

# Reincarnated With A Summoning System

## C 301-350

### Chapter 301

“Of course we have put thought into helping you. Every Guild member deserves to have the very best possible class options. There’s no point in having people sacrifice their future to poor class choices when we could be helping them into a more suitable path.” Cain explains, and Cyrene pulls them both into a big group hug, rubbing her face and furry ears on the feathers of Misha’s wings.

“Thank your so much. I can’t wait to see what you come up with. I’ve put points into everything I thought might be relevant in the future, but without being able to see the outcome of my own choices, I’m just guessing.

“Is there something you’d like to be? Like an advisor, or maybe a magical class? I can grant you one ability or spell, but it will change your body, or I can change you much more and try to have your body match a class.” Cain explains.

“Yes, I’ve had a vision of you changing one of the Inscriptionists at the palace. They seemed happy. Does it affect the mind?”

“No, Inscriptionist Nyxx asked for that particular form in an attempt to gain a hidden fire magic based class. That’s why they were so happy.” Misha laughs.

“Oh, that is, umm, unexpected? Yes, unexpected. He was such a nice older man. Hopefully, that hasn’t changed. You know, except the old man part. Can you change me into anything?”

“Within reason. If the species has considerable or multiple innate skills, I might not be able to, or if it’s one that I’m not familiar with. For example, I’ve got Amphibious Demons, but no mermaids recorded; I haven’t personally seen one.

Maybe we could make you a Kitsune? Your appearance wouldn’t change much except your ear shape, and they’ve got their own unique seer type classes.”

Cyrene thinks about it for a minute, then nods to herself and asks. “Do the Lamia have a seer? They’re so friendly and cuddly, and I want to have a snake body.”

Today is a day of surprises for sure. Though maybe not to Misha since she was on that track already.

“Are you sure? It’s a pretty big change, but I do have a Lamia Warseer in here that’s pretty good. According to the class skills, they mostly foresee the outcomes of battles. They have incredible senses, but I’m not sure if it will fix your sight since it’s not your damaged body but a persistent effect that blinds you.”

“Does it have skills other than the visions? Is it cute and scaly? How about warm? Are they warm-blooded?” Cyrene finds herself getting more and more excited about becoming a Lamia the longer she thinks about it.

Something about the creatures she met earlier just seemed right to her, as though by becoming one of them she could have a sense of belonging. For all her life she’s felt excluded and unwanted, but the Lamia just felt like they were naturally welcome, just adorable Demonic friends.

“Lamia are very warm-blooded, just like the ones you patted earlier, they radiate heat. The Warseer is a Shaman-type class; they’ve got totems and some lightning-type Elemental spells. Other species have equivalents if you want to be an Orc or even a Felian. I’m not sure if I can keep your original look for it, unfortunately.” Cain sighs, having sorted through every form of a seer named class that he has recorded.

There’s likely more with different names, but with so many options and no idea where to look, he’s been reduced to sorting by skill type or class name.

“That sounds perfect to me. I had a pet snake when I was little, but he went missing one day. I’ve always been fascinated by them, so I’d like to try. Is there a way back if I find the new body too strange?” Cyrene asks, realizing a bit late how large of a choice she’s making.

“Before you change your class, I can revert the changes for sure. After that, I’m not sure what will happen if you change back to a body that can’t use your current class.”

“Then I would like to be a Lamia, please. Not a huge one. A cute one. Like the ones you Summoned. They’re just right.”

The Lamia Scourge Casters have a humanoid torso that’s small for even an Elf, but they’re roughly 5 meters long when they stretch out. If they were regular snakes, they’d be rather terrifying, but with that humanoid upper body, they look deceptively small and cute. At least the Scourge casters do. Some other types of Lamia are much thicker and heavier, which ruins much of the cute factor.

“Any preference for appearance? I understand you’ve never actually seen anything before, but do you like a certain hairstyle, or do you want to look similar to someone in particular?” Cain asks for a reference.

“Not really. It won’t be anything like I am now, so maybe try something new. Or make me match Misha’s wings. They’re so soft that they must be a pretty color.”

That might be possible. There's a version of the Lamia that are blue with a black diamond pattern on its scales, like a rattlesnake. That's somewhat similar to Misha's wings. They've got onyx black skin on their upper torso and shockingly blue hair as well, to complete the image.

It's a very different look, but it will be hard to dress to match. "Misha's wings are actually bright blue and pink. Why don't we try for something neutral instead of making you that brightly colored?"

"You're the boss. Let me know what it looks like."

Cain looks through the options and finds one that catches his eye. A fair-skinned Lamia with bright white scales that show scattered patterns like red runic writing down her body. With her pointy ears, red eyes, and shocking pink hair hanging down to her waist, she is what Cain would call cute.

Cyrene thought the Scourge casters were the right size, so he scales the image down in his mind, keeping the proportions. That will give her a ribcage under 50cm around, very small, but that's what she wanted.

Cain walks over to where the Oracle is waiting and begins to apply the mental image to Cyrene, who gasps at the sensation of her body changing while Misha helps her to the floor.

Once the physical form is in place, Cain applies the [Battle Visions] skill that is unique to the Warseer. Her physical condition doesn't change, but Cain can see lightning flashing in the red irises of her eyes now.

No haze covers them anymore, taking away the dull white that is the signature of the Oracles, and Cyrene blinks a few times while turning her head side to side. "This body resists curses. Sometimes I can see in bright, vivid colors. Then, it fades away again. I think if I change classes, the effect should end entirely."

"Look yourself over closely; make sure this is what you want before making it permanent." Misha reminds the Oracle, who is entirely distracted by the ability of sight.

"Wow, I am stunning. And this hair does match your wings, Misha. Thank you so much, Duke Cain. I'm not wearing much, though, am I? I thought I'd be cold in a bikini top and skirt, but it feels like I'm going to be always warm." As she talks, she circles the room, slowly getting herself tangled in all the furniture and wrapped around both Cain and Misha's ankles.

"Remember, you've got a long body now. Be careful not to get stepped on or wrapped around things when moving." Cain laughs, stroking her hair. A Lamia's hair is exceptionally soft, much softer than human hair. Hers is currently loose, free for him to run his fingers through.

“Yes, being stepped on would be very bad. This body is much more sensitive to everything. Smell, sight, taste, and touch. I can even feel the people walking around the house through my scales on the floor.” Cyrene agrees.

“If you like how you look, you can check your class options and see if it Unlocked something you’d like to take. If not, I can change the skill I granted you with my class ability and try again.”

Cyrene goes still for a few minutes before returning with a big smile that highlights the fact that Lamia have no teeth, and their jaws are hinged like a snake, with extremely stretchy cheeks and throats. They don’t chew food, they just put it in their mouth and swallow it. With the mouth closed, or only partially open though, their faces look perfectly human.

“The Warseer class deactivated the curse that blinds me. I can see so well now; it’s incredible. Plus, I can use lightning. Like real magical lightning.” Cyrene grabs Cain in a big hug and her body instinctively coils around him, nearly tripping Misha as it retracts.

“Sorry, I’m going to need to practice that. When I hug you, some instinct kicks in and tells me to wrap you up tight. Like that’s the proper way for a Lamia to hug, maybe?”

Her analysis makes Misha laugh. With no fangs, she’s certainly based on a constrictor-type snake. Their instinct for embracing everything is to wrap it up.

“Just be careful with your newfound power, you wouldn’t want to hurt anyone with your hugs accidentally.” Misha points out, seeing that Cyrene is still wrapped tightly around Cain.

With his innate or merged strength, he could easily uncoil her, but that’s not true for many people. A full-force hug from a Lamia could be deadly.

Now they need to introduce her to everyone in this scaly form and hope that the locals take well to meeting with the lovely new snake girl.

Personality wise, it shouldn’t be a problem, but in Cain’s old world, snakes and spiders often created a very adverse reaction at first sight.

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

## Chapter 302

“Why don’t you take a moment and pick some class skills that will be useful to you? You said you had saved some points, right?” Cain asks.

“Yes, I saved over a hundred of them. I could take everything; there are only a hundred points worth of skills in this class. Is that right for a first advancement class?” Cyrene asks, eyes vacant as she looks at her skill options.

“Yes, basic, first and second advancement classes should all have a hundred points worth of skills. Some of the third advancement classes have two hundred, but most still have a hundred and leave you waiting a long time to pick a new class. The Dragons in Assah mentioned that getting a fourth advancement class is hard.” Misha informs the Lamia, who is instinctively moving closer to her.

While they talk, Cain finally uses the skill book in his hand and transfers the other to the Guild Bank, gaining the [Superior Mental Domination] skill.

Cyrene slowly curls around Misha as she uses up her skill points, picking absolutely everything from the skill tree for a Warseer. Now that she has overcome the Oracle curse, she believes can be a valuable member of society, and that means having a variety of skills to offer.

“What do I tell my family? I just realized they’re not even going to recognize me when I return to give them the good news. I mean, if I go back. I could go to my Grandparent’s house and tell them in person and forget about everyone else. But then they would be sad not seeing me on holidays.”

Misha stops her rambling with the stroke of a single finger down Cyrene’s back, making the Lamia moan and then call out in frustration. “Ah, no fair. This body is incredibly sensitive. You have no idea what that feels like.”

“You’re too used to spacing out. I know nobody paid attention to you before, and you were always lost, but try to stay with us here.” Misha laughs.

“I am so finding a coat. Speaking of which, did the Guild have a tailor? I only carry about three outfits with me, and my evil twin sisters picked them all.”

Cain points at Misha, who pulls a dress out of her inventory to show the Lamia, who gushes over the mixture of soft silks and chain mail accents.

“I have no idea what anything will look like on you. But we’ve got multiple tailors and a collection of armor so that you can have the proper equipment for the dungeons. After all, you have a versatile class that can be used in combat now.” Misha points out.

While they head up to Cyrene’s room, with the Lamia still getting used to her new body, Cain decides that it is time to check the random roll from the Class Quest. He managed

to get almost every mob after the quest started to die under the effects of the [Existential Dread] aura, so he should get some pretty good options again this time.

When Cain enters the random roll interface, he is met with the now familiar sight of the giant randomized wheel. The options this time are slightly different, though.

The slave bunny is still there, he sees, but now it's level 101. The lifetime supply of apples is gone, though, and replaced with an [Ancient Book of Puppet King] that promises to give him the default class skills of the Puppet King skill tree.

It's not the only truly ridiculously powerful option, though. There is a Mythic Quality [Ancient Species Companion] on offer and something called [Divine Rule], a passive aura effect that forces those who hear or see his proclamations to submit to his will indefinitely.

The Laughing God clearly does not care about balance because that one simple-sounding skill would allow the user to declare themselves King of the world. And force everyone without resistance to agree.

Then the most intriguing item of the day catches his eye. The one that isn't about power or utility.

[Beanbag Chair of Ultimate Comfort] those sitting in this blessed chair will never suffer from muscle cramps, soreness, fatigue, thirst, or hunger. Possibly the most comfortable chair in the universe.

Now that's the sort of item he could use. With his variable form and Misha's new wings, finding just the right chair has been very difficult. There's no way to predict what square he will land on, though. The wheel is enormous, and he can't even see most of the winning options spread among the free spin and the Better Luck Next Time options.

So, as always, Cain gives it a spin with all his might and sits down to watch the colored boxes go flying by his vision. The wheel slowly stops, and Cain can see it will land on one of two spaces. Either the Slave Bunny or a Skill Book called [Horrific Perfection].

Neither option sounds all that bad, after all, Bunnies are soft, and skills are good. The call is so close that without knowing what the talent does, Cain isn't quite sure which one he should cheer for. The wheel is coasting along nicely, headed for the Bunny, then it suddenly stops as if the bearing seized. That leaves him with the skill book as his winning option.

[Horrific Perfection] Unranked. Unique Skill. Ancient Only. Unlocks a Secondary skill tree with independent skill points during the user's current advancement. Passively Raises Users Modifiers to the peak of perfection for their species.

[Generate Secondary Skills?] Y/N

Cain wonders if this is a form of life skills book. It does say a secondary skills tree. If your class is the primary, then logically life skills must be the secondary skills.

[Secondary Skill Set Generated: Lord of Horrors] 18 skill points available.

Alright, so it let him have the points he's already accrued in his class to put towards this tree; that's a good sign.

There are three options in the first tier of the tree and one innate skill that comes free of charge. That seems like a secondary class to Cain, but maybe it's like enchanting, where the first skill is the one needed to attempt to imbue an item with an ability.

[Talented Horrors] puppets can be created with one additional innate skill.

Alright, so it's a puppet-based skill tree. That fits him pretty well. It's just a shame that the skill is locked to Ancient Only and used automatically, so he couldn't keep and copy the book to give to Symbia. She could use this skill tree as well, being a Doll Witch.

The first three options he can see are 10 points to get [Useful Puppets], which is also in his main skill tree for the same price, and raises all his puppets to match his level. Then bonuses to their attack power and defense at one point per rank.

Above them, Cain can see another skill and a row of options to add life skills to his puppets. Everything beyond that is grayed out and unreadable.

Now that he's got a Puppet Making life skill tree, Cain opts to save the points in the main tree and buy [Useful Puppets] right now.

That lets him access the second tier, but he doesn't have ten points to buy the next additional skill for the Puppets. It's only two levels away, though, and Cain can wait at least that long. Especially knowing that the Echoes will be on a rampage again tonight, hunting in Niman Territory.

Cain intends to leave them there to dissuade any raiding parties that might come for the border until he is ordered or politely asked for them to stop. The experience they grant is just too good to pass up.

The sudden change of the Puppets from level 21 to level 218 is not missed by the Guild, who send the chat channel into a frenzy of activity. The majority of the questions are about if they can fight now and if their skills have improved.

[I haven't given them any combat skills yet so they won't be much in a fight. They will get life skill increases soon, but it will take time until I can improve my skills and improve them.] Cain informs them all, quieting some of the most curious.



The dungeon teams are ecstatic, though. Puppets are fantastic for mining out underground type dungeons or the Naga Raid, where Precious materials are all over the place. At level 218, they're going to be an order of magnitude faster and more durable, cutting the time needed to finish the most arduous task of those dungeons to a fraction of the original.

That gives Cain an idea; he could customize a few mining Puppets to be better at their job instead of having everyone use the Dolls Symbia makes for everything.

With a thought, Cain creates five Rock Trolls with customized pickaxes. They're extra wide on one side for scooping, with the common pointed end on the other. At level 218 and 2.5 meters tall, plus nearly as wide, they should do an excellent job of clearing out materials from the dungeon.

[I made you all some new Mining Golems of the Troll Variety. I'm sending them through to the Castle now, with orders to wait there until someone needs them for something.]

"You guys see that message?" Cain asks the trolls, who all nod silently.

"Excellent. The travel circle is just over there in the yard. Have a great afternoon, and let me know if you need anything."

"Cards and dice. We need cards and dice for using while we wait." The Troll informs him in the slow, gravelly voice common to their species.

That's no problem, there are both in the Guild Bank, so Cain hands each Puppet a set and sends them on their way.

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

## Chapter 303

When the ladies come back downstairs, they've got all of the Companions with them, as well as Mythryll. Cyrene looks like she's in heaven with all of the attention she's receiving, plus she looks fantastic in her new armor. A simple black dress with gold accents and long sleeve gloves, but Cain can see that the underside of the dress is a light chain mail.

She's much more agile in this form than on two legs, effortlessly gliding down the stairs and twitching her body away from feet that get too close. Someone has pulled her long pink hair back into a ponytail, no longer hiding her face, but she looks confident for the first time since Cain met her, right up until she sees him when her look turns nervous.



“Do I look alright? Everyone else liked it, but I don’t know much about Lamia fashion.” Cyrene says, looking up at Cain hopefully.

“You look amazing. The dress suits you. Honestly, the Lamia tend to be scantily clothed because they’re so warm they don’t need it, but this is a perfect look, suitable for the daughter of a Count.”

That sets her mind at ease, and Cyrene wraps herself around his waist to hug him before Misha bonks her head. “We talked about this; you’re going to freak people out if you keep suddenly wrapping them up like that. Ask before you hug with more than your arms.”

“Oops, sorry. I get too excited about everything. I’m not too heavy, am I?”

Cain chuckles at the question. “I’ve got 175 strength; your weight is nothing. Plus, with the long slender body, I’m pretty sure you only weigh about 40 kilos.”

“True, but at least I kept some womanly curves. The Lamia body is amazing, but I wouldn’t want people to think I was a child because of my size.”

“Going husband hunting at the next Royal Ball then? I’ll bet you could land someone pretty well off. After all, you’ve got everything going for you now. Power, connections, beauty.” Mythryll teases Lamia while Cain begins to walk to the dining room with her still around his waist.

“I don’t know. I’m still worried that people won’t like me, but if they do, maybe I could talk to them?” Cyrene’s eyes go hazy as she speaks, which Cain guesses mean she is having a vision.

He stops at the dining room door to let her finish, not wanting to accidentally snap her out of a vision early. Oracles see a lot of random stuff, but a Warseer, as their name suggests, more often sees battles that somehow relate to them.

“It’s that same blue walled city again. But this time, I got a few more details, and it feels different than before. I think it’s the [Battle Visions] ability from my new class. The horse riders aren’t the only ones attacking; I couldn’t see it before, but on the other side of the city are the two huge monsters you called in the dungeon, along with an army bathed in shadow. The leader of the horsemen said something to the city about paying their debts, and then the vision ended.”

“That sounds like the city is in Niman Territory. I sent those two there to keep the Nimans from attacking others. If they have debts, it’s probably to the ones who paid them to enslave our people, which of course they never managed because we stopped the raids.” Cain explains, then passes the message on to Maria, who is with the King at the castle, in a meeting about patrol strategies.

[Have things been going well?] Cain asks her, checking how she's fitting in.

[Quite well. The other Councilors are competent, and the King listens to advice, so we're going to get along. Even the other Nobles don't bother me because I'm under your protection. I think they might bother you directly, though. Something about a marriage Alliance.]

That wouldn't surprise Cain. A Succubus naturally draws others to them, even if she's a Puppet. Plus, with her appointment to the Defense Council and links to him, she's a prime marriage candidate for Noble's younger sons.

[No worries, I'll deal with them if needed. Enjoy your meeting.]

"I let the King know about your vision through Maria, who does the work of defense minister on my behalf. They should know more about who is in your vision." Cain tells the happy Lamia.

"You should tell him about the thing." Vala stage whispers to Cyrene just as Cain settles into the oversized chair at the head of the table, with the Lamia still around his waist.

"Are there issues with the transformation? I've never done a Lamia before, so it will help if I know what to look for if you're having problems."

"Well, you see. Do you know my pain transmutation ability? I think it's stuck on. Everything feels amazing. Like, everything. The ability says it's inactive, but I think something is wrong."

Cain calls the Lamia he based her body on into a Merger to ask her about the situation, hoping there might be a simple answer. After explaining the situation, the Lamia laughs in his mind for a few seconds before answering.

[How closely did you replicate me? Run a finger down her ear and see what happens.]

"Let me check something, Cyrene. I might know what the issue is." Cain runs a finger gently across her ear, and the Lamia moans and squeezes him tighter.

[Yup, the ears are my weak point. Her problem is that's just how my species is. Unless you rip out one of her scales or something equally cruel, the little things don't bother us.]

[She says everything feels too good. Are you saying that is just the difference between species?] Cain asks for confirmation.

[Most likely. Humans are always whinging about little things hurting. She'll adapt in time, I'm sure. Until then, you should brush her hair and polish her scales personally. Don't leave it to one of these ladies; a Lamia requires physical contact with a male to calm their instincts.]

[So, it's not just an urge to hug everyone?]

[Not entirely. Think of it as a hormonal imbalance. Only they can get what they need through physical contact.]

That is clear enough, so Cain dismisses the merged Lamia and gently pets Cyrene's reptilian body. "I asked the Lamia I based you on, and she says it's normal. Small pains don't register as pain, but large ones will. If you spend a while every day in physical contact with a man, your urge to give to everyone hugs should also settle down."

"I'll be in your care then. I'm sorry that I'm a bother." Cyrene sighs, somewhere between repentant and simply enjoying Cain petting her.

The Puppets serve dinner, and Cyrene learns she has found another issue with living as a Lamia. She has no teeth and an entirely new jaw structure. Trying to chew makes her jaw unhinge and open too widely to be ladylike.

Everyone has an idea of how to fix the issue, but Misha's suggestion of simply placing the food in her mouth and swallowing works best. They can only hope a Lamia can digest large chunks of food properly because every method they thought to chew was a failure.

After dinner, Misha takes Cyrene away again to settle a wardrobe for the upcoming Royal Events. The inevitable reunion with her family, and Cain settles into the couch to test out this new skill of [Superior Mental Domination].

Thanks to the Succubus Devotion Ring, he can use it on Misha free of mana cost. The effect of listening in on her thoughts is much like Merger; only instead of just words, there is also sight and touch information in her thoughts as she works.

He lets the skill end to give Misha her privacy, finding that sharing all of someone's thoughts is a very intimate experience. You can't help but understand their viewpoint when you know absolutely everything that they are thinking and feeling.

After that, he sorts through all the summons he knows and their abilities. His new Golem building skills will be best used if he can balance various skills and abilities that work together. For now, it's only two per Puppet, but soon he will be able to add a third. With that, he should be able to create pretty well-rounded custom puppets for every purpose.

As he's searching, it occurs to him that they could use a high-class chef. Then the other puppets could be the kitchen helpers. There's certainly at least one in his records. They've eaten in several excellent restaurants.

The chef from the crab shack has a skill called [Maritime Cuisine Artist] at Master 4, so he calls a copy into Merger. Then Cain sorts the rest by Cooking related skills. At the

top of the list is a Dragon that has [Hakan Cooking] at a Guru level, which seems to be the maximum possible skill level.

Cain creates a nondescript human male Puppet in a chef's outfit and adds the two skills. Visible Tattoos spread all up the neck and across the hands. Then, the face gets leathery with age, and the eyes narrow. What he's left with looks like a cross between an aging Chinese gangster and Duke Chen. The face of the chef just has a calm and content look that reminds him of his bearded comrade.

"Have you seen all the Elves in my kitchen? Just Elves everywhere, in short, little skirts, prancing around." The chef asks after looking at his new workstation and finding the Puppets making pastries.

"Will that be a problem?" Cain asks, wondering if he should make a new Chef Puppet.

"They'll give this old man a heart attack, wiggling around like that." He says firmly.

"Puppets don't get heart attacks. They don't ever age or get sick either." Cain points out.

"Well, in that case, have you considered aprons with bikinis as a summer outfit?"

This chef seems like he could be a fun guy. Plus, he is beyond a doubt the most skilled chef that Cain has ever met.

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

## Chapter 304

"So, what should I call you? Do you have a preference?" Cain asks the new chef, who immediately nods.

"Call me Brother Liu. In my cooking skills knowledge, there is a man by the same name who looked much like this. So I shall be Brother Liu."

Cain sets his unique designation so that others can see his name with their interface, and the chef claps his hands and turns to the kitchen.

“Alright, ladies, we will be adding a few more items to the morning baked goods. Where is everything stored?” That’s Cain’s cue to return to his search through the available skills.

He ends up using a notebook to write down things that look useful as well as which

Summons they come from. Before he knows it, the sun has fallen from the sky, so he heads up to his bedroom for the night, falling asleep seconds after his head reaches the pillow.

He wakes to a pair of bright red eyes directly in front of his face and the sound of Misha laughing.

“I told her she can’t wake you up, so she’s been waiting exactly like that for the last ten minutes, saying that the proximity helps with her nerves,” Misha explains, then sends a private message to Cain.

[Our little Lamia is an odd one. The more we talked last night, the more I realized how broken her mind is. She only managed to appear to be coping because she stayed silent. Can we keep her? Even if it’s just until she’s better, that’s alright, but I think it would break her if we sent her away.]

That makes some sense. Before meeting them, anyone who heard her talking to herself or saw her doing strange things would assume she was having a vision or had gotten herself lost. Since she was born with the Oracle class active, there was no baseline for others to compare against; she was just always like that.

Of course, it was also possible that the pleasure feedback loop when she tried using her transmute ability on the notifications was the last straw. In that case, they owe it to her to help her recover.

“Again, I’m very sorry; it’s just taking me a little while to get used to this body. The best way I can explain it is that everything that used to be a comfortable background noise is now cranked up to 11.” Cyrene says, leaning over the top of Cain with an eager expression.

Cain laughs and brushes her hair out of his face. “Misha, can you lock the door and bring the moisturizing lotion? The Lamia I based this body on suggested that the physical contact of maintaining her scales would help.”

Forty-five minutes later, when they emerge, Cyrene is much more in control of her instincts and smells pleasantly of herbal moisturizer.

She’s holding Misha’s hand as they head down to the dining room to see what Brother Liu came up with last night. Even though she can presumably see just fine now, Cyrene

isn't used to going anywhere without a guide. Her assigned maid follows after the group with an amused look, so Cain listens in to her thoughts for a few seconds.

[Brother Liu is going to love her. All those bite sized snacks are perfect for a Lamia]

That's about what he was expecting, thoughts of work. As well as the baked snacks, this morning has eggs cooked to order, an assortment of meats, oatmeal, and a stack of breakfast burritos. Brother Liu might have overestimated the number of residents that actually eat here.

The food is fantastic though, and Cain decides they should put the leftovers in the Guild Bank for the others to try. Skyview isn't really stable enough to invite the whole guild to visit yet, but maybe in a week or two, they can hold a banquet.

[Master, you have a visitor at the travel circle.] One of the maids sends to Cain, causing him to turn and look out the window. A very concerned-looking Count Dufas has just left the circle and is heading for the front door.

Cain greets him with a forced smile, wondering what exactly he's been up to since the banquet.

"Oh, Duke Cain. Pardon my unannounced arrival; Duke Chen said my daughter was in your care. Her older sisters seem to have played an unfortunate prank on her after I was called out to check on some issues at the farms I work with."

So, he left early and just got back from a business trip. Maybe Cain judged him a bit too harshly for not being there for Cyrene.

"What gave them away?" Cain asks, curious how long it took him to understand what happened.

"I met Duke Chen at one of the farms, and he told me you were looking after Cyrene. Then I got home and the girls told me she found a home for the blind to help her, but no such thing exists in Skyview. It was quite possibly the worst lie I've ever heard." Count Dufas says, shaking his head at the memory.

"It wasn't entirely untrue. I agreed to help her for the foreseeable future. I also raised her level past the first advancement to get rid of the curse of the Oracle."

The Count looks a little pale, so Cain places a hand on his back to escort him to the sitting room nearest the door.

[Cyrene, when you're done eating, come see us in the sitting room.]

"You'll want to be sitting down for the next part. Your daughter has undergone a few minor changes along with her class change. They could be a bit shocking, though." Cain explains to Dufas.

"How minor are we talking? Can she see now? Please say she can finally see."

"I can see, father," Cyrene says, sneaking up behind the Count. Her voice had changed with the transformation, so he didn't recognize it right away and turned to look at her with his mouth open in shock and a confused look in his eyes.

"That's your daughter. Through a series of circumstances, she advanced to a Warseer and adapted a Lamia body to go with it." Cain says, using a gentle prod from [Superior Mental Domination] to make him believe and save Cyrene some family related trauma.

Cyrene has wrapped herself around the chair her father is in, then touches his face and smiles. "So that's what you look like with eyes. It's strange, only a single day passed, but everything before that feels like another life. Does that make any sense?"

Cain nods, thinking of the day he transferred in, but Dufas is more concerned with examining Cyrene's new body in her Armored black dress.

"Is that chain armor? What sort of class is a Warseer?" He mutters, gently lifting a handful of her pink ponytail.

"It's a Shaman-type seer class, and a really good one. It can see the outcome of battle tactics and visions of future battles or betrayals, plus it can even use lightning magic. Like real lightning. Can you imagine that? I'm a real adventurer now."

Count Dufas tried to get up to hug her, only to realize she was wrapped around both him and the chair, trapping him in. So, he settled for a seated hug before wiping happy tears from his eyes.

"You know your grandmother will be upset you lost your furry ears, right? These long ones are cute, but not like the other ones."

"Yeah, she loves those ears. If we really need furry ears, maybe Nemu could stand in for me? Or I could bribe my new Guild Master to make a Puppet that looks like the old me." Cyrene suggests.

"Guild Master? Oh, you have joined a guild. The Darklight Host... isn't that? Ah yes, Duke Cain's guild. Good work, my girl. To think, the one daughter who managed to fulfill her dreams would be the one everyone underestimated."

Count Dufas then turns to Cain. "Your Grace, please take good care of my daughter."



The way he says it makes Cyrene smile. It reminds her of the knight whose daughter married her older brother. He used the same tone and nearly the same line when the engagement was finalized.

Brother Liu brings out a tray of appetizers for the group, with the maids serving the tea and bringing the dishware to set the end tables for a light snack.

The sight of the maids seems to have rattled Count Dufas even more than the sight of his daughter as a Lamia. “Are those identical quadruplet Elves? How on earth did you manage to hire such a rare group? Not even the Royal Palace could boast such a feat.”

“They’re puppets, Papa. They’re identical because they were designed and built to be identical. It’s one of Master Cain’s skills.”

“Really now? I’ve heard a lot about the might of your summons lately, but to think they had this much versatility. You truly have been blessed with your class options.”

Blessed doesn’t even begin to cover it. Even Cain recognizes his progression has basically been cheating and exploiting the system. Still, the little luxuries, like having Elven maids serve you tea in a country estate, are so good he’s not about to complain about the advantages.

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

## Chapter 305

With the help of Master Cain, Cyrene had gone from the level 2 blind Oracle abandoned at a Royal Banquet to a Lamia Warseer in just a few short days. Honestly, they’ve been the happiest of her young life. Up until this point, things had just gone from bad to worse for her.

When she was born, she had the Oracle class active, along with the curse that blinds all Oracles. Being a newborn isn’t easy, and their mind is entirely undeveloped. Unable to see, speak or even properly move, she had been bombarded with the most horrific of visions every waking second of every day until her second birthday.

That’s when she realized that her body was not the nightmare, the visions were, and she started trying to move around that other world of darkness.

It didn’t go well at first; unlike other infants, she had never tried to move about. Because she had been trapped in a nightmare world of visions, it had never even occurred to get a possibility.

Being the sickly child of a set of triplets who were all born prematurely, she spent most of that time with a nanny. Not that she had any idea such a person existed. She only knew that food appeared in the darkness sometimes, so she took what she could until it stopped coming.

The visions didn't end long enough the first few years for her to hear anyone, so her family assumed her to be blind and deaf. But her father was holding on to the hope of healing her, if they could just find a suitable specialist class.

Until then, they decided that being born with a class was of no consequence. After all, being blind and deaf as they thought she was from the complications of her birth, how could she interact with the world, much less advance?

They were a family of merchants, not warriors. Helping her was viewed by the other members of her generation as nothing more than creating one more competitor for their inheritance.

As she slowly grew from a toddler to a preteen, Cyrene spent more time in the dark world, away from the Horrors of the visions, and embraced the nothingness of her bedroom with only a bed sitting on the floor and padded walls, arranged that way so she didn't hurt herself trying to get out.

The Governess assigned to feed and wash her soon realized that the girl was neither deaf nor dumb, at least not when she wasn't having a vision. So she taught young Cyrene how to behave as a lady should, to remain silent so she wouldn't be criticized and how to make a polite smile when others are around.

But her siblings would never allow her to succeed and claim precious family resources they viewed as their own. So when nobody was watching, they would beat her without warning.

The pain would trigger visions, and Cyrene could never convince anyone but the Governess that the pain wasn't part of the vision. Her complaints were dismissed as confusion or simply insanity.

So went her entire childhood; she often met other Nobles and put on her best unfortunate but kind act to gain their sympathy, hoping to find someone who would listen. But they never really understood, so no matter how many times her siblings would leave her in random places when her father ordered them to bring her along, she would always end up getting an escort back home.

She sometimes got notifications; they would ding when they arrived and a voice saying [New Notification]. At first, they were just annoying, then one day, when she was about five years old, she lost her temper and shouted, "just tell me what they say."

That was the correct answer. The system read through every notification she had ever gotten, one at a time. It took days and most had already expired, but it ended with an option.

[Switch to Audio Interface? Yes or No]

“Yes!”

[Think or say Interface to have the menu options read to you. Think or say Skills to hear your skill options. Think or say Tutorial to listen to the basic configuration options.]

Going through it all took her weeks, but eventually, she had the interface configured to tell her who caused her damage and how much. That changed her childhood, she could now say for sure who bullied her, and her father took her word after the first time she showed him a fresh bruise and could match it to a person and location.

Her siblings only hated her more for it, but after that most memorable punishment they got more subtle with their bullying, which was a great relief to Cyrene.

Then one day, her father insisted she attend a Royal Banquet on the off chance that her pretty face might draw a suitor of some sort. According to her mother, if she waited any longer, every noble her age would be married and she would be a burden to the family forever.

Her mother insisted if she couldn't find a partner soon, her options would be either a single and dependant life or to be traded into a business partner's harem to sweeten a deal.

The day's talk at the banquet was mostly about how a Duke named Cain had turned a Royal Inscriptionist into a female Orc as a prank. But the quieter whispers said that Nyxx was happier that way.

That struck a chord with Cyrene; there was nothing she wouldn't give to be herself. Nothing at all.

After she was abandoned yet again at the Banquet, she was found by a man who had the Aura of a monster. Not a vampire or anything so mundane, but the sort of being that the other monsters in her visions ran from on sight.

He didn't send her away with some servant, back to her home. Instead, he took her to his table at the banquet. There she felt the most wondrous aura, belonging to a Priestess of the Demon Gods. She had seen her in many visions before this, since this woman's actions alongside the one with the monstrous aura kept changing the likely outcomes of the futures she had seen.

In the best visions, the Priestess has wings, beautiful and soft ones granted by the god of magic. When Cyrene hugged the woman who introduced herself as Misha, she was granted another vision of them together in a room she didn't know.

Cyrene couldn't see herself in the vision since it was shown through her own eyes, but they talked happily about life, and Cyrene heard Misha say that she lived in the next room.

What else could that vision mean except that they were the very best of friends?

Cyrene tried to explain it, but she feared it came out wrong, going by the giggles from the ladies nearby. But these people waited with her until it was clear nobody was coming for her then took her to their home.

Master Cain, for that's how she felt his aura defined him, was kind enough to let her stay and even told her that he would help her.

He even gave her a skill called [Sonar] that let her see nearby things in a basic way. Her sisters had told her that such a thing was impossible. Skill books were practically myths, according to them. Cyrene had no way to know that the school they went to taught them dozens of basic skills once they activated their interfaces just after they reached puberty. It wasn't something that anyone in her home talked about.

The next day, Cyrene woke up to a vision, one where she was cared for and loved. Part of an actual family. Her mind latched on to that vision and refused to let go, desperate to be near anyone who would treat her that kindly.

After eating, Cain and Misha took her out to see his city, and Cyrene realized that her new best friend was just like her. They both worshiped the being known as Cain that the vision said would take care of her. She would say man, but that word implied human in her mind, and she was certain that he was much more than any human she had met.

She wasn't sure what happened in the dungeon they went to; she obeyed Cain's order to sit down, and then everything was faded in to a haze of pure bliss and the ringing of incoming notifications. When she came to, her new [Sonar] ability showed that Misha and the most adorable snake girl were watching over her, and she had gained a hundred and seventy levels.

The snake was so friendly and cuddly that Cyrene wished she could keep her around as a pet. So when she had the option, she asked Cain to make her into such an adorable creature. If she was adorable like that, surely her vision of a loving home would come true.

Then Cyrene remembered Misha's first reaction when she told her that she wanted the sort of life the Priestess, officially of the Infernal Arbiter class, had with Cain.

“I have entrusted Cain with my everything. I belong to him, mind, body, and soul. I’m not sure I can explain it properly; he’s my everything.” Misha had told her. But Cyrene, now in her new Lamia body with her sight restored and an upgraded class, understood.

Everything she has, he gave her. From her body to her level, class, and sight, everything that made life worth living was a gift from him.

They discussed the topic half the night, and Cyrene impressed Misha with her Devotion. Enough that she even let the newly transformed Lamia into their bedroom the next morning to watch Cain sleep while Misha got ready for the day.

When Cain smoothed things over with her father, one of the two family members who were genuinely kind to her, it was all she could do not to throw herself at him and hug him senseless.

She only managed to restrain herself because her father might misunderstand and think her Devotion was something as cheap and passing as Romantic Attraction.

So tomorrow she will be going with Cain and Misha to the Royal Palace while he takes care of some business, then they’ll visit her grandma, the other family member who was always kind to her.

He said she could stay behind if she wanted, and they’d come to get her after the meetings, but the palace is full of shameless women. How could she risk leaving him alone around women who don’t understand his divine benevolence? Or even worse, ones who don’t care about him at all and only feel lust.

Completely Unacceptable.

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

## Chapter 306

Count Dufas leaves after getting a promise from Cyrene to visit her Grandmother in the next few days, so she doesn’t have to find everything out second-hand.

King James has called a meeting of all available upper Nobles and ministers for the next day to discuss the state of the border regions. The patrolling forces are reporting far fewer sightings of Goblins and Gnolls, with no new reports of Niman Raiders.

The last one is a surprise to most Upper Nobles, as their informants in Nyanko have said the same thing, no attempted breaches in days. Cain knows better. There have

been a half dozen smaller raiding parties sent out, but with the advantage of Dark Phoenix to scout from the void, the Echoes have managed to intercept them all.

