

Reincarnated With A Summoning System

C 351 - 400

Chapter 351 337

"Oh, I have a plan for that. The more responsibility she's given, the more powerful she will get. So once she has matured enough, I will give her control of this place. In the meantime, though, I've still got permanent Summons that can be used to run things here.

That will work better once the place is up and running since they're created based on what you need. Once I need a manager for the Port, I'll call either my last Commander or a Lieutenant to keep things going smoothly."

Cain's explanation is enough for Cixelcid, who understands very well the way the System seems to be Optimizing Lieutenants. The ones it gave him as Cain's first Commander are a lifesaver and versatile enough that they'll be able to help with anything that is likely to come up.

Svetlana, made from the copy of his appointment, is an incredible manager for Long Fang Valley, and her Lieutenants are very good at infiltration. He can't verify it, but Cid is pretty sure by the way people react to her presence that very few have even realized that Gwen the Kitsune is not just a pretty fox.

"The Port is great and all, but I don't suppose anyone has located the raptors yet, have they? I can't train raptor Cavalry without any mounts." Neffie insists, making everyone chuckle.

"How about we finish getting everything set up here and have a Guild dinosaur hunt? We will go out in groups and see what lives in the area." Cain suggests.

With everyone here, finishing decorating the buildings shouldn't take too long, and Cain only needs to add one more active building to their list, the city's first hotel. Unlike Blood Sands Castle, the Port will be a public place, so they're hoping to attract some full-time residents to take care of most things visitors will need.

To encourage this, Cain, Paige, and Juan all send out group messages to their friends, letting them know that Port Nefheim is open and looking for skilled tradespeople, with plenty of shops already built for those with skills.

The Wave Riders think this is a fantastic idea, they're always looking for more open Ports, and Cain built a dry dock facility to make repairs easier than beaching their vessel and bringing in material.

In only a few hours, they have gotten their first response, a rope maker from Munan. The younger son of a local craftsman, he saw the opportunity to open his shop in a prime location near the docks.

Being a mostly suspended city, Munan uses a lot of rope and has an equally large number of tradespeople making it. The supplies he needs are readily available by ship or could be grown in the area if someone was feeling brave.

Considering that, Cain builds a secondary wall closer to the tree line. That leaves room for more growth, as well as a few small farms, so they won't need to import absolutely everything. Svetlana manages to use that information to draw a young couple from Long Fang Valley to the Port.

Again, they were younger children of local farmers with little inheritance, but they were hemp farmers, which the rope makers most commonly use for ship's rigging.

In this tropical climate, and with the help of the husband's skills as a Druid, the plants will grow incredibly fast. The fiber is also commonly used for sails, but with their limited space, Cain isn't sure how much they'll be able to grow. Hopefully, enough for all work done here.

Cain uses summons to build them a farmstead, and they happily set about cutting and splitting portions of the giant tree Cain had been working with to stock themselves with firewood. They brought a few dozen plants with them, and that same evening they're hard at work planting cuttings and then using little magic to get them to grow roots.

The next day brings a blacksmith and a butcher, both from the surrounding villages. The fishing boats saw the new Port and passed along the message. Since the Darklight Host cleared out the low-level sea monsters in the area, their fishing trips were also about to become much safer.

Most of the Guild went back to their business after that, but Cid and his family stayed, insisting that Char could find new managers for the Beginners Valley and that since the Port was named for Neffie, they were the natural managers for the new location.

That works out great for Cain, he can move back and forth between here and the Manor until the Coming of Age Celebrations are finished, and then he can organize that Guild wide dinosaur hunt that Neffie is after.

The promise of getting to take over from her father when she's ready had the Demon Queen practically vibrating with energy. For the first time in her life, she was eager to

study instead of looking for ways to avoid it. That alone was enough to make Lickity think that this move was a good idea.

The ships that began to stop on the third day to avoid a storm at sea brought their first guests, and the Puppets sprang into action. A night in a hotel out of the rain was a priority, with good food a close second.

The Wave Riders informed Cain that they were going to send a merchant to stay at Port Nefheim, but he was delayed by the storm and wasn't going to show up for a few more days. That would give the Port a skilled merchant, with connections to move whatever might come through.

Very convenient for a Guild with a lot of gear and Food to sell, especially since Carlos was spending most of his time in Landis lately, which still didn't get much trade traffic, in fear that the war wasn't really over.

The fact that Cain's dock inspectors didn't ask what was in the cargo they unloaded, only for the dockage and unloading fees, was not lost on the piracy-minded Elves when they came to drop off the merchant. They weren't in Port for more than a few hours, but it was only the start.

More Vessels arrived the same afternoon to deal with the merchant, and after working out trade routes, the merchant requested that access to an auction house be looked into as a possibility. Some things that they had to trade were just too specific or valuable for the open market.

Most goods he could move in and out via his Wave Rider kinfolk, but having to make multiple jumps through travel circles to sell the rest was a hassle.

Tortuga was the obvious choice, and the circle could reach them; the only issue was the bureaucracy. A new dedicated link required altering their existing circle, for which a number of rare and expensive materials were needed since the existing one was at its maximum of ten destinations.

But before that, the new location had to be approved by the council, which had to keep threats to their city from various Nations Navies in mind.

It wasn't going to be a fast process, but the Auctions in Skyview could also be used for less suspicious types of items while a decision was made. Cain might be a valued customer to the auctions in Tortuga, but Port Nefheim was still very new and didn't have a reputation to back up such a request without conditions.

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

Chapter 352 338

With things now mostly stable at Port Nefheim, Cain returned to Munan along with Misha, Cyrene, Paige, and Mary. Mary was excited to try out the new [Summon Duplication] passive that Cain gave to her, and there was no better place than the Demon Dungeon in Munan to try it out.

The extra bodies weren't really necessary with Cain around but merged back to their previous numbers; they were now doing a much better job of damaging the Demons. Mary had followed Kone's advice this run and Merged with Granite Golems Summoned with [Benevolent Leader] since they were the most durable known Epic Summon, and her own safety comes first after that near death incident.

The Beast Lord herself uses Lords of Decay because they boost mana regeneration, and all healing you do is increased when you merge with them. Still, Mary is more worried about being assassinated again than what her mana pool looks like.

The experiment is a resounding success. Mary has the confidence to take on this dungeon alone again, and Cain reaches level 260, giving him the Skill Points to activate [Greater Merger].

[Greater Merger] gain access to all skills known by merged Summons. Double the number of summons that can be merged with before every stage of diminishing returns.

That's going to be an incredible boost for Cain. The few skills he gets from his current mergers are nothing compared to obtaining every skill the Summon knows.

The secondary skills of a Summon are often the most useful. Especially when dealing with Epic and Legendary Summons. He will have to go through his entire list of known Summons later and look for ways to exploit skill interactions. With a little work and experimentation, Cain is confident that he can make himself even more overpowered.

Unfortunately for them, it's time for Paige to go home to the Royal Residence. Her continued absence has been noticed, and her mother's instability is still an issue, so the Elders want her where they can easily find the next in line to the throne.

The fact that it's the new Council Leader in Dryad form that comes to pick her up makes Paige smile. The Elder must have been more bothered than expected by the childish appearance, or maybe she doesn't want the little sister obsessed with Paige teasing her.

It's a bit quiet without her around, but Mary plans to move into Port Nefheim once she reaches level 300. There are both dinosaurs and dungeons in the area so that she won't be too bored, and it's close enough that Paige can come to visit directly from the private travel circle in her home.

Unlike everywhere else with an intercontinental capable circle, Port Nefheim doesn't charge a fee to arrivals. They want people to visit, set up shop, and help the Port City grow. Cain hopes that it's enough to help them be a primary choice of arrival destination for visitors to the continent, but Neffie thinks they need more attractions.

Adding a large sandy beach is suggested since the spot they found is among basalt cliffs and lacks any such amenity. There's good cliff diving, and the water is as warm as most people would bathe in, thanks to underwater geothermal vents, but without a beach, they're missing out.

Cain tells Lickity that it's OK to alter the shoreline at the edge of town furthest from the docks. That's up the current from the city so that any pollution won't bother the beach, and it's not near the shipping lanes, with the rocks that protect the beach separating the two.

With Lickity watching over Neffie, Cain is sure that nothing too strange will be done to the shoreline.

The following days are spent bouncing between Long Fang Valley for afternoon parties, Munan for the dungeons, and Port Nefheim to ensure everyone is settling in well. By the time the King goes into isolation with his Harem, as is the traditional way to attempt to secure his first heir, Cain is exhausted and looking forward to wandering through the jungle looking for Raptors just for the time to relax.

They will be going in teams on this mission. Kone with Larkin, Mythryll, and five of Cain's Companions. Neffie with King Aggramor, Cixelcid, five Companions, and Cain with Mary and Cyrene.

Misha has opted to sit this one out; she got a new recipe during yesterday's dungeons and planned to spend the day Tailoring with Lickity and Daisy.

Cain is sure she's just as exhausted as he is by the fast pace of life lately and doesn't blame her for wanting to relax. He suggested that Cyrene stay home and rest as well, but she's decided that it's just as easy to stay wrapped around him and give timely warnings about battle visions while keeping totems active.

Cid jokes that she's his private tutorial. Warnings that enemies are coming and their strengths, little buffs here and there, and notifications if he forgets something.

They asked the residents of the nearest few villages about the dinosaurs, and they've seen quite a few varieties, but primarily herbivores. The predators don't usually come near the shore since they can't swim.

That means they'll likely need to go further inland to find what they need, but Neffie is being much more reasonable than expected about her search.

Any form of rideable dinosaur is worth investigating in her mind. Raptors would be best, but something Armored might not be bad either; it would save on equipment. She definitely wants dinosaur Cavalry through.

Cain and Mary head southwest to search the region near a group of steep cliffs Cid saw from the air while scouting. The access is difficult, and for much of the journey you'll have to go by foot or miss everything due to the forest's canopy, but it seems like a good spot for a mount sized species to live.

The first few hours don't provide much in the way of dinosaur sightings, but just before Cain was going to call a break for lunch, the group picks up the bleating of animals in distress. That's a pretty good sign that they are close to their targets.

The ground isn't shaking, so it's likely not something huge, which would be a waste of time. You can't hit things with your sword from way up in the air.

They sneak through the trees until they reach the clearing where the noise is coming from. There is a form of Water Buffalo here, but Cain can't see any predator that might be causing the distress.

They wait in the grass near the tree line for a few more minutes before the cause of the commotion presents itself. Human hunters, not the dinosaurs they were looking for.

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

- Chapter 353 339 Dino Cavalry

Chapter 353 339 Dino Cavalry

The hunters take down a few of the large herbivores with spells, scattering the herd, then quickly gather their kills and head back for whatever village they came from.

Cain leads his small group through the woods at a bit faster pace and notices Mary is having no trouble keeping up, where most others would be.

"Since you've got a Merger, I guess we can move a good bit faster. What did you pick to merge with?"

"I went for the Oath Breakers today. They're much more agile than the Lord of Decay or the Granite Golems and still have great stamina. Plus, even the softest of Epic Demons are pretty durable."

She's got a very good point, so Cain increases their speed to a little over the average for a level 200 human's running speed. That's a light jog to either of them, and they could keep it up for hours. It's also not so fast that they can't maneuver through the woods and it's not causing them to make so much noise they'll scare their targets away.

Once they reach a ridge and descend into a river valley that marks the edge of the zone they're planning to search, they stop to search around, almost immediately finding a target suitably sized to be drafted as a mount.

It's a four-legged reptile with a beaked mouth and a single horn. It has a double ridge of spikes on its back, but they're pretty widely spaced and shouldn't prevent riding them.

They're also moving with surprising agility while playing, and faster than the pace Cain set to get here.

The largest of them are still a bit on the small side for a human or vampire mount, but for Elves, Succubus or similar-sized species, they would work very well.

"Look for egg clutches. That way, Neffie can train them from birth," Cain whispers, making Mary giggle.

"You guys do spoil that girl, don't you? Let me guess, the Guild is mostly made of those who transferred in, and she was the first child born?"

"Close, but not quite. She was born as part of a set of triplets, but she was born as a Demon Queen, so she grew up to what you see now in only a few months. You know the Succubus Lickity, with the two infants? That's her mother and her siblings." Cain explains, scanning the area for a Dino protecting eggs.

"There, back between the rocks. Do you see the only one that's lying down? It's not sleeping, so I think there's a good chance that one is protecting the eggs." Cain whispers, pointing at his intended target.

"What's the plan then?"

"I will transform into a Demon Progenitor for the wings and high flight speed. If I can draw the Dino away, you snatch the eggs, and I'll carry you to safety. If she doesn't move, I'll pick her up; you grab and run until I can fly you away."

It sounds more than a little dangerous to Mary, but Cyrene volunteers for the job. "How about I sneak in between the boulders, down low and out of sight? Mary can cover me with the summons if I'm attacked, and then you can grab me and the eggs, same plan as before?"

Cain nods and transforms, letting Cyrene unwind herself from his waist and start sneaking through the boulders. Once she gets twenty meters away, Cain takes flight, headed for the resting reptile, and hopes that they are actually in nesting season.

He doesn't see any tiny ones in the crowd, only mostly grown ones, so he's hoping that means there are eggs here somewhere.

He flies low, and as hoped, the Dino gets up and lunges at him, trying to bite at his wings and chase him away. That leaves the nest unprotected, and Cain realizes that a number of herd members that are standing around are actually standing over their nests, hidden in the boulders.

Cyrene has the perfect opening, so she rushes in to grab the eggs but realizes there is a problem. You can't put living things in inventory. Eggs that have been stored won't hatch. But her body is small, and the eggs are nearly the size of her head. At best, she could only hug one, but that doesn't help their adorable little Demon's dream of a Cavalry force very much.

Thinking quickly, she grabs all six eggs in her mouth and begins rushing back to Mary, careful not to break them as she moves. It's the first time she's ever tried anything so snake-like, but swallowing them was easy, her jaw just naturally unhinged to engulf them.

Cain has lured the Dino well away for a moment and then takes to the sky, gaining altitude so he's no longer seen as a threat. When Cyrene made it back to Mary, she spit the eggs back up with a sigh of relief while the shocked Elf stared at her.

"What? They're too big for my hands, and I didn't have a bag?" Cyrene demanded, glaring at the shocked Puppet Master.

"No, that's not it; just the sight of the eggs moving through your throat was startling." Mary stammers as Cain lands.

"Six eggs. Good girl, excellent job. I should have thought about giving you a backpack." Cain smiles, rubbing Cyrene's head.

"All six are in good shape, but we can't put them in inventory, so are we heading back or carrying them?" Cyrene asks.

"I've got a backpack with me in case I need to keep small items out of my inventory; we can put them all in there and keep looking for the raptors that Neffie wanted." Mary suggests pulling out a camping pack.

"Here, some random cloth items from the Demon Dungeon that were set to be reworked for materials." Cain offers, wrapping the eggs for warmth and safety.

"You know, people will start thinking we are strange if the Guild starts placing recruitment notices looking for Dinosaur Cavalry soldiers." Mary laughs, shouldering the now loaded backpack.

"Never fear; we have a plan for that. Instead of trying to teach soldiers that are already high level to ride them, we can use Puppets with combat skills or recruit children with systems for training. The Blessed, I believe this continent calls those born here who gain a System."

"That's right. I suppose if they grow up together, starting at level 1, they'd be somewhat matched in power as magical beast and rider. That's not a bad idea."

The dinosaurs don't have a system, but the system ranks their power level, and the fully grown ones are around level 150 for this species. They're quick but far from the most dangerous species in the area. Their hide looks to be quite tough as well, so they might not even need much armor for the job, assuming they can actually be trained.

They continue their search until almost sunset, finding only small species unsuitable for the task. They stayed out longer than most, as nobody was planning to be out overnight, so Cain shifts back to Demon Progenitor and takes Mary in his arms while Cyrene adjusts to wrap them both.

"Hold on tight; I will fly us back home in a hurry."

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

Chapter 354 340

All of the other groups struck out in their hunt for suitable dinosaurs, so Neffie is overjoyed to see Cain and Mary return with a bag full of eggs.

"Eggs? So I have to wait for them to actually become dinosaurs and then even more for them to grow up enough to ride?" Neffie complains, but she's giving the bag a look of pure longing.

"We could return them if you prefer?" Cain teases, making the Demon Queen jump forward to shield them with her body.

"No this is fine. Don't take them away."

Cid smiles and steps forward to talk to his daughter, who is back in her Ashen skinned, white haired natural form with the fluffy cat ears. It's one of the few four armed forms she knows that isn't too large to protect the bag of eggs properly in the confines of this room.

"Raising and training them from the very beginning will give better results. Plus, don't you think it would be a great way to prove to your parents that you are skilled and mature enough to be given additional responsibilities? Plus you will be training your very own dinosaur mounts." Cain suggests, and Neffie's eyes light up in motivation.

Literally, in her default form, her golden eyes glow when she gets excited. It is a little thing that makes Cixelcid happy. He's a vampire, and their eyes also glow when excited or hungry, only a Vampire's eyes glow red.

Neffie gives the egg raising proposal a bit more thought, but everyone can see she's seen the logic. Raised from eggs is best, that way they will only know their training and won't have been around wild versions of their species.

Neffie doesn't like delays in any form, but she knows she's got to convince her father that she is responsible and makes good decisions if she's going to convince him to let her lead the Port City.

"You're right. I'm going to make a nest for them in the stables, that way they can be easily watched and they'll hatch in the same spot they're going to grow up in. The book I read said that will make it feel more like home."

With her piece said, Neffie darts out the door with the eggs, stopping only to grab a straw bale from outside the stable. They've gathered a lot of those lately. The ships use it as packing material for the foods they bring from the Western Continent, but they don't need it for the gear and other commodities they bring back, so the dock staff bundles it and the merchant wagons use it as bedding for their carriage animals.

Nobody knows how far the eggs are from hatching, but Neffie is checking up on them every hour during the day to see if anything changes, and she's got the stall they're in safely blocked off and clearly marked as an incubation pen, with a warming magic powered lantern hung above the clutch of eggs.

Over the next few days the Trader assigned to their city by the Wave Riders begins to get busy, with more and more forms of legal goods being traded. Enough that the merchant caravans that have arrived to pick them up are starting to make a proper road through the jungle.

There was a path to the Port before, roughly following the shoreline between villages, but the merchants are mostly coming from an inland city to the northwest.

Kone and her group came across it during their Dino hunt, reporting to the Guild that it was a mix of species with large stone walls that Kone deemed pointless against anything that could climb trees, since the jungle had regrown almost to the perimeter.

The city had an unusual, but effective farming method, their staple foods were a form of vegetable that grows on climbing vines, which they planted to wrap around the giant trees.

Done this way, most of the growth was vertical, so they didn't need to clear land to grow foods, an idea that can intends to poach for the Port. They import and export plenty of food, but that comes at a price and a few local specialties would help the growing number of residents out a lot.

Cid has already bought a lot of the plants from the trade caravans, and asked the hemp farmers if they could assist in the project to see if they'd grow well in the trees closest to the wall.

That project is just starting, but the first hemp crop is already harvested and drying, thanks to the druids magic.

Cain is about to motivate a group to go back to Munan for a dungeon when an even better idea occurs to him. There are dungeons in the jungle. The locals have made a map, but thanks to the low population near here, most of them aren't inside a city or guarded in any way.

They're higher level than the ones that Cain has already visited, so they should be even faster leveling. Plus, now that his Echoes have finished their mission in Niman Territory and the Skyview Army has been mobilized to start conquering the region, he has his full military might available.

King James remains in seclusion, but he's at least still giving orders to his Commanders and defense ministers. The plan is for them to take the closest half of Niman Territory, which will break the Niman border with The Nyanko Confederacy and only require taking one major city.

If that goes well, they might expand towards the mountains and push the remnants of the Nimans into the Steppes, but that is a decision King James will make later.

The one city they want to take is the blue walled one that the Ancients and nomads already sacked, so Cain knows they'll be in for an easier than expected time of things, even if the Nimans manage to get some new defense forces before the Skyview army arrives.

Cain decides that for this exploration of the jungle, it's best if he sets out alone. The map says that there are two interesting nearby dungeons, one that is labeled as monsters at level 320, and one that says Dark Fae at level 340.

Both sound very promising to Cain, but he's truly intrigued by the one labeled monsters. Are they chimera type creatures that shouldn't exist? Magical Beasts much more powerful than they should be? Or something entirely unexpected like a cult of cannibals that the locals deemed monstrous?

Not wanting to be followed, Cain uses the Dark Phoenix to make record time to the dungeon full of monsters. It's exactly where the locals said it would be, surrounded by some plinths with a warding spell to keep wildlife away for their own good.

Neither Cain or the Phoenix detect any sort of observers or guards, so Cain has the beast stop right at the portal, dismissing it the same second that he steps inside.

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

Chapter 355 341

The so-called beast dungeon turns out to be a dinosaur paradise. Before Cain can summon his forces, he is beset by a horde of tiny carnivorous lizards. They're bipedal and less than knee-high, so Cain calls [Acid Rain] to blanket the area, burning and melting their skin.

Only those closest to the edge of the spell manage to flee, but the screams of those who don't make it out in time draw an increasing number of reptilian attackers to the dungeon entrance.

Since he's already merged with Inquisitors, Cain transforms into Ancient Seraphim form and uses [Ancient Resistance] to triple the numbers of the Seraphim army he calls to counter the giant lizards.

Spears of holy light immediately slam down on the attackers from above as the Seraphim go on the offensive, pushing the dinosaur-looking reptiles back enough to make room for their hosts.

"If you see raptors, lure some to me. I want to test Neffie's theory that they can be trained as mounts." Cain instructs the Seraphim who are happy to oblige.

If they're intelligent but not fully sentient, he will have to find more of them. Carnivorous Cavalry has such a smooth ring to it.

The first waves of attackers were small, but the vibration of the ground tells him that something much heavier and more dangerous was coming toward him in a hurry.

The giant creatures smash through the trees, and Cain decides that he has won every little boy's dream lottery. Alright, it's probably not the dream of kids in this world, where they're an actual threat, but Cain is beyond excited for the chance to meet Tyrannosaurus Rex.

They're far more durable than Cain had expected, kicking the human forces away while taking barely a scratch from their swords. Even the epic quality Seraphim Warriors are having a hard time getting through that hide, and the Tyrannosaurus are shrugging off holy light attacks as if they were spotlights.

That pulls Cain into action, and he lazily flaps the six white wings of his current body, smoothly propelling himself into the air. He can guess that the brain is in the skull and the heart somewhere in the chest, but as to exactly where the vital points of a Tyrannosaurus are, he has no clue.

That's a skill that would come in incredibly useful, so he makes a mental note to look for a Summon with the skill to locate vital points on unfamiliar creatures when he has time to experiment and see if it's something that he can inscribe and learn himself.

