatened his younger son." Donovan insists.

Vala snorts Rum out of her nose, trying not to laugh. "Oh, it was a fearsome monster, alright. But a monster of the transfer sort. His boy Odin picked a fight he couldn't win,

and Lancelot had to step in to save the boy's life. The fight lasted three moves, leaving him laid out with a broken shield."

That declaration makes the eyes of both other groups in the sellers lounge go wide in shock, while the Darklight Host members try to hide their amusement.

"No wonder he didn't tell anyone. The only thing more embarrassing would be losing a duel." Prince Donovan says, smirking at Lukas.

"Kindly keep that information in this room. The position of Knight Commander is politically powerful; if there was a challenge to his position because of this, who knows how much damage could be caused." The blacksmith pleads.

Cain nods. "You have my word. Several people already know, but if they're not saying anything, Lancelot can keep his secret."

"Agreed, though I won't guarantee that I don't bring it up with him in private. His boy Odin has caused troubles for my daughters on multiple occasions." Cain can see that happening; it's what got Odin in trouble with them and Donovan clearly doesn't intend to let Lancelot live this one down.

"Just one more question, what was Odin doing that caused the fight?" Lukas asks, unsure if he wants to hear the answer.

"Tried to forcefully claim a pair of twins who rejected him." Nemu answers.

"He should have let them beat that fool to death this time. Think of how much the kingdom has spent covering up for him."

Lancelot eventually claims the potions for twenty-five platinum bars, and Donovan looks overjoyed. Either his country is small and broke, or he doesn't personally have much money.

The Auction goes on for another hour before they get to the final item of the night. The Armor Suit that Cain put up for auction.

"This final item is a full set. Level 122, but don't let that fool you. The entire suit is of matching Set Pieces, made of Mythril and Legendary in Quality. It is damage reduction Plate Armor, including a shield, which grants more total defensive power than a Raid Boss. The suit also comes equipped with a Legendary Weapon, percentage-based damage and suitable to be a National treasure."

The item was introduced by the big boss himself, who brought it out on stage with his Bodyguards. They're now displaying the stats of the pieces on a sizeable magical screen, including the set bonus.

"I hope you take land and daughters in exchange because I believe half the Kingdoms here would be willing to grant them to you in exchange for that. With that kind of damage reduction, a King or his Champion would be virtually undefeatable. You could never deal enough damage to get through their healing." Lukas says, looking it over.

"Master Crafted by Dimnys of the Darklight Host. You've got a Dwarven master Smith in your Guild?"

"A Dark Dwarf. And yes, she made Master Level Blacksmithing not too long ago. The old men are still celebrating her achievements." That makes most of the previously silent Bodyguards chuckle. After all, Dwarves will celebrate almost anything for as long as they think they can get away with it.

The bidding has gone on for some time as they chatted away. Neither the others in the room were of the sort of wealth category could afford such a thing, so the price didn't much interest them. But more and more well-dressed people with Bodyguards are showing up as the bidding goes on, and that is enough to draw everyone's attention.

"That's the King of Landis. Lancelot must have called him here to bid on the Armor." Lukas indicates an elegantly dressed man in a blue and white cape.

"There's the Demon King Aggramor. He has a huge amount of power on the Western side of the central continent." That's the one the Demon midwife was talking about. He does look like a kindly Demonic Grandfather in person.

The Demon King slowly surveys the crowd before looking up to the balconies, and Cain can swear the Demon King just met his eyes, despite the enchanted glass that should be hiding him from sight. Cain gives a slight nod, and the King smiles before placing his bid.

"We will pause the auction for just a moment now while we consult with the seller." The auctioneer declares.

"Sir, the auction house would like to accept nonmonetary bids on this item. The usual fee will be waived in exchange for a flat fee from the winning bidder." An attendant informs Cain.

Technically, this piece belongs to Dimnys, but if the winning bid is unsuitable for her, he can always compensate her for the loss.

"Go ahead. I've got plenty of coins."

"Good news, everyone. Non monetary offers will now be accepted. A fee of five platinum bars will be charged to the winning bidder in addition to their offer. The bidding will be one round of closed bids in a blind auction. You have twenty minutes."

The Demon King is staring at Cain with a pensive look, while an overdressed Dwarf looks ready to explode beside him. Four other Royals, one Beastkin and the others human, are also in talks with their advisors.

"Why is the Dwarf so mad?" Mythryll asks, the Deep voice of her transformation startling Cain.

"They usually pressure out other buyers to claim all Master Crafters creations that come up at auction for themselves, keeping them Dwarf exclusive. In a blind bid, he can't do that." Donovan explains as the Dwarf rages at the Auction Manager.

The twenty minutes fly by, and Sergio brings up a closed envelope tray. "The bids, Sir. This is my favorite part, watching your reactions. None of them know who is selling the item, so they've got to guess both what you might want and what the others will offer."

"I doubt that's the case this time. The items are all made by the same Master Smith. Another Master Smith can tell, so the Dwarves at least know a little. Plus anyone else who brought a Master Smith. I'd have informed my King, but he shouldn't know I'm here." Lukas smiles at the Auction boss, also looking forward to seeing the bids.

Cain opens the first, from a human Kingdom in the Northern Continent. They offer a keep and lands, including a dungeon and two small Mines plus a hundred well trained slaves. The girls chuckle at that. Offering a Puppet Master slaves. It's worse than pointless. The others are more interested in the lands, which appear to be pretty good, though the mining quality is unknown.

Next up is the Beastkin offer. They offer a large tract of wildland and an assortment of rare materials. Cain sets that one to the side as a possibility.

The following two human offers are a joke, marriage alliances, and titles plus farmland. They would entice many people but not Cain, and certainly not Dimnys.

The Landis Kingdom offers a Keep with a mine-type dungeon entrance inside, a collection of resources, and a position as Royal Master Smith.

"Hey, Lukas, they're offering to give your position away. That's mean." Nemu says, pointing at the bid.

"There's more than one Royal Blacksmith. Don't worry; they've got plenty of work to go around."

The last offer is the Demon King's bid. While it's still written on the official notepad line the others, it reads much more like a letter than a simple bid.

"Guild Master, I can offer you a way to upgrade both your Demon and your Dragon and a Keep in my Capital with access to the Unabridged Dwarven Master Smithy Recipe Book for your Dimnys. Regards, Aggramor"

"He doesn't really get the concept of a blind bid, does he? But I suppose it fulfills the requirements." Sergio says, looking over the elegant penmanship.

It's a genuinely intriguing offer. A way to upgrade Vala and Laura? Plus, a complete set of Master Level Dwarven blacksmithing recipes for Dimnys? That is more valuable than money; the Dwarves guard that knowledge with their lives. Their trip to the western side of the continent might prove to be much more than a simple vacation.