Their persistence has been very good for Cain, who has just reached level 220. That gives him an even ten skill points, enough to finish up the [Ancient Wisdom] skill tree, allowing him to add one skill from any of his summons to the entire group as a buff, instead of just his Greater Golems or lower. It's also enough points in his secondary skill tree to add a third skill to his puppets.

Now that the ability is unlocked, the life skill improvements can be upgraded. The next tier is still locked and hidden, so he must need to put more points in, but for now Cain is happy to be able to improve the Puppet's life skills. Creating a specialist for every task is a pain; it's much better for him if they all have a strong base skillset.

[Add additional skill to custom Puppet Brother Liu?]

'He's already got a pretty wide variety of cooking skills, so what might he need?' Cain wonders. Better chopping skills might be the answer.

The Elves are among the most skilled sword fighters he knows, so Cain picks [Dark Elven Sword Style: Offense Basics] to add to the chef. If nothing else, it should make him a better guard for the kitchen, using kitchen knives as daggers, but Cain is reasonably sure it's going to be useful while cooking as well.

On the recommendation of Mythryll and Nila, Cain decides to spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing in the spa. The Puppets, with the help of Svetlana and Gwen, have kept the underground furnaces running, so the baths are nice and hot for a good soak before dinner.

He's decided to reintroduce Cyrene to the Nobles in her new form so that anyone who sees her later won't be confused or think she doesn't belong among the nation's noble heirs. Cain also thinks she might finally find a suitor, a caring husband she can settle down and spend her life with.

In her mind, that hasn't been an option since the moment she left the dungeon, but Cain isn't yet aware that she has been plotting with Misha to find a way to stay around him much longer than a few days.

While Cain relaxed in the baths, the two ladies were busy planning their strategy for introducing Cyrene at the morning visit with the Nobles before the King's special meeting began. It's not actually a court session, but with all upper Nobles invited, the atmosphere before the meeting will likely be very similar, and Cyrene hasn't attended before.

The biggest concern is the pettiness of some of the other ladies. Misha found most of them rude and snarky at the best of times but meeting a beautiful young woman who

isn't spoken for might be much worse. Especially for Cyrene, who isn't great with people, and now has a long body for them to 'accidentally' step on.

"If only there were something simple that would show everyone that I'm not interested in their husbands. But Skyview doesn't do wedding trinkets, like your Devotion Ring." Cyrene complains. Cain currently has the appearance of the Devotion Ring set as a simple golden circlet around Misha's neck, and she touches it with fondness.

"It's a unique item for sure. What if there's something else like it? The Darklight Host Guild tag should let people know you're under his protection, but that's not going to stop those who think you want their husband. Or the men who might want you as a wife. But that might not be a bad thing. You could land a great husband from among the geezer's sons." Misha teases the Lamia, who gives her the most heartbreaking pout in response.

"Noble sons, who wouldn't even speak to me when I wasn't strong and able? I think not. If even one of them had shown a hint of interest, I wouldn't have been standing alone at the banquet, waiting to be found." Cyrene huffs indignantly.

"What about a matching outfit? If we're both wearing coordinated outfits, that should show them we're together. Cain likes to pick mine for fancy events; then we can have him pick one for you to match." Misha suggests and is instantly enveloped in a full-body Lamia hug.

Like at breakfast, Brother Liu went all out at dinner with a dozen different dishes. He even sent one of the maids through the transport circle to the fish market in the Capital to get him fresh seafood. Cain is sure that it couldn't have been cheap since it costs a gold coin to pass through the public gate, but the result is worth it.

Before bed, Cain moisturizes Cyrene's scales again, finishing by buffing them with a soft cloth. He hopes that will keep her instincts satisfied all night so that she won't wake him up in the morning, but that was not in the plan Misha and Cyrene worked out.

As Cyrene predicted, the two have already become the very best of friends. Even though Misha acknowledges that Cyrene has serious mental issues, they're incredibly in sync.

They like the same things, enjoy each other's company, and more importantly, the Lamia is both utterly devoted to Cain and determined to be the best friend she can be to Misha. Cyrene just needs guidance and structure to help get her used to her new life.

Just after first light, as they agreed, Cyrene comes in with an assortment of dresses that Misha helped her pick out last night. "Master Cain? Can you help me pick an outfit?"

Misha smiles at her new friend as Cain sighs, realizing he's getting up early whether he likes it or not. "Alright, okay, bring them out, and let's see what we're working with."



Count Dufas is part of the Court faction, while Cain is one of the Business Nobles, so he's unsure how Cyrene would prefer to be dressed. Since he's not sure, and she's never seen what they dressed her in before, Cain decides to pick something that goes with the dress he wanted Misha to wear.

It's a long midnight blue off-the-shoulder ball gown, with what he assumes are fake diamonds making it look like a night sky. There's a dress the same color among the items that Cyrene picked out, so he hands it to her.

"Try that on and let me know what you think."

It covers a lot more than she expected, and Cyrene is a bit surprised at how modest the system made it, given the way it usually alters clothes for Lamia. Their outfits are normally just as revealing as Succubus outfits, except with a more beachwear theme instead of the Succubus lingerie.

When she comes back from the bathroom in her new ball gown, Misha is already dressed in a nearly identical gown, and Cain has put on a simple gray three-piece suit with a shirt that matches their dresses. Looking out the window, he reconsiders the coat and rolls up his shirt sleeves, showing a tattoo of a woman who looks suspiciously like Misha hugging a Lamia on one forearm.

"Your tattoos, do they change? I don't remember that one." Cyrene says, indicating his forearm.

"I let the system randomize them every morning when I get dressed. Only once has it come up with something scandalous, and that was on my shoulder." Cain laughs, making Misha blush at the memory.

Curiosity satisfied, Cyrene moves behind Misha and stares at her mass of brunette curls with her hands raised. Her sisters always did each other's hair before going out, but now that she's here, she realizes that the only thing she actually knows how to do is a ponytail.

"Just do to get what I do to you," Cain says softly and picks up the back of Cyrene's hair, twisting it into a bun and letting the ends hang to her shoulders. He inserts a hairpin to hold it and reaches past the Lamia to show her what he did.

With a bit of coaching, Cyrene manages the same, and Cain makes a small braid first on the left, then the right side of her face, leaving them in front of her shoulders. These she has less trouble with, since she saw them being done.

Satisfied that they all look presentable, Cain leads them to the travel circle, knowing breakfast snacks will be served in the Palace.

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

## Chapter 307

Their appearance in the palace garden draws attention the moment they step away from the transport circle. Cain is mostly used to it now, but both Misha and Cyrene can't help but notice the content of the other Nobles' whispers as Cain escorts them across the grounds, one lady on either arm.

"First a High Elf, now a Lamia?"

"That's just not fair."

"What does he have that I don't? I'm a Duke too."

"You know she's had work done to look like that."

The ladies share an amused look at that last one. After all, Misha's wings and Cyrene's entire body are a result of 'having work done.' Just not for the reasons that the older Countess meant.

Cain doesn't recall seeing any Lamia among the Nobles, so there is a lot of talk about who Cyrene is, since she's not dressed as Cain's assistant.

Keeping from being stepped on is taking all of Cyrene's attention, and it's a great relief when they finally reach the lounge where the upper Nobles wait before meetings.

"We need to get you a sign or something." Misha mutters and Cain grins, pulling out his notebook and moving to a fresh page. In seconds he's made a placard for Cyrene.

[No Step On Snek] with a rough sketch of Cyrene.

A booming laugh comes from their left, where a small human man with black hair and almond eyes stands beside a very large Felian woman in a black gown.

"My apologies. The picture is a masterful touch. Very subtle. I am Chen Fang, heir to Duke Chen, and this is my wife Rebecca. I heard there was a Warseer here and thought I might try to hire her for myself, but I must say, the young lady looks quite attached to you Duke Cain." The man says, his deep and powerful voice not matching his diminutive stature.

"Meet Cyrene, daughter of Count Dufas and new member of my personal staff, and this is my Misha." Cain introduces her.

“Lady Cyrene? The blind daughter that’s always being left places by the twin gold diggers?” Rebecca asks shocked.

“The very same. Duke Cain graciously bestowed me this amazing new body as a present to celebrate my first advancement.” Cyrene confirms, sending a wave of whispered gossip through the room.

“Oh, she’s good. They’ll be talking about your skills as a Flesh Crafter for at least half a year and throwing money at your feet for even longer.” Chen Fang says quietly.

“Mere money doesn’t buy this level of transformation.” Cain chuckles.

“Once you have enough money you find it’s utterly worthless in obtaining anything you truly want.” Chen Fang agrees.

“A few years of youthfulness back in the fur wouldn’t be bad though.” Rebecca suggests with a wink at her husband.

That level of change only takes seconds for Cain to do, so Cain decides to show off a little, taking a few years off Rebecca’s apparent age, returning a youthful shine to her fur and tightening the loose skin left after multiple children.

At first nobody but her notices what he’s done, until one lecherous noble gives her a long, appreciative look up and down. The difference isn’t large, but the perkiness of youth shows when Rebecca steps to the side to let another Duke enter the conversation.

That’s the effect Cain was after, the gossip has turned from Cyrene to how they might curry favor with Cain.

“I must say, you’re devilishly good at playing the room.” Duke Archibald says, smoothly stepping past the hesitant noble who was about to ask Cyrene a question.

“I learned from the very best. How are things in the city?”

“Calmer than expected, now that most of the funerals are finished. I thought there might be more trouble, but I think the King has finally proven himself to the public and everyone’s grown weary of the succession battles.”

As Archibald chats with Cain the young noble that was hoping to talk with Cyrene is dragged away by an irate, but familiar looking woman. Some relative of Cyrene is Cain’s guess.

“But honey, she’s family, certainly it can’t hurt to be pleasant.” He’s insisting as she pulls him across the room.

“Your oldest sister, Cynthia and her husband, the oldest son of Dutchess WonWon. He’s a notorious philanderer, so she doesn’t trust him around anyone, especially family. Don’t be offended if she doesn’t say hello while he’s in the room.” Duke Archibald explains to a confused Cyrene.

“Ah, yes. I did wonder why she never came home for holidays after she got married, but since I have so many sisters, I guess it makes sense now.”

They don’t get much longer to talk before the horns sound, indicating the start of the meeting, and everyone begins to make their way to the throne room. Chen Fang, Rebecca and Duke Archibald take up positions behind them, thankfully protecting Cyrene’s tail from accidental footsteps and the Lamia begins to wonder if it would be fine to wear armor to these meetings.

Surely a little decorative plating wouldn’t offend anyone, right?

“Good thing you’re here. They’re worse than usual.” Misha whispers to her, as she uses her wing to block the line of sight to and subtly brush away a debutante trying to get Cain’s attention. Out of everyone she knows, Cyrene understands her possessiveness the best.

Once they find their spot, Cyrene curls her lower body into a loop, lifting herself up to be equal in height to Misha so she can see what’s going on. While in motion she’s often only waist high, finding it easier to move without her upper body high in the air and unbalanced.

Count Dufas has left his usual spot with the court Nobles today, bringing balance to their little group. Dufas and Archibald from the Court Nobles, Cain and Chen from the Businessmen.

Dufas is standing next to Cyrene, talking quietly about trivialities when the horns blow again and the King enters with the Defense Council at his side and Gwen in his arms, causing everyone to bow or curtsy. Nobody even questions the fact he brings Gwen everywhere now. The white Kitsune Fox is just too cute to not want around.

“Everyone rise. This should be a short meeting, but important. All reported Gnoll infestations have been cleared as of this morning and new guards have been assigned to patrol the border.

Both the East and the Northeast borders have been reinforced, and that brings us to the reason for this meeting. The Skyview Army is short on recruits. Including the two that just arrived from Long Fang Valley, this quarter’s training group numbers five soldiers with only two weeks until training begins. We will require a recruitment of these numbers aren’t filled.

So, please report to Defense Councilor Maria when your territory sends its recruit. As you should all be aware, four soldiers a year is the absolute minimum required under the law from an Upper Noble every year.

We have been lax in the past, thanks to abundant volunteers, but if that is unsustainable, we will take action.”

That sends a murmur through the crowd. Everyone has been keeping every potential soldier for their own armies, but they didn’t realize that everyone else was doing the same to the point that the national army was getting no recruits at all.

“Duke Cain, Duke Chen and Dutchess Lucretia, your volunteers have arrived. Duke Archibald, both of yours washed out as drunkards already, please replace them. I’m available at all hours, feel free to send me a private message if your recruits require transport and the next patrol through your land will pick them up.” Maria says with authority.

The other two Councilors look overjoyed that she didn’t volunteer them for the task, and they move on to the next point.

Emmeline, the former advisor to Archduke Ferdinand is the next to speak. “The news out of Niman Territory is concerning. They were prepaid for a delivery of women to a nomadic tribe from the steppes who lost a large portion of their clan in last winter’s fighting.

Though they’re heavily depleted, the band is still strong enough to take on an entire city, so we expect the Nimans to get desperate as the deadline looms if they still haven’t filled their orders.”

“Will we be moving against Niman Territory then?” One of the Beastkin border Barons asks eagerly. It’s his people they’re targeting after all.

“Not yet. The National Army is busy at home and cannot be fully deployed at this time and the Mercenary armies of Dragons and Seraphim are finished their contracts.” Maria informs him.

“So that’s how they explained them.” Misha whispers to Cain, who winks back at her.

Having everyone think they’re an extension of his financial and not personal might helped keep those who would want to target the throne from coming after him personally.

Plus Cain hates it when random people ask him personal questions, and the strength of his summons is a very personal question.

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

## Chapter 308

“Will there be another defense force if they should attack again?” The next one to speak their concern was a young human woman without an interface. Without that, Cain could only guess who she’s representing or if she’s one of the Nobles herself.

The question is addressed as much to Cain as to the King, but Maria answers on both their behalf. “A rapid response force has already been assembled. They’re on call 24 hours a day and can be anywhere that reports a Raid within 30 minutes. We ask that the local forces report any sightings quickly and try to hold on at least that long if possible.”

The woman still looks unimpressed, but Emmeline knows what she needs to hear. “It is two thousand strong, all over level 150, mounted on fast steeds. They’re heavy on tank-type classes and have multiple healers capable of resurrections.”

That calms a lot of the muttering. Most of the Raiding Parties are only a few hundred strong because that’s all it takes to capture prisoners from the outlying villages. Even if they only get a few dozen from farms and small towns, they would still count the raid as a success.

They can all be sold at the market after all.

The questions then turn to those with border territories, verifying that everything is settled. Cain checks in with his summons, finding that none are currently in battle, and they haven’t found anything worth fighting all day, so he dismisses them all. No need to keep a roaming army around when the problem has been dealt with. Besides, plenty of other soldiers are patrolling the country now.

“The Palace will send notices should any movements among the Niman Raiders be noticed. Unlike in the past, we will not only notify those whose territories are closest to the movement but every noble near the border or with a sizable military force.” Emmeline finishes up the meeting, and the King rises to leave.

“One last item for the day. For today and the two days following, we have scheduled meetings with potential suitors for the Royal Harem. We do hope you can respect our privacy, as well as the candidates, and not interfere or involve them in political agendas at this time.”

With that, King James exits the room, leaving all the Upper Nobles smiling. So he was serious about diversifying the Harem and building alliances between now and his coming-of-age party.

Cain knows he just brought a lot of attention to himself and his skills, so he begins considering what he might need in exchange. They're not short on anything at the moment that he knows of, so Cain puts the question to the Guild.

[Is there anything that we need? Crafters, are you short on anything? Any particular sorts of items we might be short on?]

[Other than a leash for Neffie? Ever since King Aggramor started getting concerned about the spread of the war, she's been driving Lickity insane with her disappearing acts.] Cid half jokes.

[Yeah, plus he's leveled her up so far that you can't even lock her up.] Char teases the giant vampire.

[That was a spectacular failure, I agree. Who would have thought she learned lockpicking as a skill?]

[I could use some tourmaline for making these Moped parts.] One of the Crafters suggests.

[Any skill books are welcome as well.] Char adds.

[And breakfast burritos. Where did those even come from anyhow? Those were amazing.] Kone jokes, knowing what's truly important.

[I'll look for the gems, and ask about books for the library, let me know if the Inscriptionists need more materials for duplicating ones from Assah. But the burritos are easy; I gave a custom puppet skills from a top-notch chef. He's running the kitchen here in Long Fang Valley, and his name is Brother Liu.]

[That does it, safe or not, we're coming to visit this weekend.]

Kone's insistence brings a wave of agreement, so Cain plans for a party, sending the message to Brother Liu to give him time to prepare. He likes sending the maids for fresh ingredients daily, but for a party, they might need a few things that aren't on the regular list.

Cain is preparing himself to deal with the multitude of Nobles looking to gain favor with a Flesh Crafter when a small Cat Kin woman forcefully pushes her way through the crowd. She's over level 300 and looks to be in her late twenties, wearing the elaborate gown of a noble lady in the court faction.

"Is this my Cyrene? What have you done to yourself, my darling girl? Where are your ears? They were always so soft, but now you don't even have fur anymore." The lady nearly shouts.



“Grandma? Is that you?” Cyrene gasps before embracing the woman in a bone-crushing full body hug.

“We were just about to visit you to give you the news. I can see, grandma. Duke Cain leveled me up and gave me the gift of sight. Can you believe that? Not only that, this body is incredible. A Lamia is so much different than my old Beastkin body.”

The Feline Beastkin, her Grandmother, pulls Cyrene away from her a little to smooth out the Lamia’s dress. At the same time, the surrounding Nobles hide quiet laughter about her enthusiasm, mixed with a bit of horror from the lower level Nobles about how such affection might actually kill them. The small hazards of dating a Lamia.

“Cyrene, we’re still at court. Don’t forget your manners.” Misha whispers, and the Warseer returns to the floor.

“Sorry, I’ve been a bit emotional. I hope I didn’t embarrass my family.” Cyrene mutters, mostly to herself, but her grandmother pats her head.

“Nonsense, a bit of energy is a good thing for the youngsters. Now, let’s find a more suitable place to talk. I know an excellent restaurant nearby.”

The Nobles are much better about avoiding stepping on Cyrene now, being aware of her presence and the influence her family wields politically and in the food markets. They’re stopped several times by well-wishers and close friends of Cyrene’s family, which the deceptively young-looking Beastkin brushes off.

MamaNeko17 is her official name, according to the system, indicating that she’s the original transfer that began their family. As they walk to the restaurant near the palace, Cain learns that she was one of the original transfers the very first day the system was altered to affect many more species.

She started life on the southern continent but made her way to Skyview with a merchant ship. At the time, it was a Beastkin territory, and the war between the species was still ongoing. There weren’t many transfers yet, and the next generation wasn’t yet old enough to know that they might gain system interfaces if their own.

They were ambushed just offshore as they left the port, and she managed to claim the money in the hold into her inventory and escape the ship, swimming back to shore as the rest of her comrades perished.

After that, she slowly built up a business empire for herself, using the plundered savings, and started a family thirty years after the war with a human transfer who defected from the human armies in search of catgirls.

Mama Neko doesn’t stay mad at Cain long, at least not once she learns the reason for changing Cyrene into a Lamia, but she keeps giving the three of them a look Cain can’t

understand. She's been holding a text conversation with Cyrene, though, so maybe it has to do with whatever they are talking about?

When Cyrene and Misha excuse themselves to the ladies room, the older woman suddenly turns serious. "I know my Cyrene isn't right in the mind after all those years living in a nightmare of visions, but she truly cares for you, and I don't want you to break her heart."

So that's what they were talking about?

"Misha and Cyrene seem very attached to each other. The moment they met, they became instant best friends. If you don't object, I would like to keep Cyrene with me for now. Both to help her adjust and to help her feel wanted. She told me about how her sisters liked to leave her random places to see if anyone would bother to send her home. How she never got abducted, I will never know."

"Well, if you're truly serious about taking care of my Cyrene, I'll give you a bit of advice. That fancy bracelet you wear matches Misha's necklace; focus on it and try the function [Add User Cyrene]. That might be just the thing she's looking for."

She's cut off by the others returning, going instantly back into grandmother mode and drowning Cyrene in affection. She keeps it up until it's time for them all to head home, not giving Cain a chance to talk about their conversation any further, so instead, he decides to keep it in mind and bring it up with Misha later.

Cyrene needs a sense of belonging, but if that action does what Cain assumes it should, it will probably be way out of line with Misha.

After all, Cain might rarely use the control functions of the Devotion Ring the way most would, just the shape changing. But that's only because he doesn't need to.

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

## Chapter 309

The next few days are quiet in the Long Fang Valley but busy ones. The Guild is coming to visit, and Cain has decided to hold a public banquet on the grounds of the Manor.

Everyone who lives in the valley is welcome, and he asked Damien and Svetlana to let everyone know that he will have the Puppets available to watch the children if needed.

That meant that he needed a more extensive staff, mostly taken from the Puppets in his inventory, much to Brother Liu's delight. One proper chef isn't enough to cater to thousands, though, so Cain agreed to make him two Assistants with similar skills.

The two are currently debating what the Assistants should look like since it will be easier for everyone if they can be told apart from the kitchen helpers by more than uniforms.

"I can make them younger versions of you. Then everyone would know they were the assistant chefs." Cain points out the obvious.

"Fine, I'll agree that the Dwarven barmaids couldn't reach all the cupboards, but there's no reason we couldn't make them good-looking. It helps morale in the kitchen, I tell you." Brother Liu counters.

"Fine, but I'm blaming you." Cain laughs, starting to make a pair of identical puppets. 170cm tall, slender, black hair with a white stripe down the middle and cute round ears.

Cain made them based on Honey Badgers. They might be the Assistants, but they need to have the personality to keep a kitchen under control calmly, and in Cain's past life, honey badgers were well known for their fearlessness.

Cain settles the two cooking skills in, then decides to mess with Neither Liu a little, adding Tanya, the Dwarven chef's skill of Pugilist, which increases unarmed damage done. Perfect for a puppet.

The two Beastkin women form in chef's coats, and Brother Liu gets a pleased smile until the one on his left glares at him.

"Wotcha looking at then, eh? You wanna fight?" The girl with a teardrop tattoo under her eye challenges him.

"Ladies, this is Brother Liu; he runs the kitchens here. You'll be working under him, so get along. That's an order. Now, let's see. I will call you Mia and Mio."

"Got it, boss. But if he can't cook, we're kicking him out of the kitchen."

Brother Liu takes offense at that, and in a few minutes, they're well on their way to becoming friendly rivals over a dinner making competition. Satisfied that they're going to be able to work together, Cain goes to check on the rest of the Puppets, who are setting up tables for the next day's festivities.

Everything is going smoothly the next day when the first Guild members arrive, Cid and Lickity with two of their kids. "Hey, nice place. Neffie will be here soon; she's training with the King's Guard this morning. That evil old man leveled her up to level 180, and her new class of Doppelganger didn't have enough combat techniques for him, so she's learning more."

Power leveling a Toddler to First Advancement? Cain isn't sure even he could get away with that.

The Demon in question appears a few seconds later, with a sweaty Neffie in her own four-armed body, looking like a preteen and not the newborn Cain remembers. With a smooth stride that barely makes the four swords on her hips rattle, she runs to Cain with a huge grin.

"Guild Master! I missed you." She giggles before hugging him and frowning.

"Well, that sucks. Your new class is species exclusive."

"You learn them by contact, do you? Well, at least you get the full Puppet Master Skill tree now." Cain laughs as Neffie runs over to hug everyone else.

King Aggramor shakes Cain's hand with a smile. "She's a handful for sure, but she's too precious to have left her vulnerable. I had to level her up, even if Miss Lickity still isn't speaking to me."

More Demons have come through as they talk, and Cain recognizes them as the King's Guard. They're all just as disheveled as Neffie, though they at least took the time to rinse off and change uniforms.

"Misha, Cyrene, why don't you take our little Princess to shower and then soak in the herbal baths, so she's ready for dinner?" Cain suggests, and they take the little Demon away to freshen up.

The Guild members are a steady stream of arrivals now, marveling at the Manor grounds the same way Cain did when he first saw them.

"Is that just food everywhere? Seriously everywhere I look is food." Comes Elmira's voice from inside Dimnys shirt pocket.

"The whole valley is like that; they planted food everywhere so they'd never starve," Mythryll informs her, and the Pixie flies over to land in her hair.

"The desert is getting scary. There's fighting all over Landis, and they've brought the Orcs into it, so now the humans are being pushed back and hiding everywhere." Elmira tells Mythryll, loud enough that Cain can hear.

"Should I send some Seraphim armies to clean things up?" Cain asks, but Cid waves him off.

"We have an agreement with all three sides. Montauk, Assah, the Castle, and the Beginner's Valley won't be targeted, and in exchange, we agreed to stay neutral and not call in more foreign Mercenaries. Everything in sight of the Blood Sands Castle walls is

a neutral ground where they meet to discuss terms. The ceasefire never lasts more than a day or two, but it's better than nothing." Cixelcid explains.

"They tried attacking Montauk while I was visiting with Lickity and the kids. So we worked out a deal. If they break their word, I can have ten thousand soldiers at the castle in under five minutes." King Aggramor clarifies.

With almost all the human soldiers being under level 200, an army from the Demon Kingdom would have a devastating advantage in any battle, even without the castle walls on their side.

"On a brighter note, the next Tortuga Auction is coming up soon, and you've been invited, or you can send someone on your behalf. You can leave straight from my capital." Aggramor informs Cain.

"That could be fun. We can discuss who all is going later. The rest of the townsfolk should be here soon, though, so it's time for me to act my part."

The Companions have gone to let the Puppets know that the feast is starting, and the small army of servers have started to bring out the drinks and snacks, with more food to come later.

Aggramor hides his title and changes his appearance to match one of his Guards before they all change into casual clothes. They blend in perfectly with the Guild and can relax for the afternoon and ignore Royal Protocol.

He's not the only one with that idea; just after the main course is brought out, Cain catches sight of a Gwen who should be in the Palace with a man in a fox mask. It's a much better disguise than the last time the King snuck out; this time, he actually blends in with the crowd.

The big hit of the day has to be Neffie, though. She disguised herself as a teenage Succubus and mingled with everyone who was willing to say hello to her. Nemu, as well as several locals, are taking turns playing and singing while the Demon Queen in waiting collects every possible class combination she can.

Before dark, King James heads home, after reminding Cain that there is a court session in the morning. He had a great time, but not once did he even suspect that he wasn't the only Monarch present. Aggramor plays the part of the common soldier entirely too well.

That's also when the farmers start to leave, gathering their kids from the Elven Puppets who were watching them. The city residents last a few extra hours, but by midnight only Svetlana, the copy of Gwen on duty in the city, and their forces are active on the Manor grounds.

Cain comes down in the morning into the midst of a commotion; a young Guild member is crying and holding his face while surrounded and being yelled at.

“Alright, break it up. What’s going on?”

“We split up the baths. The girls are in the spa, and the guys are in the second-floor baths.” Mio, one of the Puppet cooks explains, pointing at a banner that says Ladies and brandishing a dented silver serving tray.

“And someone got brave enough to sneak a peek, then caught a serving tray to the face?” Cain asks.

“I swear, there was no banner just a few seconds ago. I’m innocent!” The Young Spirit Folk Paladin insists.

“So, who were you after?” Cain teases, straightening the boy’s nose.

“Kone.” The answer comes from a dozen voices inside the bath at once, followed by giggling.

“He’s been in love with her forever,” Elmira calls from inside the spa, and Cain can hear splashing, then a Pixie’s laughter.

“You’ve got a long road to redeeming yourself after this one. I hope it was worth it.” Cain claps him on the shoulder and then leaves, with the Paladin and the chef following behind him.

Larkin was sure he had the perfect plan to sneak a peek at his crush today; he even had Neffie cast invisibility on him, claiming it was for a prank. The only thing he neglected to factor in was the possibility of the keen-nosed serving staff bringing in breakfast through the side doors just as he got into his hiding spot.

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

## Chapter 310

Most of the Guild, along with Aggramor and his Guards, are at breakfast in the main dining room, enjoying the collection of delicacies that Brother Liu and his staff have prepared.

Unfortunately, Cain can't hang around too long today; Duke Chen is already sending him messages about the chaos of the weekly meetings. The commoners living near the border are frightened by the size of the raids and are demanding that the Supporter-led forces of Dragons that Cain had patrolling the area are returned for their safety.

That isn't practical, but trying to explain that to people frightened of their children being abducted isn't going well for the other Nobles.

The King is sending patrols, of course, but he's not going to be addressing the commoners until after lunch, when he's finished with the concerns of the Nobles. The Nobles are no less insistent about getting protection; they're just more realistic about what they can expect to see.

Cain offers to go alone today and save the others the headache, but Misha and Cyrene insist on accompanying him again. After a short goodbye to King Aggramor, who had business to get back to, and a promise that he'll try to get back early to hang out with the Guild, Cain is off to the Palace.

On arrival, he can barely move from the Transport Circle for the mass of bodies crowded into the courtyard. He briefly considers using his Ancient aura of [Existential Dread] to chase the crowd away so he can walk, but they're just scared people looking to their leadership for answers.

"Misha, I'll need you to store your wings, and Cyrene, I'll be wearing you as an accessory for a moment, so hold on tight." Cain says, and the two rush to obey.

Any excuse to give a hug is a good one to Cyrene, and Cain picks Misha up under the thighs to balance her on his arm, leaning against his side. With both ladies securely in place, Cain draws his Scimitar and activates Cloud Dancing.

The skill doesn't work without a weapon in hand, but that's a pretty low threshold for the "In combat" restriction, as Drazzit the Dark Elf showed him when he taught Cain the basics of Dark Elven Sword Techniques.

Like this, Cain can step over the crowd until he reaches a second-floor balcony and sets Misha down to walk, holding his hand.

This area of the Palace is for guest suites, and they entered from a common area patio, so Cain walks down to the main floor, forgetting that he's still wearing Cyrene and not escorting her.

The reaction of the Upper Nobles when they enter the sitting room that way is a mixture of intrigued and envious. Even her father seems impressed at what he sees as her brave attempt to claim her place as Cain's mistress.



The sitting room is open to all Nobles today, a rare occasion, to allow the border Nobles time to meet and greet the Upper Nobles adequately. The upper Nobles are most likely to have the forces available to assist them in the case of further attacks, and a major reorganization of troops is currently happening.

That naturally leads to Cain being swarmed, and it's a good thing he had Misha put her wings away. They're sensitive, and there's a lot of pushing and shoving going on today, a vast difference from the pompous tone of the usual waiting room.

If this is how things usually get on such occasions, Cain can understand why the Upper Nobles choose to hide away from the crowd.

Eventually, Cain resorts to simply using Skills to calm the Crowd around him. [Superior Mental Domination] to be exact.

[Relax. My Mercenaries are on leave, but the King has sent an equal force of soldiers to maintain border security.]

Cain only extends his mental voice to those who would be within easy listening distance and ends the ability as soon as he's said his piece, not wanting everyone to notice they were mind-controlled. However, he sees a few annoyed looks in the faces of Nobles who have most likely detected the ability.

But that was enough to at least plant the idea that the soldiers were enough, which spread quickly through the room and calmed some of the nervousness.

An Earl named Mills has made his way through the crowd to Cain's side, but for a change, he's not here to ask Cain any security issues or business. Instead, he's brought his son, hoping to meet Mythryll.

At first, Cain decided that he would make some noncommittal platitude, but then he caught sight of the son. Clearly into his thirties with no system interface, the boy is so incredibly obese that the effort of standing for so long has made his face wet with sweat.

No way would Mythryll even humor that request.

"My most sincere apologies Earl Mills; my Elven friend is already engaged to a Wave Rider Captain."

Earl Mills frowns, not having expected that answer. "Surely you wouldn't choose marriage to a Pirate over the sole inheritor of a fellow Noble?"

Well, Cain could make the boy a bit easier to look at and maybe better smelling, but mostly he just doesn't like the look in his eyes. He might not be the very best judge of character, but sometimes you don't have to be.

“Unfortunately, she is a friend, not a subordinate; the choice isn’t mine to make.” Cain dismisses the Earl, who looks positively livid. Judging by the smirks, this isn’t the first time he’s been rejected, but it might be the last straw for his dignity.

[He runs a merchant flotilla between here and the southern continent. Pirates are the bane of his existence. A commoner denying his son for a Pirate is just priceless.] Duke Archibald sends Cain a private message.

Intrigued, Cain decides to listen in on the Earl’s thoughts, finding that he’s sending a series of messages to his allies to block Long Fang Valley goods from the market. He is a Business Noble, it only makes sense that a trade war would be his choice of tactic, but two can play that game.

[I’m offering the Wave Riders one gold bar for every ship belonging to or chartered by Earl Mills of Skyview that doesn’t make its destination in the next three months. All I ask is proof that it was his ship or his chartered goods.] Cain sends a message to Captain Selah, the Wave Rider who took them on the run to get Frost Giant Vodka.

[Any Wave Rider? And you don’t want the goods?] She responds instantly.

[That’s right. Just a friendly trade war. If you happen to be in Karrack in the near future, I’m all out of Vodka, and my new territory is right up the canal from the capital.]

[I’ll let everyone know. Expect rapid results.]

Earl Mills is giving Cain an evil smirk before turning away, and Cain grins at his back, making the surrounding Nobles feel bad for the Earl, despite the fact none of them know what Duke Cain has planned.

[Damien, Earl Mills intends to block us from market. If you have issues selling, let me know, and I’ll have it sold in the east.]

[Fear not, sir, it won’t be my first trade war.]

Duke Archibald looks amused at the entire interaction, coming over to Cain’s side, accompanied by a much better-behaved version of his daughter and his Son in Law, the finance minister.

“Simply fantastic fashion sense, Your Grace.” Earl Gibson, the Finance Minister, jokes, indicating Cyrene wrapped around his waist.

“Who said Businessmen can’t be as Avant-Garde with their fashion as anyone else?” Cain answers, making both the ministers laugh.

Cyrene shifts her torso behind Cain’s back, looking over his shoulder, not used to the attention.

“You’re looking lovely today, Lady Cyrene. Spending some time with the Duke has been good for you.” Gibson greets her.

“Thank You, Earl Gibson. Being able to serve the Duke has been my greatest honor in life.”

That makes Archibald smile at the euphemism. Until she met Cain, honor, and respect weren’t things she often received. But now, she is finally getting the respect she deserved all along.

“Your advancement has been the talk of the town lately. Many young women would love to be in your place, and many more young men regret overlooking you in the past, especially Count Moovin. After that incident with your sister and all.” The Finance Minister praises her.

“Incident? My family rarely contacted me even when I lived with them, what did she do now? Count Moovin is engaged to my youngest sister Emily isn’t he?” It takes a while for Cyrene to recall who the Count is, since her family rarely told her anything, so she had to rely on the updates and gossip received from her Governess or overheard in the hallways.

“He was. Until this morning when he found out that his blushing Virgin Bride was pregnant with a stable hands child.” Gibson says quietly.

Cyrene thinks back over her past interactions, the Count seemed devoted to her little sister the few times she talked with him, but she simply doesn’t know much about their relationship.

“Voluntarily?” Cain asks, and Archibald nods.

“She’s got a hobby much like Aprilia, but with the staff. If her father hadn’t caught her, rumor says they would have eloped.”

Well, that’s a bit scandalous for high society, but hardly the end of the world, even if she’s disowned and raising her family in a rented flat with a former stable hand.

“I’ll send them something for the baby shower.” Cyrene smiles. She never liked any of her siblings, but Emily wasn’t terrible when they were roommates. A gift of support for making her own choices seems like a suitably ambiguous gift for the occasion.

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

## Chapter 311

Their conversations are broken up by the horns that announce the start of the Court Session, and everyone heads for the Throne Room to find out what the situation is.

Cain has Received updates from both Maria and Gwen, saying that nothing too unusual is going on, and the mission to have his Supporters and Seraphim clear up the Gnolls was a success.

The more important news to Gwen was that the King's dates had been going well. He's individually met with all three ladies from the banquet, and tonight plans to take them out together to see how they get along. But Gwen already knows they're friends because she sneaks over at snack time to get them to feed her pie.

The question in the King's mind seems to be who should be the face of the Royal Harem, as none of the three is particularly interested in constant public engagements. That leaves King James to pick a spokesperson or rotate through them for Companionship during public events and official activities.

Gwen's opinion is that they need at least one more member, someone outgoing and preferably human. Most of the Nobles are human, but the only human in the group is the Nyanko Confederacy Princess, Khali.

That could be an issue. Outgoing enough to volunteer for duty, smiling and waving at the King's side for every event, but still able to get along with the others? Gwen insists it's possible, though, and James will look for her at the next banquet.

When they get to the Throne Room, an unusual visitor is standing next to their customary spots as ministers and advisors. A Dutchess named Morgan and a younger woman named Rae. The girl is a human, roughly 180cm tall, heavyset, and covered in curse scars.

Cursed weapons are often used to torture since healing spells won't remove the scars, leaving a permanent reminder for the victim. Dutchess Morgan also has one down her right cheek, which she keeps covered by her hair, but when she turned to greet them, it swung away enough for Cain to notice.

"Hi, I'm Rae. It's a pleasure to meet you." Cain notices she greeted Cyrene first, as the Lamia was closest to her, instead of going by rank or influence.

"I am Cyrene; it is a pleasure to meet you too. Is it your first time here? I came twice before, once at age 12 and then for the special meeting."

“Yeah, we live near the border, so it’s a long trip if we come with the trade wagons. The travel circle makes some of the potions unstable.” Rae whispers back, then straightens as the King enters.