Looking at his class details, the usable categories of skill books are no longer listed, so Cain might have to improvise. He managed to use Shaman-type skill books already, but he hasn't actually tried any others since his class changed, has had been relying on his merged summons for skills instead.

With [Greater Merger], he can have quite a few additional skills whenever he wants, so actually knowing them is a secondary concern.

Circling to the nearest creature's defenseless back Cain finds that he can go wild with nearly any attack combination he wants. Their neck isn't flexible enough to bite him, the front limbs are useless except for holding food in front of the Tyrannosaurus' face, and the tail is easy to dodge when you can fly.

That changes quickly when the others come to the unfortunate beast's rescue. Dodging multiple sets of jaws is much more complex, and Cain realizes that these are not the solitary hunters he had taken them for.

Fortunately, with the area damage of his attacks, plus the benefit of [Might of Many], Cain is free to change targets.

The area damage isn't 100 percent like it would be with an Oath Breaker merged, but it's still a lot of damage, and the combined efforts of Cain and his summons burn through the giants' health in under a minute.

[Boss, we found Raptors. What do you want us to do with them?] One of the Seraphim asks.

[Herd them to me. Let me know how intelligent they are.] Cain replies, returning his attention to an armor-backed group with large bone maces at the end of their tails.

There is no doubt in Cain's mind that these things descended from Dragons. The level of damage reduction is insane. Not just physical, they're resistant to almost everything.

The raptors burst into the clearing, and Cain drops on to the back of one to see what happens, using the mind-reading of [Superior Mental Domination] to better judge its reaction.

There are no words or language to the thoughts, implying it is simply an intelligent beast and not truly sentient, but the look on the raptor's face when Cain lands on him is immensely insulted.

The ferocity of the attacks it sends at Cain, in a desperate attempt to dislodge him, gives an impression of wounded pride, much like Laura the first time he wanted to ride her. That further solidifies his belief that they come from the prideful dragon clans.

It's the most fun he's had in a long time, though. In this target-rich environment, with the dinosaur's durability and damage output, he doesn't even need to go a crazy amount over his level to find a challenge.

The Heavenly Host is not enjoying this as much as Cain is, though. Everything they see is deadly, often chewing heads off of holy soldiers with a single crushing bite.

The field near the dungeon entrance is now red and muddy with spilled blood, and dozens of giant trees have been downed. They're about to finish the nearby attackers and get a much needed break when a bellowing roar fills the air.

An enormous reptile is charging at the Seraphim, lightning arcing from its mouth as it advances. This one has large and well developed front arms with razor-sharp claws that easily tear through armor.

It looks more like an iguana than anything, but the lightning breath says this is no ordinary overgrown animal. Cain charges back at it, blocking the mighty swing of its claws with the point of his spear as holy light rains down on their battle.

Pure momentum pushes him backward, but the claw is brought to a stop, and the flying Seraphim swarm the boss.

Lightning crackles from its entire body forcing the attackers back, but the creature can't maintain it, and seconds later, they're on it again, smashing and slicing at the heavily armored scales.

A faster than expected snap swallowed an Ancient Quality Seraphim in one bite, a misjudged bite that proved to be the boss monster's undoing. From the inside, the monster isn't nearly as durable, and the combination of holy light and swords quickly began to tear apart the giant lizard's innards.

The decreases in the Boss's health went from mere slivers to heavy chunks every few seconds, and the creature roared and scratched at its chest, trying to dislodge the comparatively tiny Seraphim who was causing it so much pain.

The boss falls with an anguished moan, and a final notification draws Cain's attention.

[Legendary Item Received]

[Carnivorous Armor] Increases bite and claw type damage by 300 percent.

Now that's an impressive piece of armor for an unarmed combatant with claws. Cain isn't sure who would be best suited to it yet, but if he equipped it and Summoned dinosaurs or other equivalent types of creatures, they would positively tear through enemies.

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

Chapter 356 342

With the compact, single boss layout of the dungeon, one single run isn't going to be enough to get Cain a level. Fortunately, he has Echoes available.

"I know how you two love a good competition, so I have brought you to another challenge. I want this dungeon cleared as many times a day as you can. Separately, of course. The exact details are up to you, and you are free to spice up the competition any way you like within those limits. Just give me daily updates on the score." Cain

instructs them, and the Echoes give him the tentacle-wiggling Ancient version of a smile that keeps their teeth hidden.

That should keep a reasonable level of experience coming in. Not that Cain has a good reason to rush his leveling right now, but at level 290, he will be able to get the final skill in his Class Skill Tree.

[Ancient Horrors] Increase the quality of all Summons by 1 Rank and rename Basic Summoning Spells.

By the description alone, he can guess how incredibly overpowered that will be when stacked with his existing abilities. Plus, he will finally find out what happens when a Summon progresses past Ancient Quality.

Once that is complete, his next mission will be to find a way to obtain a fourth advancement class. Cain isn't sure that's even possible at level 300, but he hopes to find something not too long afterward. After all, he currently had the perfect class for it; he could grant himself whatever skill he needed to influence his progression.

That will require him to take a good long look at himself, though. Exactly what does he want? When he first arrived in this world, the answer was easy. He wanted the money and power to live a life that couldn't be called wasted.

That goal is pretty much accomplished though, isn't it? A castle, a Port, multiple Guild Houses, the title of Duke and rule of an entire valley, plus many lives changed for the better with his skills. Cain decides that so far, he's done a decent job of living up to those aspirations.

Going the route of Cixelcid and staying home raising adorable little Demonic babies doesn't sound all that bad either, but that's not a class. What would the skills even be? Increased virility? Maybe it would have advanced escaping toddler detection?

Cain wonders if that's a real skill because Cid could actually use it if such a thing exists. Maybe it is under the stealth detection category?

That keeps Cain's mind occupied all the way back to the Port, where he is ambushed and wrapped up by a hysterical Cyrene the moment he arrives.

"I thought you abandoned me. You were just gone, and I looked everywhere and couldn't find you, and I was so worried." The Lamia pouts, curling her face up against his chest.

"Did you think about messaging me to ask?" Cain asks, and the Lamia stops completely, the red and white patterned scales on her body reflecting the light like a Jade statue.

"Um, no?" She says quietly as Misha hides her laughter.

"How about you try that first next time before you panic? I just went out exploring one of the nearby dungeons and looking for more dinosaurs for Neffie. See, it isn't even lunchtime yet." Cain points out, petting her scales to calm Cyrene down.

"Sorry, I shouldn't have panicked. Did you find anything good?"

"A dungeon full of assorted dinosaurs at level 320. It's a short one, but pretty good experience."

"I know you can't take them out, but did you find raptors? Can they be ridden? Are they smart enough to be mounted?" Neffie calls, having run over the moment Misha alerted her to Cain's activities.

"The ones I found are bright orange and black, a meter and a half at the shoulders, big enough for smaller bodies to ride. They're brilliant and get very offended if you try to ride them. They're fast too, no horse could keep up with that." Cain answers with a smirk.

"Can you make me one? Maybe a Puppet one, not a Summoned one. Though a Summoned one might be good too, then I can call them later."

Cain calls out a group of them since they count as Lesser Golems, despite their incredible damage output.

Neffie cheers and shifts into a clone of Kone, calling out a group of them and hopping onto the back of the closest Raptor. The look it gives her is less than impressed, but as her summons, they don't attack.

Cain dismisses his summons while Neffie giggles and races around the town with her pack of Raptors.

[This is even more amazing than I thought. Everyone should have the chance to ride one of these giant lizards. Does anyone have a skill that can teach me how to use lances? Spearing things for the raptors to eat would be perfect.] She sends in Guild Chat as she races around.

That makes Cain wonder, the Goblin Cavalry [Bonded Mount] Summoning skill doesn't specify Mole Dogs, so could it be used to Summon Raptors if that's what the Summoner really wanted?

Cain makes a Puppet that looks like Neffie, gives it the [Bonded Mount] and [Charge] skills as well as [Knight combat Style: Lance], and then instructs it to focus on calling one of the raptors with [Bonded Mount].

The skill seems to hesitate for a second, possibly because it is a Puppet doing the Summoning, but the Raptor appears and nuzzles the Neffie Clone's face, allowing her to mount.

[Hey Neffie, I found the way to make your Cavalry without training living Raptors] Cain sends, and Neffie returns, followed by her pack, looking at the Puppet that looks just like her natural form.

"She can use a Lance and everything, but the only skills she has beyond the basic combat style is [Charge] and Summoning her Bonded Mount," Cain explains.

Even then, she will need a mana Totem nearby, as she might not have enough to charge after calling her Mount and has no mana regeneration. Still, that's enough for Neffie. She has shifted back into herself, which dismissed the summons and is giving Cain a pleading look.

"You can only have one skill added like that, ever. I'll make you a book for it later if you can use it." Cain laughs, petting her ears.

"No, absolutely not. No teaching my daughter to Summon Raptors." Lickity complains, pulling Neffie into a hug and glaring at Cain.

Neffie is about to point out that she can already do that because she's a doppelganger and can use other people's skills, but Misha silences her before the little Demon can say anything that upsets her mother any more than she currently is.

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

Chapter 357 343 Misha Is What?

At Lickity's insistence, Cain dismissed the Puppet that looked like Neffie before they all went in for lunch. Business at the Port had picked up again today, and an enterprising fisherman had shown up to make a deal with the restaurant to supply their seafood.

So far, they'd just been bringing it from Skyview every morning, but this would be a much better deal for them and would give the gumbo a local flavor.

With the Echoes running the dungeon repeatedly, it won't be long until they have passively leveled Cain to level 290, where he will be able to get [Ancient Horrors] activated, so he decides to relax for a while and then check up on Mary in the morning.

The Elf said she didn't want to move until she reached level 300, but with her summons doubled and her newfound confidence, that should only take a couple of days. It's a bit of a shame to leave those apartments empty, though; being up in the branches of the jungle is such a beautiful sight.

"Why don't we go hang out in Munan? Cid has everything in hand here, and Svetlana can take care of Long Fang Valley, so we're free to relax in the jungle." Cain suggests to Misha.

Misha invites Daisy to come with them; the tawny-haired Bunny Kin and her had become fast friends, plus relaxing to Misha meant talking about and planning new clothing designs, a topic Cain was seriously underequipped for.

Misha has been looking a little under the weather lately, possibly due to the stress of a packed schedule, so he wanted to do something for her. A nice romantic dinner in the trees might be a good start, as long as Cyrene and Daisy can get along without being supervised.

Worst case scenario, he will have to mind control them both until they can behave. He's got a huge mana pool, and the Mana Flood Totem refreshes those in range by a percentage of their maximum. It should be enough to keep the skill active on two different targets almost indefinitely.

It's only a short hop through the travel circle, and they're outside the apartment building in Munan. Cain leads the way down the stairs, fully ready to give a lecture on getting along, but Daisy and Cyrene are managing to hold a conversation. A hesitant one, but it's an improvement.

Once they get to the apartment, Cain passes the chest of clothing to Misha, and everyone gets changed into something lighter and more suitable for the hot, humid afternoons in Munan.

The four of them explore the city for a while, but strangely Misha is getting exhausted from the exertion. At her level, that's not something that would normally be expected, so they call it a day after dinner in the restaurant next to the clinic.

Once she's rested, Misha feels fine again, but Cain still decides a night in is better. Mary makes her way over to say hello, bringing snacks with her, and they all end up sharing stories of their lives until the small hours of the morning.

Cain is awoken the following day by Misha running to the bathroom, violently sick. Being a Healer, that is even further from ordinary than getting exhausted just walking around. She can cure, cleanse, heal and decurse herself in an instant. Few things in the world should make her sick.

"I've tried everything I know, and it wouldn't go away. I feel better now, though." Misha whispers just loud enough for Cain to hear while washing her face.

"How about we bring in a specialist? One of the healing classes with diagnostic skills?" Cain suggests, wondering how to contact one.

Princess Paige should know, so she's first on Cain's list.

[Princess, so you know a Healer with diagnostic skills? Misha is slightly sick, but neither cure nor healing is working on it.]

[We've got one at the house. I'll bring her by, and you can make breakfast.] Paige responds seconds later.

That makes life easy. With Port Nefheim built, they don't even need the circle in the house to be within Guild Bank range, and having the chef puppets in Long Fang Valley send breakfast takes no effort at all on his part.

The physician Paige brings looks even younger than she is but has a polite medical professional type demeanor as she warmly greets everyone.

"I don't know much about flying humans. I'm not sure I've ever seen a human with wings, but other than that, I'm fully trained and experienced." She assures them, making Misha laugh.

"Now, I'll carry out a basic scan on you, and if I need to look more thoroughly, we can go to another room."

The physician focuses for a second, and a big smile lights up her face. "I've got good news and bad news."

"Bad news first." Misha decides, her nervousness eased by the Elf's smile.

"The bad news is you won't be able to go into the dungeons for an indeterminate amount of time. Any area damage effects could be nasty for your health."

"And the good news?"

"It's because you're pregnant. Twin baby... tentacle monsters? I'm not judging, but that was a bit unexpected."

"It's likely they're closer to my natural form. I hope that's not going to be an issue during the pregnancy; Ancients are very large when fully grown." Cain worries.

"I honestly can't say. But I'm happy to keep coming by and keeping track of the changes. Learning about a lost species would be amazing. We should know within the month what species they will be and their likelihood of a healthy gestation."

Cain grabs Misha in a hug and kisses her before she can speak. "Thank you, doctor. We would love it if you could help."

She is the highest level medical specialist they've come across, so if anyone they know can deal with this pregnancy, it is her.

"Does this mean I get to be an auntie?" Cyrene and Daisy ask at the same time, making Misha laugh.

"Only if you behave. Do you think I'll keep getting tired like yesterday, doctor? It was like I didn't have a system at all, and there are quite a few stairs here."

"Guaranteed. It is a common side effect. But if you have another residence, we could go there instead? Unless Princess Paige or the Queen fall sick or pregnant, I don't have any urgent business."

Misha considers that for a moment, then looks to Cain for a suggestion.

"What about Long Fang Valley? It is the most luxurious, and with the full service spa facilities staffed by the Puppets and a warm but moderate climate, it will be the most comfortable."

Those are the magic words for the doctor, and even Paige seems excited to go. She must have gotten in trouble at home again.

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

Chapter 358 344

Along with Paige, Mary, and the doctor, Cain's group returns to the Manor in Long Fang Valley. For Misha it is a practical matter, but the others are more interested to see what exactly a full service spa facility inside of someone's home might look like.

"You are back earlier than expected. Did something come up with the King?" Kone asks when she sees them all coming through the travel circle.

"Not as far as I know. We just decided to transfer Misha back here for the duration of her pregnancy, so the others have come to assist her and keep her company." Cain casually drops the bombshell news on the Spirit Folk girl.

"Oh, that makes sense. No, wait. Did you say Misha's pregnant? I get to be a big sister?" Kone cheers, grabbing Misha's hands and spinning them both in circles.

The size difference is not nearly as significant as it once was, but Kone still views herself as a generation younger than Misha, who has a more mature personality. The actual age difference between their body's appearances isn't that large, but in this world, that doesn't mean much. The more critical factor is how old you consider yourself.

"Nobody else knows yet; we wanted to settle in for a minute before we told the rest of the Guild. You remember the chaos when Lickity first announced she was pregnant." Misha tells her excited friend, struggling to regain her balance.

"The pregnancy status is interfering with her System. It's pretty common for humans, so try not to be too rough." Dana, the doctor, gently reminds everyone.

Kone silently mouths the words "not too rough" while wagging her finger at Misha. That makes everyone who knows her laugh, but Dana just had a confused look on her face as she struggled not to think about what they might mean.

Cyrene and Kone are on the same page today and immediately begin making plans to renovate the room next to Cain's bedroom in the Lord's suite into a proper nursery for twins. So little is known about Ancients that they don't know when to expect them, so the ladies are getting a head start.

Daisy is incredibly excited about the prospect of getting to make more baby clothes, but for now, that will have to wait. It's more than just colors; she doesn't know what they'll look like when they're born.

"What are your plans now? Playing the house husband and idle Duke?" Princess Paige asks Cain, who had been watching the chaos with a smile of amusement.

"Not likely. I've got Summons farming dungeons on my behalf right now, so once I get the final skill of my class tree, I'll be starting to hunt for a way to advance classes again. I'm not sure exactly what it will take to trigger a fourth advancement class, but I haven't come this far to give up and stagnate." Cain shrugs.

"That makes sense, but I suspect you'll be needed here more often than not, even with the advantages of all the Puppets."

Cain laughs at the understatement. Twins of an unknown species? There's no way he will not be needed at Misha's side reasonably often. But he can probably work around that and not end up stuck at home.

Cid and Lickity both put everything on hold for the triplets. Still, with an array of fully customizable puppets available, Cain sees his duties as more of a moral support role than being physically necessary to help raise the kids.

Even if he wanted to help, he would have to study the topic first since he knows exactly zero about raising kids. If he was left in charge, they would likely become even more uncontrollable than Neffie.

For now, though, Misha is in the very early stages of pregnancy and is almost drowning in positive reinforcement. Everyone is excited to see more children in the Guild, and speculation on what sort of remarkable abilities they will have runs rampant through the Guild.

Cain knows that eventually, someone will get to the obvious conclusion. His physical transformations seem to entirely change his body's biological species. So whatever form he was in, mixed with humans, should be the species of Misha's child. With an allowance for the Dark Gods' blessing that she carries, which might be turning the children into Demons.

Since the doctor said baby tentacle monsters, the day in question was one in his more human sized ancient form. Cain doesn't think Misha has realized that yet, but it could be entertaining when it dawns on her.

Though it's also possible Cain and King Aggramor are both mistaken about the forms, and his children would all be Ancients no matter what species he appeared to be. That would be a real buzzkill to Aggramor, who is quietly hoping that Cain will help bring back a few of the long-lost primordial Demon species.

All day long, the Echoes race each other through the Dinosaur dungeon, feeding Cain with highly buffed experience levels. Even with so many additional beings Summoned, the gains are slower at these levels than they were before level 200.

It could be mostly related to the dungeon, but even the two in Munan weren't any faster with the same level difference. The only thing to be done for now is to wait for the Echoes to do their work and write up a few skills for the other Guild Members.

Relaxing in a comfortable chair on the upper levels of the pagoda, Cain gently pets Cyrene while he has his eyes closed, going through all the possible skill options that might be useful to others.

[Animal Training] is a generic life skill that anyone can learn. The materials are also simple and inexpensive to grant an Apprentice level of skill, so Cain makes two hard copies, one for Neffie and a second for the Guild Library.

That's precisely what the little Demon was after and it gives her a base of knowledge to work with as she studies the most effective ways to train her dinosaur eggs into viable mounts.

They also have the materials to make a hard copy of [Bonded Mount] which Cain decides is better given to Cixelcid than left out in the open where just anyone could get at it.

It's likely to be the most viable way to make their Carnivorous Cavalry when the time comes, but first Neffie must put in the hard work to train up her dinosaurs and learn a healthy level of responsibility instead of taking the easy way out.

"Will you be okay Adventuring without us? If I'm going to stay here with Misha, you'll be all alone while you look for ways to advance your class." Cyrene asks during a refreshment break between skill books.

"Of course, I'll be alright. If I'm getting lonely, I'll Summon a copy of you to cuddle with." Cain teases, making the Lamia pout.

"Oh, don't be like that. It's like anyone else going to work, only I can make enough money without needing to go anywhere, so I will go hunting for a way to improve myself instead. Just like you put in all that work to get used to having sight and friends and a more appreciated life."

Cyrene considers that for a moment. "If I asked for a favor, do you think you could do it?"

"That depends on the favor. You know Misha will need you with her, so if you want to continue being my favorite belt, it might be a problem."

"No, what I was thinking was to start an outreach program for the locals around the Guild Houses to help improve the reputation of the Darklight Host."

That doesn't sound like a problem. More outreach and a better reputation for the Guild would help smooth things over and grow Port Nefheim. Lack of a credible reputation is the biggest hold-up in getting a travel circle location linked to Tortuga, after all.

Of course, what Cyrene has in mind is no ordinary 'alms for the poor' outreach program. No, if she's going to enlighten the Central Continent to the benevolence of Master Cain, a simple bit of assistance will not be nearly enough.

They need to learn to believe in his benevolence wholeheartedly, and that will require something much grander than a bit of financial assistance. But that requires the locals to have both knowledge of and trust in Cain. So first, she must lay the foundation of goodwill and then she can start reaching out to the lost souls who have been deprived of his light.

"I think the first thing we should start with is sending some Guild members to cities where we don't have a presence. Some of the members have been looking to get out and see more of the world, and if they can help a few people along the way, it's even better. A Guild reputation for leading groups through dungeons would gain you much support among the people." Cyrene suggests.

Once he hits level 290 and his skills are upgraded, he will have to change the [Benevolent Leader] Guild Skill. After the change, the lowest powered Summoning option would be six selections from the Lesser Golem group that will come out as Epic Quality versions of their previous self no matter who summons them.

"Wait just a day or two. Once my skills upgrade, the Guild Members will have much more powerful summons to work with." Cain decides, deliberately leaving out the details to see how long Kone can resist trying to force the answer out of him.

Other than Mary, who is a Puppet Master, Cain doesn't know anyone quite as intrigued by the myriad possibilities of Summoning classes as Kone.

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

Chapter 359 345

With all of the extra levels he has recently gained, Cain found himself with a wealth of points to put into his [Lord of Horrors] secondary skill tree that he received along with the [Horrific Perfection] reward.

The most obvious lack of abilities for his puppets was going to be in the field of child care, so Cain put an entire ten points towards the category, making every Puppet as skilled as any professional Governess and Nanny.

That increase Unlocked the next rank of skills in the Lord of Horrors tree, with only 3 options. All of them grant an additional skill for Puppets, and it reveals that only one single skill is in the rank above them.

As it stands, he has enough points to select all the additional skill slots if he wants, or he could add journeyman level talent in more trades to every Puppet instead.

The secondary skill tree shouldn't have a level cap though, remaining with him even if he should manage to find a fourth advancement version of his class. So Cain's first choice would be to take all the additional skills, bringing his puppets to a possibility of having six traits each.

After that, he can focus on increasing the trade skill levels of his puppets, or even giving them obsessed attack and defense, should that prove to be a necessity. The puppets aren't intended to be fighters though, Cain uses them mostly in place of tradesmen and domestic staff. Even the few he made specifically for other jobs weren't intended to see combat.

That makes the last skill in his secondary tree visible, and it's beyond anything that Cain had expected.

[Horrid Creations] When two Puppets of similar appearance and identical talents have been created, they may be released into the wild as living beings. Such Creations lose the benefits granted to puppets, but retain up to six racial talents as independent living beings. For the furtherance of the new species, it is recommended that released Puppets be compatible for mating.

He can just send his puppets out into the world as a new species? How insane would that be?