"I believe I will take this offer. The Demon King has bid something I couldn't get for myself.." Everyone present is in agreement; the very best bid for a Priceless item is something the seller also couldn't get with money.

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

Chapter 245 - Huge And Mighty

"The Demon King requests your presence, insisting that the first part of the payment must be made in person. Do you agree, or would you prefer to remain anonymous?" Sergio asks.

"I don't think I'm anonymous now. See how he referred to me as Guild Master? He already knows who I am, so there's no reason not to go see him." Cain shrugs.

More attendants come in pushing carts carrying chests of gold and platinum bars for him the other two VIP sellers, and Cain gathers his share before excusing himself to meet the Demon King, following Sergio to a private room on the second floor. The entrance looks like a bank vault; the door is thick and covered in a runic script, closing and locking behind them to prevent interruptions.

"King Aggramor, it is a pleasure to meet you." Cain greets the nondescript-looking Demon lounging on the sofa. He's changed disguises from when he was in the Auction, no longer looking intimidating. Cain understands neither is his natural form and briefly wonders if he's a Mimic like Neffie, or more correctly, an advanced version of one, given that he's over level 300.

"Likewise. You and your Guild have been a pleasant surprise to me for a while now. I'm an ancient Demon, you see, and I've gathered a lot of knowledge. The relevant bit today is a skill I created to assist my rule called [Census]."

Cain wonders about the King mentioning his Guild being surprising to him. After all, they're from different sides of the continent. But the King looks like he will explain, so Cain waits patiently.

"When [Census] is paired with my class skill [Council Meeting], you get an effect that should finish the upgrades to some of your Companions. The Demon and Dragon in particular, as most of them are under my purview. The Dragons don't like dealing with other races, so I've been appointed to do it for them in the Central Continent."

Sergio looks positively lost at this point, searching the room for something.

"The Dragon is here. This particular form allows her to travel with ease." Vala informs the auction master, guessing his confusion.

"I thought I had gone crazy there for a moment since your group is mostly Beastkin with no Dragon in sight." The King is looking at him like he's an idiot, a notion made even more plausible by the fact the King seems to be able to see through disguises. That makes Cain wonder what he looks like to the Demon King, or if he can only identify that it is a disguise and not see the proper form behind it.

"It's easier if I just show you," Aggramor says, and flood of information fills Cain's mind.

[Form Recorded]

[Form Recorded]

It repeats seemingly infinitely, filling his consciousness. Cain closes his eyes, letting them flow through him.

"Not bad. Most pass out. Just think or say summary to see it in a more manageable form."

[Summary] Expand Categories to see details

[Demon Kings] 1

[Demon Queens] 2

[Demon Lords] 93,216

[Ancients] 1

...

The list goes on and on, and the notifications are still coming in, so Cain mutes them.

"That's the Census of the Demon Kingdom and its allies by species. It's not knowledge that I would usually share. Still, the Visionaries saw that we would be working together in the future, and sharing it with you will create another Legendary Demon for my Kingdom once your skill upgrades her."

"For your Kingdom?" Vala asks.

"I am the only remaining Demon King. All demons are part of my Kingdom." He says as if it's an obvious fact.

"And as part of your Kingdom, you can keep tabs on them?" Cain asks.

"You catch on fast. Yes, I was surprised to see young Nefertiti show up on the Census. Your people are doing an excellent job with her, though. One like her is a real handful, even with a full staff. Plus, a Succubus that isn't a single mother. How rare is that? Your Guild is utterly fascinating."

[Companion Vala ready for Upgrade. Initiate now?] Y/N

[Upgrading]

Vala begins to grow, her height shoots up to 210cm and her skin shifts to a deep burnished Bronze color, much like Cain's Progenitor form. Her wings have also adjusted to her new appearance, still leathery but now fading from Bronze at the base to a deep black at the edges. Her eyes glow red before fading to emerald green with goat-like slotted pupils. Her hair is now long and black, tightly woven into multiple braids.

Then her clothing changes to a form-fitting leather suit with gold-trimmed black metal plates on her shins, thighs, and upper chest, leaving much cleavage exposed and her torso only covered in the leather suit that seems to have been painted on over most of her body. Cain would say it's latex the way it stretches to fit tightly, but it's textured like black leather.

It looks more like an Assassin than a tank outfit to Cain, but Demonic armor is deceiving; the leathery parts are often most durable.

Sergio is in shock, sitting on the floor with his mouth agape, while Aggramor claps happily.

"A Blood Dancer, a direct descendant of the Progenitors. Every hit recovers health and mana for her allies, and her very Aura will leech health from her enemies and empower

her friends. They've been extinct for millennia because they were so dangerous that the other Kingdoms didn't dare to let them live to enter the battlefield."

[They were as fast as the Oath Breakers and carried deadly cursed blades. Many fell to them during the war between heaven and hell.] The Inquisitors add.

"You know, in your Progenitor form, you could make a whole family of them. Bring the species back and conquer the continent. It would be a lot of fun." Aggramor suggests with a wink.

"Nope, not acceptable. No getting the Companions pregnant when we don't even have kids yet." Misha blurts, before she flushes bright red while Aggramor laughs.

"Not until after you have your own, is it? Sounds like you've got a busy life ahead of you, young man."

Misha is overwhelmed by embarrassment, burying her face in Cain's chest as the tail of her Felian disguise wraps around herself and her ears flatten as if making herself more compact will make her invisible.

[Companion Laura Ready for Upgrade. Initiate now?] Y/N

"Yes! My turn. I will be huge and glorious."

"Not Indoors, you won't. Could you wait until we get outside? Auctioneer Sergio, can we access the roof?"

"Yes, of course. I don't know what you've done, but a huge Dragon indoors sounds bad."

"Just upgraded the quality of a few of my Summoned Companions, a part of the payment for the Armor. What did you need that for anyhow, King Aggramor?"

"I've got a young child who is following the path of the Paladin. It's perfect for their level one hundred advancement present."

The child of the reigning Demon King is an aspiring Paladin? How's that for ironic. But then demons aren't precisely what Cain expected them to be either.

The roof of the auction looks to be a private garden, with benches, shrubs, and grass surrounding white gravel pathways. But it's open enough for Laura to transform. She shifts into her draconian form, and Aggramor comes to scratch behind her horns.

"You're one of the largest Opal Prismatic Dragons I've ever seen, and you want to be bigger?"

"You should see some of the others. Especially that Primordial Golden Dragon, that thing is so massive it's unfair. It makes me look like a newly hatched whelp."

Now Aggramor understands the problem. Laura is from a tiny species of Dragon but dreams of being one of the gigantic species that blots out the sky.