[Her mother is one of my biggest competitors. We get along well, though; she does specialty potions while I do mainstream high volume ones.] Duke Chen explains in a message.

[And the Curse Scars?]

[A failed attempt to get her mother’s recipes. She’s recovered a lot, but they’ll be looking for your services. Only a skilled Flesh Crafter can fix the rest.]

Cain notices that King James and Rae share a familiar smile as he passes by, far enough towards the throne that only the last few of them could see. If they already know each other, maybe she could be the final candidate?

She’s human, local, the daughter of a Dutchess with extensive connections, and a level 122 Alchemist. Not a bad resume.

As expected, the first Nobles that were called on gave statements about security and asked for more troops and money. Morgan is about to make her petition when Cain reaches a hand to stop her and pushes Rae forward with a wink.

If her petition is granted a hearing, he can volunteer and use it as an excuse also to hear her request for him.

“Your Majesty, the Morgan Highlands are secure; the western border we share with Garda has been quiet. But they have placed a tariff on our products, and we would ask for a negotiator to encourage them to honor the treaties.” Rae says with her head politely lowered but in a proud and clear voice.

King James and Cain lock eyes, and the King nods. “Duke Cain, please hear her petition and determine if a treaty breach has occurred.”

Cain sets Cyrene on the ground in his spot, and the surrounding Nobles hide a chuckle at her dejected look while Misha pets her head and then straightens her skirts.

They get to the private room, and Rae grins at him. “Isn’t your pet Lamia a little too cuddly? Seriously, that squeeze can break bones like nothing.”

“It’s fine; she’s surprisingly gentle with her hugs. But we should do business first. Do you have the relevant passages of the treaty?”

“Right here. I’ve highlighted the important parts about unilateral tariffs and product quotas.” Cain looks them over, seeing they’re very favorable to Skyview.

“Who negotiated these? I don’t suppose it was your family.”

“My father was chief negotiator, and they’re up for renewal in a year. He’s passed away now, so mother thinks they’re testing us for weakness.” Rae confirms.

“That’s a possibility. But it looks like you have a solid legal case for the King to judge, so I’m with you on this one, and I’ll offer my assistance if needed. The next point is not exactly business, but you’ve got a crush on the King, don’t you?”

Rae blushes and covers with her hands while she answers. “It’s not like that; we’re childhood friends; he doesn’t see me that way; I’ve just known him my whole life. Plus, looking like this, I couldn’t be a Royal Consort.”

“And if you didn’t look that way? Childhood friends are the perfect candidates for Consort.” Cain points out.

“Can a Flesh Crafter even do that? I was petite and dainty before they got ahold of me; now, even after fixing as much as possible, I’m still hideous. We even tried a Flesh Shaper, the First Advancement version of your class, and they couldn’t break the curses.

When they tortured me, I was forced to drink the failed potions every time I lied about the recipes. But some of them I didn’t even know, so…” Rae trails off.

“Don’t worry; you remember my cuddly Lamia? She used to be a cat-type Beastkin. I gave her that body to help her advance off the path of the Oracle so she could get her vision back.”

This new information stuns the outgoing girl. That is the peak of the Flesh Crafters’ art. In her opinion, Cain must have put every single point into his class skills already to be able to work such miracles.

Rae puts on a brave face, not wanting to fall apart at Cain’s offer. “If you can succeed, I’ll pay any price.”

“Do you have a picture of yourself before? I can match that, and um, tweak and enhance parts you’d like enhanced and tweaked.”

“I have one. And unless my dear friend Rae has something specific in mind, we can use it directly.” King James says, walking in to check on the hearing.

“I, umm I, your Majesty Welcome. I hope you approve my petition.” Rae stutters, and both men smile.

“You want to use a picture of me before? But I was so young.” She finally manages.

“Well, we can increase the age. But look how pretty she was.” James says, taking out a skill-created image of the two of them playing in the forest from his inventory. Cain smiled at how happy they both look in the image, and decided that with this addition to round out the Harem, the basic requirements are essentially complete.

The image contains James and a teen year old little tomboy, mud streaked on her face, wearing overall shorts and a t-shirt. Rae blushes when he pulls it out and tries to take it away from him.

“Not that picture, you pair of lolicons. An adult, make me a proper adult.”

They both laugh even harder, and James puts the picture away. “Now you know how she used to look; just grow that up to the age of majority and keep my best friend’s pretty face.”

His teasing makes her blush and she begins fidgeting again, so Cain decides to save some time and get to it. It’s not like she’ll ask to be changed back anyhow.

For ease of transition, Cain first changes her to the image James presented, then grows her up a little at a time, her body slowly morphing for half a minute. When he gets to a certain point, James’s face takes on an eager look, like he’s seen exactly what he’s been dreaming of.

About 160cm tall, muscular legs only hinted at underneath her ballgown, and a toned torso with a somewhat average C cup chest. The pretty girl from the image looks like a Jade-skinned doll now, with an athletic tomboy overtone giving shape to the quiet beauty. Cain even gave her delicate feet and a pedicure, though she likely won’t notice that right away.

“There you are; let me know if there’s anything you’d like changed.” Cain covers her eyes and leads her to the mirror in the bath before leaving the room to allow her to get a good look at her new form.

Rae’s smile gets larger and larger as she twists and turns, admiring Cain’s work. When she’s done, she rearranges her makeup, which was wiped clean by Cain’s ability, equips her dress and exits the bathroom, turning to Cain with a stern look and placing her hands on her hips.

“No natural ass is supposed to look that good. But how long will it last?”

“Until you grow old. Just accept the change, and you’re all set.”

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



## Chapter 312

Maggie watched patiently from the walls as the two groups of Emissaries approached the South Walls where the meetings were held. As usual, the final distance was covered on foot, as she had established a no-fly zone around the castle walls to discourage any attacks or attempts to infiltrate that might come from the air.

The Human Supremacists who currently have the Upper hand within both Landis and the desert have been trying for ages to find Lancelot and the Princess, both of whom are safely hidden away in the underground levels of the castle, letting anyone in could jeopardize the safety not only of the guests but of the Guild Members that call the Castle home.

So far, she hasn't had to call on her Summoner for anything, managing to accomplish her assigned tasks of Castle defense and operations alone.

Well, almost alone. The earnest Orcish Lieutenant is accompanied by the Tengu called Sora, but the small Youkai hardly seems like a reliable assistant to her. The girl would much rather play with her friends than do anything productive and only comes to the walls a few times a day to check on the reports her summons have given her.

By contrast, Maggie is on patrol every other hour, spending a total of 12 hours a day along the walls. She would spend more time patrolling if she could, but she's also responsible for making sure things run smoothly inside the castle. That means calling Water Elementals to purify and refill the cistern, checking on the guests, ensuring the food orders have come in on time, and many more tasks.

They've currently got a big meeting happening outside the walls to be concerned about, plus a VIP guest. Earl RhickJaymz is going to be here representing Assah. They've been having troubles with soldiers posing as refugees entering the city and attacking both merchants and actual refugees.

He's determined to make the attacks stop, but Maggie isn't sure he can do it without breaking the ceasefire that the Demon King negotiated.

The group of Human Supremacists is already here, calling themselves the Human Liberation Front. They're just waiting on the group from Assah and the Landis Loyalists groups to arrive.

"Hey boss, RhickJaymz is almost here, I can sense Red coming along with some other Dragons, but I don't see any other groups in the sand," Sora calls down to Maggie from where she's playing tag with one of her summons in the sky.

“Should we scout and see if something happened to them?” One of the Guild Members asks hopefully.

“Only after they miss the meeting. If they’re going to try something stupid, I don’t want any of our people outside the walls.” The mage nods in understanding, then wistfully wishes people could just stop doing stupid things in their general vicinity.

Maggie is so cute and happy when nothing threatens the base, but when she’s in work mode, she’s a big grump. Lately, that’s been all the time.

The final two groups arrive simultaneously, both coming over the sand dunes on foot, the group from Assah walking their Dragons in all their scaly glory instead of asking them to transform.

“About time you all showed up. Are you ready to turn over the criminals yet?” The Liberation Front representative asks as the Earl, and his group gets close.

“You know the agreement. Refugees are allowed to pass through our port. We won’t allow you to keep attacking people within my city.” RhickJaymz says, shaking his head.

“And why did you call that ragtag bunch of terrorists here? They’ve already lost; everything from the Serrah Woods north belongs to us.” The human insists.

“Not yet, and not ever.” The Beastkin counters.

“Landis was never yours, and we won’t be handing it over to a bunch of traitors who would kill their rightful leaders. Your filthy zealots even killed the children, but you missed one, and now the nation’s control panel will never be yours.”

Without removing the last Royal, or gaining control of the Capital City’s System Stone, which Lancelot took with him when he fled, they can’t properly rule the country. They can act as if they do, but the system won’t enforce their mandates and taxes.

That point has been their most significant failure, and the Loyalists taunt them with it at every meeting.

“We’ve flown a long way and I’m short on patience. Will your people stop attacking Assah, or should we consider you to have violated the ceasefire?” RhickJaymz asks in a tone that gives between bored and annoyed.

The Human Liberation Front can’t afford to openly break the ceasefire, as the Demon King wrote it so that they would be declaring war on him as well if they did, so the politician tries to talk his way out of the problem.

“The attackers weren’t part of our group. We’ve never sanctioned attacks on neutral cities. I demand you retract such slanderous accusations.”

His proclamation makes the man from the Landis Loyalists smile and drags forth a prisoner. “I believe we all know who this is. He had some very interesting things to say when we captured him, but the most interesting is that bracelet on his wrist. Now, why might a level two hundred guard captain from Landis have on the entry pass of a level 60 merchant?”

RhickJaymz steps forward to check the bracelet, finding that it hasn't been tampered with. Either they managed to fool his Guards, or he had a traitor on gate duty who made them a duplicate bracelet.

“We don't know this man. Interrogate him all you wish. Eventually, the truth of who he works for will come out.” The Liberation Front have tremendous confidence in their Omerta enchantment. If a captured soldier from their army talks, the curse will kill them. The fact that this one is still alive shows that they're just guessing at his motives.

“Give him here, and we will interrogate him. I have a great skill for just this purpose.” One of the Dragon Riders with Earl RhickJaymz smiles, picking the captured man up off the ground and returning to his dragon.

“We will adjourn then and meet back here in one week with the results. I expect there will be no more incidents in the meantime.”

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

## Chapter 313

On the western border of what was until very recently The Landis Kingdom a mighty army is assembling. The Green Orcs have assembled their largest ever raiding force from a dozen different clans.

The humans have been attacking into Orcish territory for almost a month now, and the chiefs have decided that it's their turn to go on the offensive. The goal is simple, conquer ten times the land that the humans did, to prove Orcish superiority. Now, the humans only got thirty square Kilometers, so that should be pretty easy, but it's possible that they might fight tooth and nail to hold their lands.

One thing sets this force apart from any other though, the members of this raid are not all Orcs. Tens of thousands of Beastkin have formed their own Clan and are fighting at the Orcs side, and one lone Elf stands beside the daughter of the Yellow Tusk Clan's leader.

He's a level 116 War Priest named Nathaniel, and the Clan has welcomed him as one of their own. At first the others doubted his worthiness, but his wife is mighty, and his healing is reliable, so the complaints ended as quickly as they started.

"Morgan, what is everyone waiting for?" Nathaniel asks, looking out over the assembled army.

"It's good luck to start a Raid as the sun comes up, so we won't leave our territory until then." She explains, leaning up against his side.

She's right, the moment the sun breaks the horizon, the horns start and the Raiding force moves into Landis, Beastkin first, looking forward to the impending retribution they're going to exact from these evil humans.

They were driven from their homes and many of them lost their families or children. No Beastkin of Landis escaped without paying a price and it's time for the humans to pay up.

The defense force at the first village they reach is woefully understaffed, not even attempting to mount a defense before they simply flee the village. But to the raiding force, that just makes them a moving target.

A strong Orcish or Wolf Kin warrior can run just as fast as the horses that the frontier guards use, and often for much longer. Today, they have a great motivation, and the guards are caught within the hour, the first sounds of battle filling the air as the clans spread out to capture new villages.

The Orcs have a simple rule, they don't attack those who won't fight. If the farmers and villagers don't take up weapons and willingly agree to be under Orcish Rule, they will let them live. That is what the first village decided, that the leaders didn't matter, but their lives did.

After all, they had once been a mostly Beastkin territory, and the survivors of their former neighbors are with this raiding force.

The second village they reach is full of Human Liberation Front zealots, and even the children take up weapons to fight. They're the Yellow Tusk Clan's first target of the day, and Ghaz sends his warriors forward into combat, while the archers and mages set fire to the village.

They learned long ago that human villages are filthy, and full of disease, so when they conquer one for themselves, they traditionally burn everything and rebuild from a clean surface. Nathaniel and Morgan are charging with the second rank of fighters, right in behind the tank classes who have just reached the village defenses.

Only a few hastily erected barriers slow their advance, with heavy Orcish Axes meeting Landis steel swords and pitchforks with a harsh clang that the Elven Healer isn't sure he will ever get used to. But he raises his shield and mace, swinging down hard onto the head of a zealot with tattoos covering his whole body.

The damage causes a healing effect, the specialty of his class, using attacks to trigger healing spells, and the Orcish front lines are pushed back towards full health.

With his wife to his left and his brother in law on his right, Nathaniel is quite confident in his safety. The fact he's half the size of the Orcs around him doesn't hurt either. He's very hard to target.

The zealots have started getting organized now and Nathaniel backs up a little to heal the group without being interrupted. He can do a lot with his combat heals, but when things get really intense it's best that he just focuses on healing.

Morgan has a green glowing Axe that she recently purchased from Dimnys of the Darklight Host that seems to intimidate the human defenders. It's not poisoned, as they seem to think by the glow, it's actually a fire type enchantment with the flame modified to glow the same color as Orcish skin.

In this situation the intimidation is more effective than the one more Axe would be, keeping the defenders paranoid about being poisoned while the Orcs are targeting their healers.

A barbarian manages to get behind Morgan, swinging a brutal two handed sword at the back of her head and Nathaniel cancels his next healing spell to crush the man's knee with his mace. The barbarian never noticed the small man among the crowd, and the blow sends him to the ground with one limp leg. Nathaniel adds a bow to the back of the man's head and sees his body go limp.

He's only unconscious, Nathaniel doesn't deal enough damage to kill him in two hits, but that's enough for now. He returns to his healing, bringing their tank classes back up to full health while the Orcs finish off the downed soldier.

The defenders have been pushed back into the village limits now, but they don't show any sign of intending to retreat or surrender, it looks more like every able body is already in combat.

His brother in law Ghaz is having the time of his life here, and they've now been joined by Gillian and Ghaz Senior, Nathaniel's in laws, and the leaders of the Yellow Tusk Clan.

"We've got them surrounded now. Once the village falls the Yellow Tusk Clan will officially be the first Clan to have claimed a village in battle this expedition. It's a glorious day for us." The big woman laughs, proud of her people's accomplishments.

But this is only the first of many battles to come. The Orcs won't stop advancing until they've reached the sea or someone manages to stop them by force.

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

## Chapter 314

"Rae, I would like you to remain here in the Palace as a candidate for the Royal Harem. It's only a week to my coming of age birthday when we'll be holding the final banquet and announcements, and it would be good if you could get to know the others." James says, taking both of her hands in his own.

"Is this your proposal, James Skyview? You always said you'd find a way to make me a real princess, but I never expected this." Rae answers, smiling up at him.

"You won't deny me, will you? I'll inform your mother that you're moving immediately, so she knows where you've gone. No need to pack; the tailors can make you what you need from now on."

When they embrace each other and go for a kiss, Cain excuses himself out of the room, locking it behind him.

A few minutes later, King James emerged from the room with lipstick on his cheek and sent Cain a message. [I'll need you to be the Ambassador to Garda for these hearings. I'll have some Assistants sent with you for the legal matters if you need them, but the interim Ambassador was among the Nobles exiled after the last battle.]

[I understand, Your Majesty. Pink lipstick on your cheek isn't your color, though.]

With the Noble's few concerns addressed, the hearing moves on to addressing the problems of the commoners. King James will give a speech from the balcony, and he wants his advisors and ministers behind him as a show of solidarity. A large amount of misinformation always flies around after an attack, especially when a significant military response happens.

This time the event was especially large, so the concerns about it happening again are as well. A palace staffer that Cain recognizes as one of Gwen's summons leads Rae away to meet with the other ladies while everyone else gets ready to head outside.

Cain knows he will have to make a speech of some sort, so he's scrambling to come up with something good, as the head of the Defense Council, at least in the title. But he

doesn't know what the King has prepared as a speech, so he is going to have to improvise to some degree.

King James moves to the edge of a second-floor balcony with all of his inner circle behind him. The rest of the Nobles file out in front to listen to the speech while a select few are allowed to remain in the hallways and sitting rooms near the patio. Misha and Cyrene are both near the door, in the first sitting room with the guests brought by the advisors and ministers.

"Greetings, people of Skyview. We understand this has been a stressful week for everyone, but rest assured, the nation is stronger now than ever. Every Niman Raider was captured or killed, and every citizen they took was recovered. The forces hired by our loyal Nobles have cleared every reported Gnoll incursion, and the Royal Army will take up where they left off, with increased patrols to keep the border areas clear and prevent any threats from moving further inland.

To maintain our strength, an additional recruitment bonus for new soldiers will be paid directly to their families and increase with the quality of soldiers sent to join our forces."

King James pauses there for dramatic effect, as the news is incredible to the citizens gathered here. As with anywhere, life as an adventurer isn't easy, nor is there any guarantee of decent income. But the army pays well, and for young Warriors with low-income families, the bonus will solve many of their immediate problems.

"In the coming weeks, our Royal Coming of Age celebration will be held, along with the official coronation ceremony. Every citizen is invited to attend. We ask that the residents of the capital and surrounding regions open their homes and pastures to travelers so as many as possible might enjoy the festivities.

After the Coming of Age Banquet, the first members of the Royal Harem will also be announced, as I'm sure you've all heard. Once the names are made official, we ask that everyone welcomes them all as the new Princess Consorts of Skyview, the same way that you so graciously have for the generations before them."

With his part done, King James steps back and motions Cain forward. "Greetings, I am Duke Cain, the new head of the Defense Council. I'm pleased to announce that the actions by the Mercenaries and Summoned Armies to clear the land have been completed earlier than expected and will not be leading to any additional charges levied upon the affected Nobles or their people.

The Gnoll population inside Skyview has been reduced by over ninety percent, with every group we could locate having been exterminated. You may have also noticed that the Dragon-led patrols took the time to repair many damaged fields and woodlands. We hope this will lead to a stellar year for crop yields, but for more on that, I will refer you to the agriculture minister."



Cain steps back, happy with his speech, and the Ag Minister begins a long and tedious recital of the state of crops within the country. It's the perfect way to close out the announcement; he's so dull that the sense of anxiety and urgency they began the meeting with is entirely gone.

With the essential part of their day accomplished, the Nobles start to scatter. Many of them still need to come up with some recruit for the Army but don't want to give up a talented soldier. They could send just anyone, but if they don't show up or get rejected, the Noble will be reprimanded. If they can't replace them in time, they will have to pay a fine.

Cain brings Misha and Cyrene back to the Manor and contacts the Royal Negotiators to meet him in the morning to meet with Garda. They might back down after an official response, but there's no guarantee of that, and this side of the central continent is infamous for its senseless wars and chaos.

Garda also doesn't have a port; they're an island city state, so testing those around them is the only way to advance their interests.

The Royal staff are happy to meet Cain at first light and head to Garda for the meetings, so Cain goes to find the ladies and see what their plans are.

"Garda makes the best juices. If you don't mind, I'd love to come along." Cyrene declares from over by the mirror where Misha has been helping her try on new armor and clothes.

It's a downside to being a tailor who loves their work; you end up with way too much stuff. Spread between the Guild properties, Misha and Lickity have multiple rooms filled with nothing but crafted items that didn't turn out how they wanted or have a specific look that they didn't need right away.

Currently, they're passing those items back and forth, getting a wardrobe ready for an official trip, and then the coming of age banquet after that. They've got a few more items for Cain, mostly to match the ones they've picked out for themselves, but some are chosen just because they thought he'd look good in them. Like the surf shorts that Misha just added to the stack.

Fortunately for him, the Auction in Tortuga is in a few days. Cain has every intention of finding a much larger version of the makeup bag the ladies found last time. Something he can stuff dozens and dozens of outfits into and prevent having to carry a chest or use a carriage to travel.

When Cain wakes up, the bright pink hair of Cyrene isn't in front of his face but draped across his chest on top of the blanket. The two of them were still going through all the hundreds of suitable items Lickity had made recently when he fell asleep, and they must have crashed where they were. There are still clothes on the bed and everything.

Cain carefully gets out of bed, transferring Cyrene on top of Misha and cleaning all but two complementary outfits from the bed and side tables before he goes down to meet the Negotiators who should be arriving soon.

There are still a number of his Guild Members here, enjoying breakfast straight from Brother Liu before going back to go about their days, so Cain stops to catch up on all the gossip while he waits.

The meetings between the warring factions in the east aren't going well, and the Guild rumor is that it won't be long until the Orc Clans start to move to take over Landis. The fighting has destabilized the country too much, and now it's a prime target for expansion by its neighbors.

According to one Elven Ranger, who has family in the Serrah Woods, the Human Liberation Front, as the Landis Rebels call themselves, lost over a hundred thousand soldiers trying to push south into the Elven controlled woods. If they've taken losses like that, they will have a very tough time if the Orcish Chieftains decide to expand their territory.

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

## Chapter 315

The two Negotiators show up unaccompanied, a well-dressed but frail looking human man with coal black skin who, by Cain's guess, was nearly a hundred accompanied by his later middle aged son, or possibly grandson, given that visible age can be deceptive in this world.

"Greetings, Negotiators; please come in and we can talk over breakfast. I know nothing about Garda, and I'll need to know the history of this conflict before we go." Cain welcomes them.

"Thank you, Duke Cain. The situation is utterly predictable, I'm afraid. A new divine leader has taken over in Garda, and they're testing the treaties with their neighbors. Garda is a theocracy run by their Highest Priestess who can claim to have some level of Angelic lineage. The succession is a bit convoluted, but it doesn't matter right now." The younger man informs him.

"The previous leader was dissatisfied with the treaty but couldn't get leverage over Skyview. Garda is essentially a city-state but with a few surrounding farming villages

that produce scarce and high quality alchemical ingredients. Some from the land, but mostly from a unique form of dungeon that replicates the estate of an ancient being which once stood where their city now stands.” The older negotiator says slowly, as though the act of speaking pains him.

“Would you like me to do something about your lungs? We’ve got several skilled Clerics and Shamans here.” Cain says softly, and the older man smiles.

“I was ninety-five when the system went out of control. Unless you can turn back the hands of time, I am afraid there’s not much to be done for me.” The older man chuckles, making the Guild members at the table laugh.

Elmira flies over and lands on the man’s outstretched hands, placing her hand on her hips like it could make the Pixie be seen as more authoritative. “The Guild Master is an Ancient Flesh Crafter. He could turn you into an Elven schoolgirl and have the system recognize it.”

“Is good to be a protective little one, but don’t go too far.” The younger negotiator laughs, handing Elmira a piece of caramel candy.

“It’s not an exaggeration. If I fully transform a body, the system recognizes it and changes their species. Cyrene, Count Dufas’s daughter, should be down soon, and you’ll understand when you see her.” Cain says, offering the senior his arm to balance while he got seated.

Brother Liu comes out to take their breakfast order while the two look around the room in wonder. All the Companions are here, chatting away, along with a dozen Guild members, but that’s still only a quarter of the seating in the main dining room. Misha and Cyrene join them after a moment, Cyrene in a red sundress, Misha in gold. They’re the official colors of the nation of Skyview, and Cain chose them to make a point.

The official colors will act the same as carrying a flag or pennant behind him. Still, the casual style suggests that he sees no need for extreme formality and that he doesn’t see the other side as his superiors. After all, he technically rules a city and surrounding region as well.

“Will these lovely ladies be our honor guard then?” The negotiator smiles as they enter, hand in hand, and take seats on either side of Cain.

“No, they’re to accompany me. I’ll bring an honor guard of four Seraphim since Evangeline so graciously offered.”

The Seraphim twins stop making honey and sliced fruit sandwiches for the trio of pixies in the room and look up, startled. “What are we doing? Finally, a dungeon again?”

“Maybe later. We’re going to visit some people who claim to have Seraphim blood, and ask them to behave.”

“Oh. That’s not a problem. A change of scenery is always fun.”

Cain turns back to the Negotiators and gets back to business. “How long has it been going on, and what has been tried to get them to behave so far.”

“One month. So far, our response hasn’t escalated past warnings and a few delayed merchant caravans. We’ve been careful to hold up our ends of the treaty.” Donovan, the younger negotiator, clarifies, bringing out a map with a list of incidents rolled up in it.

“The next step would be retaliatory tariffs, reduction in sales volumes, or the worst-case scenario, scrapping the treaty and imposing a full embargo.”

That makes good sense to Cain. He just needs to find out their problem and get them to agree to stop messing with Skyview while these two finalize the details.

“It looks like we’re ready to go. Evangeline, if you can drop your Merger. Unless you’d prefer to stay here, then I’ll Summon a few instead.” Cain informs the still snack distracted Seraphim Companions.

“I’m with you. Who knows what weird things the Inquisitors might tell you to do if they went instead.” Evangeline laughs and waves a goodbye to the pixies and their tabletop candy-making session.

If seeing two Seraphim suddenly turn into four shocks them the Negotiators don’t show it, giving Cain a good impression of their ability to remain impassive looking during the proceedings. They also know the location name for the public portal in Garda, which serves as a code word for determining your final location during travel to public places.

That brings them to an open garden outside a walled city. They’re surrounded by guards watching the area and herb farmers; all dressed in a crude approximation of the togas that the Heavenly Host human forces wear under their armor.

[Were their citizens once part of the Heavenly Host?] Cain asks Donovan with a private message.

[They were, but they failed in their mission and were excommunicated as incompetent. Please don’t bring it up.]

Cain lets the others know as well, and they leisurely make their way to the city gates, admiring the scenery and the smell of fresh herbs.

“State your name and business in Garda.” The gate guard says, giving the group an intrigued look. Actual full-blooded Seraphim are rarely seen, much less four at a time.

“Duke Cain, of Long Fang Valley. Appointed Chief Negotiator by the King of Skyview, here to discuss the treaty between our nations.” Cain says formally, and the guard bows.

A few minutes later, a man in ornate robes comes to the gates and looks over the group with disdain, seemingly not noticing that the Seraphim are with them and not just standing behind them.

“Only those deemed worthy by the Heavenly Host may enter the city, step aside and let our esteemed guests through.” The man demands in a pompous tone, glaring at Cyrene and the Negotiators.

Cain obliges, and the whole group moves off the road, confusing the High Priest when Evangeline remains behind them.

“What is this? Who do you think you are, placing Seraphim beneath your rank?” The man screams.

[I may have made a minor miscalculation.] Cain sends to the two Negotiators, who facepalm.

“I am Duke Cain of Long Fang Valley, Ancient Flesh Crafter and appointed Chief Negotiator by the King of Skyview. These Seraphim are my Summoned Companions. If you doubt my words, I can request the presence of the Holy Inquisitors to verify that I speak the truth.”

The priest now looks like he may have just had a heart attack. He is bone white and sweating, an incredibly unnatural pallor on his golden tanned skin.

“There will be no need for the Holy Inquisition, Duke Cain; we were aware of your arrival.” A younger woman’s voice comes from behind the High Priest, and an even more elaborately dressed woman comes into sight.

Evangeline does her best to hide her smile; the Divine Host doesn’t use decoration for ranks; it’s either by your wings for Seraphim or by the cut of their sleeves for humans. The way these leaders are drenched in gold might explain why they were abandoned as unsuitable to be members of the Heavenly Host.

“Even a secular noble and a pauper of a Seraphim are welcome in our city when welcomed by the Highest Priestess. Please, do come in.” The High Priest declares reluctantly, and the Negotiators start to wonder just exactly how they’re going to deal with this mission.

Instead, Cain makes that decision for them. “That’s enough disrespect from an apostate priest, excommunicated for heresy. Inquisitors, we require your presence.”

At Cain's declaration, the entire area goes silent in awe and horror at this man's nerve, then Cain's Summoned Seraphim Inquisitors arrive. All twenty-four of them.

"Kindly explain to this gaudily dressed man what the ranking of a Six Winged Seraphim is and how little they value gold." Cain smiles, and the Inquisitors give him a wink before a pair drag the high priest into the guardhouse.

Every human in the area, the city leader included, is prostrate on their knees now, bowing before the Inquisitors and the wrathful aura they've cranked to its maximum setting.

"To think that greed had dragged our former followers so low. Go, take care of business while we educate the masses in proper manners." The Inquisitor nearest Cain informs him.

[What sort of negotiation is this, you madman.] Donovan sends to Cain, as the Flesh Crafter gently helps the city leader to her feet before Evangeline uses a holy spell to clean the Highest Priestess's garments.

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

## Chapter 316

"I do apologize for the unseemly display, but as you know, disrespect for the Heavenly Host isn't tolerated." Cain says cheerfully, escorting the shocked High Priestess back to her own castle.

"Yes, of course, that's very much the motto we live by. Tell me Ambassador, were you chosen because of your ties to the Heavenly Host?"

Cain gives a noncommittal shrug. "I can't speak to the motivations of King James, he simply said that I might be the most suitable to peacefully ensure that the treaty issues were resolved."

"The previous treaty, signed by my predecessor is exploitative at the very best. The quotas require that we sell even in the most desperate of times and well below market value, with a significant markup for the goods received in exchange. It's only natural that I would want fair treatment." High Priestess Lunarra declares.

Cain actually agrees with that, the previous treaty was very imbalanced in favor of Skyview. Even he noticed it at a quick glance, so they must have been desperate when they signed it.

"I do feel that we could make some room for adjustments to increase the level of equality, as the treaty is set to be renewed anyhow." Cain agrees as they head for an internal garden, led by palace staff.

The entire building is covered in golden decorations and made of pure white marble. Visually, it's incredibly impressive, though Cain can see that Evangeline doesn't see it that way.

[It's a tacky knockoff of the original. Showing off their wealth when I can see their people outside were going hungry.] The Seraphim informs him.

They have just reached their seats when the Inquisitors bring a very repentant High Priest into the garden from above, setting him down in the grass, where he immediately knelt and apologized to Evangeline.

"I was mistaken, rude and disrespectful, holy one. Please forgive me for my transgressions." The man begs with tears in his eyes and Cain can see the Seraphim Inquisitor is holding a wooden switch in his off hand.

"You are forgiven, but do try to be polite and respectful in the future, as befits a High Priest." Evangeline agrees, then steps back to avoid having her feet kissed.

"Very well then. We will be in the city, giving a manners lesson. Come now High Priest, your penance is only beginning." The two Seraphim declare before taking him away.

"That was, unexpected?" The Highest Priestess Lunarra says softly, shaking her head at where they disappeared.

"If I can speak candidly?" she asks and Cain nods, signaling for her to continue. "The treaty is the smallest part of our troubles. The raiders and our neighboring cities have been attacking for a long time now. If the King agrees, I would like to negotiate an alliance that would see us protected from attack and fair trade terms.

My predecessor believed in War as the answer, and it led to treaties like that when she failed to conquer new territories. I'm hoping for peace through strength, but that requires allies."

Cain considers her words for a moment before answering. "You're really bad at negotiations aren't you? Or is it the presence of Seraphim that's making you speak the whole truth?"



“The Seraphim of course. I was raised to be as ruthless as necessary, but failing to speak the whole truth to a Seraphim will lead you to nothing but pain.”

[I told you, the Inquisitors are actually really mean. They just break out that spanking stick for any old reason.] Evangeline informs Cain, a complaint he’s heard from her multiple times before when he Summoned them.

“In that case, I’ll follow your lead. What do you think of becoming an autonomous region of Skyview? We can have the tax at least partially waived, and your city can join the Kingdom as a protectorate, giving you the defense you need as well as more ability to negotiate with your neighbors and bring them into the fold, or at least stop the attacks.”

Cain can think of at least two upper Nobles who will side with him on this one, after all, they both want the products this city makes. Plus, every Duke’s territory is already essentially autonomous, with only a few regulations and a tax applying to them.

“That might be too much for me to decide alone. Small treaty changes are in my authority, but changing the governance is a lot to ask. I will call the council here to discuss it. In the meantime, please enjoy the tea.”

It doesn’t take long for the rest of the High Priests and Priestesses to appear, they’d all been inside the Palace, hiding from the Inquisitors.

The two Skyview Negotiators have drawn up a basic outline for the new plan by the time everyone has arrived, which makes the Highest Priestess a Dutchess in all but name. It has the same requirements, but with half of the tax rate that a regular noble’s territory pays, and offers the same benefits.

They’re not openly rejecting the plan, but there is some grumbling among the council about having to pay tax to someone else. They’ve gotten very used to spending every cent that comes into their coffers on themselves, and that’s going to be hard to give up.

Their current tax rate is within the allowed limits listed, the same limits imposed on Skyview Nobles, in the name of fairness to their citizens, so the actual rate isn’t the problem, just the fact they won’t get to spend it all themselves.

Cain points out that they’ll be getting benefits of equal or greater value in return, and the document is finally referred to the accountants to work out.

The accountants verdict is that the benefits do add up, even without the intangible benefits of free market access throughout Skyview, plus the duty free use of their ports, which alone the number crunchers estimate to be worth more to them than the total of their tax revenue loss.

As a neighbor and not a member, they’ve always had to pay duty to use a port to ship bulk products overseas, so they lost out on a lot of customers. That sways the council,

and they agree that the Highest Priestess would be acting in everyone's interest to sign.

They just have one last condition, call off the Inquisitors.

The actual detailed agreement will take all night and possibly through part of tomorrow to write, and only involves the Negotiators and the bureaucrats, so the Highest Priestess invites the others to rest in a room until the evening meal. All the clergy in the palace eat together, as well as any visitors, which makes things easy on Cain, who wasn't looking forward to a stuffy and overly formal private dinner.

Since everyone here wears clerical robes, Cain decides they need a change of apparel in honor of their hosts. From the Seraphim Dungeon in the Guild Castle he's got a few Toga type outfits, the same as Evangeline wears, so once they're in the guest suite they all get changed.

Evangeline laughs at the three of them looking all holy when one is a Demon and one is a Priestess of the Dark Gods, but Cain thinks they look good in the outfits. He's not used to wearing a toga though, and the breeze is a bit disconcerting.

They're relaxing on the couch with a platter of cakes that the palace presented them when an emergency message comes through the group chat, one single word.

[Help]

Cain sends Evangeline ahead, and the three rush to where the Negotiators should be, finding a larger number of soldiers, both ones in a foreign uniform and ones dressed as palace staff fighting to get inside.

When they see Cain, all those in the closest ranks turn to attack him, so Cain draws his spear and Scimitar to meet the initial rush, should they arrive before he's fully ready.

He pulls a set of four Ancient Quality Seraphim into Merger with him and uses the Holy Light attack they grant to purge the hallway in front of him, leaving a clear path to the room the Negotiators should be in.

The fighting inside is loud, with a lot of swearing and opposing accusations of treason. The Highest Priestess along with most of the council are there, along with their personal guard, fighting the foreign force.

Cain recognizes a few of the faces as Nobles from Skyview that had left for neighboring countries, so the foreign forces must be theirs, and the rest would be infiltrators that they sent to keep Garda under their thumb.

Cain releases the Merged Seraphim and in a single blinding flash of light the battle in the palace is over. It's not a huge building, closer to the size of a cathedral than a

sprawling complex like the Skyview Palace, and the combined efforts of four Ancient Seraphim is enough to encompass the entire building in one Holy Light strike.

Most of the Defense group seems to be fine, but a few are missing, along with the attackers, and Cain wonders how exactly the ability decided who is and isn't an enemy.

"Duke Cain, we thank you again. Your rapport with the Heavenly Hosts has saved the city already, and the agreement isn't even signed yet." The Highest Priestess says, removing her fancy outer robes and her big hat.

"Let's not stand on ceremony. As the Inquisitors so eloquently informed the clergy, the love of money is unseemly. From this day forward, we will be reviewing our budgetary policy and official uniforms."

That's a big step for these pompous zealots, but after seeing the might of the Seraphim, they're eager to reform their ways and seek redemption for their mistreatment of their commoners.

Plus, they're willing to become a full member of the Skyview Kingdom. Maybe Shock and Awe really is the best negotiation technique.

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

## Chapter 317

Neffie had just arrived home after an excursion to the Long Fang Valley, where she gained a significant number of new second advancement forms. The Beastkin of the valley had an incredible array of Second Advancement classes that she could now use, thanks to Uncle Aggie and the Royal Guards helping her level up.

The only annoyance of the trip was the confirmation that even her new skills couldn't copy exclusive racial classes. So the fancy new class of the Guild Master remained beyond her abilities, at least for now. But she was determined she would find a way to Mimic the Ancient Race and use that skill of his to make a custom puppet of herself to cover for her when she snuck out to do fun things.

Even though she was getting so much more powerful, her mother was no less protective, so Neffie was sure that's just how moms were. It was sweet, but it was a bit boring, especially when she could be exploring and meeting new people instead.

Her new skills let her hide her name and all her details from casual inspection, so she could appear to be a regular adventurer and try out new places, without fear of her actual identity being discovered, Neffie loved meeting new people.