But the description reveals that there is a deep flaw in the way Cain had been thinking about and creating his puppets. He had been giving them skills for a specific purpose. To make himself a chef, or a salon attendant. But that's what the specific knowledge categories available to the puppets are intended for. The skills are meant to be used to add racial talents to the puppets in preparation for them to become independent living members of their species.

Since that's the case, Cain could also make the Blood Dancers that Aggramor wanted, using Vala as a template. They would be released without a system, since it seems this skill tree predates the spell that created the system and was actually an Innate Talent of some Ancients.

The way everything is named for Horrors makes Cain wonder if it's just because the Ancients eye doing it, or if the combination of random abilities created misshapen monsters that were worthy of the name.

One or two skills didn't change things too much but Cain can see how the interaction between five or six very different racial abilities could cause disconcerting results.

That makes Cain really curious about his children. The secondary skill tree appears to be the basis of his species reputation, so will they be born with it? Grow into it as they age? Or since the System is active now, will they be born with both a class and a secondary skill tree?

All of the above are possibilities for his children, but at least he knows that the tentacle monster form, as Dana the doctor called it, is natural and not a result of self experimentation to attempt to strengthen themselves as an Ancient species.

The way that his default form looks did leave him with the impression that it had been deliberately shaped to cause a level of terror that was matched well with the [Existential Dread] aura ability.

But perhaps the aura came later, or was a byproduct of the form? He really wishes there were more answers and not so many questions regarding the species, especially now that he has little ones on the way.

Moving his train of thought back on track with the task at hand, Cain will be level 300 when he can finally activate the final skill in both his secondary tree and his class, which is giving him the impression that level 300 is a larger change than the advancements that have come before it.

But the ability to create puppets that can be set free as independent living beings is a huge development, and it could change a lot of realities in this world. Some of the species that have died out are still dearly missed by those who survived, so Cain decides to give his friend the Demon King a heads up about this upcoming development.

[Aggramor, I think I have found a way to get you back some of those lost Demon species you were looking for. I can't do it yet, but at level 300, I should be able to send you a pair of Blood Dancers. They will be children, and most likely without a class, but I have the template for their species skills.]

[The Demon kingdom would be in your debt forever if you could do such a thing for us. Let me know if you need anything in the way of materials to help your experiments.] Aggramor sends back a few minutes later, making Cain remember that other people have actual duties to attend to during the day.

That's enough stress for one day, and Cain needs a bit of time to fully absorb the possible applications of his upcoming abilities, so he decides that a nice soak in the hot tub is in order.

Cain heads to the baths on the second floor that have been reserved for the men of the Guild, while the disproportionate number of women have claimed the main floor spa in the evenings. He had expected to be alone, but the Paladin Larkin is also there, just getting ready to soak in the herbal pool.

"Larkin, how have things been? Have you managed to convince Kone to forgive you yet?"

The Spirit Folk man gives a rueful laugh and shakes his head. "I'm not sure that forgiveness is actually in her vocabulary. But she has become more affectionate. If it weren't for the daily reminders that she's still intent on shaping me into a 'proper gentleman as she called it, I would say we're actually a couple at this point."

Cain laughs at Larkin's assessment. "I think you are, but she's not ready to admit that punishing you for being a pervert has changed to affection for you."

"I hope so. She promised me that if I could behave until the weekend she would let me sleep in her bed instead of on the floor."

Cain turns away to wash himself in the wall mounted showers, hiding his smirk from the hopeful young man. If Kone has him sleeping on her floor now, getting to sleep in the bed instead might not lead to all of the wonderful things he is imagining. At least not right away.

Cain can almost guarantee that the first week in her bed will simply be a new form of torture for young Larkin as she demands that he behave as a Gentleman and keep his hands to himself, only inches away from her.

"You've got this then. As long as you think it's worth it to continue chasing your dream girl, I'll support you."

Larkin grins as wide as his face will allow. "Thanks Guild Master."

Larkin knows a lot about what has been happening in the valley lately. Him and Kone go to the Ogre dungeon at least twice a week, but they go out every day and talk to people, making sure everything is working well and helping Svetlana with her daily duties.

All of the druids and nature magic proficient classes do the same thing, helping with crops, healing the locals if they need it, really anything that the valley needs. Not much grows in the desert, so other than the few who stay at the Castle, preferring the hot and dry climate, most of the nature classes prefer to spend their waking hours here.

According to Larkin, a pair of Dwarven Earth Mages who just got engaged even went as far as renting a house here in town. Cain didn't recognize the names, but looking through the notes in his System interface, he found that they were a pair from the Graska orphanage that had grown up together.

They would have only just come of age, so they must have gotten engaged at the very first opportunity.

The notes were Char's idea, so the other members could know a bit about new members. They were exceptionally handy for those living outside the Beginner's Valley, since they would meet many of the new people only after they reached level 90 and started venturing out into the world.

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

Chapter 360 346 Long Awaited Skill

The following day Cain woke up in a pile of warmth. The bed was covered in a thick blanket, as despite the warmth, the night was still a good deal cooler than the sweltering heat of the Eastern Continent.

As he explored, Cain was starting to think that the Beginner's Valley and the Ice Youkai island were the only spots on the planet that weren't unreasonably warm. No, he had heard that the Northern Continent was cold, so there might be some escape from the heat.

As he comes to his senses, he realizes that the heat is not all blankets, though. Misha is hugging Cyrene, and the warm-blooded Lamia is draped over the pair them in a spiral pattern.

It might be morning, but it's still almost twenty degrees outside, a comfortable room temperature in the Beginner's Valley. Maybe Misha feeling cold has to do with the pregnancy, then?

Cain has never seen anyone look quite so happy while sleeping as those two do, so he lays in bed a while, mentally listening in on his Echoes clearing the dungeon. They've brought him to level 289 already, and the competition is now to see who can get the final kill that moves him over level 290.

They know as well as Cain does that the final skill will be quite a significant change, and they're eager to see it in action. If Cain hadn't already been awake, they had fully intended to bombard him with messages until the sound woke him up to upgrade the skill.

Team Beastkin gets the killing blow for the level up this time, thanks to a large number of Snapping Turtle Kin that has been Summoned by the Legendary Beastkin the Echo chose.

[Level Up]

[Skill Learned: Ancient Horrors]

,m [Skills Renamed]

[Summon Lesser Golem] is superseded by

[Summon Pet] Summon 18 selections from the Lesser category at Epic Quality

[Summon Greater Golem] is superseded by

[Summon Helper] Summon 12 selections from the Greater category at Legendary Quality

[Personal Guard] is superseded by

[Summon Assistant] Summon four selections from the Epic category at Ancient Quality

[All other Summons increased in Quality by one additional Rank. [Advisor] 's restrictions on Companion Quality are entirely negated.]

Cain notices that the increased numbers from his Puppet Master skills have thankfully been maintained instead of being unavailable with the more powerful new skills.

But that also means that using [Benevolent Leader] to share them with the Guild would move everyone from two epic quality summons to either 18 epic quality summons or 4 Ancient Quality versions of the two epic choices they had been using.

He's not sure which will be more of a disruptive force for the world around him. That's a lot of dungeon bosses, but Ancient Quality summons are nearly indestructible.

The skills said they were superseded, not overwritten, so Cain inspects his skill list.

The old ones are no longer usable for him, but [Personal Guard] is still active as the Guild Skill. He could leave well enough alone then.

But Cyrene said they wanted to start doing more good in the world, an outreach program she called it, so the more impressive he can make his Guild Members combat abilities, the better they can help others.

Char has done an excellent job of choosing and raising kind and well-mannered members, so a little more power shouldn't send anyone off the deep end, or so Cain hopes.

More importantly, with the restrictions on Quality made by the Advisor skill removed, he should now have Companions above Ancient Quality. Both Vala and Laura. Cain turns his attention to them, and a red flashing notification comes into his vision.

[Abilities Above Ancient Quality Detected] Status set to Awakened. Barriers to awakened areas are now unlocked. Proceed with caution.

There were locked areas too powerful for him to enter before? Certainly not on the Central Continent, but that's a revelation to Cain. He thought he was reaching the pinnacle of power in the world, but it seemed he was only getting ready to look at the high-level content.

Unfortunately, he knows nothing at all about awakened abilities or classes. That might be why they see so few fourth advancement Classes. Maybe the ones they are seeing are actually just strong third advancement classes and not a new category at all?

Looking over Vala for changes might give him a clue.

Everything seems to be the same as far as skills go; not much changed. The quality of her Innate Skills now says [Mythic], and it looks like she got one new talent.

[Mythic Awakening] Reduces damage taken by Skills and beings under Mythic Quality by 99.9 percent.

Faaaawk

Forget Ancient being overpowered; this is a whole new level of off the charts. Even though they're at the same level, Nemu and Nila, both now Ancient Quality, couldn't even damage Vala or Laura enough to make a noticeable change in her health, much less overcome her regeneration.

Evangeline is not going to be happy about this. Cain hadn't found enough species of Seraphim to bring her up to Vala's level, so she too, will be stuck at Ancient.

More importantly, this might mean Cain has no abilities that he can personally use to damage Mythic Quality targets.

Maybe if he merged with one of his Mythical summons? The Legendary base quality ones he summons using [Blessed Summoner] should now be Mythic Quality.

Cain pulls a Seraphim into his Greater Merger and finds that only one of the skills they have is of Mythic Quality. [Holy Light], their combined area healing and damage ability is Mythic, but the others still look the same as always.

[Getting Mythic Skills isn't as easy as upgrading Quality, though Hand to Hand combat is a possibility. You will also need to upgrade weapons, and fairly soon. Your old ones aren't going to hold up for long.] The Seraphim explains.

Cain looks through his System for his skills, which he hasn't checked or updated in a long while, and sees he has a new column. He takes a moment to distribute his points and takes a moment to marvel at the benefits he gained from [Ancient Perfection], which increased his Modifiers to the peak of Ancient Quality.

At the time, it didn't matter because he was always merged with something, but looking at it now, he wouldn't have to be. He has become just as tough as the summons he calls to protect himself.

[Name] Cain

[Level] 290

[Class] Flesh Crafter

[Race] Ancient

[Awakened] Mythic

[Stats] +1010->10

[STR] 225->475

[DEX] 225->475

[CON] 225->475

[INT] 225->475

[HP] 36000->76000

[MP] 45000->95000

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

Chapter 361 347

Cain calls a copy of all his Companions into the bedroom to see if they've undergone any drastic change with the change in quality.

Vala and Laura look the same but give off an aura of incredible power just standing around the room. If Cain didn't know better, he would think they were a form of demigod. But at Mythic Quality, and having just gained the status of awakened, the demigod level is likely still far beyond them.

Nila looks similar, but her sailor's garb has more jewelry, while Evangeline looks precisely like she did yesterday.

The only one with a significant visual change is Nemu, who is currently in a more human Neko form and now wears an elegant pink silk Kimono with white flowers. There are more layers underneath, and it looks pretty restrictive, but Nemu moves with effortless grace.

Cain inspects her new abilities, finding that she is now called a Songstress, and the effects of her musical skills are significantly increased. She has also gained a highly effective form of charm called [Lost in Song], which entrances those around her for as long as she keeps playing.

A flash of memory from Cain's past life, of a cat-eared geisha, comes to mind, and Cain smiles, gently gets out of bed, hugs the Felian, and strokes her ears.

"It is good to see you all advancing so well. I called you all here to see your abilities, but we should change rooms to avoid waking the others."

"You've got Lamia drool on your chest," Nila whispers, shifting the blankets on the bed to cover the sleeping pair and hide their nudity from the morning air.

"Good point. I'll shower; then we can meet in the dining room." Cain agrees, going to wash up and get his mind around the new information he gained this morning.

Even after a shower, the bed looks incredibly inviting, but Cain manages to get himself downstairs, where the cooks have just begun the morning meal as the sun comes up.

"Well, the benefits this morning were unexpectedly good. Especially for those of us that the System updated to Awakened status. Did anyone get something particularly interesting as a new ability?"

It is far easier to ask the Companions for answers instead of searching through every skill list one at a time. Plus, they might have noticed an interaction between skills that he would have missed.

"I gained the ability to Summon the Heavenly Host just like other Legendary and higher Seraphim," Evangeline responds happily.

Well, that certainly makes up for the lack of Mythic rank damage reduction anywhere that she had been so far. It will also make her an incredible protector of the Guild properties. He would have to tell Cyrene to talk with her about that outreach program the Lamia wanted to start.

"Other than the Mythic Rank, I'm still the same size and everything," Laura complains, making Vala laugh.

"I got much better water and wind magic. I could keep an entire fleet moving by myself now." Nila informed him proudly, then grabbed a slice of bacon off the trays that were headed for the table.

"I think you already looked through mine, but I gained the ability to draw people into my songs and stronger buffs." Nemu shrugs.

She's got a shifty look in her eyes, so Cain reads her mind to see what she's up to, finding that her clone just climbed into bed with Misha and Cyrene to bask in the warmth.

Unlike the Bunny, Nemu has claws and isn't afraid of a little Lamia hug. A warm spot to nap is much more important.

"That about covers it. I'm not sure where we can find Mythic Quality skills, so we will have to put that on the top do list along everything else we haven't gotten around to finishing yet." Cain sighs, seeing the work piling up in front of him.

They linger around the table for a while, while they catch up with everyone else who is gathered at the Long Fang Valley Manor. The Elves all come down together just after the sun comes up, looking refreshed and radiant.

"I take it you enjoyed the spa day?" Cain laughs, noticing the herbal aroma that still lingers from hours spent in a scented hot tub.

"More than you could imagine. I will warn you now, we will be spending more time here in the future. I got my mother to agree to let me to adventure for a while, learning about the world and building my level up. We were arguing about that yesterday before I came over, but her agreement means I'm free to visit for a while." Paige declares, while Dana, the Elven doctor laughs at her.

"Don't take them too seriously. They're too much alike, so they butt heads over everything. The Queen ascended the throne after her father was killed in the war, and she's still upset that she didn't get to run around free and play when she was younger." Dana clarifies, and Paige sticks her tongue out at her family doctor.

"I see you made it to level 290. Only a few more, and you can start checking to see if you get any advancement options. Are your summons still hunting?" Mary asks Cain but doesn't take her eyes off the tickle fight that Paige has started with the doctor in retaliation for making fun of her.

If the Queen of Munan is just like that, maybe he should have left her as a preschool-aged Dark Elf, Cain decides. At least that way, she would fit right in with her peers.

[Class Quest Available: True Awakening] enter a unique instance and find the lost artifact of the Ancient Species to gain a random Mythic Quality skill suited to your species and class. Warning: extended timetable may be necessary.

The notification startles Cain; they always seem to come at the most random of times. But this one is too good to pass up. He will have to wait a bit to accept it, though. Misha and Cyrene are awake now that they were cooked out of bed by the added heat of an extra cuddly Nemu, but they're not downstairs yet.

Leaving without informing Misha seems like a terrible idea after reading that extended timetable warning on the quest.

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

Chapter 362 348

When everyone is people gathered, Cain begins his explanation to the group.

"Once I gained an ability that let me call for Summons above Ancient, at the quality called Mythic, I gained a new status line called Awakening. A Summon at Mythic Quality takes a tenth of one percent of the damage done to them by Ancient and lower quality skills, and now I've got a quest to get another Mythic Ability.

It says that it could take an extended time frame and that the instance is unique, which I assume means generated by the System and only available to the one on the quest."

Cain waits to see if anyone has questions at that point because he can see the excitement in everyone's eyes.

The first one to speak was Kone. "How much damage you you think a Mythic Quality Lightning Bolt would do? What? You know you were all thinking it too."

"We've all seen what S Ranked lightning can do, so I guess it would be more like Holy Light hitting those First Advancement warriors at the battle for Blood Sands Castle at the end of the war in Landis," Larkin suggests.

Holy light, more than a hundred levels higher than you? As close as Cain can gather from the descriptions given by those that were there, that should all but vaporize whatever it hits. But that's likely also the case with Mythic rank lightning; it would leave nothing but ash and a scorch mark.

"Do we know how long this extended mission might take?" Misha asks, concerned.

"I can't see it is taking an insane amount of time, but since there was a warning, I guess it will likely be between a week and a month. Any less wouldn't need a warning, and any more seems unlikely." Cain shrugs, then realize that a calm attitude was not the correct answer.

"I'll be back before you know it, and until then, we've got a whole city full of people happy to help you with anything you need. Would you like me to make you a stuffed animal for the time that I'm gone?"

The question makes Misha giggle since Cyrene already has one, but she shakes her head. "Go on then; we will be fine for a little while, especially with all these puppets here to help us out."

"Alright, I've transferred what I might need to my inventory in case I can't access the Guild Bank wherever It sends me. Is there anything else I'm forgetting?"

"You're not wearing your Lamia." Paige points out.

"Cyrene is staying here to keep Misha company. Plus, she has got a plan to start an outreach program to help the Guild's reputation. Oh, and ask Evangeline to help with that. I'm sure that there is a reason everyone likes Seraphim, so that she might have some good ideas."

"Wait, you were going to update the Guild Skill." Cyrene cuts in just as Cain finishes.

That's a good point. He should update the Guild Skill to one of the new abilities before going. The difference will be huge, letting every one of their members safely lead groups through dungeons near or just above their level.

No matter what reputation they're going for, that will be helpful to their cause. Even if not everyone appreciates their goodwill, the extra firepower might be enough to intimidate them into respecting the Darklight Host name.

Cain opens the Guild menu and selects [Benevolent Leader], changing the skill to [Summon Pet]. That causes a wave of confusion and dismay in the Guild Chat, but it's easily solved.

[My skills upgraded. Take a good look for yourselves if you want. This is better.]

Cain looked around to see what everyone thought of the skill, only to see Misha and Cyrene trying to hold in laughter—reading their thoughts showed why. A Lamia warrior that looks almost precisely like Cyrene, but with different patterns in the red scales on their back is one of the Demons that qualified as a Pet Summon.

His pet Lamia can have a matching pet Lamia.

With no more commentary incoming, except the Guild chatter about how incredible the new skill is, Cain decides to activate the Quest. A shimmering portal opens in the room, and Nemu instinctively reaches out to touch it.

"It is solid. I can't go through it; it's just a solid object." The Felian complains in confusion. She's a Companion; she should be able to go through anything Cain can.

Vala tried next, finding that she also could not pass through the portal. It seems very strange, but perhaps it is only because the portal is part of the system, so Cain himself will need to activate it.

After a double round of hugs, Cain steps forward into the portal, and the world goes black around him.

[Class Quest Activated] 180 days remaining to find the relic of the Ancients hidden in this realm.

[All External Mana Usage Restricted]

That could explain why the Companions couldn't enter; they are summons. But if he can't use mana here, he might be in trouble. Then Cain realizes that he's still got Seraphim merged with him. So he can use mana not to affect anything outside himself.

Thinking fast, Cain tries to decide what might be the best Summon to Merge with if he's going solo.

[Try the Forest Dragon. It constantly regenerates at a high rate and heals on hit.] The Seraphim suggests.

That's a pretty good idea, so Cain uses his [Blessed Summoner] ability to call a pair of Legendary Forest Dragons, now Mythic Quality, into Merger with him.

With that sorted, he changed his gear to something more optimized for combat, including his new [Carnivorous Armor]. A quick tweak to his appearance gives him short and subtle claws, and Cain sighs relief.

[Malleable Form] doesn't require mana to use, but he wasn't sure he could activate it. Since he can, that gives him a lot more options if he does need to fight something unexpected.

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

Chapter 363 349 Solo Questing

The gear with close combat bonuses almost all comes from the Demon Dungeon he did the other day, and the Carnivorous Armor appears as a knee length Brigandine coat, reminding Cain of his early days in this world.

He spent so long looking like a punk rock musician thanks to that gear that this outfit feels comfortable and nostalgic.

The darkness is slowly giving way to a forest, and Cain can't tell if it is being created or if he is being transported to a new location. As he stops, he finds that the System has left him sitting on a rock, atop a hill overlooking a large lake.

There is a quaint looking village of weathered, unpainted wooden shacks down below him and Cain can see a lot of people going about their daily business.

They are wearing outfits the look more like what Nila preferred, and Cain wonders if he should change. His inventory is still accessible, but the obvious answer to him is to use [Malleable Form] to change how his clothing appears so he can blend in.

He ends up looking much more flashy than the locals, but the fashion is similar, so Cain decides it is close enough. There is a road leading down the hill towards the village, and Cain carefully inspects the wagon headed up his way.

Both occupants are similarly dressed to the villagers, but even flashier than Cain and openly carrying weapons. Nobody is showing a name plate, and Cain suspects they don't have a system. They don't have the immensely weak feeling of those without a system though, so either his functions are restricted or they have another way of strengthening themselves.

p Cain continues walking towards the road, equipping his [Pestilent Scimitar] in a scabbard at his waist, to better match with the local customs. If they really don't have a system, then they wouldn't expect an inventory to exist.

"Greetings fellow Daoist. If you are looking for a duel you won't find a decent one in that village. If you come with us to the creation festival in Kan you will find all you could ask for." The better dressed of the two young men in the wagon greets him.

Creation Festival sounds like a good place to find a hint about the Ancients, if they really made many of the species in this world, so Cain takes the chance that the System had been kind to him and given him a form of starting assistance.

"I would appreciate it. I have been traveling for some time without a map, might you tell me a bit more about the Creation Festival in Kan?"

"It might not be as grand as the festivals in the capital cities, but it is one of the qualifiers for the grand tournament. If you can make it to the Grand Tournament finals in the Central Continental Championship you even get to meet the Progenitor King. Imagine that? Just for making it through this one little tournament and two more you could get to meet a descendant of the Creators."

The second occupant is a chatterbox, but the information tells Cain a great deal about his surroundings. Other than the fact nobody seems to be able to use mana, it seems very similar to the real world. Could this be the past?

Before the system the only humans that could use mana were wizards, witches and heroes. It would only make sense that everything would be done without magic in a human territory.

"If you don't mind a rider, I would appreciate the ride. How much further is the journey?"

The leader of the two smiles. "We should be there tomorrow afternoon. Are you going to enter? The top ten will move on to the regional tournament in two weeks."

Cain considers for only a few seconds. "I might as well. I might not know the local customs, but a good challenge is always welcome."

"You are one of the Blessed, right? The average human doesn't stand a chance in a Tournament like this. Now me and Joe might not be as strong as some of those legends who could crush buildings with a kick or run down a flying dragon, but it still isn't something a farmer with a sword could survive."

"No worries gentlemen, I've gained a great number of benefits along my journey." Cain smiles, leaving out the details, because he doesn't know exactly how humans without a system were gaining that level of power. Magical items maybe?

Both men nod in satisfaction though, and the wagon trundles along painfully slowly. Cain could walk faster than this, if he jogged he could almost certainly make it to their destination tonight. But the wagon has a collection of trade goods in it. Without an inventory, they have no other choice but to suffer the pace.