"You might not get as large, but you will be just as mighty after this update. Don't put yourself down; you're a beautiful specimen of Opal Prismatic Dragon."

Cain starts the transformation, and Laura's form begins to shift. Along her spine, the smooth scales give way to large, ridged plates and her horns darken from white to silver. She's got a look of intense concentration on her face, and Aggramor can see her form slowly growing. As she does, her tail grows a pair of short white spikes on top of the tip, and then her form settles. Roughly a meter longer than she was and lightly armored, as the ancient Dragons were.

"Did I grow?"

"An entire meter. Plus, you got new armor scales on your spine and chest and upgraded horns." Cain confirms.

"You're now likely the largest of your species to ever grace this world with their presence." Aggramor says proudly, and Laura smiles.

"Thank you, Demon King. That means a lot to me."

Laura flies a few circles around the building before landing again, radiating happiness. "I'm fast too. Just as fast as Danni, maybe even faster."

That should be the case. Laura is Legendary now. No, make that Ancient Quality, she has been upgraded by his skills.

[Skill: Advisors detects Legendary Companions. Restrictions are removed on Legendary Companions, and their Bonded Forces are upgraded to options of Epic Quality.]

Companions upgraded to advisors and at Epic Quality didn't qualify for Glory of the Mark, only the set quality of Epic. But it seems that now they do, plus their Bonded Forces got an upgrade.. Those two will be truly terrifying in combat after this, and it almost feels unfair how he got the better end of this deal with the Demon King.

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

Chapter 246

"Here is an all-access pass to the Demon Kingdom, given to all capital residents. I must go now, but within a few minutes, you will receive the notification that the Keep has been transferred to your possession." The King informs him, still scratching Laura's head.

"Thank you. And if there are staff currently working there, inform them that I will take over their contracts. It will allow me to use them to activate a travel circle there so the Guild doesn't need to wait for me to circle the continent by boat before Dimnys can access those recipes."

"One is already placed, you'll be able to modify it when you take possession, but I'm sure the maids will appreciate the work. Just warn your Blacksmith that the Masters in the Capital are Dark Dwarves." That gives everyone in Cain's group an honest smile.

"So is Dimnys. I'll be sure to send her with an appropriate gift for them."

They've talked so long that the process is complete. Cain gets the notification that the Keep is now the property of the Darklight Host, then that the Travel Circle has been added to the network, and finally contracts for eight Succubus 'Domestic Needs Assistants' as the contract calls them. The list of duties and responsibilities looks like they're multi-purpose domestic staff, so Cain increases their pay and signs the contracts.

Well-paid workers are happy workers.

Now that they're finished here, Sergio leads them through the building again, but this time back to the lobby. "This exit is for the low-value auction purchases; you'll be led here if you made a purchase of one gold bar and under. It shouldn't raise suspicions; hundreds of others have also come here; you'll blend right in."

"Thank you for the consideration. I'll be back if I get something good for you."

Sergio passes him an envelope with the Auction seal on it, and Cain puts it in his inventory, shaking the Auctioneers hand and heading back into the city.

[I just saw the notification. Did you get me access to a Dwarven Master Smithing book?] Dimnys sends in Guild Chat.

[In exchange for your suit of Mythril armor and shield. Hopefully, you're not upset about getting a nonmonetary price.]

[Not at all. Master Crafter Certification is worth more than Platinum. Plus, it comes with all the Legendary Dwarven Recipes and one randomly chosen unique or ancient recipe. Those are only available through the system at the time of certification.]

"What's next? I could use a break from walking." Vala says, giving an annoyed glance to a transfer who is following them. Cain's not sure what he's up to; he's far too low level to be a threat. Then he notices where the young man is looking and thumps him on the head.

"Stop drooling over her ass, or she might hurt you."

"Sorry, sorry. It's just, Mommy Dommy thighs." The man says it with a sigh, and Vala looks like she will draw her sword.

"None for you. Now scram." She says with a growl, and the man flees.

"There's always one weirdo." Evangeline laughs in her large Tiger Kin male disguise, and the others nod along.

"Next time, I should take the disguise. But this new form is incredible. As soon as it upgraded me to Legendary, I became Ancient Quality, and I'm not sure anything we've met could stop me now. At least not on my level."

"But are you going to have a brood of little demonettes after Misha gets a baby of her own?" Nemu teases, causing Misha to give her a swat to the head.

"I don't think the harem route is on the table. But if I find myself a suitably powerful Demon Prince, who knows what might happen."

As they're joking, a particular storefront catches Cain's eye. Pets and Vampire Accessories is the name. Maybe they can get something for Cid or a pet for Neffie there. It's still in front of them, and Cain is about to turn in when he scans the person's description in the window.

[Vampire Healing Pet]

[Non-Sentient Magical Construct]

[Level 5]

They're human-shaped magical blood bags, animated to entertain like a puppy or other house pet. That's a hard no from him. Vampires don't need blood to survive, but drinking it increases their regeneration rates.

Plus, many transfers who chose the species just want to do it to live out some stereotypes from their past lives.

He is abruptly pulled into a clothing store, bringing his attention back to the group, and the girls start looking over the available items. It's almost all cloth and leather, but Cain does see a few high fashion plate pieces and wonders if Vala can change her outfit now that she's an Ancient Quality Demon.

"Vala, why don't you try something on? See if you can do fashion changes now? Just grab a few items, like this shirt and pants that count as plate mail, and head for the dressing room." The buildings in this city are pretty tall, built with the expectation of serving various species, so her increased size isn't an issue at the moment.

Vala disappears into the changing room for longer than expected before Cain gets a message. [Do we know of any well-dressed female Demons?]

[I take it you can change clothes now? The Demon Socialites were sitting near the King at the auction. I'm sure we could find someone if you need advice.]

[That's not it. I tried putting on the clothes, and it notified me that these weren't effective armor and asked if I wanted to pick a disguised form instead.]

[In that case, maybe not the socialites. They're pretty overdressed for a disguise. We might have to wait; everything else I can think of for demons is either half dressed or stands out a lot.]

[Got it, boss. It can wait.] Vala comes back out in her armor, handing the clothes back to the attendant as 'Not her Style.'

[You have the Census now. All those forms are in your mind; you just need to go through them one at a time until you find a good one.] The Seraphim Inquisitor suggests. It's a possibility; he can see the form and details in the Interface when switching summons if he wants, but just filtering them and picking one could take days. Best to do that while they're at sea.

Nemu leads Misha out of the changing room with a blindfold on, dressed in a pink plaid pleated school uniform skirt, matching black blouse with pink stitching, and thigh-high black stockings. "Trust me, in this form, that outfit is irresistible. But it's a surprise, so once we show Cain, I'll change you into another one."