Today, her goal was to explore a dungeon she heard about not far east of Montauk. It was only level 110, but it was supposed to have the prettiest Koi fish inside. It's not inside a city but on the edge of the desert, where it meets the mountains that surround the Beginner's Valley.

There haven't been any reports of battles in the area, so it seems relatively safe. Plus, pretty fish.

After mounting yet another successful escape from her mother's watchful gaze, Neffie transformed into Evangeline and began her flight across the desert. The Seraphim is a skilled flier, so Neffie knows it will only take a half-hour to get to her destination, flying low over the sand to avoid detection.

Once she detected the dungeon, she transformed back into her new favorite form, Misha. She doesn't have Misha's blessing, so she doesn't get the wings, but the body is convenient and taller than Auntie Kone, so she can reach higher shelves in the house where her mom hides the good stuff.

She was distracted thinking of what snacks might be hidden in every house by the various foodies and almost missed the fact that people were waiting at the dungeon. They look like human forces from the battles in Landis, but they shouldn't be this far north, at least not while they're this far inland.

These transfers' gear looks pretty beat up, and none of them are above level 120, hardly a challenge to Neffie, who can use Misha's Lieutenant abilities while pretending to be her. She quietly Merges with a Record Keeper to increase her magic power and durability and approaches the group, hiding low in the sand.

They've got a rather impressive Guild Name [The True Wizards], but none of them are wizards. Or even a wizard subclass.

They've got strange names too. TooCool, NiceGuy, SmexOffenda69. Neffie is sure she wants nothing to do with these guys, but they're blocking the entrance, waiting for something.

Then a fourth man comes into view, not from the same Guild. He looks nice, not nearly as creepy as the other guys.

His name is Cav, an Arch Paladin, and he greets the others with a forced smile. "Hey, guys. No luck finding a Healer so far, so we might have to wait a little more. I wish you hadn't scared the last one away."

"It's not like that. M'Lady was just shy. I'm sure we will find another soon; many people come to this dungeon now." NiceGuy says with a shrug.

A group is a group. So Neffie comes forward through the dunes to talk to the group. "Did I hear you still need a Healer? I've got pretty solid healing skills, despite taking the damage specialty within my class."

"See, the gods favor us. No woman can resist the charm of a truly nice gentleman." NiceGuy declares, tipping his funny-shaped hat. Neffie has never seen anything like it, but somehow it suits his overly rounded face and thick stature.

"Good enough for me. Level 140 should be easily more healing than we need even if you are damage specialized after First Advancement." Neffie is glad she didn't set too low of a fake level now; looking just strong enough got her in to a group without questions.

TooCool hasn't said anything yet, simply posing in the sun like he's doing a modeling shoot, and Offender is giving her the most creepy look ever, so Neffie decides to only interact with Cav.

"You must be the tank. I've got a Summoning skill that's also good for taking damage, so I'll send them upfront with you to help control the mobs." She informs him with a smile, but NiceGuy steps between them.

"Never Fear, we've got this. No need to worry your pretty little head."

First off, he's shorter than Misha's body is; he doesn't get to call her little. Secondly, she's twice his level, even if she's not showing it. But she wants to do this dungeon without trouble, so she rolls her eyes and nods at Cav.

As they're about to enter, TooCool flakes out, saying he's got to go back to his house and do something real quick. But it's an hour's run back to the city. That leaves them one man short again for a few minutes until a wizard named Techie shows up looking for a group.

"You're our fifth; now get over here so we can get going already." Cav calls, clearly frustrated with the repeated delays, as the other two guys try to cover for their flaky friend.

The actual dungeon reminds Neffie of the Naga Raid, with shallow water and shore creatures like crabs and monstrous crawdads. Their tank is perfect, though, especially paired with the Wrath Bringers that Neffie called, and it's not a challenge to Misha's healing skills that Neffie had never used before. In fact, she had to look them up before they started the dungeon so she knew exactly what they were.

Despite showing as level 140 to the others interfaces, their strength is undiminished from Neffie's actual level and the Demons are crushing the dungeon residents. Techie is a very competent wizard, stunning monsters that aren't coming in the right direction and switching from area to single target damage at just the right time.

The only real issue is NiceGuy. He keeps pulling random groups of monsters to stay on the sandbar, saying that Neffie shouldn't have to get her feet wet. It's honestly annoying, and she wonders if there's a way to discretely kill him inside the dungeon, so she doesn't have to put up with his nonsense just to see all the pretty fish in the water.

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

## Chapter 318

Cain and company stay overnight in Garda to ensure nobody else is intending to attack and for King James to officially approve their negotiated agreement. They'll officially welcome the Dutchy of Garda at the next Royal Court Session, but the documents are already signed and agreed upon.

A patrol of soldiers is coming along with the merchant caravans that had been delayed and a shipment of goods is ready to go east back into Skyview even before the Negotiators are ready to head out.

That leaves Cain and the ladies free of obligations, and with the Auction in Tortuga already approaching, Cain decides it is time to pay the Guild House in the Demon Capital a visit.

What they arrive to after passing through the travel circle is utter chaos. As far as they can tell not one, but two of the Dwarven master smiths are having their hundredth birthday today. They all live in small rooms behind their forges, perfect for a Dwarf, terrible for a party. But the Guild house is very large and mostly unoccupied.

Cain grabs a bottle of whiskey and goes looking for Dimnys and the two birthday celebrants with Cyrene rising to wrap around his waist in order to save her tail. Misha is quickly pulled away to dance by Ragnar, who directs Cain to the kitchen, where he just saw Dimnys.

They hear her before they see her. "Who knew that old grump was so popular? We need more servers, don't you know anyone who needs a day's work?"

"Good news. I can get you some servers. Do you want dwarves or are the Elven dolls fine?" Cain calls out to her, walking towards her voice.

“Boss! You’re a life saver. The Elves will be fine, Dwarven servers might not get anything done for being dragged into dances and drinking competitions. If you’ve got a dozen that should do the job.”

He did indeed have a dozen of the dolls on him. He brings a dozen with maid uniforms from his inventory, noticing that he’s running low on them now and he’ll have to start making custom ones soon.

Looking at the chaos in the kitchen, Cain decides that they need a proper chef as well, so he sets himself to making a properly Demonic Chef in honor of the location. He starts with a base that is a four armed Lamia and then adds the chef coat, hat and both Hakan and Dwarven cooking at Guru and Master 4 skill levels respectively.

A third skill to round her out might be a good call, so he adds [Summon Lesser Golem] so she can create her own kitchen staff. The skills sink into the Puppet body and it activates looking around the kitchen with interest.

“A party already? Don’t worry boss, I’ve got this, just leave everything to me.” Her voice has an odd lisp that draws out the letter S and Cain thinks he might have made a mistake in the jaw structure, but other than that, the body seems perfect.

The extra arms should make her job easier and with his level she should be agile enough to make full use of them. She’s already started chopping vegetables and meat for whatever dish she’s making first, so Cain decides that a name can wait and heads back out to the party with Dimnys and Cyrene, sipping whiskey.

“I hate to be the one who asks silly questions, but you know you’re wearing a Lamia and she looks terrified, right?” Dimnys says, poking Cyrene.

“I’ve never been to a party like this before, and I was afraid for my tail. It’s safer up here.” Cyrene explains.

“If nobody else has a problem with it, neither do I. Just stay away from the Whiskey, Cain is fine with it, but it hits Obsession Demons pretty hard.” The Dwarf laughs, handing her a mug of Dwarven Ale.

Cain sends a message to the Demon King’s Palace with a messenger, asking the King for permission to use his travel circle to Tortuga for the auction and settles in to enjoy the party.

It’s late afternoon when the response comes back that an escort will come for him in the morning, so Cain heads up to a bedroom just after midnight, making sure he gets plenty of sleep for a long day at the Auction.



Cyrene has never been properly shopping with Misha, and Cain is certain that he won't get off easily without using a skill to order them to stop. The markets of Tortuga are home to an amazing variety of items from three different Continents after all.

Again, he wakes up looking into a pair of eyes, but these ones are golden, and sit below a mass of white hair and fluffy ears. Neffie has come to wake him up.

"Have you figured out how to transform into an Ancient yet?" He asks the intensely focused little Demon.

"Not yet. It keeps telling me your form is invalid. It's the same thing it tells me for the Greater Seraphim, but I've got the feeling I can get this one to work eventually, the same way I got Evangeline to work once I focused on the companion aspect first." Neffie pouts.

"Let's think over breakfast, or is the escort already here?" Cain tells her, equipping his suit and picking her up as he gets out of bed.

Neffie giggles and wraps all four of her arms around his neck. "We're all here, having breakfast before we go. Your new cook is pretty talented."

The others are already at the table when he comes down, since Neffie woke him up last to give herself time to try to obtain his Ancient Species for her records. There are some dwarves still up as well, plus King Aggramor, a female Succubus and his usual set of guards.

"Good timing, there's an item at the hidden auction I want and Vinnie gave me permission to bring your group. Is this all you're bringing?" Aggramor asks, indicating Misha and Cyrene.

"The others are in Skyview in case something happens on this continent. If it's an emergency I can call them to me. Plus it's easier to travel in a smaller group." Cain shrugs and Aggramor nods.

They take the circle back to the Palace, and then go down a half dozen floors to a large open room filled with a huge circle.

"It's what is needed to travel between Continents without a dedicated link. This will bring us straight to the Auction."

Neffie transforms into a small Wrath Demon who looks a lot like a younger version of Vala and equips a set of black plate armor, moving to stand near Aggramor.

"Officially she's my assistant. We never let others know who and what she is." Aggramor says as everyone but two guards steps aside.

“Group size is limited to four for this event. Vinnie has given us seats in the same booth though. When we enter, a barrier will deactivate all active abilities, just so you know. It’s a security feature, and then they’ll track every ability you use until you leave.”

They step through and the auction manager himself is waiting on them. “Your Royal Highness, Duke Cain, it is a pleasure to see you both again. The items that both of your agents sent for the evening’s auction have been processed, and here is your pass for the seller’s lounge. I trust you recall the procedure?”

They both nod, and Vinnie heads them to a large second room. The moment they step past the door, [Malleable Form] is forced to return Cain to his 10 meter tall natural form and the auction guards panic.

“Sorry, I didn’t realize it would force my shape back to default.” Cain apologized, but it didn’t seem to calm them much, the mental projection carrying a heavy note of authority.

“The effect ends on the other side of the room, if you would please.” Vinnie stutters, and Cain strides across the hall before noticing Neffie is hanging off his leg, taste testing him to try to record his species.

Here, Aggramor looks like a grown up male version of her, they even have the same fluffy white ears and gray skin tone. If Cain didn’t know better he’d think that Neffie was his daughter.

At the other side of the room Cain can change again, so he shrinks to human sized but keeps his Ancient look, taking his cue from Aggramor who didn’t use a new disguise.

“At least it prevented the Existential Dread Aura from activating. That could have been a mess.” Misha laughs.

“Why would he need a Terror type aura? That thing is scary enough.” One auction staffer mutters.

“No kidding. I think I peed a little.” Her partner whispers in response, making Cain smile, an effort that just makes the tentacles on his face wriggle.

It didn’t seem to have the desired effect, the staff still looks terrified.

There has no common area here, everyone is in booths with mirrored walls facing the auction, and only one group is brought through at a time for anonymity. That makes Cain very curious as to what they’ve got for sale.

Beyond that, how many things even count as black market in this world where humans can level cities and dozens of nations deal in people as property?

They've got a fairly long wait before the event starts, having arrived fairly early. More bidders are still arriving right up until the auctioneer takes the stage with a smile.

"Welcome everyone to the Tortuga VIP Market. For those who are new here let me go over the the basics. Every item is listed with a condition. Only those who can provide the item or task in the seller's condition may place a bid. The bid must fulfill the condition, and be an improvement on any previous offer to fill the condition. Simple really, now let us get started."

A large crate is rolled on to the stage and it opens to reveal an Ancient Quality Ability Book. [Dance of the War God].

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

## Chapter 319

Cain was amazed by the first item of the auction.

[Dance of The War God] Usable by Dragons Only. Dragon Form combat style. Increases damage done by 250 percent of strength.

"The seller of this item requires one viable egg from any species of Divine Dragon in exchange. Do we have a bidder for this exceptional item?"

Not only is the item incredible, so is the price. Cain understands now why they called it the VIP Market, it's more of a trade than an auction, except you're allowed to bid against others who have what the seller needs.

"In this auction, you don't have to pay right away, they'll hold the item for a time while you prepare payment if necessary. But the penalty for failure to pay is extreme." King Aggramor explains to Cain, who is admiring the book.

"As much as I'd love to have it, I don't know where I'd get the price. Divine Dragon Eggs aren't something that I have just laying around.

After a while the auctioneer announced that a single bid has been made and accepted and the book is locked back up and taken away.

The next item up makes Cain smile, the recipe for Frost Giant Vodka. Guaranteed correct by the auction house itself.

“A functional recipe for this potion is a rare item indeed. The seller is asking for a rare Skill Book to finish their combat style. The Skill of [Cloud Dancing], as some of you know it was a secret skill of the Gnomish Royal Guards.”

Cain turns to the Auction attendant in their room with a smile. “Tell them I can offer the book on the condition it’s used immediately on receipt.”

Cain has the skill to copy it, barely, but the copies made by the desk only last about hour or so and he doesn’t even know if all the materials needed to make a permanent copy still exist.

A few seconds pass and the answer comes back. “The seller says that’s unacceptable. They are a collector and want it for their library.”

“Give the seller my apologies and tell them my skill is time limited. I can’t give them a copy for their library.” Cain says and the agent nods.

A few more moments pass and the auctioneer speaks again. “Unfortunately we couldn’t make a sale on this item today. But we have many more amazing items on the roster.”

As the bidding goes on, Cain and King Aggramor wait for an item they want and the agent passes a note to Cain. The seller of the Frost Giant Vodka Recipe is asking for any leads he might have on where to find a copy of the book, if he knows.

Cain decides the truth might be even more frustrating than a lie, so he writes the word [Underwood] on the note and hands it back. The hidden city of the Dark Elves isn’t an easy place to get to, but they could certainly make a copy of the book.

Finally an item catches King Aggramor’s attention. A cursed sword. The seller wants a Lava Bloom Gem half a kilo in weight in exchange and the King passes one to the agent like it was nothing. While they’re Legendary Quality materials and very rare, the dungeon under his castle is a source of them.

“Cursed swords have an affinity for Demons, so I gather them when I can.” Aggramor explains.

About two thirds of the items sell, all for very rare or regionally restricted products. The last item up is a Soul Gem. It is occupied, but the auction can’t confirm by what or who. Cain examines it and gets an error message.

[Required Skill: Living Art Not Known] item cannot be used.

Now that’s got his curiosity.

If [Living Art] can affect it, then the soul gem must be of a similar nature to the Stasis Gems that his skill creates, only it has the soul inside as well. Or perhaps just the soul, waiting on a body to be transferred into.

“This seller is a bit more flexible than most, since they’re looking for an option not an item. The seller is looking for a way to advance a Shadow Priest to the Legendary Infernal Arbiter Third Advancement class without an existing Dark Blessing. The Soul Gem will be provided when the class option is unlocked.”

That’s an easy one for Cain, he’s already done it once, for Misha. He knows he just needs to give them the [Balance] skill and they’ll unlock the class right away, but he’s not sure that he’s willing to give away that much information on his own abilities. The Soul Gem is tempting him though, he’s certain there’s something really good hidden inside, and he’s not willing to pass it up.

“Tell them I know the way to unlock the class, but it must be done in person. I did it for Misha, and the fact she holds the class they want should be proof enough of my claim.” Cain informs the Auction Assistant.

“Too tempting to pass up was it?” Neffie laughs, climbing up in his lap.

“I’m pretty sure there’s something good hidden in that gem, and once I get a few more levels I’ll have a skill that can let it out and make it my Puppet.” Cain smiles, rubbing her head.

“Why don’t you ever give me cool things like that? Everyone’s getting skills and new bodies and special classes in addition to their headpats.” Neffie complains, leaning into his hand as it reaches the spot at the back of her ears.

“Well, what exactly would you need? It’s a one time thing, and it permanently changes them. While you’re still growing up you can get what you want for yourself, with your own abilities, right? Then when you run out of options you can come to me for a little help along the way to get you past the blockage.” Cain suggests, and Neffie thinks deeply on his suggestion.

“Well, if it’s a once in a lifetime option, I guess it might be better to wait. But I hate waiting, waiting is boring.” The little demon Queen complains, making Aggramor laugh.

No wonder Lickity seems so stressed out all the time with a child like this one.

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

## Chapter 320

Matt looked around his small home in the Landis Capital's South Industrial district. Or should he say former capital? Since the chaos started, it wasn't clear who was in charge, or where anything was being run from.

He was a carnival worker on that fateful day that the Liberation Front and their traitor Senators made their move. At first, he had hoped for a quick resolution, and when the Senators lost he thought it was over. At least for a few days until the King and most of the Royal Family were assassinated.

Hopefully Prices Gurda was still alive, he's put in a lot of work using his skills as a Shadow Lurker to eliminate those who were trying to track down her whereabouts. Matt knows for sure that she'd escaped the city, he'd seen that himself, but the Rebels still mostly believed that was a double and she was in hiding somewhere inside the capital.

That was a blessing to Matt, if they were looking for her in the city they weren't going to find her, and it brought them into many dangerous and secluded areas where they could be ambushed.

He wasn't alone in his work either. There were no fewer than five former palace employees in hiding pretending to be her right now, and the resistance was working hard to eliminate any rebel who got close to discovering the truth.

The Liberation Front's grip on the city was loosening, they'd sacrificed too many in the south fighting the Elves, and now that the Orcs had attacked they were pulling guards from everywhere to defend the western regions.

But that was a secondary concern, today he had to get into the ocean. The resistance mages had created underwater breathing scrolls for him and a Wave Rider vessel had dropped a parcel for the resistance just offshore.

He had the location tagged and could get to it quickly, he just had to get in and out of the ocean undetected, as the shore was completely off limits to civilians.

Food was getting scarce for everyone, and what was rumored to be a large sea monster had been blocking all rebel attempts to get it shipped in, so it wasn't just the civilians that were on reduced rations.

The old docks by the Fairgrounds were his best bet, the whole area had been heavily damaged in the fighting and fallen into disrepair. Shipments these days went to the new docks on the other side of town next to the rebel training camp.

That way they had full control over distribution, and could “tax” the things they wanted for themselves.

Matt sneaks carefully through the rubble of the dock district, looking at the destruction that the holy light of the Seraphim attack left. He was just glad that they’d decided to leave afterwards and not stick around to level the city. Against such overwhelming force, neither the Rebels nor the loyalists would have stood a chance, and Matt wasn’t convinced that the Heavenly Host cared about the difference after the humans attacked them.

They had helped all the merchants escape though, and not just the non human ones, so maybe it would have been better if they’d stayed, even if it destroyed a large portion of the city.

As usual, nobody was around the old docks, so Matt equipped his wetsuit and dove into the water, activating the [Dolphin Speed] swimming skill he’d managed to purchase for exactly this purpose.

If he’s not noticed, he will continue out to the drop site, surfacing every few minutes for air and saving the underwater breathing scrolls for emergencies.

As he gets out of sight of shore and closer to the drop, Matt sees a number of ships incoming on the area, flying the colors of the Rebels. They don’t look like military vessels, but they’ve commandeered a number of merchant ships with the help of foreign allies, so they might be part of the fleet.

The chance they’ll see him is low, but Matt dives anyhow, hoping to make the pickup before running out of air. He’s really starting to feel the pressure of the increasing depth, but the locator the resistance was given says he’s very close to the drop before he reaches his limits.

They kindly left it in a large net for him, and he gathered everything in only a few seconds, lungs burning as he comes back to the surface.

The rebel ships are still in sight, near the horizon, but they’re no longer alone. A flotilla of black sailed ships with red hulls is racing in on their position with all sails filled and their guns run out.

Matt isn’t sure what they’ve done to anger the Wave Riders enough to send a raiding fleet to destroy their Navy, but it’s working in his favor today. They’re far too busy to notice him making his way back to shore with a load of food and weapons.

The sounds of battle are audible even from shore by the time he arrives, lightning crackling in the sky to accompany the booming Cannons of the Wave Rider fleet.



The fleet at the south docks heads out to intercept the moment they get the notice of an attack, convincing Matt that those weren't military ships, but allied merchants. It's far too little too late though, and the ships are looted dry and burning by the time they arrive, the Wave Rider flotilla already underway with their loot.

The defense Admiral curses under his breath at the sounds of Elven laughter carrying across the waves. They haven't received a shipment in an entire week and the food stores are basically empty. This shipment would have lasted the city most of a month.

Back in Skyview, Earl Mills sits with his head in his hands, devastated by the news he just received. He dumped a huge amount of money into fifteen ships of supplies to the Landis Liberation Front, who promised top dollar for them and desperately needed the assistance. But with the four just reported looted and sunk by Wave Riders, nine were now lost to the waves, and the rest had docked at safe ports to wait.

If none of them could deliver their goods and manage to deliver him his payment, he would be financially ruined. It had to be Duke Cain and that Elven trollop of his. Who else would be so ruthless?

His last thought as he drank himself into a stupor was that he would make that wretched man pay for what he'd done.

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

## **- Chapter 321**

### **Chapter 321**

"Sir, the seller has agreed to your terms, and is willing to meet you here in person, but only inside the auction house where we can guarantee their security." The assistant informs Cain.

"That's more than fine, I trust the Auction House to prevent any scams or attacks." Cain agrees, and the seller gestures to the door.

"We won't be long, I should be done by the time all the items are delivered and the rest of you are ready to go, but I'll send a message if I'm going to be delayed and you can go see the city together while I work."

Cain follows the assistant down the dark corridor, with the plush purple carpet and dark stone walls towards a staircase that seems to wind down even further below the auction

house. The security seems a bit much, but some of the items here were exceptionally rare, and could be targets for theft, so it does make sense that they've got an even more secure area to fall back to in case of an incident.

The room they lead him to looks identical to the appraisal room that he was in last time he was at the auction, understated opulence, with golden decorations and soft brown leather furniture to relax in while they wait.

The seller is already there though, a pompous looking Obsession Demon with a suit made of what looks like beastkin faces. If it weren't for the fact that this is an Auction, and Cain wanted what the demon is selling, he would not normally do this guy any favors, unless his appearance is vastly different than his personality.

The face coat makes that seem pretty unlikely.

Cain calls a Legendary Obsession Demon into Merger now that he can use abilities again, and takes a seat across from the Demon. "I take it you wish for an Infernal Arbiter Class with a specialty in the Obsession God, but failed to obtain the requisite blessing on your own to make the advancement?"

The Demon nods unhappily. "The Dark Gods spurned my devotion, but with this, I will claim the respect that is rightfully mine."

The Demon in Cain's mind laughs at the man's declaration. [No, he's just a douchebag and nobody wanted to admit that they'd favored him.]

[I want what he's selling though, can we mess with him a little bit and still get him the class?]

[I don't see why not. Give him a nice obsession, like licking toilet bowls or something.]

Cain inwardly laughs at the thought that licking toilet bowls might be an obsession and ability worthy of a blessing by the obsession God, and starts sorting through the options in his mind for embarrassing blessings.

"I have asked a Legendary Obsession Demon for a bit of assistance, they said that I just need to tweak your Obsession Ability a little, and it should unlock the class right away. The favor of the gods is fickle as you know, but some things are guaranteed to attract their favor."

The demon nods impatiently as Cain searches, then the Demon gives him a great idea. The Dark Queen has a personal bootlicker. As in a demon assigned to lick her boots clean should they get dirty. Cain can feel a malevolent amusement fill the room at that idea, and the Legendary Demon even knows the creature's name, so Cain calls a clone of it into his Merger and checks the skills.

“There it is, I have found the ability that will please the Obsession God. I will warn you, that accepting a new obsession might affect your appearance, but it will grant you the class you want.” Cain informs the seller who gets an unpleasant smile on his face.

“Yes, quickly now, before they notice and change their mind.”

Cain focuses and grants the Demon the Obsession Ability [Absolute Cleanliness]. Nothing about the demon seems to change, but he gets an odd look on his face, and then closes his eyes to concentrate on the interface.

“Yes, it is here, the Infernal Arbiter. I have finally gained the peak of the Dark Gods favor. Auctioneer, you may pass him the Soul Stone at any point now.”

Cain nods to the distracted Demon and takes his prize back to the auction room.

[That didn't seem like much of a punishment, I thought you wanted to mess with him?]  
Cain asks the Demon.

[Oh, it really is, he just doesn't realize it yet. His previous obsession left his home in filth and disarray, first he will clean away every sign of his former life, then he will clean his entire filthy neighborhood, eliminating all his former friends for continuing to live in squalor and bloodshed.

Then when everything around him is spotless and pristine, he will become bored and go looking for more filth to remove from existence, until eventually someone sent by the Goddess will grant him the joy of cleaning up after them forever. If he's lucky it will be as a noble butler, at worst he might spend his life doing laundry for a pig farmer.]

[Subtle, but effective. I underestimated the true depth of the Obsession God.] Cain informs the demon, then releases his Mergers as they reach the room where the others should be waiting for him.

“Everything is taken care of and the seller is overjoyed with their new class. The Obsession God granted them a boon right away, and they advanced their class as I was leaving, now what do we have in store before the main auction? A bit of lunch and a look through the market stalls?” Cain greets the room as he enters.

King Aggramor is hiding tears of laughter already and the others are giggling, so he must have been watching in on and narrating the proceedings, using one of his abilities as the Demon King.

“I want Cotton Candy and Misha says you need a big storage chest to reduce inventory usage, so let's go looking.” Neffie cheers.

“I’m afraid you won’t find a large chest like the makeup bags anywhere in the city, the material required to make even a small one is Legendary, but there is a larger one in this evening’s auction. I believe it holds five cubic meters.” The assistant informs them.

That’s not bad at all, it would hold an entire wardrobe for the ladies in a single inventory slot. But maybe they can get a few more smaller bags as well, since Cain is certain he will end up with even more items to carry in the future.

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

## Chapter 322

The auction assistant leads them through a series of winding corridors and up the stairs towards the surface, bringing them out at the same spot Cain exited before, the standard item appraisal area.

Once they’re free of the restrictions on abilities, Cain changes back to his human form and steels himself for the inevitable chaos of Tortuga on Auction day. The interior of the auction house is so packed at this point, as everyone tries to get a last minute registration or ticket to the main auction that not only are they not noticed, they almost need to shove people out of the way to leave.

Only the fact that their leaving creates another open space to move into convinces people to let them through, and they slowly inch through the crowd, Cain in front and Aggramor in the rear to keep everyone together.

Neffie instantly loves the city the moment they’re outside, grabbing Misha and Cyrene’s hands and skipping down the road towards the nearest food carts, where she seems to have noticed something that she likes.

It’s a Takoyaki stand, and Cain chuckles as they return with a large platter of battered octopus balls, making Neffie smirk and Misha give him a conspiratorial wink. Maybe his Ancient form really does taste like Octopus? But that’s a thought for later.

They all snack as they wander, looking in the various stores until they finally come across a Demonic Apparel store that Neffie simply must enter. It seems to be the hit thing with young female Demons, the store is crawling with them, and a bubbly Succubus clerk comes over and welcomes them.

“Hi, and welcome to Infernal Topic. What can I help you find today? We’ve got the most amazing new items in stock straight from our designers here in Torguga. Support Local business today and you can get an extra ten percent off.”

The voice grates in Cain’s ears, but Neffie and Cyrene seem enthralled. Maybe it is an ability that only works on Demons? Or it could be a form of mind control and Misha is simply immune. Thankfully, she doesn’t seem to find the voice as annoying as Cain and Aggramor do.

The fashion is at least cute to make up for the annoying sales clerk, and both Cyrene and Neffie are having a blast trying things on, while Misha goes through the racks to find them more and more new clothing options, building outfits for the pair that are more casual than what they’ve been wearing lately for official functions.

Aggramor is in one of his usual Kingly disguises, that still shows the world he is the Demon King, so the entire staff, as well as most of the shoppers are eager to help his companions find exactly what they’re looking for, leading them to spend almost two hours in one single shop, as more and more items are brought out from the back and the warehouse and then combined with items they’d already tried on, until the pair were satisfied.

The Demon King gets a hefty discount here, and Cain suspects that he actually owns the place as part of his extensive business empire, but neither demon minds, and both Neffie and Cyrene end up leaving the shop in new casual wear.

They find Neffie’s cotton candy vendor not long after and she buys up a half dozen bags, saying she’s got to send some home for the others, before they make their way into the entertainment district. Here you find street performers, fancy restaurants, and all sorts of other time passing activities.

One particularly eye catching show is a dance by an Ice type Youkai and a Fire Demon, their elemental abilities creating a stage of their own as they gracefully twirl and sing. Cain doesn’t recognize the language, but it’s beautiful, and they all end up entranced by the skill for a while, before Aggramor decides that a bit of lunch is in order before they head to the auction.

They won’t have to wait in line for the auction, as both have high value items for sale today, though Cain has no idea what the Guild is actually selling this time. According to Neffie, it’s all her mom’s fault.

Lickity got sick of items laying around all over every single Guild House as the crafters ran out of room, so she put her foot down and demanded that the failures be reworked and the unwanted successes be sold off to make more space instead of continually burning through Guild resources making more and more stuff that nobody was using.

Neffie viewed it as a minor tragedy, as she used those unwanted items as costume props to help her attempts to sneak out of the house, but having everything cluttered up would drive most anyone insane eventually.

Even in Cain's deadbeat last life, he didn't like too many things laying around the house, so cleaning was one of the few things he still managed on a regular basis other than drinking and gaming.

The restaurant they end up at serves what they're informed is Southern Continent fine dining options, and only Aggramor recognized anything on the menu. There's a lot of spicy things in sauces though, and a really good garlic flatbread, so Cain takes the opportunity to record the Chef when he sees them through the kitchen door. One more cuisine option for his kitchens.

They finish off the meal with a special treat from the chef, who declares that children simply must have dessert and brings everyone out bowls of a frozen yogurt, deep fried in a sweet and crispy shell.

The combination of hot and cold, crunchy and soft is incredible, and Cain makes a note to add this skill to a new chef as soon as he gets the chance. One more staff member couldn't hurt anything, and the other chef puppets already have all their skill options filled.

They start making their way to the auction, following the most direct path, when suddenly Aggramor realizes he's made a grave miscalculation. This path leads them through the "Adult Entertainment" portion of the district, and Lickity really might forbid him from visiting Neffie if they let her start getting ideas from the fashion in this area.

Thinking fast, he picks the little demon up and turns down another street, going from bad to worse, as this new route has some sort of interspecies erotica trade show going on.

"Forget everything you saw here, and don't tell your mother." he whispers, leading the group back out onto the main streets, while the little demon laughs at him.

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

## Chapter 323

Larkin knew he would have a long road ahead of him to earn forgiveness for attempting to sneak a peek into the ladies baths, but he never thought it would be quite this demanding. Today he was out in the hot desert sun, pruning and maintaining the plants

at the Castle. Kone had dragged him out of bed first thing in the morning, declaring that it was time to start earning some of his penance.

Normally the druids do all of this work at night, but Kone has no intention of telling Larkin that. So instead, she's given him a filter net and he's cleaning the blown sand out of one of the many fish ponds, a task she herself could do in seconds, using magic. But that's not the point of a punishment.

Outside the castle walls there is another negotiation going on, the three sides meeting to negotiate yet another ceasefire after infiltrators attempted to attack the city of Montauk, but were caught by the security forces, and dealt with by the Guild members that were in town at the time.

The Guild Skill, [Benevolent Leader] that lets them call a pair of Epic Summons each has come in incredibly handy lately, allowing any roaming Guild member to deal with much larger threats than would normally be possible.

Outside the Beginners Valley, the lower levels don't travel alone, but nobody does these days, due to the threat of attacks and bandits, while the higher levels are always ready with a plan for what Dungeon Boss level summon they might need to save them should the worst come to pass. Very few are dumb enough to attack the Darklight Host and break whatever ceasefire number the region is currently on, but there's always the possibility.

Kone has her Turtles out patrolling the walls right now, while Su supervises Larkin at work. The Dragon has a soft spot for the awkward and unlucky Paladin, but Kone isn't sure he's not just an unlucky pervert. He's sweet, but some of his ideas are just too much.

[You could take him in hand and teach him to behave right. Maybe all he needs is a little motivation?] Su suggests in her thoughts.

Kone smiles, seeing that he's finally finished with one of the ponds, and the fish are happily swimming around, ducking under the lily pads that have been spread over the surface to add shade. Su said motivation would help, and she has just the thing for him.

Kone changes outfits into a pair of short shorts and a bikini top and heads over to where Su has Larkin working in the sun, cleaning sidewalks.

"Good work on the pond. The fish are very pleased." She tells the smitten boy, smiling at him. Larkin is so happy to hear her praise that he entirely loses his focus and trips over his broom, landing face down in a patch of cactus.

"Ah, feth, gah that hurts so much." he moans, leaning back to sit on the sidewalk and pick cactus spikes from his face.



“Sit still, I’ll pull them out then heal you up.” Kone tells him, trying not to laugh at his misfortune.

She takes a steady position, sitting on his legs to keep him from flinching away as she pulls the spikes from his face. She learned a while ago that they can be pushed out with healing magic, but that still hurts, and it does them all at once, which is even worse.

Larkin freezes at the feel of her skin touching him. His beloved Kone is really touching him, with her bare skin. The thought makes him so happy that he almost forgets she’s about to rip the cactus spikes out of his face one at a time. The pain brings him back to reality in a hurry though, and he understands why she pinned him down. It doesn’t take long and she’s ready to heal him, standing up and patting his head in consolation.

“Finish up this sidewalk and we can have lunch.” Kone tells Larkin, who happily gets back to work.

The healing prevented sunburn so he’s good to go for at least a few more hours of punishment detail and she can leave him to Su while she checks on the situation outside. From the reports that the turtles are sending, it sounds as tense as usual, but they’re likely going to get things sorted out in a few minutes.

Larkin puts himself into his punishment detail as Kone leaves, knowing Su will report if he slacks. But the Dragon is chatty, and might even be on his side, so he decides to ask her for advice.

“Su, other than the punishment, do you think there’s anything I could do to show her how sorry I am? I don’t want to mess it up again and make her even more mad.”

The Forest Dragon, in her tiny wood nymph form thinks a moment before giving him an answer. “She’s a druid at heart, maybe if you volunteered to help out with the castle’s plant maintenance at night you might get time to spend with her alone?

Then you should be able to convince her you just had a lapse in judgement and will never, ever do something that stupid again. You won’t do it again will you?”

“Definitely not, never again. Thank You, Su.” Larkin declares with a smile.

He has his plan now, he will clean this path in the scorching sun, then come back tonight and volunteer to help her and the druids with the plants. They’re still adding more life to the interior castle grounds, and a lot of it needs to be placed by hand, after the Druids and Earth Mages prepare the land. It’s drudge work, but he actually enjoys being out here in the trees, at least when he’s not cooking in the sun.

Kone was called away on business with the meeting and couldn’t make it to lunch with him, but Larkin has high hopes for tonight. They’re going to be planting a new variety of flowers and they need all the help they can get to finish before sunrise.

As the sun goes down, he joins the Earth Mages and Druids headed out to plant the flowers, chatting happily about the design of the new gardens that are going in. Once everyone is assembled, Kone comes out with a cart full of plants and a big smile that takes Larkin's breath away.

"Good news everyone, we got an extra shipment of the ground cover creepers in so we've got lots to do tonight. Everyone is in teams of three with the ones nearest to you. Now, let's get to work and get everything planted by morning."

Kone doesn't even wait until she's finished talking to start with the plant control abilities, preparing the ground in the area and digging the first holes for the flowers.

'This is not the plan' Larkin thinks to himself as the two dwarves nearest to him lead him away with a basket full of flowers to plant. He's about to start thinking of a way to get closer to Kone when she walks by again in her green leather work clothes and smiles at him.

"Good work with the sidewalks today Larkin, I'll see you in the morning for your next work detail." Kone tells him, thinking of how cute the Paladin was, working hard to impress her. Maybe she will give him a chance. Once she's done teaching him his lesson.

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

## Chapter 324

When things get too crowded near the auction, Cyrene returns to Cain's waist, getting her tail safely out of range of stomping feet and making King Aggramor and Neffie burst into laughter.

"That is the most adorable thing ever. But smart too, I wouldn't have thought of hiding up there to get out of the crowd." Neffie giggles, petting Cyrene's scales.

"I was born blind and got used to needing someone to guide me places, so now that I can wrap, it's like a trained instinct. Plus, if you're so close, he randomly gives out headpats." Cyrene stage whispers back to the amused young Demon, who returned to the Wrath Demon form that looks so much like Vala once they were away from the restrictions of the underground auction.

When they reach the side door of the auction, they barely have time to flash their pass before they're ushered inside. The same guard as last time is on duty, and he remembers them both from the Dragon incident on the roof.

“Welcome back to the Tortuga Auction, Sirs and Madams. Your room has been prepared for your arrival.” The guard informs them once they reach the top of the stairs and the door is closed.

Today there is only one other person there when they arrive, a lone Elf wearing a robe that seems to be made of leaves. She nods politely as they enter but doesn't say anything and returns to her reading, so the group well sits a few seats away to avoid bothering her.

The auctioneer is kind enough to hand both Cain and King Aggramor an itinerary of items for sale with the ones they put up for auction, highlighted to show the order in which they could expect their goods to come up in case they had a problem with the auction's choices.