They come up on a tree line where the road dips into a river valley a few hours later and the one called Joe looks at his partner. "Well Gavin, what do you say? 5 bandits, over or under."

It is an incredibly obvious spot for an ambush, and Gavin simply laughs. "Over, way over. Nobody would work as a bandit with only five members along a major road. What do you say new guy? Sorry I didn't catch your name."

"The name is Cain. I would wager on twenty, if I had any money to spare."

Cain tries pulling money from his interface and finds that he can get a few hundred gold coins from his own inventory, but can't access the Guild Bank. Good thing he stocked up on the essentials for the quest.

The wagon doesn't slow, and Cain laid down on top of the goods and out of sight of the likely ambush as they approached, hoping to take them off guard.

He checks the abilities he has available and finds that the Legendary Forest Dragon has an [Intimidation] aura as well as the healing aura, with both capable of activating at the same time. That should be enough to make the common bandit wet themselves.

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

Chapter 364 350

"Halt there and turn over your goods if you want to live." Comes the easily predictable call from the woods.

"Do you honestly think you are capable of killing us?" Cain calls from his spot in the wagon, making his Companions laugh.

"I am warning you, we have a blessed warrior with us." The bandit leader responds and Cain can hear Gavin give an impressed whistle for whoever just came into sight.

Cain grabs the wagon seat and flips himself out of the wagon and on to the road in front of them. The bandits mutter about Blessed being everywhere lately, and the enormous Barbarian smiles down at Cain.

"I'll make this short. What did you find? An agility amulet? No matter, you won't be leaving here with it."

So their enhanced abilities are mostly from magical gear then. That makes sense, you can enhance even a level 1 transfer way above their starting power with the right items.

Between his own stats and having both a Seraphim and Dragon merged with him, the barbarian seems to be moving in slow motion.

But Cain has forgotten about the power differential at the moment, and he draws his Scimitar to strike with the flat of the blade.

The unfortunate man's head turns to a fine, bloody mist on contact, spraying over his comrades, who begin screaming and running even before the body hits the ground.

Not exactly as intended, but winning is winning.

"Looks like we can keep going now." Cain shrugs, seeing that there are no more bandits in sight.

"What sort of power was that? We're both Blessed, and count ourselves as fairly powerful, that that was just ridiculous." Cain exclaimed, as Cain checked the corpse for the magical item that was enhancing his abilities.

It was a simple ring, according to his System it was level 185, and gave a bonus to strength Modifiers plus a load of extra strength. Doing rough math in his head, that should have made this opponent somewhere around the strength of a level 40 transfer without gear.

Cain also collected a discarded backpack, making his disguise a bit more believable in a world where nobody had an inventory. Traveling with just the clothes on his back made it look like he was only days from starvation and wholly unprepared for a journey.

If level 40 is the level of combatant in this upcoming match, Cain will definitely have to compete unarmed. Anything else would simply kill anyone he hit.

Cain's new traveling Companions were much quieter after the run in with the bandits, and wary of him in a way that they were not when they thought he was on par with their strength.

That was fine by Cain, he was only here to complete his quest and recover the artifact, he didn't need to make new friends every time he entered a quest dungeon.

The next day passed in absolute silence, until they got closer to the city gates and found a long line of people waiting to enter.

"Blessed Competitors to the left. All others stay right. If you are not Blessed or not competing, stay right or you will not be allowed in to the city." A guard called from halfway down the line.

"We won't get through the left with the wagon, so you can go ahead." Joe informs him with a polite nod.

"Thanks, good luck on the tournament. If we have to meet, I hope it is in the finals." Cain says with a smile, striding towards the guard.

"Wait until he finds out you can't kill anyone or you get disqualified." Gavin chuckles just as Cain is almost out of earshot.

That does make things difficult, but he's only here for information, once he gets it there's really no need for him to win. Though if there's no news he might need to advance to get guaranteed entry into a bigger city.

"Name, strength and combat style." The guard at the left gate gets Cain as he approaches.

"Cain, unarmed fighter, strength I am not sure, I never had it measured."

The man brings out a middle aged Elf in wizards robes, who casually casts a spell on Cain. So, some people can still use magic here, it's just him that's being restricted by the quest.

The Elf gets a mischievous grin Cain knows all too well from dealing with the prank loving species and turns to the guards. "He's definitely Blessed. Very, very blessed."

"Good enough for me. Sign your name and take your token. NEXT."

Cain sees that the Elf is still laughing as he blends in with the crowd inside the red sandstone walls. Something is off about this whole situation, but it is clear that the Elf is not going to tell him exactly what.

The token hangs on a necklace, so Cain drapes it over his armor as he looks around for a place to stay and somewhere to eat. A hotel isn't an option, no amount of money will get you a hotel room in a city this crowded. But a nice park bench will do for the two hours of daily sleep that Cain needs.

Cain finds a Dwarven run cart selling kebabs and saunters over to see if he can find a good spot to drink.

"Two Kebabs, and if you could tell me where I could find a Stoneheim Lager or a Graskan Ale I would be in your debt."

"That's an awful long ways from here lad. But if you can stomach a proper whiskey, go to the end of the street, turn down the alley and knock twice at the basement door."

Cain pays for his kebabs and casually heads down the street that he sees is full of weapons vendors. The alley is full of trash and slag from the smelters, but that's to be expected if you are looking to keep people out. That lone Dwarf was the only non human Cain has seen, either inside the city or in line outside.

He knocks twice at the only basement door and waits until the door opens.

"What do you want?" The Dwarven woman inside practically snarls at him.

"Whiskey. But you look hungry, want a Kebab?"

That makes the Dwarf smile, and she pulls him inside, leading him to a long bench beside a Dwarf height table.

"I don't reckon you know what you are in for, but whiskey we've got aplenty. We are out of ale though, the humans have confiscated our shipment, said it was to pay back taxes or some such nonsense."

Cain creates a half dozen local silver coins from his System storage and places them on the table. "Then whiskey with dinner it is."

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

Chapter 365 351

In true Dwarven tradition, Cain drinks until nearly morning then passes out in a booth in the corner. For most of the night the small tavern was packed, and Cain learned a great deal about this city called Kan.

For one, the dwarves were only tolerated because they were the best smiths. Even the Elf at the gate didn't come into town, they only hired him for the days the competitors were showing up. Other than that only humans were welcome.

The standard of the competition here was also supposed to be laughably low. The dwarves insisted they could take most of the so called Blessed humans in a fight without using their magical weapons.

Magic was beyond most of these dwarves only a few low level Earth Mages were among their ranks, but making magical weapons was a species trait, even if they couldn't use one bit of magic they could still learn to craft the finest magical weapons.

They also recommended Cain put his Scimitar away, before a human realized what it was and arranged to have him murdered in his sleep. Cain bought it from a Dark Dwarven Master Smith, and the smiths here recognized the workmanship immediately, as well as the power.

Cain had pretended to tuck it into his pack and then joked with the dwarves. "I guess I'll have to make like the stout folk and beat the humans unconscious with my bare hands."

They were looking forward to the spectacle, and promised as he finished breakfast the next morning that they would come watch his fights.

The numbers of the fighters were all up on the board by groups. There was nothing but numbers, poorly written, and Cain suspected that whoever was in charge was actually illiterate, but it was enough to lead him to where he needed to be.

"Group 4, Cain and Kouis, you are up first. The winner can choose to hold the floor or concede to fight later. First two fighters to five wins advance to the regional tournament."

That's easy, you can keep fighting until you have your wins if nobody can stop you, instead of waiting about all day.

The dwarves are plenty drunk already, and even more excited to see Cain fight. They realized early last night that Cain was no ordinary wandering human champion, and that he didn't hold the biases that these locals did, so he became an honorary member of team non humans as they called it.

Looking around the tournament, Cain realized just what they meant. A lithe man with slightly pointy ears was being forcibly dragged from the ring and ejected from town. Too much Elven blood they announced, so he was disqualified.

They definitely wouldn't let Cain fight if they knew what he was, so he's planning to hold back as much as he can.

Kouis has already taken the ring, twin short swords in hand, when Cain walks up unarmed. The referee smirks and his opponent gets a cocky look for the entire half second between the bell starting the match and Cain back handing him unconscious.

"What did the hand say to the face?" one of the dwarves cheers, and the crowd begins to laugh.

The fighters in his group don't think it's nearly as funny though, giving Cain an evil glare as the medic checks to make sure the man isn't dead.

"Unconscious, but his neck is fine. He will wake up in a minute or two." The medic announces, moving the man to a stretcher and having staff take him to a shady area.

"I'll hold the ring until my five fights are won. Who is next?" Cain declares, and a slender man in black leather jumps up on stage.

The bell rings while he's still moving, and Cain simply catches his wrist and throws the man to the ground, gently kicking his ribs to encourage him to stay down. There is a crack, but not a horrible one, so Cain estimates that a single rib fractured.

The medic is called back again, sighing as he sees the man holding his side and Cain waiting patiently in the ring.

"Can you avoid making my job harder? Either break them all at once or not at all. I don't want to come back here in another minute." The medic complains, and the dwarves laugh.

"Aye, whoop them all at once. Give those wannabe Blessed the real what for." One of the dwarves cheers and the crowd begins shouting profanities at him.

"He's got a point. Just send the last three all at once. I didn't realize that I had ventured into an area so weak. Let me finish up here and I'll go back to looking for Ancient Relics."

"You're a Funny Man are you? Maybe you think you are the Progenitor King, collecting relics from the beginning of the world?" Someone in the crowd shouts at him.

"I reckon he's not a human at all, no Blessed fights like that. Call the Arch Cleric and check this Demon." Another voice screams, followed by thunderous applause.

"Matches are on hold until the cleric verifies your eligibility. If you aren't human, step aside now, before the guards are forced to deal with your Demonic presence." The referee announces.

The chances that they can actually tell Cain is an Ancient seem pretty slim, so Cain simply waits.

A few minutes later, a young Ginger haired Priestess jogs into the ring. "Did you need my healing? Where is the wounded?"

"No we need you to verify a contestant's eligibility. We suspect that man, Cain is not human."

The cleric looks Cain over for a second, casts a spell that covers him in warm holy light, then frowns and does the same thing again. This time her eyes go wide and she hits her knees in reverence.

"That man is no human. The body is completely human, but the spirit of a Seraphim and an Ancient Dragon live inside."

That sends a wave of shocked whispers through the crowd, and even the other competitors fall to their knees.

"A Blessed Holy Warrior? No, that can't be. He must be a hybrid. No member of the Heavenly Host would dress so shabbily." A gaudily dressed woman in the crowd screams.

"Send him out. He's a dragon blooded impostor, not a human. How dare the Dragons send their mutt here to cripple our greatest warriors?" The referee from the next arena shouts, and the guards come running.

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

Chapter 366 352

"What is the problem here?" The guard patrol leader calls as he approaches.

"My blessing is too strong, and they believe it is unfair." Cain explains with a pleasant smile.

"The Arch Cleric said he had the spirit of a Dragon inside him. He has to be a hybrid. Send him out of the city and sentence him to death if he tries to return." The referee overseeing Cain's matches calls out so the crowd can hear him.

"You heard the man, let's go." The guard demands, poking Cain with his spear, then frowning when it fails to draw blood.

The guard poked him again as Cain began moving and the dwarves started to laugh.

"See that lads. Human Spears are so dull they can't even pierce a traveler's vest. Good thing that we are here to help them out."

"Shut it you. You're here only at the request of the mayor. If he didn't protect you, we would have sent you away with this mongrel." The guard snarls, before Cain grabs his spear, then rolls the bronze tip into a shiny ball and hands it back.

"Let's go then, I've got things to see and people to do." Cain laughs and starts towards the gates.

"If you're looking for relics, try Hygar, far to the northeast in Dwarven territory." The ruckus making Dwarf calls out, waving to Cain as the guard sullenly follows him, sword drawn and mangled spear slung behind him.

That's two leads now, not bad for such a backwards city. It might be possible for this quest to be finished in a reasonable time frame after all.

The guard is not leading Cain to the main entrance to the city, but instead of towards a man door sized side gate. They have also gained a few more uniformed followers, so either they are making sure he leaves, or they intend to teach him a lesson.

Cain's money is in the second option, but with only five or six of them, they are going to have a very rough time of it.

Once they make it to the small man door on the north side of the city, the guard pushes him through then closes the door behind Cain with a resounding bang. It looks like Cain was wrong, they just wanted to make sure he didn't beat up the guard and continue wandering the city.

This place really is no fun at all. No summons to play with, no smiting annoying people with holy light, not even a chance at a half decent fist fight.

If it weren't for the fact that he got a decent lead on the location of an Ancient ruin, Cain might really have marched right back into the city.

The farmers working the field seem pretty surprised to see Cain just standing outside the city walls. That's not a regular use exit, it's for problems that need to be dealt with discretely, and the farmers are well paid to look the other way and clean up any messes that might be left behind.

"I know, I'm as surprised as you are, but you can't always get what you want." Cain informs the farm hand, as he makes his way towards the road.

"By the way, how far is it to the Dwarven territory from here? I'm headed to the Ancient Ruins at Hygar."

The farmer doesn't say anything just shrugs his shoulders, not knowing or caring about anything beyond his fields.

Once he is out of sight, Cain moves to a lazy jog. At least, for him it is. To the average human without a system he's practically flying, moving faster than a horse can sprint. He only has a general idea where he is going, but somewhere away from the stupid people is a good start.

By the time mid afternoon comes around he has reached another decent sized village, so he decides to drop in and see if they know anything about where he is going. Once he gets closer to Dwarven territory they should at least be able to give him information on distances and roads to follow.

"Welcome to Greta's Vegan Diner, have a seat anywhere you want." The teenage server, Greta by her name tag, greets him, and Cain looks around to see the place is spotless, but empty.

"Please don't leave. I promise it's really good food just give it a chance." The girl begs.

"I've had Elven vegan dinners more than once. If you say you can make good food, I'll trust you." Cain decides, picking a seat by the front window.

"Thank you. We are brand new, don't even have staff yet and you are the first person brave enough to enter."

Cain chuckles and points to the special on the board. It's got lentil stew written in delicate script, but it is also drawn in colored chalk.

"Can most folk around here not read? I found the same thing in Kan, they prefer using pictures and numbers but no words."

"Reading is for royalty with time on their hands, or so says most of the town. But my parents insisted it would help me get ahead in life. If nothing else, I can read a cookbook."

Greta returns a few minutes later with a streaming bowl of stew and a stack of soft Flatbread. The smell is amazing, so Cain cracks open the window beside him. Surely someone will be drawn by that scent and try out the special.

"So, I don't suppose you know how far it is to Dwarven Territory do you? I'm looking for some ruins in the mountains that are rumored to hold an Ancient treasure."

"Oh, Hygar. The dwarves are two weeks on foot from here, but take the East road, since the North road turns away from the mountains. After that, good luck with finding the mythical ruins, and the dwarves likely won't welcome a human visitor.

We've heard the dwarves found the ruins, and that's where they learned to Smith like that, but personally I think they're still lost.

Because really, if they found the legacy of the Ancients they would have gained a lot more than a bit of skill at the forge."

She has a point there. A bit of skill at the forge is something even he could grant right now, with all his mana locked away.

Opening the window was enough to draw over a dozen hungry workers into the restaurant, but none knew what vegan meant.

"Vegan is someone who specializes in meals without meat. Like mid winter meals, but they can actually make them taste good. You should try the special, the flavor is almost as lovely as our hostess." Cain jokes, making the girl blush.

"Lentil stew it is. And Ale, we need ale after work."

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

Chapter 367 353

Cain leaves town after his late lunch, wishing Greta good business, and turning down the East road.

This led him through the most haunted looking swamp that he had ever seen in his life, and that was saying something, as he had been though an undead dungeon set in a Plague swamp.

He didn't even get that creepy, "something is going to jump out at me" feeling, it was more like everything was already dead. Cain did consider that Greta could have just been messing with him, and sending him off course, but the road was reasonably solid and continued on through the swamp without any downed trees or overgrowth, so it might be fairly well traveled.

He reached dry land and healthy looking trees again sometime between midnight and dawn, so Cain decided to pull out a hammock and take a little nap. The Summons merged with him never sleep, so he asked them to keep an eye out, since he couldn't just release them into the wild right now. The system restrictions placed during the quest wouldn't allow it.

Having his eyes closed limits the Dragons a little, but they can still hear as well as ever, and high level transfers are sensitive to danger in a way that doesn't fit with any of the five senses. It's not necessary tonight though, and Cain wakes up with the sun, ready to begin his jog again.

He passes another village, but it looks pretty sketchy, so Cain adjusts his path to travel through the woods to avoid it and others like it, following the road where he can until he gets to a new city just before dark.

"Fifteen minutes to gates closed." The guards on duty call out to any incoming travelers who might be nearby.

"I'm nearly there. Don't lock up yet." Cain shouts back, moving to a more human pace as he comes closer to their line of sight.

"What's your name and business here in Abeyance?" The guard asks.

"The name is Cain, and I'm on a mission to find the lost city of Hygar. Don't suppose you gentlemen know any local rumors about it?"

"Oh, we know rumors alright. Hundreds of them, and they all point deep into the mountains, but so far nobody has come back with any riches, so don't hold your breath."

"Deep into the mountains it is then. Do you have an inn and tavern? I could use a drink before I go looking for the dwarves. I'm told they might know a bit more, since they're living in the mountains and all."

"It is another day or two until you reach the first stronghold of the Iron Empire, but you might want to circle around. They aren't really known for their fondness of humans." The guard laughs, closing the gates and leading Cain towards a two story building with a donkey and a beer mug on the sign.

"There you are. The Drunken Arse, or the Galloping Pint, as the barkeep insists."

Cain flips the man a copper for his trouble, and the guard follows him in, placing the coin on the counter and receiving a watery looking Lager in return.

He chats with the innkeeper for a moment, before the old man brings Cain a drink. "One silver a night, includes breakfast and all you can drink before I close up. The ale is made in house, but for a little extra I've got some fine cherry wine."

Cain looks over at the flat and warm beverage the Guard is drinking and leaves a silver and five copper on the counter. "Let's have a go at that cherry wine. A little change of pace."

Neither man knows much about lost cities, ruins or Ancients but they've got a lot of knowledge about the Dwarves. As expected, there are border skirmishes fairly often, which increase the tension between nations, but according to the innkeeper once you get past the military forts at the front lines, things get a lot more relaxed and the dwarves are almost tolerable to get along with.

For a grumpy old man, that's high praise, and Cain is looking forward to higher quality liquor. He has a small supply with him, but he really doesn't want to finish it this early in to his journey. Plus, the cherry wine is better than average.

Breakfast in the morning is heavy on the roasted potatoes and vegetables, with a side of eggs, and Cain is soothed by the familiar tasting food. He believes this is likely the past of the same world, so the similarities and differences are quite intriguing to him.

The tavern here has a crude map on the wall as well, and Cain finally knows where he is. In modern times, this would be the steppes north of Skyview in the Central Continent.

In his time, there are no forests here, only open grasslands. How and why they changed, he doesn't know, but with the devastation of the great war, many regions had not only their plant life but their landmarks and even climate changed.

If he makes it far enough northeast, he might even get to see Muzz before it was abandoned, and before it was under a desert.

That might be a long shot, and he is hoping to have his quest done before that, but if he has the chance, Cain is totally going to find one of the mopeds in good working order and study it. Maybe even learn a repair manual.

Setting out again, Cain isn't expecting trouble, but it finds him anyhow. "Halt for the banner of the King. All able bodied men have been drafted into the service of the crown for the War effort against the Iron Empire."

The voice comes from a pimple faced young lordling with a few dozen guards behind him. Cain considers eliminating them, but they should have an army nearby if they're forcibly recruiting.

"I am Duke Cain of Skyview, not one of your local peasants. Watch your tone with me young man." Cain demands and the guards immediately draw their swords.

Perhaps he should have inquired about foreign relations other than with the dwarves last night at the tavern.

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

Chapter 368 354 Mistaken Identity?

"Throw down your bag and weapon. The Skyview Assassins have been disbanded as war criminals by the crown and ordered sentenced to death." The young noble declares, managing to make his demands with only one squeaky crack of his voice.

,m "You see, that is your mistake right there. You don't tell someone you are going to kill them before they drop their weapons." Cain laughs, drawing his Scimitar.

"Give up, assassin. You won't make it out of here alive. If you don't resist wet can make it quick and painless." The leader of the guards announces, as if he is certain Cain will comply.

Why must these people be so stupid? Is it because of the lack of system? That has to be it. They just assume that all humans are working on the same power level, so numbers should let them prevail every time.

When the first one charges, Cain side steps, then cuts both him and his mount on half with a single stroke of his sword, totally forgetting about the [Pestilence] effect.

Every other warrior in the area suddenly turns sickly green, and within seconds falls dead on the ground. Strangely, the horses do not.

That's new, inside dungeons it affects everything, but it seems that here at least, the horses only get targeted if they are aggressive towards Cain.

This mess can be someone else's problem, let the army find the diseased corpses and panic, wondering if a Plague is spreading through their ranks at this very moment. The worry might slow them down enough for Cain to make his way into Dwarven Territory before anyone else can bother him.

Learning that Skyview was the name of an Assassin Cult in this time and region is also valuable information. Both to avoid misunderstandings, and to cause them if necessary. It was a bit unfortunate that he couldn't use all his combat skills here, but knowing the style lets you fight without actually activating the techniques, so Cain isn't exactly helpless.

Explaining why he is using what he suspects is the current Royal Guard's combat style to anyone who recognizes it might prove to be a bit more difficult than the actual fight though.

As Cain jogs, the buildings in the villages he passes change from wooden to mostly stone, so Cain is certain he's at the edge of Dwarven Territory. Humans likely aren't welcome here, so Cain plans to pick a new appearance, he just can't decide what.

A local looking Dwarf wouldn't need to ask the questions he will and it would raise suspicions, so that is out. Humans of any sort are a bad idea, but Cain isn't sure how the dwarves get along with the Elves in this time.

He recalls hearing that the nation of Skyview was once Beastkin Territory, and it's not too far south of here, so that could work. At the very least, Cain hadn't ever heard of the Dwarves and Beastkin having a blood feud.

What would be just right to infiltrate and not anger anyone who sees him? Bunny Kin. Everyone loves the Bunnies. Cain focuses for a moment and shifts himself into the form of Daisy. Sun kissed bronze skin, sandy blonde hair and ears and a perpetually harmless looking face.

Even in traveling clothes with a sword at his side, nobody would take this form as a serious threat.

Cain keeps up his fast jog, finding that the Bunny Kin form has much stronger legs than a human. He can easily leap a much larger distance per step, moving quietly through the hills.