The Felian is having way too much fun at her expense. Cain gives the schoolgirl outfit a thumbs up and motions for Nemu to have her do a twirl. It might look better on her human form, in Cain's opinion, but the schoolgirl uniform is still a good look on her furry body.

Nemu quickly brings her back inside and then out again in an elegant gold short-sleeved cheongsam dress that compliments her fur and matching roman sandals.

"Oh, that is amazing on her. Would you like a job here, young lady?" The manager asks Nemu, who lifts the blindfold off Misha's head.

"Sorry, we've got to sail on soon. But we couldn't leave without at least one new outfit. Is there a suit store nearby? We should dress the guys too." The Companions in male disguises are wearing boring generic outfits because Cain doesn't have much to work with, but the staff gladly runs next door and returns with various suits and shirts.

"There, much better dressed now." The clerk declares as everyone comes out in new suits. The whole group looks like a group of businessmen and their dates now, giving Cain an idea.

He opens up his Summoning Options, sorts it to Wrath Demons, then Legendary Quality, female, and then melee type. A bodyguard who looks a lot like Vala's new form but wingless and under 180cm tall is among the remaining options, catching Cain's attention as he scrolls past. He links the description to Vala and sends a mental message to try it and a suit.

She's still got her cornrows and her own face and burnished Bronze skin, but she's shorter and wingless now, and the black suit accents her curves, making her look like a high-priced lawyer. The manager begins to fan herself as if the temperature suddenly increased when she sees the new Vala, and Mythryll whistles in appreciation.

"That's too good not to show off. Let's go somewhere for dinner." Nila declares, still stuck with her usual Sailor's outfit, as she isn't wearing a transformation.

"We're due for a celebration anyhow." Laura declares, and Cain notices she's got white overalls and a baby blue sweater on her Dragon Pixie form now. Still barefoot, though.

"That we are. Miss, how much is our total?" The clerk looks shocked that they're taking almost everything they tried on and all the men's clothing, but quickly comes up with the total, paid with a single gold bar from the auction of the Amulet.

"Split the tip. Excellent work, everyone." Cain declares, leading the group out into the streets. They're not attracting any less attention now, being so elegantly dressed in a city full of Pirates, sailors, and mercenaries.. Still, enough Nobles visit for the Auction that they're not too out of place.

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

Chapter 247

It doesn't take them long to find a high-end sushi shop, recommended by an old lady at a store where Cain stopped to pick up some Inscription supplies. In her words, "You've got to show a woman she won't ever do better than you. After that, she's yours forever."

He's not sure about that logic, and Misha is already his forever, but the restaurant looks fantastic. It's a good thing they changed clothes because the current diners in the small shop all seem to be royalty of some sort, going by their elegance and jewelry.

Seeing how they're dressed, Cain updates Misha's jewelry a little, changing the collar to a Long, wingless-type Dragon-shaped golden choker to match her bracelets and make it visible. The body and tail wrap around her neck while the head sits above her cleavage with two large diamond eyes. Even if it weren't an enchanted item, it now looks like it's worth a fortune, which Cain hopes will help their appeal for a seat without a reservation.

Oddly, the chef seems to be judging the worthiness of everyone but Nila, whose Wave Rider appearance met his standards with just a glance. They must have a good reputation here. Either that or Beastkin don't, and the chef is concerned about the party acting boorish. Finally, he gives his approval, and the waiter seats them.

"Any special requests?" The waiter asks with a meaningful look between dinner and dessert courses.

"Something with strawberries. And Frost Giant Vodka." Cain answers, and the cook grins at them from the back. When he accepted the presence of Nila without question, Cain had a feeling the Sushi Chef had the good stuff hiding in here somewhere.

A single shot each is enough to get the whole group feeling good. They pay the bill and start making their way back to the dock, singing songs as they walk, the crowds parting in front of them, nobody wanting an incident with a group of drunk Nobles.

"We'll head out in the morning. I suspect that the rocking of a ship in motion will not be good for our condition, and I'd rather not waste the effect by cleansing it away."

Being drunk and amorous, the fine upstanding crew of the Queen Rose entirely forgot how well sound carries over water, causing a great deal of envy among their neighbors and spreading even more outlandish rumors about the nature of their Guild.

The first light through the portholes wakes Cain, who decides that Misha can sleep a little longer. He has discovered that roughly two hours of sleep a night is more than sufficient for an Ancient, but she is bound to be exhausted, and he's not sure that any spell can undo that.

As he's sipping Rum and enjoying the morning sunshine, the ferry makes its first round of morning patrols through the bay.

"Ferryman, do you know of a Shaman or Cleric spell that can refresh fatigue, say for someone who hasn't had time to sleep in days?" He calls over.

"Aye, the [Refreshing Wind] Shaman spell. Crews on the run use it a lot, but eventually, it will stop working, and you'll collapse from exhaustion."

"Perfect. If they've got one in town, I'll grab it. What's on the much-needed list today?"

"Mostly armor. The battles along the central coast are picking up, and the wars in the East are too, so anything they can get their hands on was emptied yesterday. The Armor racks are bare."

"I'll come ashore then. Vala, you're with me." They both hop aboard, unaware of that everyone around them heard the commotion their crew made last night until they get to the next ship that flags down the ferry.

"Ah, it's Duke Cain. Kudos to you, good sir. The bay stands in awe of your prowess." The Captain says with a mock bow. Cain instantly realizes what the man means and begins to laugh, returning the bow before the Captain boards the ferry with a few of his crew, and the boat starts heading to shore.

"Find anything good at the auction?" The weather-beaten human asks with a hint of anticipation.

"I did, but it went a bit too rich for my blood. What about you?"

"I managed a good deal on some Wind Stones to cut down on the casting cost for our next voyage. We're going to make the Run for the Southern Continent." That sounds like a title, and Cain has heard that the seas in that direction are filled with monsters.

"Your ship does look like she's up to the task. I'm not sure my crew is ready for it yet; we're going to round the south end of the central continent then head back north up the west coast, see what we can gain out of the chaos."

"Ha, I'll take the sea monsters any day over the land type. Fair winds to you." They've reached the docks, and the Captain hops off, not waiting for the ferry to stop, his crew members a step behind him. Cain and Vala follow, and the ferry turns away to begin another loop, keeping to whatever schedule the ferryman has in mind.

He makes his way to the Armory again, having forgotten to sell off most of the lower level equipment yesterday, and meets the same attendant at the doors.

"Welcome back. How might I guide you today?"

"I need a Refreshing Wind spellbook for Shamans, and I've got Epic Armor and weapons to trade."