As expected, a few weapons and two suits of Legendary Armor are among the Darklight Host's offerings, but surprisingly, they've also got enchanted artwork made available. A marble bust that allows the user to see through its eyes and a sitting lion statue that can be activated to become a defensive Golem for a short time.

The artisans must be hard at work; the quality of these items is well beyond anything they could have come up with when Cain first hired them.

The first dozen items pass by without attracting any interest from the high-value sellers, then the first armor set from the Darklight Host Guild comes to bid. It's a suit of armor that decreases the chance of detection by 85 percent and increases ambush damage by 300 percent on the first hit.

It's an item tailor-made for assassins, and Cain wonders if he should look into getting his gear upgraded soon. He's so comfortable in it that he hasn't been looking at new armor lately, just keeping things with attractive bonuses in his inventory.

“The Guild is catching up. It looks like I will have to grind dungeons again soon, or I'll end up outmatched.” Cain jokes with Misha as the bidding for the armor reaches nineteen platinum bars.

“You've got something good coming as a skill, too, don't you?” She agrees.

“Two options actually, but both cost twenty skill points. I might have to find a dungeon over level 270 if I want to get there in a hurry.”

That has the Elf's attention. “You can complete a dungeon that far beyond your level?”

Cain smiles back at her, hoping she has something good to offer him. “I was once a Puppet Master, and my Summoning Skills are quite competent. Most dungeons that are less than sixty levels above me aren't much of an issue.”

"We can talk after the Auction unless you don't mind the Demon King knowing your business." She nods her head towards Aggramor, who smiles.

"He's a good friend of myself and my Guild. It shouldn't be a problem." Cain says with a shrug, noticing that Neffie is feeding the King random items off the tray of snacks to see his response before trying them herself.

"In that case, we need a Flesh Crafter and can offer access to a pair of dungeons, level 275 and 310, in the heart of the Eastern Continent. They're some of the lowest level dungeons in the region, but perfect for your progression, given the advantages of a Puppet Master."

That's interesting; the Elf knows about the hidden leveling advantage of Puppet Masters. That must mean that they have at least one in the region or had one at one point.

"I do also need a way back home to Skyview afterwards, or the option to acquire a Guild House with an intercontinental capable travel circle." He says, and the Elf smiles.

"Not a problem, we have a link directly from there to Tortuga, and you can get to the free Port in Assah from here and from there to wherever home is in the central continent. It's a bit of a journey, but no fear of being stuck."

"Then I will accompany you after the Auction with some of my Companions."

Neffie gives him a pleading look, and Cain laughs. "Do you know what your mother would do to me if I took you on an adventure to an entirely different continent? She was reluctant even to let you go shopping with the Demon King."

"Fine, fine. I'll go bother your chefs in Long Fang City then." She says, sticking out her tongue at Cain.

"I'll send another chef back with you for extra variety and the Fried Ice Cream recipe."

Cain can tell Aggramor is about to become a regular visitor to the Manor house, so he warns Svetlana of the impending visitors and the new arrival. Because if Neffie is coming, Lickity will be coming, and that means a few more tailors and the maids will be coming, so the house is about to get busy all the time.

Cain has put enough Puppets and Commanders in place that Affairs in Skyview can take care of themselves for a little bit while he adventures, so going off to visit this Elf's homeland shouldn't be an issue.

King Aggramor's item has come up, a precious Lava Gem, one of his Kingdom's specialties. He seems barely interested, more concerned with planning a banquet meal

with Neffie than the sale. The auction crowd feels differently though, going crazy trying to buy it up and deny their competitors the chance.

Finally, the item Cain was waiting for comes up, a storage chest the size of a Steamer trunk. That's a much larger option than the makeup cases; he could fit half his inventory and only need one slot.

The bidding starts at a platinum bar and rapidly rises to five, then ten, fifteen, seventeen.

"I bid thirty Platinum Bars," Cain tells the attendant, who calls it out for him. That silences the crowd, and the auctioneer starts to call the auction.

"Thirty bars are going once, going twice..."

"Thirty-one bars." A bidder from a VIP box calls.

"Make it Forty Bars." Cain smiles at the attendant, who calls it out, causing a wave of murmurs through the crowd. It's certainly more than the item is worth, but Cain wants that box.

"Sold for Forty Platinum Bars," Vinnie calls out happily, seeing the house's commission on that sale flash through his mind.

"Normally, we would need to verify your ability to pay, but your sold items total more than the purchase price already." The attendant informs him with a smile, happy to see such a large bid come through her station.

The items from the Darklight Host sold very well today, and Cain sends a funding distribution order through the Guild interface once the last of the things they sent for bidding is sold, paying out the Crafters for their works.

It's a cause for celebration in the Guild Chat, as some of the sellers were recently advanced, and four Gold Bars for even the cheapest item they sold is a load of money. Enough that they could retire in luxury to the castle and just leisurely level at the local dungeons.

"Finally, that nightmare is over. Wearing so many clothes is stifling." The Elf, who Cain finally notices is named Paige, sighs.

"You're not taking us to another place like Sylvan Lake, right?" Misha asks, concerned.

"I'm sorry, I don't know where that is. But if it's one of the nudist colonies, then no, we don't go that far. But it's a tropical rainforest, bikinis and sarongs are more common at home than full robes, but the ocean breeze here is cold."

That's a relief to Misha, but if Paige thinks that Tortuga is cold, it must be boiling wherever they're going and likely humid. Fortunately, she has a lot of light clothing already; since Long Fang Valley is pretty warm.

Without warning, Cain makes up a puppet with three new master-level cooking skills he found here in Tortuga, a burly human woman with her gray hair in a bun that he decides should be named Gerty.

"Here, Neffie meet the new chef. Gerty, this is Neffie and King Aggramor, they'll take you back to the Demon Kingdom Capital for now, and you can cook for whoever wants it. I hope you can all get along."

"Of course, dear. I'll get this little slip of a girl all fed upright so she can grow into a big healthy Demon." The kind Puppet declares with motherly authority, and Neffie smiles, hugging the Puppet to see what her skills are.

Soups, curries and pastries mostly, with various vegetarian dishes and spicier versions of the mostly meat and potatoes meals that the dwarves like so much. A pretty good balance, so she gives Cain her very best pleading look.

"Fine, you win Neffie. Gerty, young Neffie here thinks she needs your culinary guidance, so if you could serve as her personal chef for a while and help out with the various Guild Banquets, I would appreciate it."

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

## Chapter 325

Lickity and Cixelcid both woke up to urgent messages in their notifications this morning, an unusual sight, as everyone in the Guild knows Lickity has her hands full with fast growing twins and trying to tame Neffie. It is a truly urgent matter though, the Green Orcs have taken most of western Landis in only two days time, and the Human Liberation Front has been bringing in higher level recruits from the Eastern and Northern Continents.

That's a clear violation of their treaty, and it's upset a great number of other forces, who don't want their enemies to gain territory on the Central Continent. Unless something is done in a hurry, the whole situation is going to spiral out of control and turn the Central Continent into a warzone more devastated than the scorched ruins that are now called the Great Desert.

The suggestion from Earl RhickJaymz is to have Cain intervene and help out with his high end summons. Currently the Guild Master is away though, either still at the Auction with Neffie and the Demon King, or off doing something with Misha. Lickity has heard that Cain has started carrying around a pet Lamia with him lately, but the rumors are a bit garbled by the time they reach her, so she can't tell if it's one of his Summons or if it's a transfer of the Lamia species.

She doesn't really want to bother him, but she fears that it might be necessary. First, she's going to check with Cid and see if there's anything they can actually do without getting bogged down in a giant mess though.

"Our best bet is to ask him to increase the capabilities of the Guild Skill to whatever his best summons are, and then take out the Capital of Landis and all the surrounding villages until the country collapses. If we wait much longer their reinforcements will arrive, thousands of level 300 and higher transfers, and that would totally change the war effort and drag in the reinforcements' enemies from their home continents."

Reluctantly they do message Guild Master Cain, who is happy to help out in order to bring things back to a somewhat peaceful state so that the Demon King can stop stressing out and leveling up Neffie. He informs them that the auction has ended, and that he's willing to change the Guild Skill for a while and send them a pair of Summons he calls the Echoes to help out. Neither of them know what his Echoes actually are, having not seen them in person, but if Cain says they can help, that's enough for them.

It's evening wherever he is, likely the Eastern Continent, but he sets the Guild Skill to [Blessed Summoner] and instructs them to call Seraphim into the Capital, since their skills can tell friend from foe. He says the battle should have started before they arrive, since he's already told the Echoes where to go, so the pair of leaders gets dressed to assemble the Guild's backbone, their highest level members, to form a raiding squad.

If the Seraphim are anything like what Sora, the Tengu Lieutenant can call, they will each summon an entire army of their own, so Numbers will be especially helpful. Cid, Lickity, Char, Kone, Belle, and a few more that are all over level 150 gather in the courtyard of the Castle to make their plans. But they soon receive a bunch of unexpected Guests.

"We have discussed our options, and we would all like to join with the Darklight Host Guild." Princess Gurda of Landis declares, leading Lancelot and the forty Knights they've managed to gather that are over level 175.

"You wish to join the Guild?" Lickity asks incredulously. That would be a huge shift in the power base, moving them up towards the peak of the continent, but it might also be a shift in internal power, away from Cain and towards the Princess, to whom all the Knights owe fealty.



“For the duration of the war, yes. If we win, you can expect that we will likely splinter off and reform the Royal Guilds for our attempt to rebuild whatever is left of Landis, but for now, a united front, along with the benefits that the Darklight Host brings to the war, are essential to our task.”

Lickity turns to Cid, who Cain named Commander. He’s the highest ranking Guild officer here, and she knows his judgement is sound, so this will have to be his call unless they wake up the Guild Master twice in one night.

“I’ll have a modified contract drawn up that prevents you all from voting out the existing Guild Master, but that’s all I ask. Welcome to the Guild, and I hope that we can have a short and brutal ending to this senseless war.” Cid agrees after a few seconds thought.

With almost fifty of them over level 150 now, Cid is confident that they will be able to at least deal significant damage to the Capital City’s defenders, so after a lecture on the proper Summon to call for this situation, they all set out for the Capital through the travel circle. They’re expecting to be attacked by the guards at the other end the second they arrive, in Landis Royal Guard uniforms and Darklight Host Guild tags, but there are none on duty. Instead, the city is filled with the sound of battle, and the smell of smoke.

A pair of ten meter tall monstrosities are rampaging through the south end of the city, and they’ve brought an army of demons and dragons with them. All these attackers are shrouded in a thick layer of black fog, and Cid realizes that the giants are Cain’s Echoes, so the armies currently destroying the city are their summons. The number is incredible, they’ve called on a number of Legendary Plague Demons, who called Plague Mothers as well as some form of flying insect the size of a horse. The plague mothers called even more Plague Demons to the fray, and now the whole city is awash in them, with the sounds of battle everywhere.

It doesn’t seem that Cain gave them any directions other than take the Capital but they are at least refraining from attacking the rebels who have tied blue armbands over their armor to make themselves recognizable.

Cid’s attack force quickly calls every Legendary Seraphim that they can, who spread out to the areas not clogged with Plague Demons and call for their armies.

For a second the Liberation Front thinks they are saved... Then the Holy Light starts spearing down from the sky.

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

## Chapter 326 314 Headed To Munan

The group headed for the Demon Capital leaves first, with King Aggramor using a skill to transport the three returning to his kingdom, plus his Guards away as soon as they reach the appraisal area, while Paige leads Cain and the rest to the public transport circle.

"You'll love it in Munan. We're a somewhat isolated city-state in the forest, but the trees are amazing, and so are the people. We've even got a few Snake Kin, so Cyrene here won't be the only one with a long body or have to deal with oblivious people almost stepping on her all the time." The happy Elf declares.

"That sounds wonderful. The elves have always been gracious hosts to us." Misha agrees, but Cyrene looks a bit skeptical about the idea of not simply being carried around by Cain as an accessory. In her opinion, this is the premium travel method, plus it keeps him close in case someone tries to steal him away.

With the auction has ended, the streets are pretty crowded, so they make a quick stop along the way to collect a few trinkets and oddities that are unique to Tortuga, as well as a few more of the small cosmetics bags. The price isn't low, but it's not beyond their means, and being able to organize their storage is so much better than the way things were before.

Paige recommends a few new items to them as well, light clothing for the tropical heat and some sunscreens and lotions that the elf insists are far superior to anything else they might find.

Once the crowds going home have started to thin out a little, they make their way through the stone and dark stained wood of Tortuga, winding their way through the shops and houses built along the island cliffs to get to the travel circle.

Munan seems to be everything that Paige had promised. Hot, muggy, and beautiful. The entire city is built in massive trees a hundred or more meters tall, shaped with nature magic to form walkways and bases for their dwellings, while the main streets are mostly suspended vine bridges.

It's not a single level either, starting twenty meters above the ground, where they would be safe from most ground-based attackers. The lowest level is full of shops and hotels catering to travelers of all sorts, with the uppermost levels disappearing into the canopy.

Not absolutely everything is in the trees, though; the blacksmiths and a few other trades are down at ground level, since they're dealing with fire or other activities deemed unsuitable for the elevated city. But all in all, it looks like a tropical rainforest paradise.

"Follow me, and I will show you why we needed a highly-skilled Flesh Crafter. It's a sensitive matter, so please don't ask me to elaborate publicly, but we will be there soon." Paige whispers as she leads them up through the trees.

Seeing the city, Cyrene reconsiders her stance on not traveling independently. There are twisting branches between levels that serve as Lamia and Snake Kin staircases, and twining her body between the ropes and boards of the walkways the way others are doing looks like a lot of fun. Cain made her reasonably small, the same size as his Scourge Casters, so she has no problem getting around like some of the most burly Snake Kin might, though the city looks well designed for varying body sizes.

Her size and coloration seem to have attracted attention, though. Bright white with red runes isn't exactly a typical coloration for the Snake Kin, and some think she might be a form of albino with dyed hair.

The consensus is that she's adorable, and with the black skirt and bikini top combo she picked to combat the heat, she even matches the local fashion. She attracts a lot of attention with her scales in this city, almost all positive, but a few weirdos do manage to make things awkward for a moment before they're chased away.

It's not all a result of her presence though, Paige is incredibly popular, and everyone knows her name. The fact that she's with them makes them popular by default.

The Elf leads them to the top of the city, up in the canopy of the giant trees, and towards what appears to be a palace made entirely of natural wood, formed from a vast amount of magical manipulation of the forest itself.

"Welcome back, Princess Paige. Your Royal Mother is waiting for your good news. I see you've found an Ancient Flesh Crafter. Hopefully, they will be able to do something about the situation." The guard greets them at the arch that serves as the entry gate. Cain doesn't see a door, but with a good swing of his sword, the guard could drop the entry rope bridge, so maybe it's not a necessary accessory.

Paige leads them through the palace, or whatever the elves call this magnificent tree fort of a building complex, towards her mother's rooms. As they get closer to their destination, fewer and fewer staff are found in the halls, giving the impression that whoever lives there has demanded solitude, but Paige continues as if nothing is out of the ordinary.

"Mother? Are you awake?" She calls when they reach an ornate silver set of doors. The bright color compliments the natural light wood of the hallways, and the carvings of animals keep up the feeling of being at one with nature, despite the manufactured nature of the building.

A small human boy answers the door, confusing Cain. The little ginger boy doesn't belong here, nor does he match the description of being anyone's mother, much less

mother to an elven Princess. Perhaps some cruel joker named him mother? Paige has taken the boy into a big hug, though, turning his face from welcoming to intensely annoyed.

"Put me down, you little brat. Just because I look like this doesn't permit you to treat me as a child." The boy complains. He doesn't appear to have a system to Cain; at least nothing comes up when Cain scans him.

"Duke Cain of Skyview, meet Queen Dala of Munan. An unknown enemy cursed her, her system was locked away, and she was forced into this body. We've tried everything, but the curse resets her body to his no matter what illusion we use. Not even killing and resurrecting her broke the curse." Paige explains.

Things must have gotten out of hand if they'd risked killing a Queen who was under the effects of an unknown curse. Though, with the reputation that humans hold in the Elven Kingdoms, it's possible that the Queen can't do her duties in this form.

"Alright, so Regicide is out as an option. Did you have a system interface before Your Majesty? If so, what were your class and level?" Cain asks.

"I was a level 108 Druid. I never prioritized leveling. Instead, I raised a family and focused on ruling the nation." Dala explains, the haughty tone sounding petulant from her new body.

"Alright, that gives me something to work with. Do we have a skill-created image or a good painting of the Queen to work with? That should give me a good base to attempt to recreate her body. Also, have you tried changing her into something other than a Woodland Elf?"

"Not an Elf? That would be unthinkable. No, we haven't tried other appearances to see if the curse breaks." Paige exclaims, worried about what Cain has planned.

"Not a problem; I'll try the basics first and see what happens. If the curse still takes effect, I'll try something more extreme."

Cain starts by transforming the Queen back into her old self, but as soon as he finishes, he can see the curse taking effect, pulling her back towards the human form. The change will take a few minutes, so Cain can easily hold her in her image, but she still doesn't have access to the system.

Druids get a unique skill of [Nature Manipulation] that lets them help plants grow and other essential functions to maintain the forests, so Cain summons a clone of Kone into his Merger and Imprints it onto the Queen. That reactivates her system but sends Cain an error message.

[Skill Already Known]

Queen Dala is now a level 108 Druid again, though, and Cain doesn't need to do anything to keep her system active. That makes him suspect this is several separate curses working together, and that's why they couldn't dispel it before.

"Misha, can you try the Record Keeper's version of ability dispelling, please?" Cain asks, and Misha quickly uses it on the Queen.

It ends all abilities active on the Queen, including Cains, which turns her back into a human boy again, but she's still got her system.

"Good, good, we're halfway there. You should at least be able to use your abilities again. Now, I will try a form that isn't woodland Elf and see if that will stick."

They both nod, and Cain goes for the closest thing that immediately comes to mind. A Dark Elf. The form seems to activate entirely too quickly, snapping into place as soon as he starts the change. Hollow laughter echoes in his mind, not quite the same as the times he suspected that the Laughing God was messing with him, closer to the feeling of being in Muzz.

In front of him is a young Dark Elven girl with bright Silver eyes and curly white hair, elaborately braided and hanging to her waist. She's not more than five years old and not what Cain had in mind.

[Class Invalid: Please Update Skills]

That message confuses Cain, but if it breaks the curse, he's happy to try. So he goes with the [Abundant Companions] Beast Lord exclusive skill since he's got Kone merged with him.

[Class Options Updated: Awaiting Input]

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

## **Chapter 327 Side Story The War For Landis 2**

Vala and Evangeline were playing cards at the house in Long Fang Valley when the updates about the war came in. The Echoes and the strongest members of the Guild had engaged the rebel forces in the Landis capital, causing massive destruction. Cain has also updated the Guild Skill for the day to a Legendary Summon.

That seems to have been more than enough, with reports of armies of Demons and Seraphim rampaging through the city, so they simply deal another hand and wait for things to be decided.

[There's an army coming for the Castle, all over level 200. They're flying a Skyview Flag that I don't know.] Maggie sends out in Guild Chat.

[It's deep brown with a millstone on it if that helps.] Sora adds.

[That's Earl Mills, he's in a trade war with the Boss. They're not friends.] Svetlana confirms after a quick conference with the villagers who have come to talk with her and Damien, the Administrator that Cain kept on to keep things working smoothly.

[We're on our way. Can the Lieutenants use the Guild Skill?] Vala asks.

[Unfortunately we cannot. The Summoned Lieutenants are still part of Cain. But with the two of us here, we should have a fairly decent Summoned army to work with.] Maggie gives them the unfortunate news.

[We are all coming to you now, and I will bring Mythryll.] Nila confirms, waking the Elf beside her and telling her to get dressed and ready.

Within a minute, the ten Companions are all at the Castle, headed for the walls to see the incoming force. They've brought about two thousand transfers including a Necromancer and a Forest Lord that Sora has identified.

On this side of the continent, that sort of force could take most cities within an hour, with minimal casualties.

"Alright. Once they get past the dunes, we will all call out our Bonded Forces. Me and Laura will go for the Summoners and Earl Mills. The rest of you spread out and hold back the army. They're unlikely to be able to deal with an Ancient Demon, much less two and a pair of Ancient Dragons." Vala decides, and everyone takes their positions.

"Don't leave us out. Neffie saw the messages and couldn't resist coming to help." King Aggramor declares, leading a hundred of his Royal Guard out of the Keep, carrying Neffie in his arms. The little Demon is in her natural form until they reach the walls, when she turns into Cain's old human form with a big smile.

"I'm really strong already, and I've got every skill the Guild Master had at level 200, because I can't copy his stupid new Class yet." Neffie declares, her upset tone in Cain's voice making the Companions laugh.

"You've got a deal. King Aggramor if you would be so kind as to hold your troops for base defense and look after Neffie while her summons blanket the enemy army, I believe we're good to go. The enemy forces are gathering at the East Ridgeline."

Thousands of undead, including a pair of Bone Dragons appear from the sand as the enemy army begins to charge, the Forest Lord holding back on his summons for now. Laura raises into the sky, along with all her Drakes, which have been upgraded to Epic Quality now that she is an Ancient Dragon and has broken through the limitations originally placed by Cain's abilities.

Neffie calls out Cain's favorite grouping of Summons, lots of clones of Kone, along with Oath Breakers, Lamia, Wrath Bringers and a pair of Seraphim. She might not have the gear that Cain does, but the Summoned army is still terrifying in strength after the Seraphim call the Heavenly Host.

Now the Forest Lord has acted, calling out hundreds of Dryads and Treants to assist the undead in dealing with the surface attackers as well as a group of Gryphons to attack the Drakes.

Neffie insists that she be brought into a guard tower so she can see the battle, and Vala teleports into the action, going first for Earl Mills to eliminate the chance of a follow up attack. The blades of the two Ancient Quality Demons have split him in three pieces before he can even scream, and Vala is already charging into the command section of the invading army venue they stop rolling, her sword killing everything it touches and spreading the Pestilence Debuff all over.

Even from here she can hear the cheerful tune of the battle hymn that Nemu is playing to boost attack power for their army and see the lightning flashing from Nila into the front row of undead.

The attackers have prepared for this though, and they've brought a secret weapon, a level 405 transfer from a class known as a Null. Near him, abilities can't be used and spell effects fizzle out.

Aggramor can see his frustration as Vala doesn't disappear when he gets close to her, her resistance preventing him from dispelling her. Instead of staying to fight, the Null runs away and heads for the front lines, his presence causing the defending summons to vanish in a huge radius.

"The Null isn't a combat class. Get as close as you can with travel magic and eliminate him." Aggramor orders his Royal Guard, who flash into the middle of the battle and start slaughtering undead.

Again the Null runs, and Neffie sends her Summons back in from the other side. But this time he's made a fatal mistake, he forgot to look up, and Laura is racing down at him, merging with herself to increase her damage and resistances.

The Drakes vanish as they get closer, but Laura is safe, and her jaws clamp around the Null, shredding flesh as she races back up into the sky. That removes him from the effective range of the battle, which is beginning to tilt in the favor of the defenders.



With their primary target gone, Aggramor's Elite forces have turned their attention to the Necromancer, who is fighting for his life, and Vala is pressuring the Forest Lord.

Now that they're not being dispelled, the forces of the Heavenly Host are pushing hard into the attackers, their unified battle cry ringing across the desert sands.

"No Retreat. No Surrender. Repent!"

The Forest Lord is the first to fall, Vala's speed is too much for him to handle, and her blade takes his head from his body. Not long after, the Royal Guard eliminated the Necromancer and the attackers broke, trying to flee.

That wasn't going to happen though. The Heavenly Host was as good as their word. No Retreat. No Surrender.

Laura forgot that she was still holding someone for a good reason, opening her mouth in a cheer that let her captive fall Thousands of meters to the ground. For a moment it looked like he was going to land on his feet, but at the last second Vala planted a spear butt down in the sand under him, skewering the falling transfer in a final gory blow to end the battle.

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

## **Chapter 328 315 The Queen Is NOT Impressed**

"Check your interface and let me know what you find for new class options." Cain informs the Queen, who still has her eyes closed, unwilling to look at herself and confirm yet another failure.

"Alright, I selected Beast Master. Was my class being a Druid part of what was activating the Curse?" She asks, still holding her eyes shut.

"Yes, but that's only part of the issue. Dark Elves can't be Druids, you see..." Cain says softly, and Paige finally lets out the breath she was holding.

"Holy Crap, you turned her into a Dark Elf. She's not changing back; does that mean the curse is broken? Can she be herself again?" Paige asks, grabbing Cain's shirt and shaking him like she expects the violent jostling to force better answers out.

"I think the curse of becoming a human is broken now. She's not turning into a human anyhow. But as for being herself, that is yet to be determined." Cain explains.

"What do you mean?" Queen Dala asks suspiciously.

"Well, you see, the transformation may have attracted the attention of the Spider Goddess halfway through. She picked that form for you, and I'm not certain she will allow you to change back to a regular Woodland Elf. I might be good at my craft, but I'm not a God."

At her look, Cain immediately attempts to change her into her old form again. It succeeded, but the moment he finished, a dark mist surrounded her and changed her back into the Dark Elven Child.

"At least you're an Elf, and no longer a boy?" Cain asks hopefully as Paige stares at her mother in shock.

"This is worse than before. Not only am I a Dark Elf, but I'm also even younger than after the effects of the first curse." Dala points out.

"How about we try a new form? Something subtle, not your original body, but one that might be less difficult to explain?" Cain suggests and gets only a 'Get to it' wave in response.

Cain contemplates what he can do that won't upset the Spider Goddess. Some of the Elves are very tanned, and her current form is a lighter shade of gray-skinned; maybe a tweak of her tone might stick? After that, he'll try to do something about the shocking white hair color and her age.

The modification of the skin tone proves tricky, she won't seem to change into any sort of woodland elf tone, but he has a bit better luck with a Bronze tone that he found under the options for High Elves. That version seems better and could pass as a very tanned woodland Elf.

The hair appears non-negotiable, though. Nothing he does will change it to a color other than white for more than a few seconds.

Giving up on that, he goes back to the bronze tones, thinking that other draconic techniques might work. The blue turns to the gray-blue tone that is very reminiscent of a suntanned Wave Rider, and Paige smirks at her mother, who shakes her head. Gold works, and a light gold almost looks like a regular elf, but seconds later, it too reverts, and the mocking laughter in Cain's mind is back.

"What forms of Elf might be acceptable? I'm pretty sure the Spider Queen wants to keep you as her own." Cain asks.

"If we have no other options, then a Wave Rider will work. They're still elves and viewed as Separate from the Dark Kin by our people; we'll just have to explain that it's a side effect of the Curse that couldn't be removed afterward. But can't you make me at least look regal? It was hard enough to get people to take me seriously before."

Cain tries and has better luck once he stays with a Wave Rider appearance. He gives her what he hopes the elves view as a Regal and beautiful look, then gets a good idea and goes through his options to try giving her old face back, but with the new hair and skin tones.

It looks fantastic on her, and Cain settles the form in and waits for an opinion.

"It's the Queen again. Different, but it still looks like her. That's not bad." Paige congratulates him.

"Like this, I can finally get back to the essential tasks of managing the Nation until we can find a way to turn my appearance back to that of a proper and respectable Elf and not a floating exile." The Queen begrudgingly agrees.

If Nila were here, she would take a significant exception to that, but for now, it's the best Cain is going to manage to do. Queen Dala is looking at her face in the mirror, and Cain can see she's getting upset at being a Wave Rider and not a Woodland Elf.

Then, suddenly her appearance snaps back to that of the small Dark Elven child that she first changed into.

"I see now; the curse is tied to your emotions and not yet fully broken. Whoever cast the curse must have thought you were behaving like a human child, so that's the form it changed you to. You would have reverted to the human boy again just now, but the Spider Queen won't let you stop being one of her children."

Cain wonders what he can do at this point. He's already used the skill assignment, but he could try changing it and hope that her class holds stable. That might make things worse, though, and leave her without a system interface again.

Her temper is getting worse in a hurry, and Cain suspects this trip might turn ugly if he can't find a cure. Fortunately, Misha comes to the rescue before Cain can find a decent idea.

She uses the Record Keeper's dispel again and returns to the Queen to her adult size. A dark haze surrounds Queen Dala as she continues to rage at her situation, and Misha casts the spell again, then a third time, before a ringing sound of metal shattering fills the air.

A ring falls from the Queen's finger, where no ring was visible before, and her appearance settles back to the Adult Wave Rider Cain made her into.

"A hidden cursed item? Who could have even placed that on you, and when?" Paige wonders while Cain bends to pick up the pieces in a gloved hand. There are no markings on the silver band and no indication of what it once did, other than the fact she's no longer changing into a child. It could have been the source of the entire curse, or it could have been just a part.

"Great, now I'm free of one cursed item, but I've gained a cursed appearance," Dala mutters, then squeaks in pain as if she had been electrocuted.

"What in the world was that? Did the Spider Bit... Aaah, dammit, that hurt." she screams.

"Looks like now that you've gotten her attention, insulting the Dark Goddess isn't the greatest idea ever. Mind if I try changing your appearance again, though?" Cain says in a flat tone to hide his amusement.

"Whatever you want. At this point, how much worse could it get?" She whines like a little kid, and Cain is reminded of Neffie when she doesn't get her way.

Cain tries again to change her into a Woodland Elf and gets her very close to her old appearance. He checks her system to see if it worked and finds that the answer is both yes and no.

[Name] Dala

[Class] Beast Lord

[Level]108

[Race] Blessed Elf

"I'd say it's a success. You're a Woodland Elf, but you're not a Dark Elf and surely a Blessed Elf will not upset too many people."

"Read the description, though. Her form will alter according to her behavior. She's still cursed, I think. A whole new cursed species that can't misbehave or throw tantrums without their body changing to match their actions." Misha points out.

"It might make for a perfect Queen, though. If you're forced to do things that are in the best interest of the Forest and make mature decisions in order to keep your form stable, that can't be a bad thing for our people. You were a bit famous for your tantrums before." Paige points out, and her mother glares at her before schooling her face back to neutral in fear of changing herself back into a child.

"It's more than I'd hoped for. At least I can be myself, as long as I remain the image of the proper and gracious Queen anyhow. Thank you, Duke Cain; we will remember your

actions every day of our very, very long life." Dala says with a smile, and her hair flashes to white for a second, making Paige smirk.

The changes in her appearance are like a mood ring; you can tell exactly how she feels about things that affect her intensely by the way that her form alters.

"I'll leave you to recover, Your Highness. Princess Paige, if you could have someone show us where we might find a room for the evening, I would appreciate it." Cain makes his excuses to leave with a polite bow.

"I'll escort you to a room in the Royal Home. Tomorrow I can show you around and to the Demon Dungeon. That is the primary reason you agreed to come along if I am not mistaken." The blonde-haired Princess smirks, doing her best not to gloat at her mother's situation.

She had been immensely enjoying the childish form of her petulant Queen Mother. The fact she can still turn her mother back into a child at any time, just by getting her to throw one of her famous tantrums, is not lost on the Princess.

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

## Chapter 329 316

The room they're brought to is not for those who are afraid of heights; the floor is made of thick glass, looking down over the city below them, with the option to roll a carpet across it for privacy, while the walls are made of natural, living branches, open all around and surrounded by leaves. The ventilation is the best part about the building, as the heat is as bad as in the Great Desert where the Guild Castle is placed, but it's also insanely muggy here.

Cain has long since changed to shorts and a light linen tunic, and he's even forced Cyrene to travel beside him instead of around him to cut down on the heat. The room doesn't have a bed. Instead, it has a collection of hammocks strung around near the openings that Cain can't decide whether to call windows or patio doors.

The disappointment of the ladies that everyone will be sleeping alone in their hammocks is plain to both Cain and Princess Paige, but they've both chosen to ignore it for now. The Princess assures them that someone will be by with water and an evening snack soon, then returns to the royal quarters to bother her mother for a while.

After a few minutes, they realize that the walls aren't open; there's an enchantment on them that keeps bugs and birds from flying into the room. The sun goes down not long after they get to the room, which confuses them all until they realize that it's the time difference between continents, and they're suffering from the magical world equivalent of Jetlag.

They're planning to farm the dungeons hard tomorrow while they're here, so they all turn in not long after the food arrives, enjoying the evening breeze as the sky turns to full dark.

They wake up with the sun shining through the trees as the temperature starts to climb the following day. It's not a bad way to wake up, and Cain gently swings himself in the hammock for a little while before deciding to get mobile and productive.

"We need a house here too. It's amazing, especially first thing in the morning." Misha declares, coming in from the shower. Like the rest of the room, the theme is natural, the shower itself is just a water enchantment on an overhead leaf, and the water disappears into a hole in the branch that makes up the floor.

When he gets out of the shower, Cain finds that they have not just one but two visitors. Princess Paige, plus a Puppet Master called Mary. Cain tries recording her and finds that now, the Puppet Master records as a form, but it doesn't seem to be a valid summon under any of his options.

"That's strange; I should be able to record and summon pretty much anything," Mary complains, and both Misha and Cain snort in amusement at the shocked look on their face.

"You can't summon Puppet Masters. I've tried before. Just be glad that I've advanced already and that you didn't trigger the quest the moment we met." Cain tries to explain their amusement.

"There's a Puppet Master Quest when they meet each other? Like for exchanging forms? That would be amazing." The elf gushes, excitement plain on her face.

"The only problem is that you have to kill the other one to get their recorded forms and have their Lieutenant and Commander summons numbers added to your own. If you hear of another Puppet Master, be careful about that. They're unlikely to be friendly when there's that much power at stake." Cain tells her in his best lecturer's tone.

"Noted. Did you know the trick with summoning things that summon? It's ridiculously overpowered." Mary asks.

"I did. If you do both skill trees, you'll also get hidden bonus skills as you finish ranks and an extra special one at the end. So unless a new class is good, you should

consider sticking with Puppet Master for 200 levels. Also, if you find a skill that clones your summons, it's incredibly broken and should be obtained at all costs."

That bit of information seems to have broken her brain. She's trying to figure out how many summons she could have active with everything duplicated. "I'm already a General Tree Puppet Master; twice as many summons would be insane."

"You have no idea. It would help if you came with us to the Dungeon today, and Cain will show you what broken means. We didn't bring the Companions with us on this trip, so we're down a couple of hundred summons, but it's still a lot." Misha adds.

"Companions? Is that a special class of summons?"

"Oh yeah, you don't get those in the General Tree. You get one from the Lord Tree, but I got an Ancient Quality Skill Book that gave me companions from the major species categories. The Lord Tree gives them all summons of their own, which gets a bit crazy at times. I've managed to activate a Demon, Dragon, Beastkin, Seraphim, and a Dark Elf." Cain explains.

"Okay, that's just too cool. I've got to come along with you on a dungeon run. Even if you left all the Companions behind, I want to see what a Puppet Master's full force looks like when they're level capped. Plus, a few extra forms wouldn't be a bad thing. If you don't mind, that is."

"Of course not; another body along for the run is no trouble. Is the Princess coming with us as well?"

"Please. I've been banished from the Royal Quarters for the day. Mother caught on to the fact that I was teasing her to make her get mad and turn into a child." Paige laughs.

"You remember that she's the Queen, right? Even if she's having troubles, she still possesses the authority to banish you from the Royal Family if you make her mad enough." Mary teases her friend.

"Fine, I'll behave, but I won't be happy about it. You should see her when she's mad now; she is so cute. I told her for ages that she should have made me a little sister, but she kept saying it's not going to happen."

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

## Chapter 330 317



The entrance to the Demon dungeon here in Munan is down on the ground level, between two massive trees, surrounded by guards. They bow politely when they see the Princess and her group coming, opening the gates to let them through without any hassles or questions.

"We keep it under guard because for some reason, the Demon Dungeons all over the world open in more than one location. They're not all interconnected, but they've often got five or six different exits." Paige explains.

"We thought that was a unique feature of the ones in the Northern Region of the Central Continent. It's interesting that it happened here too, I wonder if it's a result of the way Demon Magic interacted with the Dungeon spell, or a previous attempt to escape the time loop?"

"Nobody really knows, except maybe the Demon King, but he's not likely to tell anyone. But this one is level 270 near the entrance, which is a good bit higher than I am, so my Summons will struggle a bit. I hear from the rumors that yours are stronger though, so we should be fine." Mary shrugs.

"You'll see once we get inside, just try not to freak out. I'll call out the everything and we can test how fast we can level up inside a massive dungeon that won't be easily cleared."

They step inside the Dungeon and find themselves inside a Forest, standing next to a black stone pyramid with steps up the two visible sides. It doesn't come to a peak, instead there's a temple built at the top, and roads run off into the jungle from the base of the stairs.

Scattered through the trees is a lively looking society, houses, businesses and everything, only the demons aren't living normal lives, they're just wandering around or standing in groups, driven insane by the Dungeon spell.

The Wrath Demons closest to the entrance notice they have visitors and charge just as Cain starts calling his summons. Lamia Scourge Casters and Wrath Bringers to start, that quickly engage the first group. Their strength impresses Paige, but Mary is more interested in Cyrene.

"When you said you had a Demonic summoned Companion, did you mean Cyrene? She looks so real though."

"Cyrene isn't a summon. I made her into a Lamia to break a curse of blindness from the Oracle class. My Demonic Companion is named Vala, a Legendary Wrath Demon. As you learn more Summoning forms, your Companions will rank up in quality, though once you get further along into the Lord tree you'll be able to make them all Epic, no matter how few forms you know for their category."