When Cain sees smoke on the horizon, he slows his pace to a brisk walk and comes closer to inspect. It is a farming village, and he is in luck, there are both Dwarves and Beastkin here. Wolf type Beastkin though, which poses a small problem, since he's disguised as a bunny.

They have an intense fascination for Rabbit type Beastkin. An instinctive part of them wanting to give chase, while the more human aspects see them as friendly and fluffy.

They have surely seen him in the distance though, so Cain heads towards the village, being greeted by a farmer who is mending fences near the edge of town.

"Greetings little rabbit. What brings you so far from home?" The older wolf Kin smiles.

"I'm on a mission. I need to find the Ancient Ruins near Hygar, or known as Hygar. But humans are useless, do you happen to have directions?" Hearing the gentle voice of Daisy speaking his words is a strange experience for Cain, but immensely effective.

"Of course, everyone in the Iron Empire knows the legend of the ruins. Nobody knows exactly where they should be, but according to legend, the Ancient city was only fifty Kilometers from the modern one, way up in the mountains."

"See, that's already more than the humans knew. Is there a road to the new city from here?" Cain asks and the wolf Kin shakes his head.

"The only roads here lead along the border to confuse the humans. That way they think there's nothing in the hills and don't go raiding all our villages on their way to attack the mountain cities again."

Cain nods his head, long ears bouncing with the motion. "That makes sense. I'll just keep going the same direction then until I'm getting close enough for specific directions."

"Why not stay a day or two? Surely the ruins aren't going anywhere, and I'm sure the villagers won't mind a lovely lady for company?" The farmer asks suggestively.

"I appreciate the offer, but this is still a bit too close to the humans for comfort. I saw a large military force of them not long ago, and I have no intention of still being here when they arrive. I was going to warn whoever is in charge before I left."

That changes the weather beaten farmer's whole demeanor, and he grabs Cain's hands to pull him into the village. "Quick, let the chief know so she can Summon the army. The more details you can give the better."

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

Chapter 369 355

The chief turns out to be an elderly Dark Dwarven woman with one missing eye. She clearly isn't in great health, and Cain is a little worried that the news might be too much for her.

"Are you alright? Is there anything I can do to help?" He asks, before noticing a notification from the system interface, asking if he wants to set the villagers as friendly targets by default.

That would let them benefit from the healing aura of the Legendary Forest Dragon, which can take care of almost any form of malady, though Cain isn't sure the aura alone is enough to regrow an eye or a limb.

"I'll be fine dear. You don't get to be my age in the border without seeing a fair few battles." The old woman answers, giving Cain a toothless grin.

That settles it.

[Villagers of the Iron Empire set to friendly by default. Status will be canceled by any hostile action.]

"How about a hug. Bunny hugs are magical." Cain laughs, embracing the stout woman so the farmer can't see the healing aura repairing her health and injuries.

Cain lets get to a few seconds later, and the woman looks decades younger. Not only that, but her missing eye has reformed and is beginning to clear up as the aura heals her.

"We came here because I saw a human army recruiting near the border not long ago. The wolves can likely track my scent back most of the way to them if they need to." Cain explains.

The chief hasn't noticed the changes yet, as her healing eye is still blind for now, but the farmer is simply staring at her in amazement.

"Well, Ralph, are you going to send a runner for the army or just gape at me like a fish on land?"

The farmer, now known to be Ralph, takes off running, not noticing the lingering health issues that he too faced from a hard life have cleared up. The door has just banged shut when the chief's eye regains sight and the old woman grabs Cain by the arms.

"Bunny girl, what did you do? I can see again. It doesn't even hurt to breathe."

"Bunny hugs are magical, just like I told you. Everyone who is a friend to the Bunnies gets a small share of the blessing when a Blessed Bunny passes by." Cain makes up a somewhat plausible excuse on the spot.

"Blessed you say? With healing hugs that can grow back an eye? Now that's an ability worthy only of a Bunny." The elderly chief laughs hugging Cain around his waist, despite him being in the smaller form of Daisy.

"Let's go get a drink, I think I need one. Don't worry, I will keep those horny pups from bothering you."

As they walk across the small village, Cain explains his mission, and the chief agrees to draw him a map of the area. Since the roads are designed not to lead anywhere into the mountains that isn't heavily fortified, she will lay out a safer and more efficient path for Cain to follow.

Once you leave the foothills even the strongest of non flying species will find the route slow and difficult, but the chief is certain that he can make it there within a month, two at the most.

Cain has no intention of burning that much excess time here, so he will likely fly, but without a map, he would just get himself even more lost.

"What sorts of things do you like to eat? I know most Bunnies can't stomach meat." The chief asks as they reach what Cain guesses is the town hall and dining room.

All dwarves love of a good party, so every meeting turns into a banquet, and their town halls always resemble a tavern more than anything else.

"If you've got deep fried vegetables and Ale soaked potatoes, that would be great." Cain agrees, unsure how this body would take to large amounts of meat.

"Deep fried vegetables?" A Dwarf in a leather apron asks from the other room.

"Mix Ale, flour and spices into a batter, coat sliced vegetables or mushrooms in them and fry in hot fat or cooking oil until they're golden and crispy on the outside. You'll see, they go great with whiskey." Cain explains, and the Dwarf disappears into the back, returning ten minutes later with a huge platter of assorted fried objects, as well as a bowl of potatoes.

"Here we have it. No leafy greens for you today?" The cook asks.

"I can get those myself later. Come try these with us. I swear they're really good, and not just to Bunnies and Elves."

The platter doesn't last long as more and more dwarves file in, getting ready for the chief's announcement about the human army sighting. Ralph called the army, and the village sent out wolf Kin scouts following Cain's Bunny form scent, but they won't be back for a few hours at least.

When they do arrive, it's with the worst possible news. They found the army, and it is moving fast in this direction. But it isn't alone.

At least three other nearby border villages have called for army assistance to deal with human attacks, all at the same time. This is no normal skirmish, it's an all out invasion.

The scouts report over two thousand human forces coming this way, many more than the fifty Dwarf security patrol will be able to deal with. With that many incoming, Cain would feel really bad about leaving these strangers to their fate. Especially against people who attacked him and chased him out of town.

After a long consideration Cain decides to announce his decision to the chief.

"If you're going to be that outnumbered, I will stay and help. The power of a blessed Bunny is not to be underestimated."

At first the chief thinks Cain is joking, but with the healing the Bunny showed earlier, they might have gained a truly powerful ally for the day. As long as nobody does anything stupid and chases Cain away, that is.

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

Chapter 370 356

With all these talks of invaders, a large detachment of the Iron Empire army has been deployed to come assist the border villages. They are half a day away though, and nobody is sure that they have that much time.

The first group of fifty will be here soon to help the villagers make defensive plans and fortify the village itself, though. According to the locals the small attacks are a regular occurrence, and the patrol should be well equipped with defense tools.

Cain learned that the fences around the village are actually designed to tilt, to provide barriers against charging Cavalry and an obstacle to infantry. That will make things a

little easier but they are still very short of defenders, even with every adult in the village counted, plus the older children.

Cain wishes that he could use mana properly right now, a couple of Seraphim, or a Legendary Beastkin Summoner would turn the tide of this battle in an instant. Even a couple of well trained puppets would do the job, but they also take the external application of mana to create.

The defense unit from the army arrives and Cain sees his opportunity. He can grant someone a skill. They might not be able to accept it permanently since they don't have access to the system, but there is a Shaman in the group. Cain knows a wide variety of Shaman skills, including [Chain Lightning], so he might be able to help this group out just a little.

They are all business as they arrive, getting right to helping with the fences and clearing ditches to fill with tar, as they have done dozens of times before.

"It is best you start running now bunny, give yourself a bit of a head start before the humans arrive." The Shaman declares grimly when he notices Cain.

"I have been blessed with healing, I will stay." Cain declares and the Shaman simply nods his acceptance.

"Have you heard that bunny hugs are magical? What is the deepest desire of your heart? Maybe the Gods will help."

The blonde bearded Dwarf simply laughs. "Unless they are going to open the skies and send lightning to smite the invaders, I'm not sure if it will make a difference."

They are both thinking along the same lines, so Cain gives him a hug and activates [Modify] granting him chain lightning. The Dwarf pulls away as if embarrassed to be publicly hugged, but he's got a look of awe in his eyes.

"Do you feel it now? Luck is on our side, I am certain, we just need to relax and accept that we can win." Cain declares with a big smile, very grateful that worked and didn't get stopped by the limitations on his mana use.

But if that works, maybe he can also use combat skills that don't cause a visual effect? He has a passive [Pestilence] and area damage that would be devastating in combat. But both only activate with a skill use.

The human army comes without warnings or scouts, already familiar with the area and expecting some level of resistance.

They don't lead with Cavalry, but with infantry wielding Spears. The dwarves are ready in an instant, firing crossbows at the invaders, while the humans charge the fences, trying to flip them backwards with their Spears.

An arc of lightning flies into the human Vanguard, killing dozens and the Dwarven Shaman crows in victory. A second bolt followed soon after, leaving a large area of the fence line vacant.

That made the Shaman a priority target, and his comrades move to hide him behind thick metal shields as the arrows come flying in.

Cain doesn't bother to hide, drawing the Pestilent Scimitar to match the more mundane one and sets himself to begin blocking them. He has more than enough skill and speed for the task, but he still can't activate the combat skills.

Thinking a bit more on the topic as the arrow volley ends, Cain recalls that all the skills from the Dark Elven combat style coat your weapon in protective energy. That must be why he can't use them.

He hopes the Laughing God is thoroughly enjoying this spectacle, having an Ancient Summoner wave a sword about with no skills.

It's a bit amusing even to Cain though, so he probably is.

The wounded near Cain are rapidly recovering, but the area effect is so large at his level, that it covers half the villagers, making it impossible for anyone to tell if it is him, or a Totem the Shaman is using. They are standing close to each other, and the effect is drawing the defenders closer together, with those in range healing from near fatal arrow wounds in seconds.

"Full charge!" The human Commander calls, and the entire line begins moving forward, with their Cavalry moving to take the road and the open gaps between fences.

"Light the pits." The Shaman calls, and a flaming arrow hits the tar filled ditch around the village, sending flames roaring upwards and plumes of black smoke into the sky.

The humans are going out of their way to destroy farm houses as they advance, and Cain is getting more than a little sick of their nonsense. With a mighty thrust of his legs, Cain hurls himself across the battlefield, slicing apart human soldiers and using their corpses as a spring board to get closer to the Commander.

The man didn't even have time to recognize the threat before the blurred form of the bunny had taken his head, and Cain stops to watch [Pestilence] spread through the attackers.

The screams of terror from the afflicted cause the advance to break, soldiers scattering everywhere, and defenders retreating into the village to get away from the outbreak. Some will surely survive, but that is fine, they can tell their leaders not to come back.

Fighting at this level really is too easy, and Cain almost feels bad for interfering, but destroying the farm houses is a sore point for him. What did the farmers ever do to them? Nothing. But still they destroyed their homes and crops. War should be between soldiers.

Cain happily hops back into the village over the fences and goes looking for the Shaman and the Chief.

"The humans ran away after they upset the nature goddess. You're safe now." Cain declares when he finds the two fortifying a building.

"The Plague won't keep spreading?" The Shaman asks, and Cain realizes his mistake.

"No, sorry, that was the effect of a Dwarven Master Crafted sword. It fades out after battle and won't spread to your allies, or so I am told."

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

Chapter 371 357

The battle is over, and Cain doesn't want awkward questions, so he follows the map that the chief made for him and darts off into the trees, headed for the hills and the location where the modern city of Hygar is.

The villagers and army patrol will surely be talking about the incident for some time to come, but that's fine, just a bit of amusement for Cain should be need to come back this way.

Once he gets twenty or so Kilometers from the village, where nobody should be able to see him or have followed him, Cain transforms into the Golden Proto Dragon and takes to the sky.

The cliff faces below him are steep and treacherous, and the road leads many hundreds of Kilometers off route, past every significant city in the Empire. Crossing even one of these peaks every few days would be a difficult task on foot, but here, a thousand meters above the valleys and between the peaks, Cain could soar without worries.

Though he mostly kept hidden among the clouds, Cain kept track of the villages below him, comparing them to the memory of the map he was given.

Hygar is supposed to be in an enclosed valley, accessible only where the road runs through the mountain. If he can find the road, that should make it reasonably easy to find.

When the sun comes up on the following day, Cain can see a city in the distance. It is built on the side of a mountain, overlooking a river canyon, which doesn't match his admittedly rather rudimentary map, so Cain decides to drop in and see where he is.

He can't do that in Dragon form; everything he sees hides from his mere shadow. If he tried to fly into the city, they would likely shoot siege weapons at him and attack if he landed.

Instead, Cain lands ways out of town, hidden between two cliff faces and out of sight of the city.

There doesn't seem to be anyone but dwarves here either, which isn't a surprise so far into the mountains. But it did limit his options. Cain isn't sure what dwarves would call handsome, so he picks the appearance of Ragnar, the black-bearded Dark Dwarf he met in Graska. A durable leather outfit with a thick wool sweater, artfully blackened as though he had worn it at the forge too many times to ever come clean again, and his disguise is complete.

He pulls the backpack from his inventory and adds a sleeping roll, jerkey, and some smithing tools to complete the image. It still looks too tidy, though, so he hangs some cookware from the sides and breaks apart a bit of a dead tree for firewood to strap at the bottom.

When he makes it to the road, he finds that a cave of merchants has just pulled into the ledge where he will be arriving, unloading their cooking gear to prepare for a late breakfast.

"Greetings," Cain calls, so his sudden appearance doesn't startle them.

"What are you doing back there?" One of the guards asks, hand on his ax.

"I just went to get some wood. There's a deadfall tree just there." Cain points back the way he came.

"Save yours; we've got plenty. What do you have for the pot?"

Cain knows this tradition. Everyone puts something in the stew, adding variety to the meals when each traveler can only carry so much.

Cain sets his gear down and pulls some smoked fish jerky from his inventory, pretending it came from his pack. "Fish is on my menu today."

The merchant nods happily, glad to see a bit of variety in the flavors. "What brought you way out here?"

"The mine ran dry, and I thought I would set out and find a new spot. I heard that there's a likely spot near Hygar for quality ore, but I lost my map while fishing." Caught replies with a shrug.

"A Deep Dwarf out fishing. I'm surprised you didn't drown. But no matter, they will get you all sorted out in Boron. It's the last proper stop if you're turning south to Hygar, so grab everything you will need."

That's precisely the information that Cain needed. His destination is to the south and reasonably close. If he can get a few more hints about the ruins, he will be set.

The man Cain takes as their cook pulls out a copper pot, curses, throws it on the ground then picks out a much smaller version from the wagon. Cain picks up and inspects the discarded implement, finding a large crack in the bottom from years of use.

[A real Deep Dwarf is part elemental, they could fix that with a touch.] The Forest Dragon speaks in Cain's mind for the first time.

That's easy enough. Cain calls a Greater Earth and a Greater Fire Elemental into his Merger. They can both control their element as an Innate Skill without mana, so this should be easy.

[Thanks for the heads up. I appreciate all warnings that I'm about to make mistakes.]

[Except about sharing a bed with Obsession Demons, you know that's a bad idea and do it anyhow.] The Seraphim half jokes.

"I need a bit more copper; the pot is pretty worn," Cain tells the group, rummaging through their gear until one comes up with a cheap copper dagger.

"Will this do then? You must be a full-blooded Deep Dwarf if you reckon you can fix that without a forge." The Dwarf tells him, handing over the knife.

"That should be just fine." Cain agrees, breaking the blade from the wooden hilt and dropping it in the pot.

Once it's in, he recalls just how fussy dwarves are about the items they create, so Cain also brings a copy of Dimnys into the Merger so that he has the skills of a Dark Dwarven Master Smith available.

With her guidance, and the Earth Elemental's Skill, the pot is as good as new in seconds. Then, he reshapes it to what Dimnys insists is the optimal shape for a cooking pot and adds a bit of decoration to the outside.

The pattern is a Dark Dwarven good luck charm Cain has seen on many pots before, and now the formerly battered copper looks fit to grace any smith's shop window.

"There we are then. The right proper vessel for stew. You can't cook right if you don't have a correctly shaped stew pot, so why don't you give it a try?" Cain jokes, making the merchants chuckle and bring out a whiskey jug.

"I always knew that seeing Deep Dwarves on the surface was good luck." The cook declares, adding ingredients to the stew and letting it simmer while everyone tells stories and drinks.

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

Chapter 372 358 Boron

After eating, Cain joined the merchants on their way into the city. They were a wealth of knowledge about the area and happy to share what they knew with a fellow Dwarf looking to make a fresh start.

Supposedly this city, known as Boron, was a crossroad within the Iron Empire. Roads lead out in six different directions, mostly headed even deeper into the mountains, and the bridges around the city could all be raised should the need to defend against attack arise.

Like Graska, the town takes up the whole mountain and is carved on multiple levels, with the vast majority of its structure being inside the rock, but this city is lighted by strategically placed holes and an array of mirrors.

That should make it a fair bit brighter than Graska during the day, and then they will only need to rely on firelight to see in the evenings.

The merchants suggest that Cain take the entry examination written they arrive, since the city is very merit-based. It is a ranking system the dwarves use to place themselves in society, allowing him to buy what he needs more efficiently and for a better price if he can prove he has skills that are of great benefit to the Empire.

That doesn't surprise Cain; the dwarves have always valued skill above almost everything else, so he agrees to take the test.

"There's only one small problem; I left home because the mine was played out. I have a lot of nothing with me to prove my skills." Cain says with a frown.

"They will lend you materials in exchange for the item you make. Of course, if you fail they will throw you in the debtor's prison. But you are a Deep Dwarf; surely you can make something worth more than raw ore."

That makes the whole group laugh. Nobody would respect a Dwarf who couldn't improve the value of raw ore after all. Even successfully smelting it would be enough to keep you out of jail, though you might be laughed out of town if you weren't a cripple or a child and had nothing better to offer.

"Hey Red, we have a traveler for the tests. A Deep Dwarf is looking for a new mine out by Hygar. He needs some supplies for the journey."

The guard, Red, is enormous for a Dwarf with hair as red as his name and runic tattoos all over his body. Dimnys recognizes them as fortifying runes used in the forge, but she has never seen them on a person before.

"I will put up materials for you. What do you need?" Red asks Cain, who is busy consulting with Dimnys.

"If you have Frost Iron, silver, Shadow Iron, and an ax handle, I reckon I can get something done," Cain answers, having come up with the easiest to make master-level recipe Dimnys knows.

Cain knows he will have to improvise a little since the recipe needs more heat than a non magical force can produce, but with the Greater Fire Elemental merged, that should be a problem he can overcome.

"As long as you know what you're doing." Red says dubiously, bringing back the eclectic bits of material and leading the way to a forge.

The challenge draws a large crowd, eager to see what the newcomer can manage with those hard-to-manage materials but well aware of the reputation of Deep Dwarves, who even their own Kin rarely see. The species prefers to spend their entire life in the deepest mines, surrounded by the warmth and weight of the rocks.

Cain heats the forge up to the necessary temperature using the Fire Elemental's temperature control skill, bringing impressed murmurs from the crowd, and begins heating the Shadow Iron. Once it is liquefied, Cain adds the silver and gives a stir. The last bit is the hard part, getting the Frost Iron to melt and fully Alloy before it solidifies again due to its frosty nature.

Fortunately, Dimnys has done this hundreds of times, and Cain manages to follow her directions to what he hopes is perfection, smashing the rapidly cooling alloy lump into a beautiful ax head with the help of [Earth Shaping].

Cain gives a brief thanks for no mana cost species skills and then begins the process of adding runes to the two pieces of the [Giant Slayer Ax]. Once finished, Cain drives the handle home, and the runes activate and begin drawing their own mana to meld the magical item into a single nearly indestructible piece.

[70 points, barely passable.] The clone of his friend mumbles in his mind, making Cain smile as he turns it over to Red.

"There you go. A new ax for you." Cain says proudly.

The crowd is in shock, and it takes Cain a moment to realize why. He's level 290. Therefore, so is the weapon. The Giant Slayer Ax adds a tremendous amount of strength and vitality, as well as extra Frost damage against creatures twice your size or larger.

Cain didn't do well enough for it to come out Legendary, but even at Epic, it is quite the item.

"If you don't say a thing, I'll start thinking you don't like it." Cain teases, and Red finally breaks from his stupor.

"Bloody amazing work. An ax like this could drop an Ogre in a single slice." The Dwarf declares, and the crowd begins demanding to get a better look at it.

This is how they decide the quality of the work, by consensus. The ax is placed back on the anvil, and the crowd gathers close around it, careful not to touch the head and get Frostbitten.

They note that Cain's runic script isn't as precise as it should be and that the ax head isn't perfectly smooth with some indentations where he had to hurry to get it formed before the Alloy set. They ruthlessly scrutinize every millimeter of the finished product and pass their judgement.

"72 Points, barely passable as the work of a Master Smith."

[Ha, they gave me 72 points.] Cain teases the Dwarf merged in his mind.

[Don't tell the real me. She would never forgive you for doing so poorly even with her guidance.]

They are much more welcoming and enthusiastic about helping now that the inspection has been completed. Having been recognized as a Master Smith makes finding the things he will need for a journey much easier on Cain.

The prices are lower on everything, but they are also willing to provide many more details about the area in question when Cain says he is following rumors of a good mine hidden at the ancient Hygar ruins.

They know exactly where the ruins are, but they say there's nothing left of value. The Ancient mines that remain intact have all been searched for even a hint of promise and gave been found totally lacking in any signs of wealth.

If he wants to search for a mine site there, he is welcome to it since they didn't find anything worth mining, but they warn that it will likely be a waste of time and suggest a few abandoned mines further out in the region. They weren't played out, but various circumstances led to no Dwarf having a current claim to them.

Normally, other mountain dwarves would take their word for it, so they don't appear to be insulting their elders, but with elemental heritage, Deep Dwarves have a talent for finding hidden ore veins that others may have overlooked.

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

Chapter 373 359

Cain only grabs the essentials, reveling in the chance to resupply inside what is essentially a dungeon, since he doesn't actually need much. A fresh pickaxe, travel food rations, a small cask of whiskey.

As thanks for going all out during the examination and making him a master-crafted ax; Red puts him up for the night in his own home, a large stone building whose occupants make Cain's Guild look calm and rational. The giant Dwarf has fifteen children of his own and lives on a family estate with his parents, six brothers, plus all their wives and children.

Even the orphanage wasn't this chaotic. Red's family is far from wealthy, but they're very lively. Cain is pretty sure he has answered enough questions from the adolescent dwarves to successfully solve the meaning of life by the time he sets off the following day.

A trade caravan is headed for Hygar, and Cain can't find a suitable reason not to travel with them, so he settles into the wagon for a long journey between cities.

The roads are supposed to be pretty good in this region, so Cain isn't too concerned about the trip itself, but if he could have gotten out of the city solo, he could have transformed and made it to his destination in a day.