He's again brought to an appraisal room, where Auctioneer Sergio joins them, holding the Refreshing Wind spellbook. It's a Rank D spell, so it's probably far less expensive than Cain had thought; it simply wasn't common anywhere they had been.

"Another precious item for auction? They only run once a week, but we can arrange payment directly to your Guild Bank if you're gone."

"Small things today. In the excitement yesterday, I forgot about several Epic armor pieces and weapons our in-house Crafters had made." Cain sets them out on the table, twenty sets of armor from cloth through plate, all Epic Quality.

"Is your Guild perchance a life skills Guild that happened to get lucky with the combat members?" Sergio asks, happily sorting the offering.

"The opposite. A Raid Guild that got lucky with life skills members. We've got everything from Tailors, Smiths, and an Enchantress to Sculptors, all power leveled through to First Advancement."

"An actual Enchantress? Or someone with enchanting skill?" Sergio asks Hopefully.

"A Dark Enchantress, plus another with Enchanting skill that makes a lot of our jewelry. But the Dark Enchantress is currently on maternity leave, newborn triplets."

"That's a shame. Those enchantments are a huge selling point since they add so much to mid level gear. The higher-level equipment is naturally in short supply, but with enchantment, the mid-level gear can be a solid option."

Cain looks through the Guild Bank, not finding much, but there is a stack of damage reduction enchantment tokens next to a note that says free use. Cain grabs eight, enough to do two sets of armor, and adds them to the stack.

"That's what I can spare. Use them how you like; I saw how popular full sets of armor with balanced stats and good damage reduction are yesterday at the auction." Sergio is about to tell him that armor was anything but balanced. It was ridiculously broken damage reduction, but he decided to keep silent and use these tokens to build extra profit for the Armory.

"I have no problem taking these all of your hands. Take the spellbook as a complimentary gift for your continued patronage. I'm sure you know we made a large sum off your previous items."

It takes a few minutes to sort and categorize the gear, and then Sergio sends the Assistants to pass a few messages, which bring in other Appraisers that take away portions of the equipment for their clients.

"Many people are waiting for armor this morning, and it's going at a premium. Do you have any weapons left? They always sell first."

Cain sees a wide assortment of them and a pair of Legendary Scimitar. They are level 48 items, made by Rufus, son of Ragnar, according to the description. Indeed the young Smith will be overjoyed to get such a cash windfall to help buy more materials.

"I've got these for Epic and a matched set of Legendary Scimitar made by an Apprentice." Cain sets them out, and Sergio laughs.

"[Bloody Scimitar]. How appropriate. Decent damage, both have bleed effects, level 48. The Eastern Continent will snap these up. Like the Elves, they love the Scimitar, and they've got a war going on in a first advancement area. The low level won't be too big of downfall since the quality is good."

"Do you have a high-level mana totem book for Shaman? And a passive for increasing the duration? A little more mana is never a bad thing at sea."

"We do. I have an A-ranked [Mana Flood] totem, plus an Aura ability to increase durations of nearby Totems to double their base duration. In total, that's about a tenth the price of the Epic gear."

Cain sends the payment for the swords straight to Rufus, who floods his chat feed with messages of thanks for selling his first Legendary Swords so quickly. He's got big plans to make a better weapon, a hammer suitable to a Dwarf, and grind more levels in the dungeons.

There are so many thanks that Cain ends up muting the young Dwarf, ignoring his messages for the next hour, much to Dimnys dismay, when she has to hear it in person instead.

With their essentials purchased and equipment sold, Cain and Vala take the ferry back to the Queen Rose, just in time for everyone to finish breakfast.

"What did you forget onshore? A crate of condoms?" Their neighboring Captain, a Wind Rider woman in her middle years, calls over as he leaves the ferry.

"Refreshing Wind Spellbook. Can't be having exhaustion muddling the mind." He calls back, and the Elf throws her head back in laughter.

"By the Dark Goddess, you're intending to kill the poor woman, aren't you? Be safe out there; the coastal battles have spread well south and are starting to draw the Landis Coast Guard into the fray."

"The run to Assah is mostly clear, but we saw a pair of juvenile Armored Octopus along the route," Nila calls back.

With that, the other Captain waves goodbye, and they're ready to go.. Nila instructs the puppets to untie them from the mooring and gets the ship turned to head back out to sea, her clone already working on an updated route that should avoid the fighting.

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

Chapter 248

As soon as they start moving, Cain heads below decks to copy his newly acquired books at the inscription desk, finding that only the Mana Flood totem is a challenge; the others are low ranked and quick to copy.

He's all finished and has sent the originals to Char so she can have them duplicated and the originals placed in the Guild Library by the time they're out of the bay, and Nila orders the ship to cruising speed, while the First Mates set out their Mana Totems under the effect of Cain's new passive duration increasing Aura.

Cain waits until they don't see any other ships on the horizon and calls out a complete set of Giant Armored Octopus to escort them again, with orders to keep out of sight under the water. If they do see anyone, Cain doesn't want to cause a panic before they know if there will be a fight or not.

The planned route takes them further south along this volcanic Ridgeline, then straight west towards the capital of Landis. They've skipped almost all their planned stops along the way due to the danger of being attacked by the groups fighting in the desert, but at least they'll get a chance at the most important one.

With the summons safeguarding them and the excess of mana regeneration thanks to his new mana totem, which lasts a full hour with the Aura buff, they're making incredible time across the open ocean.

They can't quite hold full speed, but well over half without drawing down their Mana. Full speed could be held indefinitely if they switched out repeatedly, though that is a surprise Cain intends to save for the moment they need to flee.

Cain also let everyone drop their mergers, increasing the number of people on board, now all in their traditional forms. It's also the first time since they left Pampa that everyone looks like themselves. It's almost strange seeing everyone back in their usual forms and not Merged with their clones, a stark reminder just how large his party of traveling Companions has gotten.

With everyone awake one on deck, Cain tried out his new [Refreshing Wind] Spell, removing all fatigue from the crew and making the already lively Nemu and Laura a little bit hyper. Even though he wasn't feeling tired before, now that the spell has been cast, Cain feels fantastic. That Spell was definitely worth learning, even just to compensate for early mornings.

For five days, they travel peacefully, just enjoying their time onboard, free from responsibilities and interruptions. Mythryll and Nila are spending a lot of time together, the two Elves increasingly in sync with each other. They don't seem to realize they're beginning to finish each other's sentences yet, but both Cain and Nemu have, and Felian is doing her best to hide her interest in their interactions while still watching them like a soap opera.

On the sixth day, Cain gets a sense from the Giant Armored Octopus that they've found something dangerous, but their methods of communication are confusing at best. A group of dangerous monsters on top of the water? They must mean ships.