With the first group taken care of, Cain calls all the copies of Kone, then they call all their summons, filling the area around the Pyramid Temple with Summons.

"Alright, everyone fan out. Travel in pairs of Supporters for additional strength. Go, have fun and I'll see you later." Cain instructs, sending hundreds of Dragons and Drakes flying off into the jungle.

"That's crazy. Let's see, new forms, oh there she is. A Beast Lord named Kone." Mary calls her and gets Kone plus one copy of Su, but no additional Drakes.

"Did I do something wrong? You get so many?"

"It's my skills. Cloning for the second Companion, then Appointed Companion that made Kone herself my companion and let them summon all those extra Drakes. She will still have a lot of Epic Quality Turtles, even without all the extra buffs that I get."

Mary instructs her Supporters to call the same Snapping Turtle Kin tanks and smiles at the assembled force before sending them all out in one group to start clearing the forests around the main encampment at this entrance to the Demon Dungeon. That leaves the comparatively few summons that Cain and Mary have from their base skills waiting around, but Cain still has to summon his top two tiers of defenders.

"The Lord tree gives you a pair of summons that start as a base Epic Summon." Cain explains, calling for the Oath Breakers to join the assembled forces.

"And then, having every single Puppet Master Skill lets you call on a single Legendary Summon. Carnage, why don't you come out and play?" Cain calls Carnage, then transforms himself into a Demon Progenitor to triple all the demons he has called.

He can hear the Echoes laughing in his mind, they're still in Niman Territory, harassing villages and small towns, and suddenly the number of demons in their ongoing contest tripled. The town they're attacking is utterly terrified, and they're about to crush it into gooey rock dust. Just a little added bonus to Cain for actually doing a dungeon for once.

"The Form that triples all the Demonic Summons numbers is an Exclusive Skill from a random roll. As you can see, it's a lot of fun. Demons let's go play with your crazy Kinfolk."

The Demons rush out into the village, the gigantic axes of the Demons known as Carnage sweeping wide paths through the defenders, killing weaker packs of Demons in a single strike.

"To the North, you will find something big. There's a Legendary Demon there on par with Carnage, but a different kind of Demon." Cyrene declares, pointing in the desired direction.

"You heard the lady, clean up here and we're going boss hunting." Paige cheers, too far away to help with the battle in any meaningful way, but enjoying the show.

,m There is a minor problem though, Cain doesn't have any healers summoned and handy, so he has to call back one pair of Kone Clones to take over the duty that Vala's area heals usually do. That's bound to slow down their clear rate a little bit, but the Drakes and Turtles can fight just as well where he is as they could in the woods.

"I didn't really get to see what was going on last time. But this is crazy." Cyrene breathes, watching the lopsided massacre as Carnage and the newly arrived Drakes rampage through the demon village.

"How large is your Experience bonus area of effect? The amount of incoming experience is crazy." Mary asks, and Cain actually checks the description for the first time in a long time.

"With the bonus to the skill for being a Lord Commander, it's 50 meters per level, so over ten Kilometers now. None of the summons are that far out yet, and I'll instruct them to try to keep in range, since we've got such a great modifier going today."

"You could shift forms and call out the Heavenly Host, Legendary Summons that Summon is just broken, especially when tripled." Misha suggests.

"But they'd be tripping all over each other in the forest, most of what they summon are ground troops, and that works much better on an open field." Cain points out with a smile for the memory of the last time he saw that in action.

"Have I ever mentioned that I'm glad you're on my side?" Cyrene teases them, climbing up Cain to get a better view just as they hear a roar from the far east side of the Village. That must be the Boss Monster that Cyrene predicted.

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

## Chapter 331 318

This area of the Demon Dungeon has more than one Boss level Demon in it, and the six-armed Obsession Demon is less than impressed to see six copies of Carnage smashing their way through the village. Carnage, on the other hand, is delighted to see him and rushes over to give the Obsession Demon a big hug. To the face. With an ax.

The claws of the Obsession Demon meet with the Steel of the gigantic weapon, and the ground itself begins to shake. They weren't using that ability earlier, but now that they're found a worthy opponent, they're pulling out all the stops. Six on one can hardly be called a fair fight, though, even if the other demon does have one arm per ax that's coming at it.

Two get successfully dodged, but the other four dig deep into the demon, with a horrific shriek as the metal meets whatever passes for bones inside that creature. Smoke fills the air as flesh burns, then Carnage moves in for the kill, pulling the axes free and coming in for another hit.

The Obsession Demon is struck from six directions at once, chunks of flesh and dismembered limbs flying into the undergrowth of the forest while the Wrath Demons cheer and go looking for more enemies.

"That was crazier than I thought it was going to be. I've never seen anything like that in my life." Paige says, pointing at the dead Boss Demon.

"Legendary Demons are no joke, and these are upgraded to Ancient Quality."

They've almost cleared the village now, so Cain orders everyone to start moving North to look for the next Boss level Demon. They're perfect targets to experiment on while getting to get stronger. In the past, meeting new high level Demons has often triggered quests for him. The Quest system has yet to let him down; whatever God governs the random loot rolls is a good friend of his.

That reminds Cain; the Echoes mentioned giving everyone Carnage's Axe a while back. Cain activates the Flesh Crafter Class skill [Ancient Wisdom] and grants the ability that creates the weapon to the entire group. Again, this makes the Echoes laugh and cheer, and now Cain can see what they meant about making people fly.

The Scourge Casters are attacking the ground near their targets, causing an earthquake, which puts the enemy off balance, then the successive hits cause an effect like a double bounce on a trampoline, throwing them up into the air, where they're chopped to pieces.

It's honestly hilarious, but he's got the feeling that not everyone appreciates his sense of humor. Mary has gone very quiet. A glance shows she's not freaked out, though, she's got the skill active, and she's examining the ax in her hands.

"What sort of skill is this?"

"It's an Ancient Flesh Crafter Class skill. It grants one spell or skill from myself or my summons to the whole group. That's the ax that Carnage uses." Cain explains.

"Well, I don't know how to use it, but it looks like the Snapping Turtles do." Mary points at where the beastkin summons are fighting, using the ax one-handed while holding a shield.

The extra damage is pure overkill, and the summons are rushing around the jungle, hunting down demons to kill. The sight of forest dragons with gigantic axes in their front claws is fantastic. It almost feels like an exploit of reality, but really, it's no worse than if he had given everything dragon breath.

That's a good idea now that they're hunting in the jungle, so Cain switches the skills, and the ax disappears from Mary's hands.

"Change of skills, the summons are in the jungle now, and they need area attacks to be more efficient," he explains to the confused Puppet Master.

"You know, I'm used to being overpowered, but this is way better than doing things myself. Plus, with all these summoned helpers to increase the experience modifier, we're just racing through the levels."

She's not wrong; Cain has gotten almost five levels since they entered, and they haven't even been here an hour. Having two Summoners in one group is a great benefit to the experience adding skill, because the area effect skill compounds with the below dungeon level base experience bonus to become insanely efficient.

All the group does for the next hour is walk north along the road from the Pyramid temple until they reach the next Village. There were a lot of groups of demons in the jungle, but nothing compares to the direct benefits of an open area village clearing expedition.

This village is a bit hard to see, with the Dragon Breath coming from every direction, but it's still caused another level-up notice to appear, and that's what matters. Beyond this village is all open fields, and Cain can see the peaks of at least three more Pyramids in the distance. Being out of the jungle, he decides the Legendary Demons are no longer the best call for the situation, and changes from Demon Progenitor to Seraphim, replacing Carnage with Seraphim and the Smaller Demons with Acolytes, Crusaders, and Inquisitors, keeping up the damage and tanking specialties.

That's not enough to shock Paige or Mary, but seeing the Seraphim call forth the Heavenly Hosts certainly is. Thousands and thousands of white-robed summons fill the village and the fields, dragon breath flowing from human mouths even as they charge with their golden spears into the ranks of the assembled Demons.

"This is going to be long and messy; we should have lunch," Misha suggests, pulling out a picnic basket she made from the meals provided by the palace this morning.

"Picnic in a dungeon? I like the way you think." Cyrene agrees, wrapping around her and laying out a blanket.

The other three temples and the villages that likely exist at their base are well within the range of Cain's experience bonus, so there's not much need to go charging after the summons; sitting here will get the job done just fine.

Plus, the Seraphim are enjoying themselves here in a world full of insane demons for them to purge.

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

## **Chapter 332 319 The Intriguing Soul Gem**

Everything within ten kilometers of the spot they chose to sit is cleared by the time that night falls, and Cain has gained an even twenty levels today. It's been an incredible level of advancement by any standard, and Cain is looking forward to doing it again tomorrow, getting him from level 240, which he just reached, to hopefully level 255 before he moves on to the beastkin dungeon.

Hopefully there are a load of new classes and combinations in there for him to record, so he can get Nemu up to Legendary quality. That might be a bit too much to hope for, since he's told that it's a standard dungeon, an underground labyrinth best known for its mining potential. The rarity of materials is relatively low for their level, but the quantity is high.

That's perfect for Cain, with his puppets he can mine it out and load up the Guild bank once he's back in range. None of their crafters are even close to level 300, so it's all going to be good stuff to them.

But first, Cain is going to use up the skill points that he gained yesterday. He bought that Soul Gem specifically for the day that he could test out his [Living Art] ability. It transfers a Soul into a Puppet body and places the physical body in a Stasis Gem, or alternatively pulls a Soul from a Soul Gem into a Puppet body.

It's not quite resurrection, but in some cases, it might be conditionally better. The condition being that the one brought back to life isn't upset about becoming Cain's Puppet.

First, Cain goes through his secondary skill tree, looking at the second rank, where he has the option to add points into life skills. Mostly, the puppets clean or mine out dungeons, except the custom puppets who already have high level skills, so Cain looks

over his options, finding that Cleaning and Household Maintenance are separate skills. He's got twenty points though, so he puts five into each. That brought them from Apprentice 1 to Apprentice 6 Cooking and Household Maintenance. Then he puts 10 points into Mining, bringing it to Journeyman 1.

That should keep everyone happy. It still didn't unlock the next rank of skills though, which is unfortunate, but they'll be doing more dungeons in the next few days, so there's a good chance he can add more useful skills to the puppets along the way.

At only 10 points to give them all a Journeyman level of a trade skill, he could use them to open a variety of construction facilities as well. Journeyman carpenters and smiths to make basic furniture and tools, while the Guild's skilled artisans make the good stuff.

Cain decides to put that proposal to the Guild members at a later date, since he himself has no intention of actually running the shops that would be needed. But if they want to take him up on the offer, he would certainly be willing to spare them some staff.

Before leaving the secondary skills menu, Cain looks through the options, which are much more extensive than the first rank, which was only attack power and defense. There's every basic trade skill listed here, so if Cain does want to specialize in a life skill later, he only needs to add points to his puppets and they can quickly become very competent at it.

Of course, he could just duplicate the skill of an already trained Professional, but that's beside the point, and limited to making a new puppet.

With the life skills taken care of, Cain moves on to activating [Living Art]. It only takes a second's thought, and the moment he activates it he gets a notification.

[Contained Soul Available: Create Body?] Y/N

Cain has no idea what sort of Soul is trapped in the Soul Gem, so he's not sure what to build for a body, but he can always alter the shape of his puppets afterwards.

[Creation Selected. Use Default for Soul?]Y/N

[Default Form Selected]

Cain watches happily as the puppet begins to take form. Fair skin, Long Brown Hair, long brown ears and a cute little round tail. The trapped Soul is a Bunny kin. The puppet slowly looked round once it was formed and then realized it was in fact standing nude in front of a strange man and made a run for the tree line.

"Stop." Cain commands and the bunny comes sliding to a halt halfway across the clearing.



"Equip this." He directs the bunny, handing them a buttercup yellow sundress from the chest full of clothing he is holding in his inventory.

The bunny looks a little more relaxed now, but still confused and lost. Understandable really, they've essentially been resurrected into a strange place, by someone they don't know, who can force them to do whatever they say.

"Who might you be and how did you end up in the Soul Gem that I extracted you from, little bunny?" Cain asks and he can see the Puppet struggle not to answer for a fraction of a second before succumbing to the restrictions placed on puppets.

"My name is Daisy, Most beloved of the Consorts to the King of Lucca. Or at least I was, since it seems I'm your property now. It is tradition that when a Consort's King dies that the necromancers trap their soul in a Gem to rest beside him for all time. If you're a grave robber, you've made a grave mistake in taking my Soul Gem." The bunny informs him.

"The King of Lucca? Lucca fell a thousand years before the Great War. You've been in that gem a long time, Miss Daisy. Long enough that it was most likely an archaeologist that removed you from the grave where you were buried." Princess Paige explains and the bunny looks stunned.

"But the Might of Lucca is eternal? What could have even toppled the Kingdom?" Daisy asks her suspiciously.

"Of all things, it was a slave revolt. If you would like we can ask the Elders here in Munan for the answer, some of them are over 1200 years old and would have been children at the time." Paige suggests, and Daisy collapses down in the grass.

Cain can see Cyrene making her way over to comfort the shocked girl, but stops her with a warning.

"Cyrene, hugging the bunny is probably not going to relax them. At least not one of your full body hugs. The great of being constricted is instinctive to them." Cain explains and the bunny looks alarmed at the mention of being wrapped up by the Lamia.

"Oops, sorry. I'll remember that for later. But for now, what do we even do? It's not like we can send her home, and she's a Puppet."

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

## Chapter 333 320

"You keep saying Puppet, but what does that mean? Does it have to do with I can't disobey you?" Daisy asks.

"Indeed it does. You've missed out on a lot while you were in the Gem. The humans cast a worldwide spell to call champions to their side during the Great War between the species.

The Laughing God decided that was a bit unsporting, so he altered the spell to apply to most races. Then it spread among the new generation, giving them the power of Legendary Heroes, which we now call classes. Specific abilities can let them use magic or make them significantly stronger and better in combat."

Misha smiles at her confusion and decides that it's OK if she hugs the bunny. "It's a lot to take in, but I was once living in another world until I was summoned here and given the class of Cleric. It let me use Healing Magic, which didn't exist in my old world, and as I used my new skills, I got stronger, just like the Heroes of Legends. A third of the world is like me now, with a class. Most were born here, but a few summons still show up every year, bringing new ideas to the world and changing it even more."

"Will I be like that? Able to use magical spells?" Daisy asks.

"I'm not sure if you can get a class since the body you're in is one of my Puppets, but I can surely give you a few skills and spells. What did you dream of doing in your previous life but never got a chance to? Or what would you like to do in this one since you've got a fresh start." Cain asks.

"What are my duties in this life? Am I a bed Consort again? I don't get what a Puppet is."

"It just means that I made your body with Magic, and I can control it. Other than orders that I give you, you're free to do anything but harm my allies." Cain explains.

"So, now I need to decide what to do with a mostly free life? That's a lot to ask of a Bunny." Daisy sighs.

"If you prefer, I can give you direct orders?" Daisy nods at Cain's suggestion.

"Daisy, if you could do anything, what would you do with your spare time?" Cain asks, using [Noble Command] even though it's unnecessary on a Puppet.

"I would sew pretty dresses all day long," Daisy answers automatically, covering her mouth and glaring at Cain.

"See how easy that was? It's not even a problem to achieve. I can give you the Tailoring skills of a Master Tailor and a room next to the other crafters to practice your trade."

"Will there be a quota? Who will I be serving? I'll get an actual indoor room, even as a commoner?" Daisy's confusion isn't fading, so Cain turns to Paige for answers.

"All Luccans, even Royalty, were considered property of the King, but didn't get the title of slaves, they were just commoners and potential heirs. The word Consort was reserved for those who gained enough favor to work directly for the King.

So, Daisy here was a Consort chosen to have children with the King. They were a nomadic culture on the frozen plains of the Northern Continent, so very few actual buildings existed, and most slept in large communal tents for warmth."

"Alright, I understand now. Yes, you'll get a room, because we have multiple houses and don't live as nomads. Instead, our cultures have established farms. There won't be a daily quota, only special requests for a specific item. For now, you can help Misha and Cyrene here make clothing for whatever functions they need. Misha also has strong Tailoring skills."

"Mistress Misha, Mistress Cyrene, it will be my honor to serve you." The bunny declares, bowing with her head to the ground. She doesn't even come back up when Misha keeps petting her ears.

"No need to be that formal; we're not Royalty. Cain is a Duke, the highest rank of non-Royal Nobility, and we are what you might call his Consorts, but as free women." Misha explains.

"Expect to have people pet your ears. Bunnies are extremely soft, and most species find it a relaxing activity." Mary laughs, seeing the bliss on Misha's face.

"So some things never change, do they? That's fine." Daisy giggles.

"We should leave the Dungeon and head home, though. It's getting dark, and Daisy has a lot to learn." Cain suggests, and everyone packs up their snacks while the bunny looks lost.

"Don't worry; we'll feed you once we're back in the Royal Residence. We're currently visiting with Princess Paige's family." Cyrene whispers, indicating which Elf she means, and Daisy smiles and nods but doesn't say anything.

If they attracted a lot of attention yesterday, it's easily doubled today. Lamia and Snake Kin have an instinctive love of bunnies just as strong as the Bunny's fear of being wrapped up.

Just a tiny bit of their animal nature that transferred through centuries of evolution, but it has led to very awkward relations between the two species for as long as anyone can remember. They're unwilling to approach and strike up a conversation today, though, not with a protective Cyrene plus Princess Paige here.

Fortunately, Daisy is good with heights, not having a problem with the rope bridges or the thick glass floor of the room. She looks extra confused by the sleeping arrangements, though. Hammocks weren't a thing where she came from, and the thought of everyone sleeping in the same style and size of bed broke every bit of common sense that she brought from her past life.

"It's too hot for a regular bed or anything else. These hammocks are perfect, and increasing the size doesn't increase the comfort." Cain explains with a smile for her confusion.

"Now, let's sleep. I am looking forward to doing that again tomorrow." Cyrene cheers, happily going through her available skill options, zoned out in the middle of the floor.

Daisy looks like she desperately wants to help the Lamia to bed, seeing how she's spaced out but has no idea how she might move the serpentine Warseer.

"You get used to it. She used to be blind, so she got used to just spacing out wherever she was when an interesting thought occurred to her." Misha whispers, picking up the diminutive bunny and placing her in a hammock.

"One more question. What's an inventory? It asks if I want to put my clothes in inventory as soon as I enter the hammock." It seems like they've got more than a few things to cover tonight; sleep will have to wait.

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

## Chapter 334 321

It takes a few hours to cover everything that will be necessary knowledge for Daisy, but she quickly understands about the nature of the system and her limited ability to interact with it.

Her inventory is a whole four slots, so she can't actually carry much, but it's better than nothing. At least she can equip and unequip her clothing, which resets it to perfectly clean. That alone is a wonder to Daisy, and she has declared it the world's most useful function.

Cain also granted her Misha's Tailoring skill, to see if it would activate a system in a Puppet with a soul, but no such luck. He will have to try again, using a soul that already had a system interface to see what happens.

She can accept the skill though, unlike the premade puppets, and Cain considers what else she might need to know. He can add two more Skills to her Puppet body for now, so he could round it out with enchanting and something else. Or maybe he could grant her a useful spell? That seems like a good idea.

With Misha's input, they decide on adding the Dark Enchantress ability [Random Enchantment] which should add low level bonuses to items that she makes, as well as the Forest Keeper Aura [Natural Growth] that Cain learned from a transfer he recorded on the way in. It doesn't only work on people, it also heals damaged plants around the caster.

Daisy was overjoyed at these new skills, not only because they let her live her dream life making high quality and pretty clothes, but also because she could now be helpful if anyone was injured.

It's not a large amount of healing, though they could increase it by giving Daisy equipment with healing bonuses on it, but it's enough that any scrapes or cuts she might get will heal in seconds, a great benefit to any craftsperson.

The fact that the wilted flowers arranged in a vase near her hammock perked back up when she approached into range of her aura sent Daisy into a fit of joyful laughter. "Look, just being around me makes the flowers prettier now. I think I like this system that your world has."

"It's your world now too. But get some sleep, or do you not need it as a Puppet? I'm not sure how that works for a Puppet with a soul."

"I'm not sure. I know I'm not sleepy yet, but I just got to this world. I could stay up all night and see when I get tired?" Daisy suggests and Cain nods his agreement.

"We'll leave you here with a bit of work to do tomorrow morning while we go to the dungeon then. Don't wander too far, since I don't know what areas of the castle are off limits to visitors, and I don't want to get everyone in trouble. We already had a problem with the Queen, I couldn't fix her problem as well as she hoped."

Misha makes her up a sewing kit in one of the makeup bags that they bought in Torguga, since the Bunny only has four inventory slots, and then passes her two types of cloth for whatever they've arranged for her to make tomorrow.

If she were crafting from a recipe, she could just use the skill and the item would form from the materials, but to make a unique item or one whose recipe you don't know, you have to actually cut and sew everything, which is what Daisy will be doing all day tomorrow.

For Today's visit to the Dungeon, they're again joined by Mary and Princess Paige, who are both eager to see how much of a power level they can get with two Puppet Masters in the same group.

Cain decides that it's more efficient to just start with the Heavenly Hosts active and a full dose of Seraphim, but he does take the time to teach Mary a wide variety of Plague Demons first. They're strong, durable, and as a bonus, a number of them can summon. She can't use the Epic Plague Mothers yet, but there is a Plague Spreader that summons small plague spawns in large numbers, which is even better for their current goals.

The summons have just cleared the first of the villages, and the group is headed for the forest to the North to have them clear the same area as last run when they hear not one but two ear splitting howls at the same time. Both the Obsession and the Wrath Demon Bosses have found the Seraphim armies at the same time.

Cain isn't concerned about it at first, then his keen sense for magic manipulation detect a disturbance in the flow around him, coming directly for Mary. Cain launches himself at the point of disturbance, spear first, just as the Legendary Obsession Demon arrives.

The strike drives the creature's claws wide of their mark, and the Puppet Master collapses, body deeply gouged but intact, her head attached by the merest of threads.

Cain forces the Demon back while Misha resurrects and then heals their fallen member, canceling one of his summons to pull a set of Seraphim Inquisitors into himself for additional stats.

"Misha, explain to her how Merger works. This guy is tough, but she shouldn't have gotten one shotted like that." Cain calls and the demon sneers at him, attacking with six armed fury in retaliation for foiling his plan to cut the Puppet Master into Pieces that couldn't be resurrected.

It hasn't yet realized that Cain is the true threat here, it simply recognized the Puppet Master Class, and the fact it was being targeted by Summons, so it attacked the target that would be the most likely to end the threat.

With the Merged Seraphim Inquisitors and the additional range of his spear, Cain is holding his own against the five meter tall, but lanky demon. The number of arms is concerning, but he is a small target, so it is hard to effectively use them all at once, and Cain has forced it away from the rest of the group where it might be a major problem.

A few seconds later, one of the Ancient Quality Seraphim arrives alone, its armies sent forward to clear the dungeon while it assists Cain. Two on one, the Obsession Demon no longer stands a chance, and the flurry of bladed attacks, combined with Holy Light begins to make quick work of the Legendary Assassin type demon.

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

## Chapter 335 322 Mary's Gratitude

Once the Obsession Demon has fallen, and the area is relatively safe again, Cain turns to see how Mary is doing. After all, she was very nearly bisected in a half dozen spots only a few minutes earlier. Right now, she's curled up in a ball on the ground, whimpering. Not precisely what Cain had hoped for.

"Mary, it's time to get up and call all your summons again. We need them so everyone can get strong faster, alright." Cain says in a soothing tone, but using [Superior Mental Domination] to plant the idea in her mind, that she needs to get up and get stronger.

He keeps it active while she gets up, and while Misha finally explains to her the importance of maintaining a constant Merger with one of your highest level Summons while inside a dungeon above your level if you want to be safe and push for faster advancement.

Since Mary doesn't benefit from the Guild skill [Benevolent Leader] to let her use Epic Summons of her own, Cain decides to activate the [Ancient Wisdom] ability, granting the whole group one of his skills for the day. [Personal Guard] is granted to every group member, and Princess Paige cheers as she summons a group of Seraphim Inquisitors.

Mary grits her teeth and focuses on the present, with the help of Cain's mind control, and calls for all her summons before also calling Seraphim Inquisitors and Merging with them.

"This ability is incredible. I saw it and that it gave a skill from the merged summon, but the description is so lacking that I thought that was all it did. Having them merged with me, I feel indestructible. Even when you're not here, a few of my Greater Golems will make me much more durable, and I could keep them active all the time, just not out in the open." Mary gasps, realizing just how powerful her class is.

"I'm glad you're feeling better because this run will be insane. The whole group gets that skill, which means all my summons that can cast spells can use it right now. So, in short, there are possibly more Seraphim Crusaders and Inquisitors here in this dungeon than on some of the higher planes right now.



We're going to have to move around some to keep up, but I'm pretty sure we can get another fifteen levels minimum today before it gets dark, even though we're getting closer to the dungeon level."

"In that case, move East as we clear, the Demons in that direction start getting higher level, and it will help a little with the slowing returns as we get more powerful." Mary declares with renewed determination. Cain isn't affecting her mind anymore; she's finally gotten her resolve back after the near death experience.

Or do you call that a short death experience? Post Death Experience? Cain's vocabulary is missing a convenient phrase for having died and then having been immediately resurrected.

The wait in the clearing doesn't take quite as long today, not with so many additional summons. By mid-afternoon, they're relocating East through the jungle towards a location where the Seraphim have identified another cluster of three Temples.

After fighting in the dungeon for a day and a half, Cain has learned a lot about those temples; they're not just a pile of rocks; they've got a temple complex built inside and on top of them. The defenders inside vary, but they've gotten a few interesting drops from here so far, and he's got a decent selection set aside to upgrade his usual gear.

[Cain Has Received An Ancient Quality Item]

Those are never something terrible or worthless, so Cain immediately checks to see what it might be.

[Ancient Pet Collar] Usable by Beast Bodied Species Only.

[Invalid User: Effects Hidden]

Well, that's not a suspicious item at all. Cain tucks it safely into the storage chest full of clothing and out of sight until he decides what to do with it. Cyrene is still a little unstable, so he's not sure what she might think if he handed her an item called a Pet Collar after turning her into a Lamia.

She's the only one of them that can use it, though, except maybe Daisy, but after living her previous life as a concubine, he's not going to create that particular misunderstanding so early.

The notification settings didn't hide that drop, though, and Cyrene has wrapped around his waist, face to face with him, to demand to see the item.

"Please, please? I've never seen an Ancient Quality Item before, and I'm the only one that can use it. You're going to let me use it, right?"

"I don't even know what it does yet. The effects are hidden because I can't use the item. I'll give it to you to inspect, but don't do anything strange, you promise?" Cain says, suspicious of her enthusiasm for the oddly named necklace.

"Not a problem, nothing strange." Cyrene declares, giving him a little salute, and Cain hands the item over.

"Oh, this is good. It can make an ability activate on command, which is perfect for my Visions. They've always been rather random and flaky, and they even missed the ambush earlier. I saw a bit of the fight, the part where you and the Seraphim were winning, but we're in a dungeon, that's expected behavior, and I didn't see the ambush." Cyrene gushes happily.

"Well, if it's that good, feel free to keep it. I'm glad you finally found a way to control your visions to make them as useful as possible to you." Cain congratulates her, petting her head.

"Onward! If we've gotten an Ancient Item drop, there's more good stuff in this dungeon run. Other than the Legendary boots that I already got." Princess Paige laughs.

A Legendary and an Ancient item are already asking a lot of a single dungeon run, even if they're clearing this much, but the Temples all seem to have something good hidden inside them.

They stay until well after dark, clearing the next three Temples, and barely get back to the Royal Residence before midnight, finding Daisy asleep in her hammock, with a lovely dress, designed in layers of green and gold hung from the wall beside her.

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

## Chapter 336 323

When Paige comes to visit with Cain the following day, she finds him happily braiding the hair of his Lamia companion, Cyrene. The relationship between those two is a bit odd, and she can't seem to decide what exactly their status is. The Lamia is clearly, even obsessively smitten with him, but Cain treats her somewhere between a favored child and a beloved pet.

The human, Misha, is clearly his wife. But seeing the affection between him and the Lamia, the possibility that Misha is actually the head of his Harem is one she can't

ignore. Simply put, the indeterminate status of the Lamia makes the way the group will receive her next offer uncertain.

Once the Queen calmed down a little and realized the benefits of her new body, she graciously offered the Duke an apartment in the upper levels as a reward for his service. But if he's got a Harem, the small bedrooms of the upper levels of the city might not be suitable.

There are three bedrooms arranged around a central living room and a kitchen. One of fifty similar units reserved for foreign Nobles who wish to visit the city regularly, in a building located close to a travel circle that will take them to and from ground level effortlessly.

Finally, she decides to make the offer, then realizes Cain hasn't noticed her yet and watches his interactions for a while. Someone is in the shower, likely Misha, but possibly the Bunny he Summoned, and Cain is almost finished braiding the slightly damp pink hair of the Lamia.

Once he finishes, he starts working the lotion into her scales, and Paige wonders if she should announce herself and interrupt the oddly sensual scene. But he's not touching the Lamia anywhere inappropriate, just moisturizing her body. Then he hands her a piece of clothing and kisses her forehead.

"Get dressed; we've got company." He says softly as the Lamia changes into the short red dress in a light fabric suitable for the tropical heat.

So he noticed her here and kept on with what he was doing? That makes Paige even more confused. Does that mean it's innocent behavior, or just that he doesn't care who is watching?

Misha and the Bunny both come out of the shower in a towel, waving their greetings to her before receiving their daily outfits from Cain.

"So, do you usually dress everyone, or is it just because you've got the storage chest full of clothing?" Paige finally asks.

"A little bit of both. Are you coming with us back to the dungeon today? Or did you have another activity in mind?"

This man's ambiguous answers aren't helping.

"The Queen would like to reward you with an apartment here in town. There are no houses big enough to be called a Guild House anywhere inside the city itself, though I know you would likely prefer one. Those are built in the surrounding forests and need to be defended by their residents, but the apartment is a lovely place in a prime location."

"That would be amazing. I think everyone enjoys it here, so I would love to come back regularly, and not just for the dungeons." Cain agrees, and Misha nods happily. Cyrene has gotten distracted by styling the Bunny, Daisy's hair, but gives them an enthusiastic nod.

"Let's go and see the apartment then; I've got the location information and the scrolls that will attune the spells to your presence, much like a key in a conventional lock. We use them all over the city since everything is open-walled for ventilation." Paige explains, leading them through the Royal Home and out into the upper levels of the city.

This seems to be the downtown core of the Elven city, with the pathways between trees built five meters wide to accommodate the foot traffic and what Cain sees as apartment buildings designed as if they're growing up the trees for dozens of levels.

Near the building they're headed for, there are a wide variety of shops around a central platform, which holds a cluster of transport circles that are labeled as heading to various spots at ground level.

It's as beautiful as expected of this city, and Paige leads them in to one of the apartment trees, with a guard standing on duty at the door, who smoothly moves aside to let them through.

"This is the building, and the unit the Queen has gifted you is on the First level. This is the seventeenth level, so you'll be at the very bottom looking out over the city. It's a bit of a walk down the stairs, but worth it for the view."

The Princess is absolutely right, this view is worth it. They're all high enough level that a dozen levels worth of winding staircase isn't going to be an issue for them, and the floor they're on is smaller than the others.

Only eight apartments ring the prodigious width of the tree on this level, with open-air balconies between the paired units. From the collection of chairs, loungers, and such, they seem to be public use spaces that double as event rooms.

Paige opens the apartment for them, showing an interior made of almost white wood, polished to a shine. Each of the three bedrooms on the outer side of the open concept kitchen and living room combo is decorated with cloth in different colors, giving a sense of vibrancy to the natural wood of the rest of the unit.

"This is beautiful. Oh, look down below; there are trampolines!" Cyrene cheers, looking out the window, down at the ground a hundred meters below their unit.

"That's a safety net, in case someone falls off a balcony, not a trampoline, sorry. But if you're satisfied, I can transfer the unit over to you right now, and we can head out for the morning. Mary lives next door, so it will be easy to pick her up."

The Puppet Master is their new neighbor? That's perfect. Nothing builds experience bonuses quite like a second puppet master in the dungeon. Hopefully, she's not too freaked out at being assassinated by that Obsession Demon Boss to agree with coming along again today. The odds of getting ambushed like that are incredibly low, and they can keep a few summons nearby today.

Safety first and all.

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

## **Chapter 337 Side Story, Landis Aftermath**

It had been an entire day since the capital city of Landis fell to the combined might of the loyalists and the Darklight Host and Queen Gurda was about to begin holding her first public meeting to pronounce her return to her rightful place and the defeat of the traitors.

There will be major changes announced to the country this time, no longer will there be a Senate overseeing everything, no more politicians or bureaucrats without oversight either. The fact that this is possible is down to her chief advisor Symbia. The Doll Witch is now level 199, and has gained a number of new skills from repeatedly running the dungeons inside Blood Sands Castle.

Her Dolls, like the Puppets of her Guild Master can now perform all basic tasks at a reasonable level, and she's put many skill points into their planning, strategy and accounting skills, furthering the plans she made with Gurda while the Queen to be was in hiding.

With one truly loyal follower and a staff that can take care of the duties of her ministers alongside the Knights led by Lancelot, Gurda is certain that she can make things work, without letting the old pattern of the Royal Family being figureheads in all but name begin again.

They've attracted a few more loyal followers as well. Carlos and Lancelot finally made up, and Carlos is moving into Landis to be with his children, who went into hiding, helping they loyalists just before the Academy fell to the Rebels. The entire staff of the academy was killed and replaced by zealots intending to indoctrinate the kids, and it's become quite an issue for Queen Gurda.

The staff obviously has to go, but the damage that they did to the students might not be reversible. If they've converted any significant number of them, it's possible that a culture that isn't compatible with the rest of the Kingdom could be festering inside those hallowed walls.

So, the academy has been closed for the next year or two, enough time to repair the physical damages from the battle, but also enough time to start over with a whole new batch of teachers and students.

That might not be as good of an outcome as she might have hoped for, but it seemed to be the best call in the end.

The battle at the Blood Sands Castle, that happened while the high level members were away helping Queen Gurda reclaim the Landis Capital ended in a resounding victory for the defenders, once Neffie and King Aggramor showed up to help out. Earl Mills, knowing he would be under surveillance, had hired mercenaries from other coastal nations, plus a large number from the Nothern Continent to avoid arousing suspicion before launching his offensive.

Both the Earl and every one of the mercenaries he hired perished in that battle, and the effects are beginning to be felt all over the coasts. The men he hired were often guards for the Merchant ships, which are now nearly defenseless against an uptick in raiding by the Wave Riders. They've looted more ships this month than they did in the entire last year, and a rumor is going around that Earl Mills had done something to directly offend them.

Certainly, many of the ships that were targeted were his, but others were freelance merchants, so not every Captain believes the rumors, but very few of them are willing to ply the routes towards Landis for any reason right now.

That's caused Gurda some headaches, but compared to the fact that half the nation's former territory now belongs to the Orcs it's a minor inconvenience. She didn't realize before returning that the rebels had lost so much territory during their brief rule of the region, but she's started negotiations with the Chiefs to arrange a ceasefire and negotiate a proper end to the battles now that she's taken over.

p Who will eventually end up with the larger portion of Landis is up for debate, but at least she holds the capital and surrounding areas, giving her the advantage of having the ports at her disposal.

With the threats in the Capital of Landis under control, the members of the Darklight Host took a small detour up the coast, clearing the zealots from the desert and returning rule of the coastal cities to their residents.

Only one city was ignored, the City of Behar, which is doing just fine on its own, since the King managed to make that cloak to mind control humans, with the help of the Royal

Spider Silk that Cain traded them. That place is best avoided at all costs right now, despite the fact they don't actually have many humans in the guild.

Despite Gurda becoming Queen, the greatest beneficiaries of this war have definitely been the Orcs and the Darklight Host. The Orcs got a lot of new territory, and the Darklight Host has become a legend on this Continent, with their fame spreading as far as the coasts of the Eastern and Northern Continents, calling them a merciless military powerhouse with the influence to topple nations anytime they wish.

The reputation is good for Earl RhickJaymz as well, since they're so often in Assah, and have a house in the city. He's known as a friend to the greatest military on the Eastern half of the Central Continent, as well as to the Wave Riders, who started showing up at his docks daily once the ships belonging to Earl Mills started disappearing.

The routine is the same every time, they send a representative to the house belonging to the Darklight Host, talk to the members there or the Puppets that maintain the building, and then return to their ships in a great mood before bringing the majority of the crew ashore to party.

Sure, they trade goods in and out of the port, but to RhickJaymz, as well as his dragons, it seems much more likely that they've got a deal going with Cain, who is paying them to cause very specific types of chaos on the high seas.

Whether it's temporary or the ambitious Duke intends to make some much larger move on the global trade routes isn't their concern. What does matter is that his guild now has enough high ranking and powerful members that the Earl can bum along on dungeon runs with them. With that extra free time, he's gained quite a few levels lately, and might even make level 300 himself within the next year or two.

If he'd known such a great castle site had existed, he would have moved there years ago, but no need to fret now, their alliance is strong enough that he can go visit anytime he likes.

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

## **Chapter 338 324 Mining The Beastkin**

"Why don't we visit the underground dungeon today? You know, instead of risking assassination two days in a row?" Mary suggests when Paige brings her over from next door.