Blowing his cover at this point is just more trouble than it is worth. If he doesn't find what he needs, he will most likely need to go back to the dwarves to get more information on the legend of the area. If they get paranoid and start checking people for disguises as the humans did during the Creation Festival contest, we would be left without leads.

Technically the Progenitor King that rules over the Demons is a lead as well, but getting in to see him might be much more difficult than simply chasing rumors to Ancient Ruins until he comes across something that will satisfy the quest.

This road is very strangely designed. It winds and wanders through the hills, but the entire distance is slightly uphill. It doesn't make any sense to Cain until mid-afternoon when he starts seeing ore carts headed for the city.

Each mine exit is slightly uphill from the last one, so they can roll their ore to the city quickly and return empty on the uphill route. The amount of planning that must have gone into this road is staggering.

There is a large artificial plateau conveniently located at the point that they reach just before dusk. It has been carved from the mountainside and has several quality stone fire pits and a stock of wood at the ready.

That explains why they were so insistent he accompanied them; the entire route has been designed for a specific traveling speed and anything else would leave you on a narrow path with a vertical cliff on one side when the sun suddenly went down behind a mountain.

These merchants trade wools and leather from the Western regions for gems and exotic woods from the eastern ranges. Several very durable species of trees grow hidden in the mountains, and Dwarven weapons need very sturdy handles.

With all the talk of blinding snowstorms that pop up in the mountains, Cain is sure that this life isn't ever going to be the one for him. The dwarves have mistaken his aversion to snow as the ignorance of a Deep Dwarf who has spent his entire life far below ground, where the vagaries of seasons and weather are foreign concepts that they have never seen.

That's a sentiment Cain can relate to. The regions he has lived in since arriving in this world have all been tropical, with mostly wet and dry to tell the seasons apart. Frigid and

snowy winters weren't a thing for him in his past life either, at just as fast as he can recall.

The memories of that wasted life have been fading ever since he transformed into an Ancient. They have just been so far from relevant to his life that there was really no need to recall them at all. Perhaps if he had brought some useful skill with him, the memories of his previous life would have mattered at least a little bit.

Cain tells the merchants a little bit about what he had seen since crossing the Iron Empire border, embellishing the details of things he saw from the air when he was traveling as a Proto Dragon.

p Since they always do the same route, those things are also new for them, and everyone gets to share a good laugh at Cain's attempt to describe a farmer losing an argument with one of the overgrown mountain goats that the dwarves raise. The creatures are three times their height, and gave a thick wooly coat, to go with equally thick curved horns and an irritable nature. The dwarves say raising them is no easy task, but the beasts provide many essentials that Dwarven society relies upon.

Back in the Beginner's Valley, the animals were smaller than the ones he saw here, and much more pleasant and docile. They could and did use them to pull carts and all sorts of other domesticated tasks that wouldn't be possible with the aggressive version found in the Iron Empire.

Cain is supposed to have the last watch before dawn, so he is startled when the guard comes to shake him awake just after midnight.

"Get up quickly. The Yeti are upset about something, and it looks like they are going to attack." He whispers, bringing Cain to full attention.

The journey was so quiet that he completely forgot that these mountains are filled with dangerous wildlife. It is only pure luck that they haven't come across anything else that might eat them so far.

But at his eyes adjust, Cain can see dozens of points of light spread through the darkness, eyes reflecting the firelight of their camp. Normally that is not a big deal, but these ones are four meters in the air, and there are sporadic growls rumbling from somewhere in the dark, on the uphill side of the plateau.

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

Chapter 374 Side Story Outreach

Cyrene and Misha are sitting together on the top floor of the central pagoda in the Long Fang Valley Manor, going over the good works they and the Guild members have accomplished over this past week.

With every Guild member able to call upon sixteen Epic Quality Summons, the entire power scale of the Guild has broken free of what could be considered normal. But between the two of them, and with a lot of help from the others, they have managed to turn that into a positive for the continent.

"Right now, we have Larkin leading a group of farmers through the Ogre dungeon here in the valley, Kone has gone to Ferdinand's territory and is helping with a crop growth issue there, but she should be back tonight. Preferably we would have everyone back at a Guild House tonight, because Neffie and Lickity say they have come up with uniforms for the Guild." Misha smiles, revising her notes.

"Uniforms? Like costume clothing worn over the armor?" Cyrene asks, and Misha nods.

"Cloaks and tabards. The cloaks come in a couple of varieties since they grant bonuses, but the tabards are just cloth. Both are black on one half and white on the other. The tailors agreed that would make us easy to identify and the pattern isn't in use by anyone else."

"I was hoping for something more Cleric-like for the casters, but making everyone matching robes with good bonuses is a lot to ask, isn't it?" Cyrene sighs, and Misha pets her scales.

"The tabards are enough. You will see once everyone is wearing them." Misha consoles her before looking over their reports again.

"It looks like the Guild has found seven more Dungeons in the desert around the castle, and they have marked the locations for further endeavors."

"Why don't we build shelters over them? That way, they're easy to find." Kone suggests, Climbing the stairs to join the two working on the top floor.

"Stone gazebos like we have back in the Castle? Earth Elementals could do that pretty quickly, and then we could have the Inscription specialists carve protection runes into them to keep them free of sand and desert creatures." Cyrene agrees, seeing visions of small temples to Cain scattered all over the desert.

"A place for groups to gather or rest would be a fine thing in the desert. Out of the scorching sun." Misha agrees, making notes in her to-do binder.

"That sounds great to me. Standing out in the sun all day is no fun. Speaking of which, I think we took care of the crop problems in the next territory. After the succession battles, they didn't have any druids or nature Mages left. It sounds like that is a common

problem all over the country, so if we can find any that are willing to spend time out helping the farmers of Skyview, it would be a huge benefit to everyone." Kone suggests.

Larkin is the next member to return back to the Manor, explaining that he has finished the run of the Ogre dungeon scheduled for the day and all the farmers that went with him are safely back home. Kone escorts him away while Cyrene checks the Guild messages for good news.

They had one minor incident today; a bandit group attempted to rob Fizzle, one of the female gnomish Warfire Warlocks. She is fine and managed to get her summons up before she could be immobilized or knocked unconscious, but that does highlight one of the problems with outreach work.

,m Not everyone is a good person, and having lone transfers off doing missions in dangerous areas is a risk to their members.

Having someone die while out trying to do good work for the Guild would be terrible and undermine everything they are trying to do.

The decision is to send them in pairs when they are going to be passing through or working in dangerous areas. Though the membership is biased towards younger females, thanks to a particular recruiting Shaman's love for cute and cuddly things, they have several couples who wouldn't mind going on adventures together.

[What does everyone think about having couples or teams go to the more dangerous areas instead of letting people go solo? It should be safer, and for those who prefer time alone, there are still many things to do in cities and other less hazardous regions.] Misha suggests in Guild Chat.

[That's not a bad idea. Then we won't feel pressured to go to different locations all day.] Larkin suggests bringing a round of jokes about him having to clear it with Kone before changing his duty assignments.

The overall reception is optimistic, though, and just before dinner, the tailors put the stacks of uniforms into the Guild Bank. They made three patterns of the cloak, straight Summon damage, enhanced healing and Summon damage, and increased resistances with Summon damage.

The bias is deliberate; with every outreach worker having so many summons available, getting the extra damage from the cloak allows them to optimize the rest of their gear for their own class.

The cloaks are black on the left, white on the right, and the tabards opposite. The effect is very striking and immediately identifiable as a uniform.

[The Enchanting Group has a brooch to go with the uniforms. It is a new recipe that they hope everyone appreciates.] Cid adds, speaking on behalf of the reclusive jewel Crafters. There are over ten of them, but they are even more rarely seen than even the artists.

A stack of identical black Octopus shaped pins are added to the bank, and everyone grabs one to add to their outfit. They all add ten points of healing on hit, which will apply when the summons attack as well, and they bind to a transfer on first use, showing the name of their owner when inspected and being unable to be equipped by others.

[They're like our identity cards, so nobody can pretend to be us.] Cid explains.

[Excellent initiative, everyone. Thank you for all the hard work.] Misha adds her congratulations to the crowded chat.

They have gone through most of the day's duties, but one item is left at the bottom. Carlos wants to place a building on a vacant property in the slums of the Landis capital, hoping to make a Guild Hospital. His summons can do the job, but he needs approval from a Guild officer to make it a Guild facility.

Misha doesn't see a problem with that. They have at least one young Cleric who would prefer healing all day to doing dungeons once the building is done.

Their Guild roster is only a third full, with the recent addition of Port Nefheim increasing their maximum membership numbers. That isn't exactly a problem, but more of an opportunity for them to expand. One that Cyrene wishes to capitalize on.

"We should send out a few friendly people looking for new members. The ones from Beginner Valley that Char raises are perfect, but there are only so many of them available if we're not going to clear out every unaligned transfer from the valley.

Maybe everyone could keep an eye out while they are on missions? Bring back youth in need for Char to train?" Cyrene suggests.

Controlling a territory allows them to set quest missions, so Misha makes a bunch up and issues them for the Guild to pick from.

She does this regularly, using it to pay members for spreading the glory of the Darklight Host. But today, she adds an extra mission to the usual list, letting the System fill in the details of their recruitment requirements, along with the reward that it will issue in addition to the token gold coin that the Guild offers.

[Quest: Find suitable representatives to be trained as Ambassador Members for the Darklight Host under Guild Master Cain.] Quest rewards 1 Gold Coin, plus five skill points for every recruit deemed worthy.

'Yes, that is what they need.' Misha decides, then, she reads the system's bonus reward, which is usually a bit of experience. Getting skill points from any sort of quest is rare, and the reward is unheard of from a repeatable quest. In theory, someone could earn an entire advancement worth of skill points just by finding new members.

The only question is, how will the System device so is deemed as a "Worthy Recruit"? It will decide before they are admitted and indicate to those on the quest when they have found one.

That somewhat takes recruiting out of their hands and places it at the will of the system, but if the system decides they are worthy ambassadors, they shouldn't be bad people. The system has been pretty reliable that way.

They only have to wait two days until they find the first automatically vetted new member. According to the system, this fifteen year old Gnomish girl who was dropped in Port Nefheim as a stowaway, who didn't even have a class until Neffie found her and took her in to complete the quest is worthy.

Currently, she is in Port Nefheim, recovering from weeks of starvation hiding in a merchant ship, but the system interface has now activated for her.

Gnomes are superstitious, believing that fate decides what new experimental devices fail and which ones blow up, so she chose random class selection, letting fortune determine her role in life.

The System awarded her the class of Crusader, which Neffie finds hilarious since the gnome is even shorter than she is. Still, Brazz is hugely enthusiastic about helping the Guild spread a positive reputation.

Why she is so devoted after just being rescued becomes apparent when they realize that Neffie had power leveled her to level 50 the very first night while everyone else was sleeping.

The superstitious gnome believes that Neffie's help, along with her new class, is a sign that the System has given her a Divine Duty to help the Guild.

[Send her here to us in Long Fang Valley. We will help her get acclimatized, and she can meet everyone while she gets settled.] Cyrene tells Neffie, who sees the opportunity to come to visit the pregnant Misha and sample different snacks than the ones her cook usually makes.

"We are off to a good start. One cuddly gnome incoming." Cyrene giggles to Misha, looking forward to meeting someone new to teach all about The Truth.

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

Chapter 375 360

The group of Yeti is slowly filling the plateau, but other than the growling, there are no obvious clues about why they have decided to attack in such large numbers.

Cain should smell like a Dwarf in this form so that it won't be that. Maybe they are hungry?

"How had this last season been for berries and wildlife in the mountains? They aren't hungry enough to start eating dwarves, are they?" Cain whispers to the merchant next to him.

"It shouldn't have been that bad. But this is more Yeti than we thought were in the area. If they have been secretly growing in population, they might have eaten everything they could, and now they're being forced to scrounge or move to find food." The Dwarf whispers back.

That's not good news. Yeti are beasts, brutal even though they don't have access to the system. Cain's interface ranks the adults at just over level 200 but focuses on using the Earth Elemental's senses to complement the sensory enhancements from the Seraphim and Forest Dragon. Like that, Cain can tell that many of them have small forms on their backs.

"Look closely; doesn't it look like quite a few of them are carrying young ones?" Cain asks quietly, and most of the dwarves turn to look at him.

"You can see them? Not just the eyes?"

Cain nods his confirmation. "Not well, but some are carrying a small body."

"It must be the seasonal migration come early. Everyone back up close to the fire and the wagons and wait. Once their weaker members have passed by, the stronger warriors in their clan should follow without attacking. At least, we can hope." The leader mutters, and the scattered group gathers together in one spot.

At first, it seems to be working; the eyes in the dark begin to move, and they can hear walking and growling, but as the last few eyes disappear, Cain feels something moving behind them. The Earth Elemental is sensitive to anything living touching the ground.

"Behind us. Something circled." Cain informs the group, drawing his Scimitar.

If they do have to fight in the dark, he will bring out his spear as well, but for now, this will be enough.

Without any warning, the largest of the Yeti charges the camp, grabbing the closest Dwarf and crushing the life from him. Cain charges in, kicking the four-meter tall beast back out of the fire light where the others won't be able to see the battle, and draws his spear.

The first thrust is blocked and knocked aside by the furry monster, but his sword cuts deep into its side. The Yeti shudders for a second as [Pestilence] takes effect, giving Cain the chance to land another blow, but then the creature's resistance stops the effect, and it is back in action, though with well under a third of its total health remaining.

That is all the fight it needed to know that it was not going to win this confrontation, and it gives an echoing roar before fleeing down the mountain.

Cain rushes back to see a lot of blood on the ground and signs of more headed down the hill, with several wounded Dwarves huddled around the fire. His aura would have been healing them the entire time, so they must have taken some pretty severe injuries to still be in this bad shape.

"The leader fled down the hill after the pack. How bad was it here?" Cain asks, looking over the group.

"We lost six, and unless this healing Totem is extra amazing, we might lose more. The Shaman is in a bad way." One of the dwarves informs him.

Cain can see the Shaman is slowly recovering, but he has a healing reduction debuff that is resisting the aura's attempt to cleanse him.

He most likely will not die, at least not with Cain around, but it might be half a day before he has recovered unless that debuff wears off, and that would be highly suspicious since his Totem won't last much longer.

Cain's luck holds, though, and the debuff wears off before the Totem expires, letting the Dwarf recover enough to cast a fresh one.

"Well, that was too close for comfort. My thanks to the Deep Dwarf for dealing with the Yeti Boss. Unlike you, we aren't part elemental; no way we could have stopped that thing. You didn't take too much damage, did you?"

Cain shakes his head. "What I did take your Totem already cured."

They collect what they can of the bodies into a litter, dragged behind the wagon so that they can adequately bury the dead and head out at first light. After the attack, nobody

would be sleeping anymore, and they just wanted to get away from that blood-soaked ledge.

They won't make it to their destination for a few more days, but they get a chance to stop off at a mine and make funeral arrangements placing the fallen merchants to rest in an abandoned shaft, as is Dwarven custom.

The following overnight location is a cave, giving them a much safer feeling than the open-air spot from last night. At least it does once they have checked every corner and crack for possible hidden threats and secondary access points.

They might be paranoid, but they're not going to get ambushed by Yeti again tonight, that is for sure.

The afternoon of the third day finally brings Cain to the modern city of Hygar. Unusual for a Dwarven city, it is built on and under a valley floor instead of being placed most of the way up a mountain.

Cain suspects that is because they reused Ancient mine shafts to form the basis of their city. Since the Ancients are so large, the tunnels would be very well sized for a Dwarven city giving plenty of headroom for ventilation.

The surface level looks similar to the villages in the foothills, with tidily organized stone buildings, clean roads, and a small assortment of Beastkin working and living beside the dwarves. This time it is mostly Bear Kin, and Cain smiles as he adds more varieties of Beastkin to his collection.

You don't see many bears in the desert or in tropical jungles, and the Long Fang Valley is full of Wolf and Fox type Beastkin.

Unfortunately none of these have a system, so as actual summons they won't be of much use, but they are still a variety of new species and forms for his collection. Cain tried the same with the dwarves everywhere he had been, but found that dwarves here are the same as dwarves without a system at home as far as his ability is concerned.

"Welcome to the Low Valley Tavern. How can I help you tonight?" The stout and matronly Dwarven woman working the bar greets them as Cain and half the merchants come in for a drink while the leaders set up to sell their goods.

"We all need Ale, and I'm hoping to learn a bit more about the ancient ruins nearby. The rumor at home was that there is still a good ore deposit hidden there, just waiting for a Deep Dwarf to find it." Cain answers setting a Gold Coin on the bar.

"It is good to see that even travelers speak proper Dwarven." The older lady chuckles pocketing the coin.

"Go three peaks south, then one east. A Deep Dwarf should find the entrance. The ruins aren't out in the open as most looters expect them to be, but they are there. It is bad mojo though, so smart dwarves don't go there. Too much of the lingering evil of the Ancients remains in their places." She explains and Cain nods.

"I have heard all sorts of wild and crazy things about the Ancients, but you never know what you will find after so long. It may be that time has claimed most of it back, or it might be that I will have to go deep underneath to find what I am looking for." Cain's answer makes the dwarves in the bar smile. Of course a Deep Dwarf would end up at the very bottom of a mine shaft in the end. It is their natural habitat, like they are drawn to the depths.

"I've been near them, tending the herds and the aura of the Ancients is still strong in the region. Watch yourself if you want to get closer, they might have left traps to keep out those who would try to steal from them.

Like in the legend of Martin, the human who stole the secrets of magic and shared them with his people before he was caught and tortured into the first of the bog monsters." Another tavern patron explains.

"I don't know that one. But it sounds like a pretty horrible fate." Cain agrees, and that is all the incentive the dwarves needed to turn the subject to stories of the Ancients.

In Cain's time, most of these stories were forgotten, so he is doing his best to remember them in case they can give him insight into raising the twins. They are embellished by fearful dwarves, as expected, but there should still be a hint of truth in most of them.

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

Chapter 376 361

With the help of Cain's healing aura, the dwarves tell stories all night, finishing with more detailed directions to the ruins.

They have high hopes that having a Dwarf mining the area might be enough to calm whatever lingering evil spirits remained there, upset at being abandoned. They still likely wouldn't go near the place, but it was good to feel like things might improve.

When everyone leaves for work, Cain heads out of the city, shifting back into Daisy once he is safely out of sight to move faster without attracting attention.

Unlike the wolves, who were more than a bit creepy, the Bear Kin are just all around generally friendly people. Almost everyone he passes waves before going back to their work, and Cain jogs happily through the mountains.

By evening, he is out of sight of civilization, so he shifts back into the Golden Proto Dragon and flies low over the trees, following the directions he has to the site of the ruins.

Cain stops when he gets close and shifts into one of the burly Bear Kin men he saw yesterday. At just over 3 meters tall, this form feels like a mountain of muscle. Bears are among the most physically powerful Beastkin that Cain has found so far, and the feeling is quite relaxing.

He hangs his hammock in the trees, intent on getting a little sleep before the sun comes up, the rotund mass of muscle that is his current form settles into the net of a hammock like they were made for each other.

The form Cain chose was like the Felians, fully furred with partially bestial features. This one was a very light golden color, with long hair on his head, deadlocked with wooden beads worked into the length.

He has both sharp teeth and claws but furry human-shaped feet. Cain had his full armor set equipped, but the form still appeared shirtless, with black hemp canvas cargo pants and thick leather boots.

Overall, Cain was impressed. The guild could use some of these friendly giants in their ranks.

Cain isn't sure if he can communicate with anyone as he hasn't seen any messages since entering the portal, but he tries sending a message anyhow. He explains all about the Bear Kin and how they would be good members but receives no reply.

Not surprised, he heads towards the ruins, coming over a ridge overlooking where it should be hidden in a mountain.

There is no mountain, only a colossal mountain-sized city built for beings the size of his natural Ancient form. There is a barrier faintly visible around it, which must be what looks like a mountain to everyone else.

He can see that the supposed hidden entry is an open door in the outer wall around the city. Someone must have stumbled through it accidentally and thought it was a disguised cavern entry into the mountain. It would be a fairly compelling explanation if they still saw the barrier from the inside.

Cain doesn't see any sign of roads or residents in the area, so he decides to go as himself as a show of respect to the original Ancients.

Spreading his wings, Cain flies in his Ancient form for the first time, finding that this is even faster and more agile than his Dragon form. The only real downside of using it more often would be the [Existential Dread] aura.

The barrier is no hindrance to him, and he smoothly lands on the steps of what looks like an ancient temple at the top of the city.

The architecture is very similar to early Greek or Roman from his past life, heavy on the stone blocks, pillars, and elaborate tile frescoes. Even after all this time, the city looks like everyone just stepped out for the day.

But some things are missing. The furniture is flawless, but the paintings and other artwork that should have been here are gone.

Cain heads down the hill and checks random houses, finding the same thing. All the signs of an advanced civilization, but nothing to indicate who created it. It's like the Ancients have been deliberately erased.

Cain always wanted to visit such unique historical places, but this half-empty state is unnerving. Everywhere he goes is the same, until the point when he enters the city's core, finding that the entire town is hollow, with a giant magical device covered in runes taking up most of the mountain.

Cain flies to the device's control panel, wondering what the purpose could be. There is writing on the table in glowing magical runes.

[Process 9 percent complete. Population power level insufficient.] Increase power level.

[Population 1. Population Insufficient]

Now Cain is even more intrigued by the function of this device. What could it be doing that needs a Population of more powerful Ancients? He looks it over but doesn't see anything resembling instructions, so Cain tries treating it like the system interface and asking questions.

He starts by touching the runes for process, causing the image of a globe covered in lines. They make a linked grid, and Cain sees that many intersections are in locations that now have cities on them. Could it be a transportation map?

Cain touches the intersection that should be in Long Fang Valley, and a description appears.

[Ley Line Luo1] 0.1% active.

It is a map of the flow of magical power in the world. But the supernatural power of this world feels the same as at home, so does that mean the world could potentially be thousand times more powerful than it currently is?

[What was the highest level progress had historically reached?] Cain focuses on asking with his hand on the desk.

[Full Activation Occurred for 18 years, six days and 7 hours after Operators joined the conflict recorded under the title "War Between Gods." Functions were deactivated due to the insufficient remaining population on the planet.] A gentle but robotic voice sounds in his mind.

Cain stumbles back and takes a seat on the floor. The Ancients weaponized the entire planet to let them fight toe to toe with the Gods for 18 years before they were annihilated. That bit of information is insane.

,m [Did that include the Laughing God?] Cain asks the machine when he has recovered from the shock.

[The Elder Gods were not present during the war between their creations and the invading Gods until after this process was halted.]

There is too much to learn here. He will have to return later.