"The Octopus has found something in the distance, likely ships, but I'm not sure if they're enemies or not yet. We're getting close to Landis waters, and we should be careful not to attack and sink any of their vessels. We don't want to be lumped in with the desert raiders."

They keep up their speed until sails are already visible on the horizon. Not the blue and silver of Landis, but dark blue and black, dyed so they won't stand out against the evening skies and water.

"Pirates on the horizon. Are we running or fighting?" Nila calls from the crow's nest.

"They're right in our path and spread out as far as the eye can see. If they're even moderately good at their job, it will be tough to evade. Octopus, you're up; destroy those vessels directly in front of us. Full speed ahead, and go for the gap opened when the sea monsters attack. We're going to run their blockade."

Nila laughs at his reckless plan but follows instructions, the wind whistling over the deck as the Queen Rose picks up speed. All four casters are at work now, smoothing out the ride and maximizing speed at the cost of their Mana slowly depleting.

They're only a kilometer and a bit away from the blockade line when the Octopus attack, grabbing startled sailors off the deck and throwing them into the water, attacking the rigging and biting at the hulls of the two nearest ships. Single level 180 monster attacks are dangerous but easily survivable for most crews. When two dozen of them attack simultaneously, it's a whole different story.

Every time one gets heavily injured, it dives below and waits for its natural regeneration to heal it while the others attack the ship. The spells on their hulls are fluctuating up and

down, only bring refreshed at the last moment to save on mana, as the wind mages pull their surviving crew back on board before they drown.

That's an Octopus special; wrap the sailor up and drown him; no need to fight. Their tentacles are strong enough to keep most targets from escaping on their own.

The two ships are fully engaged, and the two beside them are starting to take attacks when Nila brings the Queen Rose close at her maximum Embargo running velocity. The Pirates are swearing and calling her a madwoman, but the Wave Rider is just laughing at them.

"Thanks for keeping them occupied. Sorry, we couldn't stay to help." She shouts as they pass between ships.

Their Spell casters throw a few annoyed attacks at the Queen Rose but soon have to turn back to defending against the Giant Octopus, who have caused large amounts of damage to their vessels already, rendering them nearly immobile.

As they pass by, one octopus climbs up on the deck of the Queen Rose, stretching out in order for Cain to rub its head. To the other ships, they look like they're under attack as well but still fleeing. After all, the others can't see the creature's eyes roll back as Cain finds the sweet spot beside its beak.

It drops off to help the others once they're a few Kilometers away, giving the appearance that the Darklight Host won their battle and knocked it overboard. The first two vessels attacked weren't so lucky. They're disabled, taking on water, and most of their crew members are dead or floating in the ocean.

The ships that came to rescue them are doing better, but not by much, and one has already lost both of its masts. The Giant Armored Octopus have only lost four teammates so far, thanks to their hide and recuperate strategy, and they're still going strong in their attempt to crush the ships.

Cain lets the Octopus know that they can leave the ships alone since they've taken casualties, but they're determined to get their snack now that they've put all that effort into opening the hard shell of the boats.

Nila sails them sail two more hours southwest at high cruising speed before they come across a flotilla of Landis military vessels on patrol. Nila orders their speed dropped, and they turn to head towards the ships at a moderate pace, indicating they're not going to run.

Cain orders all the Companions but Nila to merge again, much to their dismay, but keeping their potential numbers secret comes first. Both clones can see and hear when under the effects of the Merger, so they're not missing out on much; they just need to share the decision-making.

"Hail to the vessel. Drop your spells and your sails and prepare for inspection." The lead vessel calls with a magically enhanced voice. The Queen Rose glides to a stop as the Landis military vessels approach, their crews looking nervous and tired.

"You managed to run the blockade, I see?" Is the first thing the Admiral says to them.

"Sea Monsters attacked them, so we ran the gap. The Queen Rose is far faster than any pathetic human vessel." Nila declares proudly.

"Sounds like quite the story. But one for another day. We'll need to come aboard and check your hold for contraband. You know the routine." They do, and the only thing in the hold are their provisions.

"No cargo?"

"We sold out at the Armory Auction in Tortuga. Quite the shindig this time, even the Knight Commander Lancelot showed up to bid on some items."

They accept that as a reasonable response, more than a few vessels sell out there and come fast and empty for Landis to restock. It's a big kingdom and the biggest city on the Central Continent's Eastern coast, the perfect staging area for merchants.

"I heard the Demon King came from his capital to bid on a suit of armor. It's the talk of the castle right now. My sister is a maid there and lives for a good bit of gossip." One of the soldiers says.

"The Auctioneer said the Armor went to a nonmonetary bid, but the crowd didn't get to see who won. That armor was incredible, though, so much damage reduction." Vala lays it on thick, currently in her default form, armor and all.

The conversation is short since they don't have much to inspect, and they're sent on their way with the correct heading to come into the Landis Capital without causing suspicion. The Navy is sending everyone to a point outside the city and then in from there. Those that don't know the correct spot will be immediately searched upon arrival.

It's a simple but effective way of separating who has been searched from those who were missed and the blockade runners. Not that there seem to be many of either, only two other vessels are waiting at the appointed location when they arrive, and one belongs to the navy.

"Anchor here, and you can head in tomorrow morning.. We don't want anyone moving at night right now."

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

Chapter 249

After a subdued night at anchor, the Navy ship gives them instructions to head for the Port and tie up at a designated spot along the pier. The Landis Capital Port is much more magnificent than the piers in any city they've even been to before, holding over a hundred merchant ships at its peak, though not even a third are filled right now.

"Buying or selling?" The dockmaster asks when he makes it to where they were instructed to tie up, near the end of the southernmost pier, far from shore and the warehouses. Not exactly a prime location, though that's expected for a non human crew.

"Mostly buying. We have very little left to sell, just some silk." Silk they've got in abundance. The Spider Queen is a workaholic and insists her Minions are, too, so they've amassed a wealth of regular and low-grade magical silk in the Guild Bank. Far more than their Tailors can use.

"Alright then. Do you have anyone in the city who can vouch for your integrity? With a guarantor, the entry fee is lower." Cain thinks a while then decides saving a few coins isn't worth the hassle.

"Not today, but perhaps next time I visit."

The dockmaster nods, assuming Cain means he's intending to form a business relationship with whoever he's dealing with in the Capital. He pulls out the official fees chart so everyone knows he's not scamming them and has Nila sign the register as ship's Captain before Cain leads the Companions, plus Misha and Mythryll ashore.

They can see some sort of carnival in the distance, so that's the direction they head, ignoring the strange looks they're getting from the almost exclusively human locals. It's not like Cain can make everyone look human anyhow. Vala has changed to her more nondescript form, though, and a crisp black pinstripe suit with a peach blouse.