"Now that you've learned to merge properly, you shouldn't get one hit killed like that again. Hopefully. But a visit to the other dungeon does sound fun; we've had great luck with mining-type dungeons in the past. I'm just worried that we won't be able to hold everything we get since I'm out of range of the Guild Bank."

"That's easily fixed. The Mages make a circle that you can place in your house. It allows access to the Guild Bank as if it were a Guild House but doesn't extend the usable range, so you'll still have to be in direct contact with the circle. It's not perfect, but it's decent." Paige explains while Cain and Mary smile.

"So, that's why I leave a Puppet in my apartment and have them pull items from my inventory to transfer to my parent's Guild when I've got too much stuff. They're merchants up in the northern region of the Eastern Continent, mostly trading along that coast or to the west coast of the Western Continent." Mary explains, and Cain nods.

He pulls the very last of his Doll form puppets from his inventory and instructs her to take care of the apartment, as well as what to do once they get a circle made to open the Guild Bank.

"I have ordered you one from the market upstairs. They're not a regular stock item, but since I'm asking, the Inscriptionist Guild should make it up right away and bring it to us here." Paige explains while Mary inspects the puppet.

"These are well made. Do they come in butler as well? Please say they come in butlers." the elven Puppet Master insists, giving Cain a pleading look.

"I can make you a butler, not a problem." Cain laughs, then forms an Elven Butler, taller than average for an elf, with well-toned muscles and an angular face that Cain pulled from Mary's mind when she imagined exactly what she'd like in a butler. He thinks a moment and gives it a sweet and romantic personality to mess with the elf before activating it.

The new puppet turns to Mary gently and lifts her hand to kiss her knuckles. "Greetings, Madam. I shall be your servant; won't you be so kind as to give me a name?"

Mary blushes and shoots Cain a dirty look before her attention is pulled back to the butler in front of her.

"I will call you Lenny, is that alright?" she whispers breathlessly.

"It is perfect, Madam. With your leave, I will get to my duties and await your return. Do you have any requests for dinner?"

"Vegetable stew, with mixed fruit juice. Wait, how well can a Puppet Cook?" Mary asks, directing the question at Cain.

"You'll see. No butler made by me would dare disappoint." Cain laughs, adding Master level Elven cuisine to the Butler's skills to complement his generic abilities.

There are still options, so Cain adds Sculpting to his talents, as well as Master level metalworking. That should let the Butler create high-quality dolls like Cain uses for his maid to help Mary out. If he gets a chance later, Cain will also gift her the book that gives all Puppets apprentice-level life skills as a welcoming gift as a new neighbor.

Cain also gave the Butler a few other "Advantages" over the average Elf that he's sure Mary will appreciate later, but she can discover those at her leisure.

"Let's go see that new dungeon. I've never been in an underground one. Is it like a natural cave or like a labyrinth?" Cyrene asks eagerly, but Daisy cuts off the answer.

"Before you all leave me again, where am I staying? What should I be doing? If you brought me back, you should have had a purpose for me, right?" The bunny kin looks fully confused at this point and is just looking around the small but beautiful apartment in wonder. Everything in this city is well beyond the living standards of her previous life.

"I just did it to see who was in the Soul Gem. As a Puppet, you share my level, so work is mostly unnecessary. I have a maid here; you can help her out if you choose to. But other than that, it's just whatever daily tasks Misha had for you as her Lady in Waiting." Cain shrugs.

"She wanted a particular item of clothing made, but that's only a few hours of work. Is it alright to take so much time off during the day?" Daisy sounds both shocked and offended at the notion.

"Tell you what, here are two Gold Coins; go do the shopping for dinner tonight, and make a list of everything you think this apartment needs. That's all that needs to be done today."

Getting Daisy used to the changes in modern society could take a while, having come from such a low baseline, but Cain is confident that she will adapt soon enough. Cain does notice that the bunny still keeps herself as far across the room from Cyrene as possible, though. Getting used to the Lamia might take her even longer than getting used to an advanced magical society and people with systems.

Cain takes one final look around, making sure there's nothing he's missing, but the apartment is well-appointed; even spare bed linens are stocked in the closet. Only one bedroom has a proper bed, the others have hammocks, but that's not a problem for Cain. A real bed might be too hot for this city anyhow.

"Let's get to work then. If the underground labyrinth isn't too large, we can finish it and mine it out twice today." Cain jokes, pointing to the door.

"Wait, mine it out with what? Do you have mining skills that I don't know about?" Paige asks, chasing after the group that Mary is leading, eager to see what Cain has in mind for this dungeon.

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

## Chapter 339 325

"This is not what I thought when they said underground labyrinth." Cyrene points out when they enter the dungeon.

It's actually very similar to the one Cain built under the Guild Castle, with carved stone walls covered in paintings, glowing moss on the roof, and solid stone floors cut to look like reddish tiles. It's more like being in the interior hallway of a building than anything Cain would associate with mining.

"There will be large caverns spread through the labyrinth. That's where the mining comes into play, and where the largest number of Beastkin will be." Paige informs them, looking at a point on the wall near the entrance.

"Mary, call all your summons and merge them into a single copy of each type. That will avoid overcrowding and give us some strong backline defense." Cain suggests, and the Puppet Master summons and then Merges what they can, taking the bodyguard type summons into herself for the extra durability.

"Cyrene, do you see anything?" Cain asks quietly, winding how effective the new Ancient Quality item will be at improving her visions.

"There's a boss in the first big cavern, A Hippo type Beastkin. I am sure he gets his face smashed in by a large pale Demon." Cyrene answers after going vacant for a moment.

"Well, we have our mission. Demons it is." Cain smiles, patting her head, and Summoning a full set of Demons before transforming into the Progenitor form to triple their and then merging them to half their maximum numbers. The dungeon simply doesn't have room for more summons to fight.

Sending the Demons ahead to battle, the group carefully makes their way through the winding tunnels of the labyrinth, stopping now and then to check on good spots to collect valuables.

Not everything of value is buried in this dungeon; some of the gems are embedded in the walls as statues' eyes or simple decorations. Gathering them slows progress, so by the time they reach the first cavern, where Cyrene saw the vision of the death of the dungeon boss, it is already dead and the Demons have moved on.

An abundance of minerals is visible in the walls and floor, though, which reminds Cain of the Giant's dungeon where the Gold Vein that provided the group with much of the Guild's wealth was found.

He quickly makes four Mountain Troll Puppets with pickaxes and sets them to work on the various deposits around the room. Most of what they're digging up, Cain doesn't even recognize, he just accepts it because the System says it's valuable. Still, since it's either blue or epic quality ore, Cain gathers it and instructs the Maid Puppet to pull it from his inventory and deposit it into the Guild Bank using the newly installed circle in the apartment.

After a bit of surface digging, the trolls finally come across something Cain vaguely recognizes.

[Raw Divine Mythril] Legendary Crafting Material. Mythril ore that was imbued with divine energy throughout the millennia since the planet's formation.

There's quite a bit of it, too, hundreds of kilos. Cain wonders how long it will take for anyone to notice, so he has the Puppet deposit it into the Guild Bank without any warning, alongside the Shadow Silver that one of the other puppets had just unearthed.

"Wow, having miners above level 200 is incredible. Especially Trolls, they're pretty good at that." Princess Paige cheers, watching them work.

"I have created the bodies with master-level mining and the [Earth Manipulation] passive that makes it easier to dig. I didn't want to create a whole army just to get the dungeon cleared out." Cain answers her unspoken question about the reason for their efficiency, while the pickaxes of the Puppets ring through the cavern.

They've cleared out all the detectable loot from this cavern, leaving Cain with a dilemma. There are multiple exits, and Cain doesn't know what direction the summons went. He instructed them to clear the dungeon, and he can tell what direction they're in now, but he doesn't know what portions of the labyrinth they've already done.

Minor oversight.

"Cyrene, are their monsters down the left tunnel there." He asks, and the Lamia shakes her head.

"I don't think so; I don't get any visions of battle when I focus on that direction."

"Off we go then. The Summons must have cleared it already.

This section of Labyrinth has a very different motif. Somewhere between Ancient Egypt and Elvis Presley in fashion sense. There is gold everywhere, precious gems as well as some very bright-colored carpets, and statues with rhinestone encrusted suits.

Paige is about to grab a solid gold statue off the wall when Cyrene suddenly wraps her up to stop her. "This entire area is cursed. Taking anything puts a deadly curse on the whole group. Plus, it's not real; all this wealth is fake, just part of the curse."

It's a good thing they have her along; that could have gotten ugly, even with Misha's advanced abilities to remove curses.

They make their way past cluttered hallways and side rooms full of wealth and dead bodies until they finally get to another cavern. But the moment they step inside, Cyrene goes blank and then turns to Cain.

"Incoming boss fight. I must have missed it because of the Curse. I'm sorry."

Any more apologies will have to wait, because she had been cut short by the appearance of a burly Felian man, covered in silk and jewels, most of which manages to clash with the pieces worn next to it—a genuinely tacky boss for a truly gaudy dungeon zone.

With a wave of the Felian's hand, gates appear and block all the exits to the room, preventing retreat. Mary sends all her Summons into combat, while Cain orders the Trolls to stand back while he waits for an opening to engage.

Though they might not have gotten all the bonuses that Cain's summons do, and her gear isn't optimized for Summoning damage, a fact they will have to rectify later, Mary's summons are doing an excellent job of holding the boss and chipping away at its health despite the level difference.

Cain waits until the creature's back is turned and lines forward with his spear, driving it into the boss Beastkin's back.

[Damage Reduced By Ability]

The single hit took roughly a tenth of Felian's health, but it has some ability that caps damage per strike. That's alright, though. They have plenty of time to take it down and boss hasn't used any magic yet except on his claws and to block the doorways, so he's not a direct threat to their more vulnerable members.

He might have more tricks, though, so Cain orders the Trolls to surround the group and prevent ambushes with their massive bodies.

Between Cain and the Plague Demons that Mary chose, they've managed to effectively pin the boss, every attack leaving him open to more critical strikes. Just as he falls, a Quest Notification comes in.

[Can't Be Fooled] Find and destroy the source of the Felian King's Power. Reward, one random choice per party member.

"Well, you heard the Quest; let's see what was powering the Boss," Cain instructs, and the Trolls get to work digging up the room.

Trolls have got an intuitive sense of treasure, so they should do a pretty good job at this quest. For now, though, they're only finding low-quality ores, mostly silver and iron.

With the Boss dead, the spell blocking the exits has faded, and it's not long before Cain's Demons join them. They've gone through the Labyrinth and can't find anything else to kill.

Cain thinks about the most efficient way to complete this quest for a moment and then makes two dozen more Mining Trolls. Two for every Legendary Demon.

"Take these guys with you and go mine out everything you can find in the dungeon. You're looking for whatever might have powered that last boss, but everything you get for the Guild is a bonus."

The Demons split into groups, bringing their Trolls along and hoping to spring more traps while Cain and the others search. The first for battle is never truly satiated for the higher level Demons.

There was nothing in the first room, so they moved on to another. This one had better loot but still wasn't showing them any signs of the quest objective. At least not until Paige grabbed a two-meter tall Jade statue and placed it in to her inventory.

Usually, such things are just part of the dungeon, decorations that will reset after a day, along with the instance they came from, but this one had an item name, so she grabbed it to decorate her room at home.

When she removed it, a translucent white Jade Pillar lifted from the center of the cavern floor with a glowing golden orb trapped in the middle.

[Stone of Kings] grants the ability to create wealth with mana. One Gold Bar for every 50mp expended.

[Quest Item Located]

"Wait, we're supposed to destroy that for the quest? But it's money. Free Money. You only need to add MP, and you'll be wealthy forever." Paige points out, moving to stand between the group and the pillar.

"You saw the wealth it created in the tunnels. It's not real; the stone is a cursed item." Cain points out, trying logic to convince the Princess that the quest wouldn't have the orb's destruction as a condition without good reason.

"You only say that because you want it for yourself," Paige growls, sounding far less threatening than intended.

"You understand, right Mary? With a stone that creates gold, we wouldn't ever have to tax anyone again. We could buy everything the city needed." Paige pleads her case to her best friend.

"There, there. Don't worry; we'll get this all sorted out." The Elven Puppet Master declares, pulling her friend into a hug and nodding at Cain.

Cain sends the Trolls around back, and with a single blow, they shatter both the Pillar and the stone to bits before happily picking up the pieces of Jade to send to the Guild Bank.

[Quest Complete]

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

## Chapter 340 326

The wail of anguish that Paige lets out truly makes Cain feel horrible for completing the quest. Even after seeing the notification.

[Stone Of Greed] Destroyed

[Quest Complete]

"Paige, calm down, see, it was a trick. The stone was cursed and hiding its true nature." Mary whispers in her friend's ear as she holds her.

It takes a while for Paige to calm down, but when she does, she's got a determined look that says Cain isn't forgiven yet.



"Why not try your random spin? See what you get? I've seen some pretty crazy things in that list." Cain suggests.

Paige doesn't look hopeful, but closes her eyes and collects her reward. They all watch in interest as her facial features change while she checks the visible possibilities, from hope to confusion then to concentration and back to hope, finishing with joy and a little dance before she opens her eyes.

"The random thing this time was a set of chests to pick from, and it gave me a great prize.

[Consolation Stone] Legendary Item. Generates one Gold coin every 24 hours.

"That's actually pretty awesome. It might not be as amazing looking as the fake Stone was, but it's a Gold Coin every single day. That's more than enough for spending money." Mary cheers, still holding the Princess.

"You're up next Mary, let's see what you get." Cyrene demands, wrapping the pair of Elves up in her excitement to find out what everyone got.

Unlike Daisy, who panics at the thought, Mary doesn't mind the Lamia's antics and simply retreats into her system interface to see what she can get.

"Adventuring with you always brings out the weird things doesn't it?" Mary asks Cain when she returns from her random roll.

"Not always, but they're a pretty good chance of fun and unusual things. What did you get?"

Mary links an item in party chart with a big grin.

[Ring of True Luck] Increases Item Drop Rate. Condition: group must contain more female members than male.

"Hey, that's a pretty good item, not something strange. Especially for a female Puppet Master, because even alone you fill the requirement." Cain points out, making everyone laugh.

Even he had to admit, that's not a bonus condition he's ever seen on an item before. Other than classes, very few things are gender locked. A few rare spells and items, but that's about it.

Cyrene collects her own next, wriggling and wrapping happily around the two Elves in celebration.

"What could be so good that you're crushing your party members?" Misha asks, bonking the Lamia on the head and pulling her free from the Elves to wrap around her instead.

"I'll tell you later." Cyrene whispers, then giggles.

Since she's not going anywhere for a moment, Misha goes next, getting herself a new Epic Tailoring Recipe for a set of robes that require level 300 to use. Another oddity, as items have levels, but usually not level requirements.

"It seems today is the day of odd and unique items. Let's see if I can keep the lucky streak up." Cain laughs, opening the reward interface to see a row of chests.

[Please Select One Chest To Receive Reward]

[Enchanted Ration Pack] can be opened once daily to receive a hot meal. Meal will always be breakfast. Non transferable.

"I got unlimited breakfast for life." Cain laughs, linking the item to the group.

"Breakfast in bed every morning? That doesn't sound half bad." Misha teases and Cyrene nods enthusiastically.

"On a practical note, an item like that would save the life of any number of stranded or captured transfers. Some regions of the Eastern Continent don't allow bank access, so if you're stuck there it's fairly common to run out of food and water." Princess Paige informs them.

"Then we'll need more of them. Breakfast for everyone!" Mary cheers.

"On a serious note, are we going to keep doing these dungeons every day? I'm getting incredible experience, and Mary here has gotten a load of levels already." Paige asks.

"For a few days, then we need to return to Skyview for the coming of age banquet for King James. He's announced that he will be bringing non humans into the Royal Harem for the first time, so we all expect that there will be some level of trouble.

You can come with us if you like, I'm sure I can get passes for a few more. I am technically the defense minister after all."

"How about one more run to get you to a nice even level 260 and then we can all go visit Skyview early? I've never been to the Central Continent and I'm certain mother would approve me as an envoy just to get me to stop teasing her." Paige suggests.

The extra levels will help Mary as well, increasing her Summon numbers and then merging them is a great way to increase her combat effectiveness against higher level targets.

But first they have to wait for the Puppets to finish mining the last of the possible materials before they leave this instance.

Judging by the responses of the Crafters in Guild Chat, the drops this time have been pretty good. They got a lot of high quality leather as drops from the Beastkin, and the ores they're digging up from the open caverns contain a lot of materials that are new to the Guild, materials that are not commonly available in the Central Continent.

That's exactly what he had hoped for, new materials to help the Guild build up their skills and repertoire. They've already made a reputation for themselves making high quality goods, and higher level materials will let them keep it up and not stagnate at lower levels.

That's the fate of almost all Guilds, they get comfortable in one region and never progress beyond that point, simply living a good life in the place they call home with the materials that are available.

The Darklight Host has done better than most, thanks to the members that venture out to new places, but they're still in danger of stagnation once most of their Crafters have progressed to the peak of the Central Continent.

Their plans for a second run are cut short by an urgent message from Daisy. A large number of people are at the apartment looking for Cain and they're getting mad at her for not being able to tell them where he's gone.

[We will be back there in a few minutes. Tell them all that I'm on my way.]

"It seems I have a lot of visitors at the apartment and Daisy is freaking out. Neither her or the Maid has any real combat skills, so we should go see what they're after before they tear the apartment block apart trying to get in." Cain sighs, making the others laugh.

"It must be hard being popular. But you just got here, there shouldn't be many people who know you here, and even fewer that would come looking for you in person. Plus, they know where you live, so there's a good chance it's the nobility and The Queen or one of her attendants let slip about how she recovered." Mary points out the obvious.

"If they're just showing up at my door to harass me for cosmetic alterations, I'm totally going to turn the whole lot of them into Dark Elves." Cain grumbles and Paige laughs.

"Can you imagine the uproar? The entire nobility becoming Dark Elves? If nothing else, I should be able to talk to them and calm them down to find out what they want." From the look on the mischievous Princess' face, she wouldn't actually mind if that happened, just for the entertainment factor.

"You spent a lot of time alone in your room, bored as a child didn't you?" Misha asks as they walk out of the dungeon towards the travel circle.

"Yeah, why?" Paige asks, startled and Mary bursts into quickly stifled laughter.

"Nevermind."

As they feared, the entire building is full of Elven Nobles, but they quickly make way for Princess Paige, and Cain transforms himself into an Elf to confuse and distract the crowd until they can rescue Daisy.

Because they're looking for a big human man, the disguise works wonderfully, and the Nobles assume that Paige is here to help them with whatever they're after, smoothly clearing a path for her party through the crowd all the way to Cain's door, where the group enters and Cain transforms back to talk to the Elves.

"Alright, I'm home from my morning Dungeon run. Now, can we pick a representative and tell me, clearly and one at a time, what you've all gathered here in front of my apartment for? It had better be good for this scale of disruption, the residents of the building can't even leave their homes for the crowd of bodies."

The crowd discusses it among themselves for a while before a truly ancient looking Forest Elven woman with a walking cane and one blind eye steps forward to represent their cause.

"You see, it's about the future of this city." The old woman begins in a slow but musical voice.

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

## **Chapter 341 327 Revitalized Nobility**

For the good of the city is an excellent talking point to start a conversation, but how exactly they expect Cain to help might become a point of contention. The ancient Elf seems happy to enlighten Cain on their plan, though.

"As you can see, the Elders are facing the end of their Mortal lives. I am one of the younger members on the council; the others all have mobility issues that prevented them from coming today.

The Elves greatly value the wisdom of the previous generations, but there is a gap in our ranks; entire generations were lost during the great war, so the next group preparing to replace the aging elders is nearly six hundred years our junior and lacking much of the wisdom that comes with age." The older woman slowly tells Cain.

"And you're hoping that I can turn back the clock and keep you alive long enough for them to gain the knowledge needed for the role?" Cain asks, Seriously considering turning them all into Dark Elves.

"That's the request of the nobility—a fresh chance at youth after seeing the Queen. But what the council Oracle has seen is a surviving Ancient creating one single eternal leader of the council. Brought back to a youthful body now, they would guide the city to prosperity for two more millennia."

"They expected him to make them all young again?" Paige snickers, and the older woman gives her a genuine smile.

"They brought bribes and everything." The older woman confirms as Cain's Maid escorts her to a seat in the common area and pours her a cup of tea.

"Which councilor would you ask me to change?" Cain asks, wondering if this entire request is just personal Greed.

"The obvious would be Lamott, head of the council, but I doubt he'd allow it. He's been looking forward to dying of old age for a long time, mostly so people will stop bothering him. We're all from the same generation, though, and we all get along, so you can pick whoever is compatible with your skill, and the job will be done."

"I suppose I could work something out. Princess Paige had requested a younger sister, and I'm certain the Queen would prefer it wasn't her." Cain jokes, and the councilor smirks.

"You should see her. Every time she loses and then calms her temper, she returns to a form that's ever so slightly younger than it was before. After today's meetings with the nobility, she looks as fresh as the day she ascended the throne."

"Alright, I don't know about the Nobles, but I can help the council with their issue." Cain agrees.

In Paige's mind, six years old with long blonde hair and a button nose is the perfect little sister, so Cain visualizes exactly what the Princess was after and then turns his ability on the wizened Elder.

Before it takes effect, Cain does give her a warning, though. "I don't know if this will extend your natural life, but it will bring youth back to your body."

She nods grimly, prepared for the worst, and Cain slowly changes her body, the robes of a Council Elder shrinking to match her new form. Paige can barely hold in her excitement as she stares, waiting for a response.

"I seem to have shrunk." The childish voice of the Elder rings through the room with surprising vigor, and she stands up on the couch to inspect herself.

"You and me, we have very different ideas of what a return to youth meant." She declares, looking directly at Cain.

"But you must admit, it is youthful." Paige giggles, giving the woman a big hug.

"Oh, Nanny, it's perfect. I can return every hug and cuddle you gave me over the years." The Princess sighs, holding the diminutive form of the councilor before being flung across the room by a lightning bolt.

"Don't get carried away. I brought you into this world; you don't get to treat me like a doll." The Elder complains.

"Can't you do something about the personality? She's always been like that. I'll bet you can't even pat her head." Paige whines, and Cyrene smiles.

"The physical change doesn't change their personality. At least it didn't when Cain used it on me. You just need to go slow, sneak in the cuddles until she gets used to it." The Lamia whispers.

"They know I can hear them, right? I'm still a level 284 Arch Druid; there's not much in this city made of trees that I'm not aware of." The Elder asks Cain, ignoring the girls.

"Oh, they know. Maybe I went a bit overboard, but it gives you a couple of extra centuries to keep things in order versus making you a young woman. I don't know if you'll be able to have the same thing done again after all, and that's assuming that this does indeed extend your life."

With a wiggle of her fingers, the child's form is gone, and a 170cm tall Dryad with leafy hair stands in her place, making Paige pout.

"This should do fine for the time being. I can keep it active indefinitely, and with that youthful body as the base, my recovery and stamina are back up to the peak for my level."

She crooks one branch-like finger and invites a small group of Nobles in to present their case. All are in their later middle years, and Cain suspects that these are the next in line to become elders once the previous generation is gone.

"Before you begin, I will warn you, using that sort of transformation for selfish purposes has side effects. So if you're looking to have your body changed to upgrade to a younger or more powerful spouse or other such reasons, I recommend you discard that notion."

That should scare at least a few of them off and calm the excitement. The actual chances of the skill going haywire are pretty remote, though. Even with a strong curse on his target, Cain nearly managed to activate it successfully.

"Thank you for the warning. The Origin stories tell us much about the Wonders and Horrors of the Ancients. But what we ask instead is more of a business arrangement. As you can see, the client base is well established, so we were hoping that you could open a cosmetic medical clinic.

If the rumors are not mistaken, you can create a form of body double that could do much of the work for you, leaving only the most complicated cases to be handled personally."

That's actually a much more sensible proposal than Cain had expected, with the crowd's enthusiasm.

"We can arrange a space for you; there is a vacant shop I own available in the market upstairs. The services of a Flesh Crafter are never cheap. They're notoriously hard to find due to their connections with the underworld, so finding a reputable one like you, who works mostly with government leaders, is a great relief."

That's also a good point. While a few do above board work, the real money is in transforming wanted criminals to allow them to avoid detection and capture. When you're looking at a rather gruesome death penalty, any price is a reasonable one.

It wouldn't be hard to make a Puppet with the [Modify] skill. The regular Flesh Crafter class uses a dozen different skills and surgical techniques to enact various changes; Cain's class only uses one skill that does all his modifications on other people.

"I think I can agree to that. A few nurses and a clinic doctor that can do the basic changes most people will request shouldn't be a problem. If you've got a contract, we can go over that and see the location before dinner."

The murmurs of the crowd are very excited now. Cain will agree to set up a cosmetic skills clinic here in the city. Not only will that be good for them, but once the backlog clears and word spreads, it will also be good for tourism.

That's what they were truly after today, not just the personal services of a Flesh Crafter, but a new city amenity.



Being a city-state in a dangerous jungle, wounds that routine healing doesn't fully repair are pretty common. The Elves also tend to be rather vain about their physical appearance, avoiding scars, deformities and even the smallest hints of being in poor physical condition.

The only one who doesn't seem overly enthusiastic about today's outcomes is Paige, who realized her potential for a little sister had slipped through her fingers when the Elder transformed into a Dryad. The two stop seen to be friends though, so maybe once she's out of public sight, the Elder will relax and change forms back.

The shop contract is a simple thing, half a Gold Bar monthly in rent, and the landlord pays amenities and taxes. After carefully reading it through, Cain rolls it up and gets to his feet.

"Let's go see this place in person. A lot goes into a clinic, and proper patient moods and comfort are essential to a healthy recovery from a major procedure."

They understand the necessity for property facilities very well, and while the Elder chases the rest of the nobility away, the middle-aged Elf known as Duke Owen leads Cain to the shop.

It's just off the main concourse, still busy but not as noisy or crowded. Next door is a fancy restaurant, and on the other side of them is an open space full of vines and moss that Cain takes for this city's version of a playground.

The inside of the shop is changed from the city's all-natural motif to smooth walls and stone floors, with a very human-run diner sort of decor, with stainless steel wall accents where booths used to be and on the front counter that compliments the black and white square stone tiles on the floor. Two separate rooms in the back that could both serve as consultation rooms, plus a restroom and a storage cooler.

"We can redecorate if you would like. The last tenant ran a candy shop and chose this for the ambiance." Duke Owen suggests.

"No, with a little furniture, this should be just right."

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

## **Chapter 342 328**

It only took a few minutes for the Elven Duke to arrange to have furniture brought to the shop, so Cain decides to start making the Puppets right away.

A copy of his human sized Ancient Form, in long white coat is created and given the [Modify] and [Mana Flood Totem] skills will be the doctor for the clinic. Puppets have almost no mana of their own, and no regeneration so Cain adds a passive skill most mage subclasses get [Mana Battery] that grants 2 maximum mana per level.

[Puppet Created: Additional Ability Gained]

[Existential Dread] active

Cain quickly orders them to turn that off and save it for times when it's necessary.

Next up comes two nurses, Elves in white outfits. After a bit of thought, Cain gives them [Mana Battery] [Holy Light] and [Superior Mental Domination]. That should be enough to keep patients under control, hopefully.

Plus it will allow them to see exactly what the patient wants, and as fellow puppets, they can convey it directly to the doctors.

After some consideration, one last worker was created, a Snake Kin with [Mana Battery] [Summon Greater Golems] and Master level [Accounting] to work the front desk and give a bit of muscle as security. Inside a city, a group of Greater Golems should be able to deal with most things until the guards arrive.

Unlike Cyrene, this one is mostly serpentine, except for the humanoid upper body shape. Fully scaled under the tidy skirt suit, Cain gave her the look of a common carpet python, a pattern he's seen a lot in the city. Most of the Snake Kin they've seen here have serpentine heads, so this one should blend in.

The smaller back room becomes the operating room, while the larger former stock room becomes an apartment of sorts for the Puppets and the cooler is adjusted to be an air conditioned break room.

Comfortable chairs are brought in for the front and the room almost immediately looks like a clinic waiting room.

Duke Owen finds the decision highly amusing, as must Flesh Crafters would have their waiting room look like a luxurious country club, but Cain made his look like a dentist's office. He's about to mention it when he realizes everything in here can be washed clean and sterilized in minutes, perfect if you're expecting to need to clean up blood in your office.

Making the wealthy customers feel too relaxed might encourage them to make demands, but this has the feeling of a medical facility, where everyone is equal under the doctor's knife.

Cain searched through the items in his inventory, but didn't find the next items that he needs. "Does anyone have a brush and some window paint? I want to make a sign."

Paige smiles at him, bringing both from her inventory. "I'm well versed in calligraphy, what should it say?"

"Darklight Cosmetic Clinic. That should be enough. I don't think it will struggle with customers for quite some time."

That's an understatement, and Paige gets to work painting it on the front window. She's only just finished the writing when a large snake Kin warrior, a young man at level 84, slides in the door.

"Are you open yet? I don't recall seeing this place last time I was in town." He asks.

Cain can see the Elves flinch a little at his appearance, but he doesn't see what the big deal is, he just looks like a coral snake.

"We're just getting set up, you can be our test client if you'd like?" He nods and the clerk ushers him to the counter to sign in.

"How can we help you?" The python patterned Snake Kin Cain created asks politely.

p "I guess you're not local. Snake Kin are territorial, and my pattern comes from my mother, who was born in a neighboring territory we've been at war with for a century. I was hoping to find somewhere I could get the pattern of my scales changed. I see you've got a Flesh Crafter here."

"We do, but our resident doctor has the skill to quickly take care of that for you. We haven't set a fee schedule yet, but the big boss says it will be alright to take care of you free of charge today. If you'll follow the nurses they'll get you ready."

The Puppets take him to the back room and Cain realizes it's not soundproof. They'll have to change that. But the nurse gets his request, along with a drawing of what he's hoping for. She gives it to the Doctor, who nods and goes inside the waiting room while Cain prepared a mental list of things they will need. The nurses can order them once they're finished here.

"We will need a few more mirrors as well, for the operating room. Everyone will want to see themselves from every angle." The nurse points out.

That's what a trial run is for though, finding all the little details you missed. Payment will be the hard part. The Flesh Crafter class is exceptionally rare, as uncommon as Puppet Masters, so they tend to demand esoteric prices instead of cash.

Cain decides to continue that tradition, one interesting item in payment. Epic for a small change, Legendary for large, plus a skill book the Guild doesn't have for extreme changes like species alteration. He will keep skill additions mostly off limits and secret, except in special cases where it's necessary for an extreme change.

That should let them take care of almost everybody who comes in without causing problems.

The snake Kin comes out of the office a few minutes later, his scales now a mottled pattern instead of stripes, but he kept his red, black and white colors.

"Looking good. How was the experience? Running a clinic like this is something new to me." Cain asks their volunteer.

"Amazingly painless. I know a change of scale colors might not be the most extreme thing that has been asked of your skills, but it went very smoothly."

"Excellent. Now you can roam the city without the stigma. Hopefully that helps as much as you hoped and doesn't disappoint your mother. Family is more important than the opinions of strangers after all."

The snake Kin rushes out to see his family and Cain works out his plan of action.

"Alright, gather around everyone. I want you to only take a few of the Nobles every day. Two a day should be good, give them a nice long consultation and make the process look more complicated than it is, wealthy people love drama and showmanship. But be sure to leave yourself time to sneak in at least one person in need every day.

Let the extra clients pay what they can, those cases are more for spreading a good reputation than making money and collecting shiny objects." Cain explains out loud to his puppets for everyone else's benefit.

"Got it. I'll put on a good show for them. Will you be nearby if we need you?" The doctor asks.

"We've got to go to King James's coming of age party for the next week or so, but then we will come back again for a while. If there's serious issues I can be here fairly quickly. An hour or two maximum for an emergency."

That's good enough for the Puppets, and they get to work rearranging the office to suit their own preferences.

"Shall we head out then? The circle to the eastern continent in Tortuga is across town from the one that leads to Assah, so we've got a bit of a walk ahead of us." Paige points out, getting everyone motivated to head out, Daisy simply following the crowd like a lost bunny.

"We should grab a bite to eat while we're in Tortuga as well. They've got a lot of great restaurants there." Mary suggests.

Nobody's going to argue with good food, so they head to ground level and then take the portal to Tortuga. The security officer takes the fee and Mary takes the lead towards a sushi shop she wants everyone to try.

"Duke Cain. Excellent timing. We were just about to go drop some paperwork at your house in Assah." A Wave Rider called out to them as they're strolling through the crowd.

The weather beaten Elf has a half dozen more similar looking sailors with him, all dressed as Captains. The difference is subtle, but the Captains of Wave Rider Ships wear their sash differently to keep their compass and sword accessible instead of keeping them in their inventory.

"Do you have good news for me?" Cain asks with a smile.

"Since the Earl fell in battle, the contract will end early, but we sacked the port of Badawi and found five more ships full of his goods." The captain says proudly, handing over a stack of documents.

They confirm that five separate ships were chartered by Earl Mills, so Cain hands over the Gold Bars and pockets the documents.

"A pleasure doing business with you as always. Now, we're off to the shipwright, we took some damage securing the port, but they've learned their lesson about trying to cheat us." The Captain laughs, before turning and walking away.

"Did he just say they sacked a city on your orders?" Paige asks incredulously.

"Oh no, they did that on their own. I just had an open contract to interfere with ships sent by an Earl from Skyview. Just a minor trade war, I'm sure you know how those things go." Cain corrects her.

Paige does not know though, trade wars in their region don't escalate to the point that cities are sacked, such a thing would be the end of them.

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

## Chapter 343 329

They've just finished dinner when Cain gets a message from Maria, the little Succubus Puppet that Cain left with King James to be the defense council representative on his behalf.

[The initial Harem composition has been leaked. They might have been speculating, but they got it right. Can you return to the Palace early?]

[Of course, are we expecting trouble?]

[Not much, but they're moving up the official announcement to this afternoon, followed by the traditional ten days of celebrations and then the official coronation and ten days of seclusion. It's just starting one day earlier than usual; James will officially be of age at midnight.]

"Change of plans, ladies. King James has started the party one day early, so we need to be at the palace tonight. We can go directly there from the house in Assah." Cain informs the group.

"I will show you the spare rooms to change when we get there. Don't worry; I've got everything we will need for a Royal ball; we only need to pick outfits." Misha smiles.

Daisy, who has been mostly silent this entire time, perks up at that news, so Cain hands her the chest full of clothes. "You get to help the whole group pick this time. Get everyone looking good, yourself included, and I will change to match." Cain instructs the happy bunny as Misha pets her ears.

It's not a long walk to the house once they're through the public portal in Assah, and Cain stops to greet the members who have gathered where while Misha pulls everyone up to their bedroom.

It hasn't been used in a while since they travel too much, and Misha wonders if they shouldn't just reassign some of these bedrooms that are reserved for the Guild Master. Today however, the large bedroom comes in handy, as they've got five ladies to get ready for a Royal Event.

Daisy has done this before, pulling dozens of outfits out of the chest and laying them across the bed while she instructs everyone to strip down.

"Getting dressed takes forever so we will do that first." The Bunny decides.

"With the system, we can touch them and equip them. It makes any piece of clothing fit just right and only takes half a second." Misha reminds her, and the tawny-haired bunny girl faces palms.

"I forgot about that. But we should still change into the ball gowns first, and then we can take it back off to keep it clean and do makeup to match. Does anyone have a collection of jewelry?"

"I do, but Mary doesn't wear any." Paige informs her.

"Mine is enchanted; Cain can alter it to match my outfit," Misha informs her, and the Bunny giggles.

"Oh, well then, I'll let him know what would look best afterward."

"Um, my necklace is the same? He can change it, and I can't take it off on my own." Cyrene says softly.

"Alright, no more holding back. What is that item, and what did you get from the random roll that was so exciting that you couldn't tell anyone in public. Just send it in a private message if you need to."

[Ancient Pet Collar] Allows use of any of the wearer's skills on command of an Ancient. The wearer may return to gifting Ancient's side immediately once every 24 hours from anywhere in the world. Grants additional skill [Trick], Allowing the Wearer to utilize one previously unknown Skill or Ability designated and known by the Ancient. Appearance can be modified by gifting Ancient art at any time.

"Oh, you sneaky little snake. I knew you were holding back on that item's abilities. Teaching you to do tricks is pretty amazing as well. You know you're going to have to tell Cain, right? But more importantly, what did you get from the random roll?"

Cyrene pulls a giant plush stuffed animal from her inventory. 2.5 meters tall, it is identical to Cain's Ancient Form.

"You got a stuffed animal?" Paige asks incredulously while Daisy moves forward to cuddle the stuffed Ancient.

"Oh, it's so soft. I'll bet this is softer than my ears."

"Huehue. If I can't cuddle him all night long, this is the next best thing." Cyrene giggles and wraps around the stuffed animal, sighing at the feel of soft fur on her scales.

"Alright, so the Lamia is obsessed. But can we get on with the clothing? I swear if you don't behave, I'll call him in here." Daisy teases Cyrene, who freezes. She wouldn't



object, but right now, she's naked and wrapped around a stuffed version of him, which could be more than a little embarrassing.

"Alright, let's find some good outfits. We absolutely do not want to be late for the party; they have the most incredible sweets and snacks served by the Royal Kitchen." Misha orders, holding a powder pink and gold dress up to Paige.

"Not bad compliments on your blonde hair, but it needs a little something else."