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

Chapter 377 362 Bears Everywhere

While Cain is chatting with the magical device in the Ancient Ruins, back in his own time a premonition passes through the Bear Kin of the central continent.

"Prepare for a journey. The tribe's Elder Shamans have experienced a shared vision. The Creators want us to send the finest of Ursas to join with their chosen Champions on this continent. The vision said we would recognize them by balancing light and dark." The chief of the Ursa Tribe informed his gathered clan members.

"Do set know what they need? Or should we send a bit of everything?" One of the elders asks.

"We should send our finest. The Ursa Tribe are the finest Druids in the land, so we will send druids and trust that the other tribes also heed the call." The Shaman, a powerful man in the prime of his life, declares.

All through the mountains and the Serrah Woods, similar scenes play out as each tribe of Bear Kin prepares to send a pair of their tribe's most capable to look for the chosen ones of the Creators.

In Port Nefheim, two visitors arrive the following day, declaring that the Creators have sent them to help. Neffie is utterly confused, so she refers the issue to her father, Cixelcid, who recalls the Ancients being called Creators, and decides that Cain must have sent them from wherever he is right now.

"Welcome. Will you be visiting as friends, or would you like to join the Guild?" Cid asks, unsure what Cain intended.

"We will join you. I am Po, and this is En." The large black and white-furred bear smiles, mostly hiding his teeth.

The one called En is a midnight black-furred female with golden fur on her face. Though she is much smaller than her companion, she is still 2.7 meters tall and very muscular.

"When the Shamans had the vision, they recognized the sign to mean the tabards and cloaks your guards have recently started wearing. We will be at your side until the Creators call us away." She announces, her voice surprisingly rough like she doesn't speak much or has damaged her throat.

Neffie makes a mental note, bring her to Cain's doctor and have her throat checked if she wants.

"What are your classes or specialties?" Cid asks, preparing to welcome them to the Guild.

"My class is Monster Hunter. It's pretty self-explanatory." En gives a coarse chuckle.

"My class is Remembrancer; I specialize in realistic paintings and architecture, with bonuses for work that shows a historical story." Po shrugs.

"Don't look down on your class. This world is desperately short on historical documents and art. We could use your skills to make a true history as we learn it." Cid assures the big bear, who gives him a happy pat on the head.

Back in Long Fang Valley, Cyrene was busily 'educating' the Gnome Brazz, who turned out to be a hardened street kid who ran away from home to survive. Not at all sweet and innocent as hoped; instead, she was a natural-born zealot.

She absorbed everything that was told by the Lamia as if it was gospel though, lacking any of the inherent doubt that she should have learned in her difficult life. She was also used to Lamia's random visions, so when Cyrene had another, she simply stopped and waited for Cyrene to tell her what she had seen.

"Master Cain is sending us Bear Kin to help spread the truth and uplift the people. We need to make sure we are ready to welcome our new friends." The Lamia declares, and her Gnomish shadow finishes the sword technique set she was in the middle of and follows her to find the others.

They doubt her vision at first, but when the Bear Kin start showing up in pairs announcing that the Creators sent a vision asking them to come to join and assist the Guild in their works to help the people, it is hard to argue against Cyrene's insistence.

The large number of powerfully built new arrivals, all over level 200, made the locals nervous the first day, but their polite and helpful nature endeared them to everyone they met.

It changes the Guild's deployment plan though; with so many eager new high-level recruits, it makes more sense to send larger five-person groups that can do missions and dungeons while traveling together and station lone members at locations where people might come to them for help on short notice, and where that help won't require much violent intervention.

It is hard to say if Earl RhickJaymz is the most startled the first time a group of bears and dwarves shows up with Trollish mining puppets to start clearing the dungeon outside Assah or if that honor belongs to the Mining Guild members who are outclassed and overpowered by these uninformed visitors in every measurable way.

Either way, between them and the group that went to mine one of the new dungeons the Guild found in the desert, the material collection system is so effective that a gravel pit only for precious ores needs to be built outside the Manor.

Cain, for his part, had no idea of the changes that his attempt to send a message has caused and is happily exploring the architecture of the Ancient Ruins.

Everywhere he goes, all trace of the Ancients is gone, only the size of the furniture giving a hint add to the nature of the ones who built this place.

Next up is a particularly elaborate Manor that Cain hopes was a leader's official home. It might have something left. Looking from the outside, it seems this one did, at least for a while. Numerous pillars and one decorative wall have been crushed to powder, destroying whatever history was left there.

Combing through the rubble for hints, Cain finds a small pin. A bent cufflink with the Demon Kingdom royal crest on it. To his acute senses, the pin smells like both Ancients and Demons, but the Ancients have been gone far too long for that. It must have been a Progenitor and a reasonably recent visit at that.

The humans said the Progenitor King collected Ancient relics, but to Cain, it looks like he has been destroying them, unless this particular mural offended him.

Inside the house, all personal effects are gone as expected, but Cain notices a table that shouldn't be a table. The city control panel has been moved from its place in city hall, which he had already searched, and turned into a coffee table.

In this Era, only an Ancient city would have one, so this hiding spot would have been very effective at preventing anyone from recognizing it.

[Activate City Interface] Cain orders and the magical runes appear in the air above the stone.

[Welcome, Ancient. Appoint a new Mayor to continue?]

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

Chapter 378 363

[New Mayor election selected. 1 Valid Candidate was found. One valid voter was found.]

[Congratulations, Mayor Cain]

[Well, that might be the fastest mayoral election in history.] The Seraphim that Cain is merged with jokes, making both Cain and the other Summons laugh.

Cain checks through the city options, finding that there are many things he can set, like tax rates and the frequency of automatic public area cleaning. He decides not to change anything for now and takes a seat on the nearby chair to contemplate what sort of relic of the Ancients he might need to finish this quest.

The city control panel wasn't enough to do it, though perhaps that's because it isn't an item he can easily physically take. But he has searched pretty much everywhere inside this city and found nothing.

The best lead he has is that Demon Royal Family cufflink, so Cain decides to turn northwest and fly over. If he could use summons, it would be easier. Having to stop every day to sleep just wastes time.

This is a grand ancient city, though. Shouldn't there be some sort of a transportation system here? Cain checks the City Control panel and finds that there is indeed a travel circle here. An unauthorized one that leads to Karrack, the Demon Capital.

Cain isn't sure where exactly in the capital it leads, but there is a good chance it is targeted somewhere inside the Palace, which means he needs to think up a proper introduction when meeting Demon Nobility.

The Demons are staunch proponents of heritage and power as indicators of personal worth, so Cain transforms himself into the Demonic Progenitor form that he is transformed in to when he uses the [Ancient Resistance] skill to multiply his Demon summons.

The building they placed the circle in is the equivalent of a dog house in the Ancient city, a small two-bedroom home in the yard of an Ancients Estate with a roof that can be easily lifted off to remove the occupants.

The fact Demons likely didn't notice this and chose to go home from the pet house instead of the main house is quite amusing to Cain, enough that he forgot he needed to think up an introduction before he stepped through the travel circle.

He found himself inside the King's Residence in the Karrack Palace, and Cain began to wonder just how much chaos this would cause. Even a basic security spell would detect his arrival, and if the Demons could use travel circles, they certainly could use security wards.

Standing right where he arrived and waiting a minute was enough to get a full security force to his location, looking confused as to why an unfamiliar Progenitor was standing inside the Palace.

The Progenitors are all Royals, but they don't know this one, causing them to hesitate.

"If you could kindly inform the King that Cain wishes to speak with him about what happened at the Ancient Ruins near Hygar, I would appreciate it," Cain announces, not moving from his spot near the travel circle.

"Aggron, get away from there. Why would you go see an intruder." A shrill female voice calls and Cain sees a young teenage Demon child that looks like Aggramor but with two black feathered wings on his back, peering at him from behind a pillar.

"I would run away from that voice as well. You must be the Demon King in waiting. I love your wings." Cain smiles, then realizes that the reason nobody is getting close because all the auras from his summons have activated.

Healing, Intimidation, and Seraph's Grace are all overlapping and leading to a nearly irresistible but threatening feeling in the air. They must have activated when he changed forms, but with nobody else around, he didn't notice.

Cain turns [Intimidation] off and turns down [Seraph's Grace] to its lowest setting. That's almost an Intimidation aura to Demons, but with a warm overtone.

The little boy is suddenly picked up by a two winged version of Cain's Progenitor form in a black robe with fur trim. That must be the current Demon King.

The Demon double-takes when he notices Cain's six wings, stopping halfway across the room. "Who are you then? There hasn't been a living six winged Progenitor in hundreds of years. Drop the disguise and show yourself."

Cain decides skipping the games will likely be most the most straightforward and effective course of action, so he transforms back into his natural form, head nearly touching the ceiling and his wings taking up all the room behind him.

[I want to know where the personal belongings from the Ancient city went. I know the Demons were there.] Cain sends the mental message to the whole room since this form has no vocal cords.

The smell of ammonia hits Cain's senses, and then the sound of running, but the King is still here, and the boy doesn't look the least bit scared. Even under the effect of his [Existential Dread] aura.

Cain throws the cufflink on the ground between them to show what he means by knowing the Demons were there, and the King swallows hard, looking at the object on the floor.

"That's my grandpa's. See, it is his seal. Where did you find that, giant Demon?" The fearless Prince asks.

[It was left in my home, but someone destroyed my garden wall and stole my belongings.] Cain may have embellished the truth, but explaining who he actually is would be a real hassle.

"The old man is long dead already, and you've been gone for thousands of years. Forgive us for not knowing you were still alive." The King stammers.

[Where are the things that were taken?] Cain asks again, and the King shakes his head.

"The old man destroyed them all, so none could attempt to emulate the history of the Ancients again. I am sorry, but there is nothing I can do. Maybe you could ask the Gnomes in Muzz if they have anything? There are ruins of an Ancient city near them too." The Progenitor informs him with a hint of hope that this monster will go away.

[I shall ask the Gnome King then. Young Prince, do I need to scour your father's mind to see if he is lying, or is he honorable?]

The little boy puffs up proudly. "My father is a noble King. He would never tell a lie, Ancient Cain. That's your name, right? I heard you tell the guards that Cain was here to see dad."

[That is correct. Be well, little Demon, and may your children be strong and Noble.] His mental projection has a hint of Avedon in it for the brave little Demon, and he can see how happy the boy is for the blessing.

With the conversation now effectively over, Cain steps back onto the travel circle and chooses Muzz as his destination, changing forms into a Dwarf again as he disappears.

"Listen, son. We must tell nobody of what happened here. To the world, the Ancients are still extinct and must remain that way. I will erase the minds of everyone else who saw him here." The Progenitor King tells his son, who nods grimly.

"It was just like the Legends said, father. If you are kind to them, they are kind to you. They're still terrifying, though."

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

Chapter 379 364 Ancient Muzz

The portal at Muzz is fully intact when Cain arrives, and he takes a step to the side to admire the artistry. There are quite a few Gnomes in the area, but the sight of Dwarf admiring stonework isn't exactly something new or noteworthy; they do it all the time.

Cain is actually making mental notes of how it used to look so they they can restore the entry they rebuilt inside the Blood Sands Castle to all its former glory.

It is hard to say that the city is in its heyday, though. Already the grasslands are looking parched, the trees in the distance are stunted, and he doesn't sense much wildlife, which the Forest Dragon is very good at.

The city is still fully active, though, so Cain heads below, excited to see what wonders they have in store for him.

The signage is all in gnomish and Dark Elf, so Cain calls for Drazzit to merge with him, the same dark Elven Cleric he used to translate the first time.

[Oh, this place was nice when it was still occupied. I wonder if my dad is here?] The Dark Elf asks.

That's a good question, Cain doesn't know the actual date he is currently experiencing, so it is possible that they are not long before the city's fall, and a much younger version of her father might be here working as a Royal Guard.

Cain makes his way through the city before a moped sales and repair shop catches his eye. Kone wanted one of these, so Cain heads inside.

Whether he can bring one back home in his inventory is a good question, but at the very least, he can get one to ride around the city with. The shop has a small collection of the two wheeled vehicles, and accessories, including what Cain believes to be a folding solar panel.

There were none of those in ruins, so they must have taken them all as they left.

"What can I find for you? Gnomish mopeds are extremely sturdy, well-sized for a Dwarf, and can be recharged at any gnomish lightning outlet or with the optional sun collector." The shopkeeper welcomes him.

"I would like to try one in your larger size. If it rides well, I will also take a solar collector." Cain informs him, looking over the sleek black paint on the largest-sized moped.

It would be on the large side for a Dwarf but is capable of carrying two riders, or a single human could sit at the back of the seat. It also has a small cargo rack at the back, suitable for putting his backpack on while traveling.

In short, this is the perfect pattern to buy if he will have their design team produce them for mass-market sales in the Central Continent.

"You have a keen eye. Our luxury model includes a double battery pack and a quick charging option. Two solar collectors can fully charge it in a single day." The gnome informs him proudly.

"How far can it go on a charge?" Cain asks, curious as to how viable these things are as a primary form of transportation.

"To the ocean ports. Over two hundred muzzles at twenty muzzles an hour. You might not want to go that fast on some of the roughest sections though."

A muzzle must be about two Kilometers, so that is a very impressive pace and range by this world's standards. It's not Dragon flight, but no horse could keep up. Likely not even any of the nightmares or other ordinary magical steeds.

The attendant rolls it into the road, holding Cain's backpack as collateral, knowing no Dwarf would abandon his tools. Cain takes a quick spin around the block, impressed by the quality of this electric bike, and returns to collect the accessories.

"I'll take it, along with two panels. I'm headed to Assah next if I can't find what I need here." Cain informs him, and the gnome nods happily.

The price is over a hundred gold coins. Exorbitant by any standard, but this is the height of gnomish luxury travel. Cain slowly tours the city, taking it all in and getting many envious looks from the Gnomes, before turning towards the palace.

If he's going to find out about Ancient Relics, they will be the ones to know.

Cain stops behind the stables and stores everything, including his pack, in his inventory. He is a bit shabbily dressed to meet government officials or Nobles, so Cain decides to try being human for a change, picking his usual heavily tattooed form that still reminds him of an ambitious young mob boss.

Dressed in an elegant black suit in the Dark Elven style, with red gloves and shirt, and a black tie, Cain heads for the main entry, where he can see visitors of a dozen species coming and going. There aren't many humans, but a few, primarily ragged looking nomadic sorts.

Hopefully not all humans in the region are like that, or this could be awkward. Cain considers adding horns or wings to look Demonic but doesn't see any Demons in the line, so he refrains.

"Human Noble, what can we do for you today?" A gate guard asks him.

"I require information on the Ancients and was informed that it could be found here. I am willing to pay for it if necessary."

The Dark Elf looks startled but nods his agreement and leads Cain inside, another guard taking his place.

"I will find you someone who speaks Human. Your accent is atrocious." The guard mutters, and Cain realizes he has been having no problem understanding people. The system must be assisting him, though it still isn't translating the written script.

If the system is the one translating his intentions to his speech, his accent shouldn't be too bad. More likely, the Elf was offended at a human speaking his language. Or perhaps he was speaking the common language of the Forest Elves and not the local dialect of the Dark Elves?

They are basically the same language, or so he had been told.

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

Chapter 380 365

The guard leads him to a side room, where he is joined a few minutes later by an elderly human man and a teenage gnomish girl.

"Welcome to Muzz. We heard you needed information on the Ancient Cities. I will translate for you, and Princess Manila will decide what information is suitable for the public." The human greets him with a heavy accent. He must have lived here in the city for most of his life.

"He doesn't look all that bad. I wonder what he did the insult the guards?" The princess asks her translator, and Cain laughs.

"I may or may not have answered him in Forest Elven."

"You speak Gnomish? More importantly, you spoke hippie to a Royal Guard and didn't get stabbed? That alone is impressive."

The translator isn't quite sure what to do now that it is clear his services aren't needed, so he takes a seat off to the side and waits while they talk.

"I am on a mission to find a relic of the Ancients. So far, I haven't had any luck, but the young prince of the Demon Kingdom suggested that your city might have a lead." Cain explains.

"Aggron? Do you mean Aggron? He is to be my betrothed, an alliance between the Kingdom's Royal families." Princess Manila informs him, standing up out of her chair.

"What is he like? Is he handsome? Kind, strong, noble?"

"He is very kind, brave to the point of fearless and a bit handsome. You will love his wings. Feathered wings are very soft and warm."

"Why would I worry about the softness of his wings?" The princess asks, confused.

"Oh, maybe it isn't a gnomish ideal to be held in the strong arms of your gallant-king, wrapped in his protective embrace, safe from all enemies while he wakes and from nightmares while he sleeps?" Cain jokes, and the princess blushes a shade of red that no human can turn. It is as bright as red Goblin skin, brighter and more vibrant than even most species' blood.

"Hush, you. It is a political marriage, not an interspecies romance novel like they sell in the red light district."

"It could be both. I will put in a good word for you when I return if you like?" Cain teases, and he can see the older man hide a smile.

"That won't be necessary. But if you see him again, could you tell him good things about me?" Her voice turns hopeful at the end, and Cain smiles.

"I will write a letter glorifying all your finest points today before I leave if you have any information on the relics of the Ancients. It seems the Elder Progenitor King destroyed all of them that he could find."

"Everyone did. The only things they left behind were too dangerous to be allowed to continue existing. Dangerous things, horrific things. Can you imagine how it would have turned out if humans or Beastkin gained the ability to transform anyone into the perfect soldier at will? They would take over the world." Princess Manila explains.

"So you don't know of anything left?" Cain asks sadly.

"There are three ruins left in the grasslands that aren't fully cleared. The Ancients put a barrier around them that none can break without destroying a good chunk of the continent. We might be having water supply issues, but this would be much worse."

Not just one but three ruins hidden behind barriers? That is excellent news.

"If you could draw me a map, I will begin writing that letter for you." Cain declares, thrilled to finally get a solid lead.

"You weren't joking about that? Why would they take you seriously?" The princess asks.

"I share a special bond with them. They will read my letter." Cain announces with absolute certainty.

The old man brings them both pens and paper, and Cain begins to write his note.

[Your Highness Aggron,

I do hope this letter finds you well. Your advice led me to Muzz, and I have found myself in the presence of a lovely young Princess known as Manila.

I have shown her only as much as she needs to know to help, nothing frightening from the past. Please take her in and treat her well. She is a very kind and gentle soul.

Your Ancient Friend,

Cain

PS: Gnomes have a soft spot for romance.]

The letter probably isn't necessary. Going by the diminutive size of Aggramor's natural form, the Gnome Princess was most likely his ancestor, but it couldn't hurt.

Cain rolls the letter, then looks at the wax and wonders what sort of signet to seal it with. Short on ideas and knowing his Long Fang Valley signet means nothing here, Cain slightly adjusts the shape of his thumbprint to create a stamp in the shape of his Ancient form's head. That should be obvious enough to prove the letter isn't a fake.

"If you can have this sent to the Karrack Royal Palace for Prince Aggron, it will complete our deal," Cain announces as Manila finishes the crude map.

"I put rough distances on there. Hopefully, it is enough for you to find what you need." She agrees, looking at the signet mark on the sealed letter.

That concluded their business, and with a round of polite goodbyes, Cain heads back out into Muzz, exploring the Dark Elven sector this time.

He sits down on the benches beside the statue of the spider queen that he gathered the moss from last time he was here and notices that the legs of the statue have greasy hand prints all over them.

Most likely it is from kids climbing on the statue, and someone will eventually clean it, but Cain takes a piece of cloth from his inventory and wipes the legs down anyhow. That's much better, he decides, taking out the one-a-day hot breakfast pack and enjoying a meal in the underground park.

Seated where he is, he can't see the statue's eyes glow as it activates, nor does he notice the blessing it bestows on him.

With travel circles, the letter reaches Prince Aggron before Cain is finished eating. The boy reads it over twice, then takes it to his father.

"Look at this. The Ancient sent me a letter. He went to Muzz and vetted my bride for me. I don't know if he did anything, but she sounds perfect." The young Demon exclaims, hugging his father's leg as the King reads the letter.

"You did receive a great blessing this time. Congratulations, son." The King had worried about who would be sent for the alliance, as his son didn't want a Harem, but it appears that the problem has been taken care of.

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

Chapter 381 366

With his stomach full, Cain decides to visit the closest of the ruins marked on the map. If they all have barriers around them, he should be able to explore in peace, and maybe he can even find something to help him with the twins that Misha has coming.

Once he is back outside, Cain decides that a smaller flying species is the way to go, so he transforms into Vala's new Mythical body shape and begins flying near the road. Most travelers don't give him a second glance, seeing that he isn't aggressive, but the Demonic merchants all wave as he flies by overhead.

He considers that it might be because Vala looks vaguely like a Progenitor with leathery wings but then recalls that Aggramor said the Blood Dancers weren't killed off until the great war, so they should still be alive and holding a high position in Demon society.

There is nobody near the ruins other than the few travelers in the distance on the road, so Cain flies low between the trees and passes through the barrier, almost running straight into a building on the other side. The distortion from looking through the wall must have messed with his depth perception.

That wasn't the impregnable player of the barrier though, there is a bright purple arcane shield over the city's central core, and Cain can see movement inside.

Intrigued, Cain flies over the outer residents, stopping at a couple of windows to ensure they have been picked clean, as expected.

The movement in the inner city is a Puppet. It looks pretty ragged after all these years, and the broom it is using to clean the streets is almost entirely worn away, probably the latest of a great many like it.

Cain walks up the barrier and places his hand on it, causing a doorbell like a chime to ring and the nearby Puppet to come rushing over.

"Greetings, Ancient; how might we help you today?" The Puppet asks.

"I need to recover an item that was forgotten inside. May I enter?" Cain asks politely, and the Puppet pauses a moment as if considering the request.

"My instructions are to ask what item you need to prevent impostors."

"I am hoping to find a Mythic item that will help with learning new skills. Or a book on child care." Cain informs the Puppet.

"Very well, both items are on the approved lending list at the library. Please follow me."

As soon as the words are said, Cain's hand quickly passes through the barrier and he steps behind the Puppet.

"Your broom is very worn. Is there not a replacement?" Cain asks as they walk.

"The replacement domestic tools Puppet has gone offline. We will be passing by it soon." The cleaner informs him.

That gives Cain a reason to look more closely at the buildings they pass, noticing that they are all pristine and fully equipped. But somewhere visible in most of them, an inactive Puppet can be found.

"Were you made autonomous?" Cain asks, wondering why this one still functions.

"Unlike the others, I was placed in a Puppet body as a punishment. Though my Creator is deceased, her orders still stand, and the embedded soul keeps this body functioning." The Puppet informs him.

"That's a bit extreme. I'll bet the punishment for whatever they did was not intended to last for multiple millennia." Cain mutters, but the Puppet hears him anyhow.

"My sentence ends once I have earned forgiveness for getting sweat in my mistress' tea." The Puppet informs him.