He could have them all disguise in Neko form, wear hats, and hide their tails, but given Odin's reaction to the sight of identical twin Nemu, that might be even worse if someone notices.

It doesn't take long before Cain realizes that it's Evangeline and Vala walking side by side that's confusing everyone and drawing attention. Demons and Seraphim rarely get along. Once they reach the fairgrounds, it doesn't matter anymore anyhow. Everyone is so busy checking out the activities that they don't care who is around them.

Cain recognizes approximately zero of these games but sees that they're all variations of carnival games he is familiar with. They've been modified, so they're all games of

chance. Since thanks to the system, games of skill, even rigged ones, are not in the house favor.

"Should we split into groups, meet up at the Ferris wheel in two hours, and then go for lunch?" Vala suggests.

"Sounds good. I'll go with Vala." Evangeline agrees.

"And I'll go with Nemu, who will turn me into a Beastkin so I can play the games, right?" Laura says hopefully.

"That means it's me and Mythryll and Cain with Misha," Nila says, smiling at the other Elf.

One copy of the Wave Rider is still on the ship with the summons and the puppets, making sure they're on top of the ever-present cleaning and maintenance duties that come up every time they reach Port.

"Don't go overboard with the gambling. No matter how attractive the prize is, and I'll see you all for lunch."

Before they separate, Nemu turns Laura into an adult catgirl that closely resembles her own current fur reduced form with cream colored fur and hair, with black tips to her ears and tail. They're close enough in appearance that Laura could be her little sister. Those two only make it a few stalls away from the group before they discover a cotton candy vendor and have to wait in line to get some.

Vala and Evangeline have a hard time just making it through the crowd, the soft wings of the Seraphim brushing against people and drawing attention. Everyone wants to talk to her, learn what it is like to be an angel, ask her questions. In the end, it's only the presence of Vala that keeps her from being overwhelmed.

Evangeline has her Aura set to its lowest possible setting since it can't be turned off entirely, but she is still treated like an A-list celebrity in the crowd. They even go to the stalls and try to win prizes for her whenever they think one has caught her eye.

"The lowest setting seems to be the winner. They're not giving you lewd looks, but everyone loves you. Now you know for the next time we're out with humans." Vala teases as a young woman comes and offers Evangeline a giant stuffed angel that she just won. The Seraphim looks panicked, not wanting to be rude but not needing another huge stuffed animal.

"Sign it and give it back. Trust me." Vala whispers. The girl is so pleased she swoons and almost faints when the stuffed toy with an elegantly written "Evangeline" enters her hands.

"I don't recall it being this bad before." She hisses at Vala, who gives her a genuine smile.

"That's because I turned my Aura off. The Wrath Aura doesn't just demoralize enemies, it also makes bystanders uncomfortable." That does it, Evangeline decides. Demons are evil through and through. How long has Vala been waiting to set her up like this?

On the other side of the carnival, where the food and games stand to give way to more exotic-type activities, two Elves are walking hand in hand. One fair in both skin and hair, though she's been trying to tan, the other ashen gray with shocking white hair. Both are wearing matching brown leather pants and boots with a green tunic and black sash, though the fair one's tunic is more of a dress than a shirt.

"Now that's an event. Do you think we could win?" Nila laughs, pointing at a spot where human children attempt to ride Big Horned Sheep.

"We might be the same size, but you're level 180. I'd say that's a pretty unfair advantage." Mythryll teases back, watching the kids get thrown off by the cute, wooly creatures.

The carnival worker thinks the pair are hilarious and would let them have a go if they didn't have a system. They don't get too many nonhuman visitors, but the Mutton Busting event seems to attract the small ones who love excitement.

"Just down the way is a version you could try, ladies." He calls out to them, pointing towards the water. They skip off with a laugh, instead of asking what he means, finding that this arena holds a level 120 Mole Dog instead of a sheep. They're almost bear-sized, though narrower in the body like a giant dog, much smaller than the two-ton Great Horned Wildebeest that the humans use for a Rodeo challenge in this world.

"Care to try, ladies? Any woman who can manage wins double the prize." He's taunting their capability, and Nila gets a fantastic idea.

"Not only could I, but I'll also bet my Summoned Goblin could ride that half-tame puppy." Her Bonded Forces summons are Dark Fae, of which the Red Goblin species are a member. The two of them have faced enough Mole Dog Riders to know that this one would be no challenge for one of Nila's Summoned Goblins

"If your Summon can do it, I'll pay you to double from my pocket. If it can't, how about you give it a try. Topless. Call it a penalty game?" He seems extra eager to see them fail now, but Nila has no doubt she will win.

"You're on. You heard the wager, everyone. Double from his pocket if the Summon can ride the Mole Dog for 15 seconds." She calls out, and the crowd begins to gather.

Looking through her Goblin Bonded Forces options, she sees Lieutenants, Captains, Knights, Elite Guard, and finally Rimbey, Knight Commander of the Goblin Royal Guard, and an Arch Paladin.

She calls one pair, merged for the challenge. "Rimbey, darling. This human says you can't ride that Mole Dog for 15 seconds. Be a dear and prove him wrong, will you?"

The Goblin in shiny silver armor under a red tunic grins at the Mole Dog, her Mohawk bouncing free as she nods her agreement and removes her helmet to strap it to her side.

"Got it, boss. Are you sure you don't just want me to pet it instead? I thought you only broke wild mounts?"

The Mole Dog is furious now, snapping and snarling. They're brighter than most animals, able to understand thousands of commands and simple phrases, and this one certainly knows they're insulting him.

Rimby kicks the gate to the Beasts stall open, letting it free to run around the arena before jumping over the fence and into the dirt circle. The Mole Dog immediately charges, but the Goblin Paladin side steps and grabs its saddle, pulling herself onto the enraged animal.

It begins to lunge and kick, twisting and Snapping at the Goblin, trying to get her off its back to no avail. Finally, it even tries rolling over to find that her Armor is pointy and the Goblin is still attached. Howling in fury, the Mole Dog continues to go berserk well beyond the fifteen seconds, and Nila shoots a happy smirk at the worker.

"See, not a problem. Now, if you'll kindly pay up."

The animal soon exhausts itself, and Rimbey climbs off, patting its head in affection.. "I was wrong; that was a pretty good ride."

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

Chapter 250 - Trouble In Landis

The two Elves decide to take their hard-earned winnings and explore the carnival after dismissing the Goblin and laughing a while with the highly entertained onlookers in the crowd around the Mole Dog Rodeo.

They soon come across something even better, a poker game. There is one seat open, and the sign says one hour limit before switching chairs. That's perfect, except for the lack of space.

"Just come sit in my lap. Others are doing the same thing, see?" Nila says, pointing to where a scantily clad woman is in an older human's lap.