It takes three hours to get all the outfits right and the makeup and hair for five finished. When they come down, they're all suitably dressed for the banquet.

"Looking stunning as always." Cain declares, kissing Misha and changing her accessories to a ruby-encrusted golden necklace and bracelets that complement the black dress with golden accents that she picked.

"Cyrene here has something to tell you, don't you?" Misha says, pulling the Lamia front and center, the plain metal chain choker looking very out of place with her red and silver ball gown.

"Well, if, you see I. You gave it to me, you see, and how could I not? I mean..." Cyrene babbles, so Cain activates [Superior Mental Domination] and looks into her mind.

The name of the item he gave her wasn't just related to the appearance of seems. He does indeed now officially have a pet Lamia.

"That's fine, I understand." He smiles, rubbing her back and making her give an involuntary sigh, which sounds more like a soft hiss.

"You do?"

"I can read minds, remember? I know what it is now and what you need. But first, let's make that a bit more appropriate for a Royal Ball." Cain smiles back at Cyrene.

Looking into her thoughts, he realized that trying to fix her damaged mind was a lost cause. She was already so obsessed with the fact that someone finally cared for her that she had flown full-on into a cultist's level of Devotion.

If he ordered her to serve as his belt every day, she would see it as an honor. She was so far gone that a pet bed in the corner of his room was currently her highest goal, other than getting him to praise her.

Cain wasn't sure what to do about that, but for now, just taking care of her and keeping her safe and happy would do.

[Like any good pet owner should.] The thought pops into his mind, and Cain remembers that he's still merged with a pair of Seraphim Inquisitors.

[The Ancients kept anything as pets. After all, they made most of them. Just don't go overboard, and the regular people around you shouldn't get too upset. The original Ancients went overboard.]

The second Inquisitor's mirth appears in Cain's mind before he speaks. [Plus, having your very own loyal cult is kind of nice. If you were Seraphim, you could gain the power of their adoration.]

Cain wonders if a similar effect might occur with Ancients if they gather enough followers, but tunes the pair out before they convince him that becoming a cult leader is the right thing to do, instead focusing on Cyrene's necklace.

It won't become anything but a choker, unlike Misha's, which will become any necklace he likes. So Cain settles on a delicately engraved silver collar with one single large ruby in front, matching her with Misha, as well as the Lamia's beautiful black and red ball gown.

Cain changes into a black suit with a red vest and tie, then looks over the others. Paige looks every bit the part of the Princess she is, but Mary isn't wearing any visible jewelry. Cain has an older necklace in his inventory that gives a decent amount of Summon damage, not even a third of what his current one does, but a big bonus for Mary.

"Try this one, and let's see what it looks like on an Elf," Cain says, handing over the necklace.

Just like on him, it's a simple gold rope, only much thinner. It adds a bit of flair to her appearance, and Cain nods.

"You can keep that. It adds Summon damage, and you'll be grateful to have a much of that as you can get if you decide to start rerunning dungeons solo." Cain smiles.

"It is beautiful, thank you." Mary blushes, and Misha hides her smile.

The Puppet Master is sweet and Misha adores her kind and gentle nature on a personal level, but she decides the Elf will need to be paired up with someone before she becomes a threat to Misha's own position. Her Cain likes cute things too much, and he's got a soft spot for women who are kind to him.

She could also induct the Elf as one of Cain's followers. Maybe one of the Guild Members would be a good match for her? If she organizes a series of parties for King James's birthday and invites everyone, there's a good chance she will find someone suitable.

Misha is lost in her thoughts of matchmaking as they make their ways down the stairs to the travel circle, only coming back to her senses once they arrive at the Skyview Palace Gardens.

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

## Chapter 344 330 Royal Birthday

The entire palace and surrounding area were packed with well-wishers when Cain's group arrived, despite the somewhat early hour.

Everyone was excited to see who the King would pick and if the rumors were true. The atmosphere wasn't tense, as Cain had feared, but festive. A great variety of guests were on the list today, from Skyview, the Nyanko Confederacy, the Serrah Woods, and other friendly nations.

None of the guests of honor were out yet, but Cain did see one friendly face that he hasn't expected to. Prince Sven and his fiancée Princess Lauren of the Serrah Woods are in attendance, standing near the travel circle.

The Kitsune recognizes Cain right away and brings his bride to be over to say hello, escaping from the boredom of being introduced to Nobles and answering questions about the recent events in Landis.

"Duke Cain, my good friend. It's wonderful to see you again. I'm sure you've heard the rumor that the Princess Luann is among the top candidates, so we couldn't resist visiting." Sven greets them before pulling Lauren in front of him to make her own introductions.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, Duke Cain. Thank you for getting my beloved safely away from that war zone." The Elf greets him politely, but he can see her hands are still going for Sven's tails, despite him placing her in front of him and safely out of range.

Maybe the magic of fluffy tails is addictive? It wouldn't be the strangest thing Cain has discovered about this world.

With such a large group, strangers are reluctant to butt into their conversations, much to the relief of Sven, who was getting overwhelmed. A quick round of introductions are made, and Lauren gives a longing look to Daisy's ears.

Misha decides to save the new arrival from her fellow fluff lover, so she brings out her blue feathered wings and wraps Lauren up in a hug. Cain realizes what she's doing and adjusts her jewelry to have blue gems instead of red while maneuvering the Elf to a quieter location.

"Ladies, why don't you have a chat while I catch up with Sven?" Cain suggests, and the other ladies follow after the pair, just as intrigued by the previously hidden wings as Lauren was.

With the group split, the other Dukes come to visit. Chen and Archibald first, then Dutchess Morgan, and a businessman Cain doesn't recognize.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. Meet Duke Roscoe of Lapland on the northern continent, who has graciously accepted to be my plus one for the festivities." Dutchess Morgan introduces him to the group.

"These are the Dukes Archibald and Chen, and Duke Cain, whom we have heard so much about."

"Oh, I hope the rumors are good ones this time?" Cain laughs, and Roscoe almost chokes on his tongue.

"After the events on the eastern side of this continent, I'm not sure if the rumors should be called good or bad. The story on the Northern Continent is that a burgeoning young warlord has put half the Central Continent under his protection.

The Wave Riders like to gossip when they're drinking, and they weren't shy about the amount of money you donated to eliminate your rivals; then the stories from the Mercenaries started coming back of multiple Summoned armies all carrying the same Guild Tag of Darklight Host, of which the system says you're the Guild Master." Roscoe explains.

"You should also check in on your summons in Niman; they've run amok and are helping a nomad army from the steppes besiege the capital. It's making people think you've got a deal with them too, to take over Niman and the Southern Steppes." Duke Chen explains.

He's right; the Echoes are having a grand time attacking the blue-walled city that Cyrene saw in her vision. The nomads probably aren't going to want the whole town, being nomads and all, so maybe they should bring it to the King's attention that they might be able to gain new territory and end one of the threats to the region entirely.

If the Echoes have been doing as well as they think they have at eliminating the slavers, the entire territory should practically fall into their lap if the Skyview army attacks with the intention to conquer.

"That's enough politics for today; this is a celebration. How has your dear daughter Rae been getting along with the King?" Cain asks, and Dutchess Morgan smiles so wide it looks like the scar on her face will split open.

"Very well indeed. I expect good news will be coming about their relationship very soon." The proud mother declares.

"Would you like for me to gift her a conception chance increasing skill, or do you have it covered with potions?" Cain jokes, and the other Dukes start laughing.

"You laugh now, but I've always wanted grandchildren. They seem like so much more fun than children. It won't be long, and the succession will be secure again."

The trays of drinks and dessert squares are beginning to make the rounds, a signal everyone recognizes as meaning the King is about to appear. His favorite snacks are always served just before he comes out.

Most Nobles think that is his intention, getting people to associate him with his favorite food, but it's a result of Gwen colluding with the kitchens to get HER favorite foods served. They just happen to have similar tastes.

Sure enough, he soon comes out, followed by four lovely ladies. Rae and Khali, the nearly matching pair of petite dark-haired, pale-skinned humans, one the King's childhood best friend, the other a Princess from Nyanko Confederacy. They are joined by Luann, a blonde Elven princess, who is the sixteenth Daughter of Prince Galt of the Serrah Woods, and towering over all the other Consorts is Adalynn, the Cat Kin granddaughter of Duke Chen.

All of them are dressed for their new station in elegant ball gowns with a delicate tiara on their heads to signify their position as members of the Royal Harem.

Gasps fill the air at the sight, realizing that the King is really making good on his word of a diverse and equal chance for humans and nonhumans to join the Royal Family, firmly sinking the change of Royal policy into every mind.

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

## **Chapter 345 331**

Once they've reached the railing that overlooks the gardens, they all stop and Rae steps forward to stand beside the King. That makes everyone who knows the pair smile for their good fortune, and the King begins his introduction.

"We welcome you all to the official announcement of the formation of the Royal Harem. Let us begin by introducing the new Head Consort, Rae, eldest Daughter of Dutchess Morgan of Skyview.

It was not easy to choose a leader from among such fine candidates, but the Ladies saved us the trouble and chose from among their own ranks a leader who they believe best suited for the duties of public engagements.

As you know, we have been the best of friends all our lives, and it is an honor to welcome Rae to the Royal Family. Please give her your most earnest of welcomes."

The crowd breaks into cheering at the announcement, and Cain takes a good look around to see if there is any sign of a threat. Gwen certainly had her assassins spread throughout the crowd, but there's no harm in taking extra precautions.

The announcement that a locally born human is leading the group seems to have been enough for any among the Nobles who still harbored doubts, and all the faces look genuinely happy, with the exception of a few groups of young women.

That's understandable though, with only four out of thousands being picked, and only two of them from Skyview, the dreams of life as a princess have been crushed for a great many unwed noble daughters.

Looking more closely, Cain notices that more than a few young men look a bit dejected at the young ladies being taken off the market, but after the war, there are many more female than male children of the nobility surviving, so it shouldn't be too difficult for any who aren't an absolutely horrible person to find a suitable match.

It looks like that's what Misha is doing right now in fact, introducing the prime choices among the young noblemen to Mary and Paige. Cain takes a quick look in on her thoughts, seeing that they are mostly about finding the perfect husband for the ladies, in order to peacefully eliminate the competition, so he just leaves her to her work.

Really, the worst that could happen is that she succeeds in finding a suitable match and one or both of the ladies lives happily ever after.

Well, there's a chance that she might find a charlatan with a good mask, but since they're so much higher level now than the youth of Skyview, that shouldn't pose much of a problem, should the Elves wish to get rid of the nuisance.

Cain missed the others being introduced as he was distracted, but the applause as the speeches are finished brings his attention back. He adds his applause to the noise, and the party really starts to get into full swing.

Today marks celebration day one of ten, so everyone is fresh and ready to party, the enthusiasm level extremely high as the Nobles celebrate the King's coming of age.

[What one smells better, rose petals or lilac blossoms] Gwen sends him a message out of the blue.

[I think Lilac, why?]

[We're getting the King's bedroom ready for the evening, but the servants couldn't make up their mind. We needed a tie breaking vote.]

Cain isn't sure what the King's preferences are, and he's not about to go digging through his mind for those sorts of thoughts, so Cain decides that the 50/50 chance is close enough.

[As long as nobody is allergic to either, you should be fine.] He finishes the conversation, feeling Gwen turn her attention away from him and on to whatever task they're taking care of.

The rumors turned out to be even more widespread than Cain had expected, with the events involving the Guild laid squarely at his feet. The assembled Nobles and dignitaries all agreed on two things though, the Darklight Host was running things behind the scenes on the eastern side of the continent and that King James was an ally of the Guild.

Some of the variations of the rumors were pretty outlandish, like the claim that King James was dead and replaced with a Puppet, or that Cain himself was over level 600 and simply hiding his true power. The supporters of that theory claimed it was the only explanation for the sudden changes in level they had seen him exhibit.

Cain was listening to all the gossip about himself mixed in with the chatter about the Royal Harem when he heard one version that made him smile. That Demon noble claimed that the massacre at the Blood Sands Castle wasn't Duke Cain at all, but the Demon King and his protégé, who had a defense pact with the Darklight Host.

The Succubus was laughed at, her story dismissed as too outlandish, so Cain went over to talk to her.

"You're half right you know. King Aggramor was there. As was his protégé. But she's the daughter of one of our Guild Officers and a member of the Darklight Host herself." Cain whispers to the dejected Demon.



Cain turns to leave, but the Succubus grabs him. "Wait, tell them that. The honor of the Succubus Maids is at stake."

Her voice was loud enough that the Nobles who ridiculed her could hear, so they all turned to see what was going on.

"I wasn't personally at the recent battle at our Guild Castle. But what I can tell you is that King Aggramor was there, visiting with one of our young Guild Members that he is quite fond of. The actual details are, of course, confidential." Cain explains and a fresh round of rumors spread through the crowd.

Misha had gathered a pretty sizeable group of ladies by the time midnight came around and King James took his leave, along with the guests of honor. Nobody expected to see them again anytime soon, so the less party minded attendees began to disperse.

The party at the palace would still be going on in the morning, and all through the next week, but for now they would be moving a portion of it back to the Manor in Long Fang Valley.

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

## Chapter 346 332

Misha was arranging a garden party for the following afternoon at the Long Fang Valley Manor, promising good food and like-minded company. Cain wasn't sure what they all had in common, but a brunch for fifty was well within the capabilities of the Kitchen staff.

The actual number would be a bit higher, as several Guild members, including Kone and Lickity, were at the Manor when they returned, enjoying the natural surroundings, but that is always expected. Everyone loves a good party.

Cain woke up to the warmth of Misha on his arm and the familiar pink hair of Cyrene looking down at him. She had clearly been there a while, waiting for him to wake up.

"Are you sure you're alright with being a Lamia? If it's causing trouble for you, I can change you again." Cain offers, petting her head while she gathers her thoughts.

"I like things better this way. I know I'm a little odd, but I swear I will be your best Lamia ever." Cyrene insists, making Cain smile and ruffle her hair.

"Alright, I should get ready for the day. Come here and cuddle Misha so she doesn't get cold." She instructs, sliding from under Misha's arm and letting the Lamia replace him.

Misha would likely notice the change in only a few minutes, since the Lamia is warmer than he is and smells like coconut lotion, but that still gives him enough time to get showered and ready for the day.

Once they're all ready, Cain heads down the hall to where Mary and Paige are staying to see if they want breakfast. He finds that they're both already awake and interrogating one of the Honey Badger girls Cain made as additional chefs.

Neither of them had been to Skyview before, so when the cook came around to check breakfast orders, they captured her to catch up on current events and make sense of everything they heard at the Royal Ball last night.

The chef doesn't know much about the rumors since the Guild Members do not need to gossip. The rumors are about them, after all, and they already know what really happened. But that's even better for Paige and Mary, a bit of truth to go with the rumors they heard. But it still seems pretty incredible.

Cyrene catches up to Cain again before he makes it to the dining room, wrapping around his waist so he doesn't leave her behind. "I had a question for you this morning before I got distracted. Can you set a skill for my collar's ability? Something powerful or unique that people would associate with you?"

As a Guild member, she can already Summon Epic Golems. Cain decides that something with flash and utility would be the best choice. But he doesn't have any flashy skills other than Summoning. She can already use lightning, and he could teach her totems from a book; no need to use the item's unique ability for that.

It's the summons that everyone associates with Cain. But his ability to buff everyone is the real secret to their success.

"I will give you one of my more interesting abilities to use for your [Trick]. It is called Ancient Wisdom, and it will let you grant the whole party one of your or your summons abilities. It works like a buff so that passives will affect everyone, or active skills will be usable."

Cyrene remembers this one, he's used it before, and it was awesome. The variety of her valuable skills is limited, but she does have a few bonuses that could help the group, or she can use the Guild Skill and Summon something to share their best skill with everyone the way Cain did.

Cain considers what books to get for Cyrene to help increase her versatility over breakfast, spending most of the meal half lost in his thoughts. The atmosphere in the large dining room was much more lively than usual with so many people present for a change, even if Mary was mainly looking around in wonder.

"You haven't spent much time outside the jungle, have you?" Cain asks the young Elven Puppet Master.

"No, in fact, this is only my third trip away from the city since I moved there. I got the Puppet Master quest on my first one and went out once more looking for new summons."

Her Summoning list is probably as short as the other Puppet Master he met, Gillibrand. Maybe it's a joke by the system? Giving the class that benefits the most from being widely traveled to a bunch of homebodies? Cain could see the Laughing God doing that on purpose.

"We should bring you out, explore a few more dungeons then. I'm sure you've got lots of Demons and Beastkin, but we could bring you to see more Fae and Ogres. I'd say Seraphim too, but you've surely recorded them when I Summoned them."

Mary nods happily. "I got a bunch of new forms from you. The area near our entrance to the Demon Dungeon is all Obsession Demons, so I didn't get too much variety from there. I've got a lot of Forest Beasts, though, since it's the best way to level up in the jungle."

That gets Kone's attention, and she draws the Puppet Master into a chat about animals of all varieties. Nemu takes this distraction as a chance to climb into Cain's lap, and Misha uses her wing to swat at the Felian.

,m "No, wait, it's perfect, you see. Reptile, Mammal, and Bird with the Ancient." Nemu laughs, rubbing up against Cyrene, enjoying the warmth.

Cain just smiles at their antics while the combination of furry and warm makes Cyrene and Nemu friends in an instant.

"Mary, I have a proposition for you. How do you think your parents would feel about an alliance or Merger with the Darklight Host? We've got a pretty good network from the Central continent to the shores of the East and North. I am about to start expanding our equipment deliveries to the South, and I think it would complement your family's business well."

The proposal seems to have taken her off guard, and she looks shocked for a while. "It's my parents Guild, so I don't have a say. But it's just one ship and a shop on the Eastern coast of the East Continent. They might be high level, but compared to all this? We're poor sailors compared to this. You own an entire valley, and it's not even the Guild's home base."

"Why don't you see if they can come to visit us here then? If we can bring them into the fold, even with an alliance, it would help expand our reach. I'm certain we've still got some spaces left in the Guild since the castle expanded our maximum numbers."

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

## Chapter 347 333

Around noon, the Nobles started showing up for the garden party, and Mary had good news. Her parents were at home and willing to talk with Cain. Her slightly nervous appearance said Mary was hiding something important from him, but he could sort that out later, once it came time to negotiate.

After breakfast, Cain had taken some time to bring out his inscription desk and fill in Cyrene's Totem abilities since she could now use Shaman books. He also added an [Area Healing] Totem to his own skills. Just in case he ended up somewhere without his summons handy, it couldn't hurt to take a little precaution and expand his abilities.

The last item he wanted to create was a book for Mary. The one that began his path to greatness, [Summon Cloning]. The inscription desk was the only way he could get it done since it was an S Rank book. He had borrowed Guru level inscription from merging with an Inscriptionist Summon but didn't know or likely have the materials needed to make the book in permanent form.

They weren't officially allies yet, but Cain liked her attitude, so he was willing to help Mary along the way and give her the advantage. For some reason, the Elf made Misha territorial, a notion which he would have to correct later, but Cain was sure that Mary would make good use of the help he was willing to give her.

He slowly completed the textbook that a Rank S skill comes from, spending the rest of the time between breakfast and the party making a single copy before calling Mary over.

"Mary, I have a gift for you. I hope you'll appreciate and make good use of it; it's one of my most precious skills. [Summon Cloning]." Cain handed her the heavy tome, and Mary stared at it in awe.

Such a gift was worth more than her family's ship. She wasn't lying about being poor merchants; her parents weren't great at business to begin with and had recently lost almost everything to pirates.

They had managed to keep their vessel afloat, but they'd been hauling mostly small margin herbs and food between Continents for years, kept out of the Armor and valuables markets by stronger Guilds that controlled the ports.

Now, Cain was giving her such a valuable gift, and they'd have to explain that they hauled food between Continents and weren't going to help make the Guild rich.

"I am not sure I can accept this. It is far too valuable, I mean, a skill book that doubles summons? That's crazy. No wonder you're so overpowered, and it explains why you chose Lord as your first tree."

"It is yours now; use it quickly since that copy will decay if you don't. It's a form of security to keep the book from falling into the wrong hands." A small lie; it's just a feature of the Inscription Desk he uses that is intended for students making their skill books.

It was more likely designed to prevent students from cheating and sharing their successes.

Mary uses the book before Cain can change his mind, then turns and grabs Paige in a bone-crushing hug. "Did you see? He made me an S Ranked skill. I've got an actual S Ranked Summoning skill."

Mary spins the elegantly dressed Princess in a happy circle while Cain tries not to laugh.

"Even happy tears smudge your makeup, ladies. Hope about we join the garden party? There are a lot of Nobles here already, and it looks like my Companions are having a grand time."

That's an understatement. Nemu plays along with a band that Cain recognizes as locals from Long Fang City. Mythryll and Nila are dancing, and Vala is animatedly talking about something with a group of Knights, while Laura and Evangeline play tag with some of the flying Beastkin.

"You've got a good thing going here, don't you?" Paige asks, looking at the celebration.

"It was a bit of a mess at the start; I'm sure the cook told you about the succession wars. But things are settled now, and Skyview is slowly becoming more stable. We've even mostly dealt with their most troublesome neighbor."

"Oh, the slave merchants that were mentioned at the party. That bit was your doing as well? The Nobles at the party said you'd hired Mercenaries, but I didn't believe you could afford such a strong force." Paige answered, looking deep in thought.

"A unique skill from my newest class. Third Advancement Summoners are no joke. I've sent a clone of myself there to cause chaos. Even if they kill it, they haven't won; I can simply send another." Cain explains, and the Elven Princess shakes her head.

"No wonder there are rumors about you putting half the continent under your protection. It's like being everywhere at once. But what sort of insane skill lets you give the ability to Summon to everyone you know?"

Misha, who had just come over to see what they were up to, burst into laughter. "It is a Guild Skill called [Benevolent Leader]. It sounds simple, just sharing a single class skill with your guild. It has to be gained from a class change or skill tree, nothing that came from a book or quest. But for a Puppet Master, that includes all their basic summons."

"That makes sense. I've seen a Guild with something similar; they use it so they can all have healing auras, which stack when they're close together, so they can send just Rangers and Warriors out into the jungle to hunt."

That's a perfect way to use the skill for a Guild that's short on healers. Plus, it would make any hunting party or raid happy to have their members. A healing aura on a front-line warrior is ideally placed to help those who take the most damage.

The chef has just brought out trays of chocolate-filled baklava when Mary's parents arrive, heavily scarred and dressed to go sailing, along with one more young Elven man.

"Sorry for the delay; Manuel here was at the new clinic in Munan; the doctor there made space to sneak him in between Nobles." Juan, Mary's father, explains, making everyone laugh.

Mary runs forward to hug the group. "They're not laughing at your misfortune. The Doctor you went to see is a Puppet Created by Duke Cain. I take it the attack was bad this time?"

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

## Chapter 348 334

,m "Worse than ever. The Pirates had a Beast Lord with them and used sea monsters to attack the flotilla. We made it out afloat but were sacked. Most of the others weren't even that lucky." Juan explains to his daughter in a low voice.

"How is everyone else? There's something wrong with my interface, and I can't see the Guild List." Mary whispers back.

"It is likely fine. We are all that's left. But we can hire more sailors and try again. This region looks pretty good, though. Maybe they'll be willing to set up a deal to trade with us; we could circle the western continent to make the drops."

"Or you could join us entirely, and I'd help you get a proper warehouse to distribute food and goods from the Darklight Host to the eastern and western Continents," Cain suggests, sliding into their conversation.

"A proper warehouse? What did you have in mind?"

"Large facility, over ten bedrooms so it could count as a Guild House, Intercontinental Travel Circle to bring food and gear directly from our allied farms and Crafters to the Port you're working out of. We've got direct ocean access in Long Fang Valley. If you get a chance to look over the city later, you'll see the Queen Rose docked here."

That has their complete attention. Paying for rented space and a dock killed their margins, but with a backer wealthy enough, they could open their port on a section of quiet shoreline.

The Eastern Coast of the East Continent didn't belong entirely to the Elves. It was contested territory, constantly at war like the region around Skyview, but that made their food imports from the Western Continent worth the risk.

"I have an idea for where to place such a building. Can we retire inside to talk in private?" Juan asks.

Cain nods and waves everyone back to the party. "We will have the boring business talk; you all enjoy yourselves. Just try not to party too hard; there's still eight more days of celebration for the King's coming of age."

At the Skyview Castle, parties were the last thing on King James's mind. Last night had been the single best experience of his entire existence, and he had only just gotten out of bed in the early afternoon.

All of his chosen lovers were with him, none dressed for the day yet. There was no rush, though; everyone in Skyview understood that the King only made a brief evening appearance at the party and hosted a daily dinner. The rest was entirely up to the citizens, with food and drink supplied by the Palace.

After the first night, the Palace Grounds also opened to everyone. Most of the Upper Nobles would be having their own parties all week, so the lesser Nobles and anyone else who could manage an outfit suitable to be allowed entry to the Palace Grounds would fill the area all week long.

That made the palace much more lively than the upper nobility ever got, with their need to maintain their dignity and the competition between them.



In public, his childhood friend Rae might be the one who steps forward to take charge and enjoys the limelight, but behind closed doors, it was a very different experience. There it was the dainty and delicate Elf, Luann, that took the lead.

None of them had any practical experience, but King James thought it had gone relatively well. There was only one way to find out, though. He needed a larger sample set to compare to. Good thing they hadn't bothered getting fully dressed.

Duke Chen, along with a large portion of his Sect, showed up at Long Fang Valley that afternoon. They don't hold parties at their compound; it would interfere with the training of the others, but they're not celibate monks, so getting out to celebrate now and then was still part of their routine.

That seemed to be the trigger for the actual party, and by the time dinner rolled around, a garden party for fifty noble ladies had morphed into a City spanning party for five thousand, and every Puppet Cain had in the area was busy.

The locals had been expecting this holiday, so they'd stocked up on everything in preparation, the smell of barbecues in the public parks filling the valley and drawing the farmers in to party with everyone else.

Many citizens from the villages outside the valley came as well, having been informed by their friends here that the Lord opened his parties to everyone and didn't expect any official duties to be done for the duration of the King's Coming of Age.

In essence, Long Fang Valley was closed for business, and Svetlana had convinced Damien to loosen the purse strings from the city's taxes to fund ten days of free drinks and food.

The change in culture, from their serious "fight to survive" life as merchant sailors, was a shock to Mary's family and the deciding factor not to rebuild their decimated Guild. Instead, they agreed to merge it with the Darklight Host, giving Cain an additional Guild House near the coast and one very battered ship plus four new members who turned out to all be family.

Manuel, as Cain learned while negotiating with Juan, was His wife Sofia's brother.

The ship was in for rebuilding at a dry dock on the coast and wouldn't be ready for at least a month, so they had plenty of time to look for a better facility. The House they inherited was a treehouse in somewhat a run-down shape, so Cain intended to scrap it and build something better.

It would be no significant loss; they didn't even have a travel circle there and had to use the one in town. Cain suspected that Juan wasn't very good at business, but he was a very animated man when talking about sailing.

In the future, Cain would have to assign either a Lieutenant or a Puppet with business skills to help out on the eastern continent. Leaving Juan to run the business side of things clearly wasn't a great idea.

If they are going to represent the Guild, they will have to do it well, so Cain is willing to put some upgrades into their trading vessel to get it back to peak shape. He will send Nila to look at it later, and if it's unacceptable, he will have another one built.

The prospect of having access to Guild Summons and not being helpless against Pirates opened up a whole new world to Juan, and Cain had high hopes that he just needed someone with business sense to turn the imported food business into a profitable one and a high volume trading partner for the Long Fang Valley.

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

## **Chapter 349 335 Gojira**

One thing Cain learned about their proposed new location is that the wars were only a part of the issue. An attack against the Dragons during the great war had mutated many of the weaker reptiles, and left the whole region infested with giant lizards.

The prospect of fighting dinosaurs sounds like great fun to Cain, but it does make placing a Guild House problematic. There's a lot of unclaimed shoreline, much like the Great Desert, so Cain is thinking that a castle fortress along the coast might be a much better option.

They could use it as a trading post, as well as a second Guild Castle, and make money with dockage and ship repair services. One thing he learned from Tortuga is that a good spot that has lots of wood, skilled tradesman and doesn't ask unnecessary questions is a lot to ask for in this world. But it's an amenity that his Guild can provide.

Juan and Manuel headed back the next morning to scout out the location, after being inducted into the Darklight Host. Mary wanted to accompany them for safety, but her mother managed to Guilt Trip her into staying behind.

The Puppet Master had been away from her family for years, living in Munan and hanging out with her best friend Princess Paige. She frequently found them items to trade, or helped them out when money was short, but in her mother's eyes, she did not come back home to visit nearly enough.

Cain learned that Kone had moved to the valley full time, along with Larkin. He was still working to earn forgiveness for peeping at her in the baths, but to Cain it looked a lot more like the young Beast Lord was training him as her servant.

As her species always does, Kone was growing up fast. Not mentally, but physically. She had grown over fifteen centimeters in the past few months, and was looking much more like a young lady than a young girl now.

Her interactions with the smitten Arch Paladin never failed to bring a smile to Cain's face, and he suspected the former prankster was much happier this way, getting all the attention he could ever want from the woman he was madly in love with.

By comparison, Cixelcid and Lickity were the boring couple. Cuddling on the couch, reading to the babies, and sitting up at the top of the Long Fang City Manor's pagoda to watch the sunset together.

They still mostly lived in Sunnybrook, preferring the weather there, but had started gaining levels again, so they were often at the Castle or in Montauk. The maids that Cid Summoned as Lieutenants had long since given up on keeping track of Neffie, assigning that duty to King Aggramor, and instead helped Lickity care for the two children who were growing at a more normal rate.

Both were maturing faster than would be normal for humans, but Lickity did at least get to enjoy their baby phase, and neither were walking or talking yet.

The prospect of dinosaurs was enough to draw the elusive Demon Queen in training away from whatever else had been holding her attention though. Only a few minutes after they were mentioned in Guild Chat, she was in Long Fang Valley with a pair of Guards and a Royal Architect in tow, ready to make plans for a dinosaur hunting Castle.

In the mind of Neffie, horses would become obsolete as Cavalry mounts if she could just capture and train Velociraptors for Knights to ride into battle. They were described as exactly what Cain recalled from his previous life, except possibly even more intelligent.

He wasn't sure that they could be trained as mounts, but he had to admit that the idea did have a certain appeal.

Even the Demon Royal Guards thought the idea was a great one. They didn't think it was possible, but if it was, they agreed to the brilliance of the plan. Mole Dogs used to be a wild predator and they Bonded with the Goblins to become mounts, so it wasn't unthinkable that other species might be the same way with enough effort.

Nobody had actually tried as far as they could tell. The locals viewed them as abominations, or as too dangerous to try to domesticate, so it wasn't something that they would have attempted.

They were in to day four of the party and Castle design planning when the perfect location was found by the exploring sailors. Over sixty Kilometers to the nearest village, with a deep bay protected by a breakwater. The rocky outcrop made the approach by sea a little dangerous, but nothing that couldn't be overcome, and it made the potential port much more appealing than a simple open water shore.

They had Summoned Kraken using [Benevolent Leader] to clear the monsters from the seas in the area, and had set up a good camp to make sure there weren't too many dangerous predators.

Having the summons made things much safer for them, but Cain decided to head out right away bringing only Misha and Cyrene with him, and leaving the Companions behind again to manage the party.

Honestly, Cain was happy that they got to have their own lives. He could call for them at any time, but they were more friends than summons at this point, so letting them enjoy the party just seemed right.

The first stop was Tortuga, where ten Platinum Bars were necessary to buy a pair of Circles that could link Long Fang Valley to the new Castle. Cain was going to have to spend more time in dungeons soon, this level of spending was hard on the budget. Not that they were going to go broke, but they were getting dangerously low on platinum.

It took a couple more portal trips to get to the village closest to his destination, but after that it was just a short flight by Dark Phoenix to where the two Elven sailors said they would be.

From above, it looked perfect. A large clearing between the jungle and the ocean, solid basalt for a base, and that barrier of rocks in the ocean that made a calm spot in the water.

Cain went through Neffie's plans and found one that somewhat worked for the shape of the outcrop where he wanted to build a castle.

A hundred meters wide and three hundred long, it was big, but not too big to defend, and a second ring of wall could easily be placed outside it from steep cliff to cliff, enclosing a village if they wanted.

A stone pier would be raised into the bay, and the sea floor reshaped a little to let ships have more room to maneuver.

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

## Chapter 350 336 Naming A Port

With an army of Granite Golems and Earth Elementals, he immediately began the process of building the fortress as the two sailors gasped in shock. When Mary had left home, she wasn't level 200 yet and was a Shaman specializing in sculpture. Because of that, they've never seen the might of a Puppet Master in action.

It's a much easier process this time than it was in the desert, thanks to the increased number of summons, as well as Cain's higher level, so they've got everything, right down to a collection of single room stone guest houses with slate shake roofs built near the keep, finished by evening. Neffie insisted those were important additions in case visitors snored.

Neffie insisted that people who snore too loud shouldn't be allowed in the main house to sleep, so she added these houses to the design. Cain added a barracks for the Puppets that he would need for working the docks, as well as a dry dock and some warehouse that Neffie didn't include in her village planning.

Making the Central keep as a replica of the baby Demon's image as requested wasn't structurally possible, but they did make four gargoyle statues of her for the roof.

That will have to do for now.

Cain spent almost an hour searching through his summons before he finally managed to find just the right one to finish off the Port. An Earth Element Legendary Demon that specialized in Inscription and Enchanting.

Cain explained what he wanted, and the stout Demon with its long beard smiled happily up at him. The look made Cain wonder where Dwarves came from. They're technically Fae, but these guys definitely look like they are the progenitors of the Dark Dwarves.

The Demons work together to ring the entire wall and the pier with inscriptions and enchantments that should make them virtually indestructible. They finish off with an area of effect magic cast on the nearby ocean. If anyone in the designated area fires at the port, a group of twelve Epic Krakens will be Summoned.

It will need to be recharged between uses, but that's an excellent start to their defense against naval attacks.

Now that the structure is built and complete, Cain opens his interface to add the port to the Guild Inventory. Surprisingly, once registered, it doesn't just count as a castle; it counts as a Port and allows them to set ships as Guild Vessels. What the benefit of that is, Cain doesn't know, but he suspects that it's the minor version of having their own navy.

That brings Cain to the next dilemma. He forgot to ask for a name. He's terrible at naming things, and he can't exit this interface without calling it something. Yes, it can be changed later, like they did for the Castle, but the first name will be announced to all Guild Members when he finalizes the addition.

He doesn't want to embarrass himself with a bad name, so he's got to come up with something. Cain panics for a moment before the most brilliant of ideas reaches him. He will name it after its designer.

[Port of Nefheim Has Been Added] Guild maximum members increased to 600.

"Yus! Suck on that; I've got my own Port City!" Neffie cheers in Guild Chat, and Cain can see the tears of laughter rolling down Cyrene's face.

[You know nobody lives there, right?] Char teases the ecstatic Demon.

[Yet. Nobody lives there yet. But soon, they will, and we will train raptors as Cavalry, and it will be glorious.]

"What appearance should we go with for Puppets to work the docks? What species live near here?" Cain asks Juan and Manuel, who are more familiar with the area.

"Mostly Elves, but a few species of half-giant live in the nearby villages as well. If you mix the two, that should work out well." Juan suggests.

He needs to describe to Cain what these half-giants look like, but it only takes a few minutes, and Cain has a Puppet ready. He makes ten default versions, then five with shipbuilding, carpentry and sail making skills. That should take care of the docks.

Two male Elves with accounting skills are made to keep things organized, and then Cain creates five Elven maids and two clones of the Honey Badger cooks. One cook and two maids go to the keep; the others will be running a waterfront seafood restaurant.

Misha finds uniforms for the restaurant staff, a version of the sailors outfits with aprons added for the servers, or to go under the chef coat for the Honey Badger. That seems much more appropriate than the default Maid look Cain gave them.

They've got lots of food and building materials in the Guild Bank, which won't be a problem, but as a precautions, Cain created a half-giant lumbering team.

The trees nearest to them are big Rose Oak trees, the same pink material that Queen Rose is made of but it is also suitable for fires to keep the ocean chill off without magic and it makes for cheap ship repairs, should anyone need them.

They're over three meters across; dropping a single tree would last the Port for months, so Cain has four cut down and pulled near the walls. They can dry and split one for firewood and planks, then let the others dry naturally.

All they need now is furniture, which the Guild happily adds to the bank. Chairs, tables, beds, a bunch of wood stoves. It doesn't take long to get everything transferred, but it takes quite a while for Cain and the Puppets to set the essentials up while the others watch the organized chaos.

The last thing to go in is the circle. The intercontinental Circles have to be matched to a destination, so Cain asks Cid to set up the second copy in the open area outside the Long Fang Valley Manor. It's near the main road, and the open field will give room to set up a new market or stage wagons to head to the Port to be loaded onto merchant ships.

With that complete, they're ready for their very first visit. Who else but the Port Namesake could be worthy of being the first to visit the Guild's New Port?

Neffie comes through first, followed by her family, and immediately begins doing a happy dance while cheering "Nefheim". No amount of convincing or animals by Lickity will get the hyper Demon Queen to stop celebrating the fact she has a town named after her.

"You know, you're never going to be able to change the name of this place, right? She won't allow it, and I'm certain she will have King Aggramor on her side as usual." Cid laughs, watching his daughter celebrate.

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