Not wanting to stand, Mythryll happily hops on the chair, and the next hand deals them in. She knows nothing of the game, but Nila does and places a fistful of gold coins on the table to get started. The table they're at seems to be all gold, but other tables are playing for much less, more for sport than money.

"The game is Landis Hold Em. We get two cards, and then the dealer turns five more one at a time while we bet on who can make the best hand with them." Nila explains quietly, placing her first bet.

As they play, Nila constantly interacts with Mythryll, sharing drinks, feeding her snacks, and silently distracting their opponents, causing them to make errors. The Wave Rider has the perfect poker face, showing nothing at all on her expression the entire time until the house stops them.

"That's time on Chair Six. Please open the seat for a new player."

They nod to the dealer, picking their earnings, and Mythryll turns to whisper at Nila. "How is that not against the rules? You should have seen their faces."

"All is fair in war and poker. Silent distractions and bluffs are just part of the game. If they took your reactions to indicate my hand, that's their fault."

They're just leaving the tent when they see Cain and an overly happy Misha coming from a drink vendor. They all catch the eyes of each other with the same thought. "Those two have been up to something."

"How was the carnival? Find any good spots?" Mythryll asks, hoping that the others had as much fun as her and Nila.

"You could say that. Though mostly, we've just been in the carnival snacks area. How about you?"

"We found a Mole Dog Rodeo and then played poker. How long until we've got to meet up?"

"Not long now. We're headed for the Ferris Wheel. Did you see anyone else?" Both Elves shake their head no; everyone just vanished in this huge carnival, but the Ferris Wheel is so giant you can see it from out on the ocean, so they shouldn't get lost.

The first ones they catch up with are Vala and Evangeline. The Demon is trying to apologize for something, offering the Seraphim cakes and takoyaki. But Evangeline is having none of it, giving her the cold shoulder.

"What's up? Have a falling out?" Cain asks when he gets close.

"This evil Demon turned off her Aura and made me get swarmed by humans. They were everywhere; it was crazy. We couldn't even walk." Evangeline complains, and Cain gives her a hug and head pats.

"I'm sure it was just a prank, and she is very sorry. Do you want to transform later? Your form is beautiful and approachable, even with the same Aura effect; you shouldn't have the same problem if you were a big Tiger Kin-man again."

"Why didn't it do it when I'm alone with you, though? If it's her Aura that stops them, when it's just us, we should have the same problem." She points out, even as she tilts her head for more pats, and Cain adds a wing stroke to the mix.

"One of my combat skills is [Sword Aura]. You don't notice, because we're always together. Still, the passive effect from knowing the Aura makes me feel dangerous to those without a system, as well as the active ability to use it to intimidate and its combat purpose of adding area damage." Cain explains.

"Hmm, interesting. But we should find the others. I'll bet they're still hanging around the candy shops."

Close, but not quite. They discovered a barbecue place that smells even better than candy, where the group found them with sauce-covered faces and sticky hands.

"Hi, guys. We found lunch. Chef, we'll need six more orders of ribs, 6 of brisket, and a tray of cornbread." Laura greets them before a large and sweaty human woman brings a food platter over to the table.

"And a round of drinks. Whatever goes well with barbecue." Cain decides, flipping her a gold coin in payment and sending her rushing away to grab a cask of mead.

They're on their third round when everyone notices just how quiet the area is getting. When they sat down, the place was packed; now it was empty, despite the number of people still moving through the streets. Vala tips her chin to indicate something behind Cain, so he turns on the bench, finding a group of fifteen thugs glaring at them.

"What you think you're doing here, eh? Didn't nobody tell you this is a human city, in a human Kingdom, in a human continent?" Their leader says, trying to sound intimidating.

They're not low level, all over level 150, but Cain has Ancient Quality Summons with him. Vala alone could annihilate their little gang in seconds.

"A human continent? The only way the humans could claim it is if nobody else wanted it, and even then, I'm not sure they'd succeed." Nila laughs, making the gang leader turn red in fury. He's about to get up and make a move when the sound of numerous people running in steel armor and the ring of metal boots on cobblestone streets fills the air.

"Do we have a problem here, gentlemen?" The guard captain asks, ignoring Cain and his group.

"Yeah, a trash collection complaint. There's filth in my favorite restaurant."

Cain gestures for everyone to calm down, and the guard turns to look them over. "You heard the gentleman. Kindly clear out before we have to make you."

Oh, that's how it is? Everyone was being so lovely to them earlier. But then, they likely thought he and Misha were both humans.

"That's not how you ask politely. KNEEL. BEG." The last two words are heavily layered with Cain's [Noble Command] ability, gained as a reward for defeating Gillibrand.

"Please, sir, would you ask your animals and the Demon to move along? I don't want any trouble, you see." The guard asks pleadingly, falling to his knees as everyone stares at him.

"Well, since you asked so nicely, I suppose we can," Cain says with a half smile, and the guard struggles to overcome the command to get to his feet.

"What did you do to him?" Comes a booming voice from down the road, and Cain spots a familiar and fancy suit of armor.

"Knight Commander Lancelot, a pleasure as always. I see you got your shield repaired. This kind city guard was informing us about the policy on nonhumans. It seems we've been asked to leave."

Cain lifts the compulsion, and the guard gets to his feet, drawing his sword. "You bastard, you'll pay for that."

"Guardsmen put your swords away. Since when do you evict anyone from the carnival on the word of a gang member?"

"They're animals and demons. They shouldn't be here." The guard insists, and Lancelot shakes his head.

"All of you, with me. That means all of you. Duke Cain and your party and whoever you lot think you are." As he's speaking, dozens more Knights have joined them. The thugs don't look concerned, though.

"You have no power here, Knight Commander. The Senate will evict all nonhumans from the kingdom soon enough." The man sneers before turning to walk away with his friends. Nobody tries to stop them, but Lancelot and his men still have the guards under watch.

"Alright, the rest of you then. You'd better have a good explanation, or you'll be back to mucking ditches and out of the guard barracks. And you, you know, using Abilities on the City Guard is forbidden everywhere."

"Abilities? I'm just a persuasive man, you see. All I did was ask him to be polite, and he gladly complied." Too many Abilities are being used for the carnival to put a detection barrier over it, so it comes down to hearsay. Legal standards might not exist in this world, but Cain is willing to stick with his story.

"You know what? This never happened. I'm not dealing with this crap today when the Senate is already trying to start a civil war." With that, Lancelot stomps off with his men following him.

Is the senate going for civil war? What sense does that make? Or has the King lost too much power, and they think they can take over his kingdom? They'll have to ask because they were planning to stop at several other places in Landis as they traveled south.

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