Cain isn't sure what to say to that, so they walk in silence until they reach the Library, where an Elven Puppet with a small stack of cleaning supplies rests.

They have been deteriorated by time, not protected by whatever spell holds the Ancient Cities in stasis, but the Puppet looks salvageable.

[Modify], which Cain uses both to reshape others and to create Puppet bodies, doesn't require any mana to use unless he wants to add a skill, so he places a hand on the Puppet, fixing the degradation of time.

[Reactivate Puppet under your control?] The system asks.

[Puppet Active]

"Oh, dear me, what a blunder. My apologies, Ancient Cain; I will get the cleaning supplies restocked immediately." The Puppet announces, and the other one sighs, seeing the amount of work it is capable of doing increase.

"I will activate a few more for you before I go so that you can maintain the city with assistance." Cain smiles, and the Puppet nods.

"This way, Ancient. Mythical books suitable for childhood and learning new skills are on the ground floor at the back."

Cain activates two librarians he passes by and another cleaning Puppet. They get to work immediately, tending to the thin layer of dust that has accumulated despite the barrier.

His guide stops and gestures to a shelf. "These are all Mythic Quality books, suitable for teaching skills."

Cain searches the shelf until a book catches his eye. [Essentials of Spellcrafting] looks like precisely the sort of thing he needs to know.

"You have performed admirably. Your debt is more than repaid and forgiven." Cain tells the Puppet with a smile, and she bows.

"Thank you, Lord Cain. Your mercy will not be forgotten."

Cain is about to reach for the shelf again to see precisely what [Design Fundamentals For Superior Beings] is all about when a notification fills his vision.

[Quest Complete: Calculating Reward.]

The quest can wait, Cain decides, but before he can move, he is forcefully pulled backward out of the ruins through a portal, landing on his lawn in Long Fang Valley.

He is home, but who are these people in black and white? Did he not end up at the correct time?

The answer becomes apparent when Misha and Cyrene come running out to meet him, crying happy tears to have him back.

"You won't believe everything that happened here while you were gone. Where do I even start? The bears say you sent them a vision that told them to come here and help us. And then there are the uniforms, and the new dungeons, and the Mining Pit, and that is Brazz, our newest Helper." Cyrene exclaims, wrapping around both Misha and Cain as they embrace.

"Just don't let the Lamia teach you about personal space; she doesn't understand the concept." Cain informs the Gnome, who smirks and then hides her face behind her hand.

"The pleasure is all mine. Everything we do, we do to benefit the people."

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

Chapter 382 367

The giant piles of precious ores have to be the most shocking thing Cain has seen in a long time. They have several mining teams in high-level dungeons, but this volume is insane.

According to the Bears, it is all thanks to the Summons. They know of an Elemental Hound who can sense underground ore, so they have managed to find every hidden deposit and precious vein in every dungeon the mining teams have entered.

The outreach programs are working amazingly well too, and Svetlana has received a commendation from King James for the Guild's work to help stabilize and heal the nation over the past few weeks while the majority of the Nobles and their armies have been away, taking over Niman Territory.

The only concerning issue is the single notification that Cain received from the System.

[Awakened Experience reduced by 99 percent in nonawakened areas.]

That's enough for Cain to call back his Echoes after their final run. If he is receiving 1 percent of what he could be, he might as well look for higher level places.

Sure, that's still more than the average transfer because of the number of summons, but how inefficient is that? Unacceptably inefficient.

Instead, Cain focuses on the Spellcrafting Book. In the early stages of training it is similar to an advanced version of Inscription, one that doesn't need fancy materials and in later stages it can create new skills.

There is a template and an example spell at Ancient Quality in the book, the easiest of abilities that the skill is intended to create. Spellcrafting can't be used by anyone but those with Ancient Blood, and you must be Awakened to learn the craft, as his System informed him the first time he opened the description.

Cain looks over the spell with his pen at the ready, preparing to do some serious learning.

[Summon Companions] Ancient Quality. Summon a permanent companion from species categories you are familiar with. Quality increases with knowledge.

Seriously? His single most remarkable ability is the introductory training primer for Spellcrafting?

Cain can't tell how many of the voices in his head are laughing at him, but he's pretty sure it is at least two more than he is currently merged with.

Fine, page two.

[Recall] Mythic Quality. Spellcrafter Only. An essential skill for every wayward child and shirking employee. It returns you home when the ability is used from anywhere in the world.

Now that's the sort of spell that Cain could make good use of. The instructions are clear and step-by-step since it is expected to be the second spell that trainees create. Cain follows them to the letter, slowly understanding the concept behind what he is doing and how mana control can substitute for materials, at least for an Ancient.

He even completed the spell successfully on his first try, feeling very proud of himself

[Skill Gained: Spellcrafting Apprentice 1]

[Spell Learned: Recall]

"So, you are going to create new skills and spells to empower the Guild you tasked with improving the world? Cyrene spoke highly of you, but you are even more impressive in person." A voice announces from near Cain's knee.

"Oh, it is you, Brazz. It is good to meet you properly. I've heard you are very dedicated to the Good Work of the Guild Outreach programs?" Cain greets the Crusader.

That gives him an idea, Spellcrafting isn't meant for simple things like a Summoned mount, but there might be something in the book he could use instead of giving her the Bonded Mount skill book that is so popular with the Goblins and Neffie.

There, page 23 has an option. It looks complex, but it is usable by any bipedal mammal. There aren't any class restrictions on this book though some the he flipped past have skill requirements. Without class restrictions, this ability might be perfect for the Guild.

"Wait here. I want to try making you a new ability called [Noble Steed]." Cain tells her, beginning his work.

This one is also an Ancient Ability, which shouldn't pose a problem later for her progression like a Mythic Ability which caused her to be labeled awakened would. It is still in the essential utility section, which all Spell Crafters are expected to learn and use, so he will have to do it at least twice. Once for her and once for his own utility.

It takes him three tries because he missed multiple lessons along the way, doing this out of order, but he does get it completed.

[Skill Learned: Noble Steed]

Like before, he learned the skill and was left with the physical written copy. But the moment Cain hands it to Brazz, the stack of paper changes into an impressively bound Ancient Skill book.

[Brazz Received Ancient Skill Book of Mounted Protector] is announced through the whole Manor on everyone's interface.

"Interesting, the skill had a different name in the book," Cain mutters as Guild Members come rushing in to see what Brazz has received.

She hugs the hefty tome tight to her body, smiling as she cries, so Cain picks the Gnome up and hugs her.

"I know it is a lot to take in. Just breathe, and then when you are calm, you can use the book." Cain whispers, stroking her back as she calms down.

"Sorry, it was a bit of a shock. Alright, I've got this. I am learning an Ancient Skill. I can do this. Just have to use the book." Brazz slowly psyches herself up before finally finding enough emotional stability to let her activate the book and learn the skill.

"Why don't we go outside and see what you have learned?" Cain suggests, leading the whole intrigued group out into the lawn of assorted herbs and fruit trees.

She summons the Steed and is lifted into the air by a glowing light. A horse-shaped ball of light grows underneath her, gradually turning bright white and then growing wings. The Steed for her [Mounted Protector] is a Pegasus.

"Good morning." Cain greets the mount, who nods and whinnies at him.

"According to this, it doesn't just fly; it reduces damage taken and allows me to Summon an Ancient Quality shield and Lance to use the [Charge] skill.

Brazz summons both, the tip of the 5-meter-long Lance pointed up into the air before suddenly apologizing to the Pegasus. "Sorry, so sorry. She can fly, she. Of course, a Pegasus is not an it. I didn't mean anything by it, just poor grammar."

Her attempts to console her annoyed mount are a great source of amusement for everyone, so Brazz opts to fly away to avoid the embarrassment.

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

Chapter 383 368

News that the Guild Master can write Ancient Quality ability books to create flying mounts for the Guild spread to every member within seconds. The great question on everyone's mind is, what exactly do they have to do to earn one?

Surely they won't just be handed out to hundreds of members; that would be a tremendous amount of work, even if they all could use them. So they must be reserved as a reward for good performance.

Every member has been motivated to contribute more than usual by the Quest Rewards handed out lately. Still, the prospect of an Ancient Skill and the power that would come with it is a substantial driving force not just to turn up for missions but to do well enough that they impress the other members.

Nobody knows how he is going to pick, so thinking that it might be by referral, favoring the members that he hears the best things about, sounds reasonable to them.

The officers, on the other hand, know better. The selection is likely going to be completely random; whoever happens to be standing nearby when Cain has a relevant idea will become his guinea pig, or the lucky winner, depending on how you look at it.

For today, Cain is more concerned with making his way through these fundamental abilities for a Spellcrafter and then finding out where an awakened area might be to fight than he is with creating random treats for the Guild.

He will have to fight Mythic Quality opponents, limiting his options. Still, he has Vala and Laura, plus one spell that can match that quality, and he is almost at level 300 when the class options will become available again.

Starting over from the recall ability, Cain finds that the next few lessons are all combat-oriented. According to the book, the experiments that the biologists have set loose in the world are often violent and unreasonable, so putting them down humanely is an essential skill for every Spell Crafter that ventures out into the world.

So it wasn't all Ancients making new species, but just a specific subset of them.

[Crushing Tentacles] [Void Shift] and a Mythic version of [Fireball] are the three basic options. Two are self-explanatory, but Void Shift is unexpected. It simply creates a pair of portals, one at the target and one directly above the caster at a distance of one million Kilometers and tosses the target into space.

[Strange, but compelling. I wonder why they don't do that with lesser spells?] The copy of Dimnys Cain is still merged with asks.

[Because the more powerful Dragons, Demons and Seraphim would come back. They can survive the void for a short time, even without using magic.] The Forest Dragon explains.

He has a point; it is rather difficult to kill something of his Quality. A little fire from atmospheric entry probably wouldn't do it.

Cain decides that's enough studying for one day. Without using the skill books, learning new skills gets much more difficult.

Fortunately, he has two more Skill Books that others can use, though [Void Shift] is Ancient only. He has Misha touch each of the stacks of paper, and as happened when Cain handed them to Brazz, they form into an Ancient Skill Book.

Perhaps it is a glitch? They are Mythic abilities to him but Ancient when anyone else tries to use them. Or maybe it is only because he is awakened that he can use them at a higher level?

Since Cain doesn't know what features an Awakened Class might have, maybe that is normal, and they can upgrade Ancient Quality abilities to Mythic?

He really will need to get active in looking for mythical quality areas. There is a chance that he might find more information on them at the library where he got the Spell Crafting book from, or the device that was empowering the planets ley lines though, so that will be his mission for tomorrow.

But before bed, he makes a second copy of [Crushing Tentacles] for Misha to use. An Ancient attack ability of Tentacles goes well in his mind with her Demon fire themed skills and gives her a highly powerful crowd control ability to go with her random debuffs and damage.

The best way to keep her safe is to make sure she can prevent anything from getting near her after all.

Cain decides that this journey brought him away from home for too long. Everyone has gotten clingy from being unable to contact him while he was away. Misha is understandable, but even the Companions and Neffie show signs of stress.

That means a group activity is needed.

[Echoes. I got you a few fun new abilities. Go capture the rest of Niman Territory on behalf of the Kingdom of Skyview.] Cain directs, recalling from the notes provided to him by Svetlana that the war there was going well and almost completed.

[Crushing Tentacles] reaches everything within a radius equal to the caster's level in meters. If they stand in the middle of a small city, they could eradicate it in seconds.

[That reminds me. Finish the task with minimal civilian casualties.] Cain tells them, and they laugh. To the minds of the Echoes, enslavers aren't civilians; they are combatants because the enslaved people are taken by force. But if Cain isn't going to clarify, they will not mention it.

In a day or two, the Echoes will give give them all a reason to celebrate. That reason being Skyview's Annexation of Niman Territory.

p Everyone loves a good party, after all.

It isn't long before the experience starts rolling in again, and Svetlana starts sending him messages asking if he is messing with the Nimans.

[Just a little. If anyone asks, tell them I sent the Mercenaries back to finish the job.] Cain tells her, sensing her annoyance through the mental link. She must have gotten more than just one or two messages.

It has only been a few minutes; how much could have happened in a few minutes even if the Echoes took a travel circle?

Cain checks his combat logs quickly to see what they are up to.

[Seraphim Inquisitor has eliminated Enslaver] XP 350

[Living Tentacle has eliminated Niman Guard] XP 27300

[817435 More Unread Messages]

Oh. Well, never mind then. They have gone all out.

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

Chapter 384 369

With morning comes more news. Large portions of Niman Territory were entirely depopulated overnight, leaving only children and slaves alive. The survivors tell an insane tale of Eldritch Horrors and Avenging Angels bringing about the end of the world that most take as a form of traumatic response, but the news has brought the Long Fang Valley Manor several esteemed guests this morning.

"I see you are still working on the subtle and not overboard part of keeping your species alive?" King Aggramor jokes when he arrives with his usual guards.

"Minor technical oversight. I forgot to specify what a civilian was, and they eliminated everyone who the system deemed an enslaver." Cain shrugs, and the old Demon smirks.

"So what do we do now? Are you claiming an entire country?" King James asks.

"Not just no, but NO. That honor is all yours. You have an army there, civilians to rescue, and a nation full of formerly enslaved people to comfort. Speaking of which, how is that Harem working out for you?" Cain responds.

King James blushed and declined to respond, but the assistant he brought with him was happy to elaborate.

"As of this morning, it is confirmed that both Consort Princess Rae and Consort Princess Adalynn are with child."

Cain smiles and gives the King a congratulatory pat on the back. "My man. Excellent work. The childhood friend and the tomboy Beastkin in the same month. I'll bet the palace is abuzz now speculating who will be the first born."

"That is already obvious. The Beastkin pregnancy is only 19 weeks long on average. But for the sake of suspense, The Palace will not be testing to see if they are sons or daughters. Both names will be picked for every child and announced after the birth."

The attendant smiles, enjoying this plan they have come up with to let everyone get worn down by speculation instead of getting overworked about the sudden news.

"How long do you have left?" King James asks Misha, who can only shrug.

"According to the Healer, they will most likely be Ancients, so we don't know if it will be a human term or significantly different."

None of them have any additional information on that front. Ancient pregnancies weren't common knowledge to the outside world even when they were still alive.

"Will everyone be staying for the celebration? Skyview just gained new territory; I say that's worth at least a night of the party." Cain declares, changing the topic back to things that do have answers.

"We Party!" Neffie declares, running over to hug King Aggramor with Lickity following behind her.

"You heard the Princess. A party it is. Do we need to bring anything?" Aggramor declares with great dignity.

"Not today, I don't think, but we should do this again to hold a baby shower for King James's wives." Misha smiles.

"At this rate, we need another whole city ..." Cain begins, then tails off.

In the corner of his interface, which he opened to tribe s few items for the party, Cain notices that he is still carrying the title of Mayor of Petros, the Ancient city in the mountains.

"On second thought, I think I know where we can find another city ready and waiting. One of the Ancient Cities is hidden in the mountains inside Dwarven territory near where many of the Bear Kin came from."

"You are already aware of the ruins? But the entry hasn't been found again since the time of stories." One of the Bears points out.

"I'm an Ancient; I can fly through the mountain and into the city. It doesn't exist for my people. The door must have locked when I left the last time." Cain explains, and everyone looks confused.

"Skip that part. Yes, I can get into the city, and I clearly recall where it is. I should check up on a ruin in the desert first, though. Oh, and I got a working Gnomish Moped that we should send to the smiths, or whatever design team handles things like that."

The look on Neffie's face is such an effective pout that Cain almost lets her take a ride on it first before changing his mind.

"No, they would never forgive you if it broke before they could duplicate it. But I would bet that you can do the product testing for the ones they make afterward." Cain teases.

"Yes. Mopeds are fine, right, mom? I can fly faster than they move, so they're safe."

"I don't see any problem with them. Were you planning to have the Guild make more?" Lickity asks Cain.

"Yeah, both as mopeds and in dirt bike form for wilderness travel. I know the Guild can Summon mounts to fly us to our destination, but most of the world can't, and an electric bike would make travel so much more efficient, even around town."

Both Kings look rather intrigued at that prospect and speak simultaneously.

"We are willing to help."

James and Aggramor share a dirty look at the other trying to steal their plan to be the first outside the overseas gnomish cities to have this technology but give up, realizing that Cain will share them with both nations anyhow, for a price.

[Dimnys. I got a moped and solar charging panels. Like new condition and fully functioning. If you want to pick it up and get the engineers and smiths on it, everyone wants more of them. And I would like you to look in to making larger wheeled versions with more suspension travel for offroad use.] Cain sends through Guild chat.

Most of the involved people know what he means, as they have been working on rebuilding the one Dimnys recovered from Muzz, so a brand new one is like a miracle. Especially one with brand new batteries and clearly legible, working inscriptions on the charger.

Those have been their two big hang-ups since the physical structure wasn't too hard to duplicate.

[We will be over right away. Give it to me before the party, and I will keep it safe.] Dimnys answers, and soon after, the sound of Dwarves and gnomes running across the garden pathway sounds through the open windows.

"Cooks, I am sorry for the short notice, but we need a party spread and lots of liquor. Tonight we celebrate Skyview's victory."

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

- Chapter 385 370

Chapter 385 370

While most of the population of Skyview nurses a hangover the following day, having heard the good news that their slave-trading neighbor is no more, Cain says a short goodbye to Misha. He intends to take today and tomorrow off with Laura and Vala to inspect the Ancient city of Petros, waiting for them in the mountains to the east.

The Echoes have been told to take turns doing whatever dungeons they like, with one guarding Misha and the Manor at all times, in case of retaliation for the events in Niman Territory, so he is free to explore for a little while.

Even at their incredible maximum speed, racing above the clouds, this wasn't going to be a short flight, so Cain called out the Dark Phoenix to get them to their destination today. The travel through the void is much more efficient, bringing them to the city disguised as a mountain a few hours before sunset.

The city looks the same as before, abandoned but perfectly preserved. The door in the outer wall must have closed when he left, though. It is shut tight against intruders, so

there is a good chance nobody has been here at all unless they found a way through the barrier further up the cliff face.

"Remind me again why we are here?" Laura asks, looking around the empty city.

"Because I should still be the Mayor here, even if the city is empty. I want to make sure everything is set up and then question the ley line enhancement device below the city. I don't know exactly what it does, but there is a possibility it will greatly increase the power level of this world." Cain patiently explains.

"In that case, let's get going. There aren't any challenges left now that I made Mythic anyhow." Laura cheers.

"Just wait. I saw the system mention allowing us to access Awakened areas now, and we should be among the weakest things there." Vala consoles her but that only gets the competitive Opal Dragon more excited.

[Welcome Back, Mayor. Petros has welcomed three visitors since your last update.] The floating text greets Cain when he sits down next to the city control coffee table.

That's three more than he expected, but the link to the Demon King's Palace is still open, so it was likely them.

Cain checks the log to see who has been here, just in case it was someone unexpected.

[Visitors identified as Aggron, Aggramor, and Manila.]

Two Demon Kings and the Gnome Princess, as expected.

"Hey, who is this inside the bubble thing in the back room?" Laura calls, exploring the house.

"A person? There might be an inactive Puppet here; nobody has lived here in a thousand years or more." Cain calls back but shifts into Ancient form and makes his way through the house.

In the back is a room that Cain hadn't noticed as being anything special before, labeled first aid supplies. The door has been splintered by whoever broke in, but an impenetrable purple barrier still fills the hole. Inside, on the smaller table, meant to be used by human-sized operators, lays an an Ancient, frail and gnarled Gnomish woman.

The room keeps her in stasis on the table, and Cain wonders how much energy the Demon Kings had to expend to get through the barrier.

Cain checks with his System, seeing that it is indeed Manila and that she never had a system. Her age is listed at 198 when placed into stasis, which is a long time for a gnome, as far as Cain knows.

A tap of the table shows that the emergency function was auto-activated to save her life, and it is waiting on input. The diagnostic scan said she had a very severe case of cancer that had spread through her whole body and had suffered a heart attack at the time of stasis.

[Revert to saved form] Cain selects, as he had met Manila once before.

It returns her to a gnome's body in the prime of her teens, healthy and vital, and Cain smiles.

If he is right, this is Aggramor's mother or possibly grandmother, since Cain heard almost a whole generation of the Demon Royal Family was lost during the war, but he isn't sure if former King Aggron still lives.

Cain checks the [Census] that Aggramor gave him to help with his Demon forms count and sees the name on the list as a Demon Patriarch.

"New plan, we are going to visit Aggramor first. Be very careful not to wake the gnome; I want this to be a surprise." Cain whispers, bringing her out of the room.

The travel circle is in the building in the yard, and Vala smirks when she notices the layout.

"Do you think they ever noticed that the link to their palace is in the doghouse?" She chuckles.

"Probably not. But look at this, I can lift the lid to get at anyone inside; how convenient is that for someone with Tentacles?"

Cain lifts the roof to show what he means, then settles it back into place and transforms into the smaller version of his Ancient form.

When he passed through the travel gate this time, he didn't even have to wait for someone to notice them. There are guards stationed right there in case someone enters.

Cain mitigates his aura to level 1 but doesn't entirely turn it off, knowing that Aggron will still remember it if he is nearby.

"Ancient Cain and company here to see Patriarch Aggron. Please inform him that I have brought him a most precious gift." Cain says softly, and Vala hushes the Guard's reply, pointing at the sleeping gnome.

"We will inform him, but the Elder Patriarch rarely accepts guests." A guard confirms before leaving the room.

They wait nearly fifteen minutes before an old and crippled Demon comes into the room with the aid of a walker.

"Fearless Young Demon, you look terrible. What happened to you while I was gone?" Cain teases, and the older man's eyes light up.

"You locked the damned medicine cabinet when you left, and it nearly killed me trying to get it open." Aggron complains, then smiles

"I never thought I would see you again."

"My apologies; a few things came up. I was going to begin by giving you a gift today, but I think I will need to patch you up first. You don't mind, right?" Cain didn't wait for an answer but began reverting Aggron to how he looked the day they met. Only this time, he is a level 341 Corpse Master, an advanced form of the necromancer.

"There, that's much better. You are going to love the present I brought you." Cain smiles as Aggron looks himself over in shock.

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

Chapter 386 371 It Was You

The entire guard force was reeling in shock, trying to compute that this tentacle monster had just turned the Patriarch back into a child, casually rewinding millennia of aging in the blink of an eye.

It is Aggron who recovered first, despite being the one changed. "This appearance, it is the very first day I saw you, so in your arms that must be..."

"Exactly, this is Princess Manila, your blushing gnomish bride. As good as new. I am told that a kiss from their beloved is the best way to wake mortals up from stasis, so if you would do the honors." Cain teases the renewed Demon, handing over the sleeping form of the Gnome.

She isn't in stasis anymore, hasn't been since her modified her; she is just sleeping whole her mind slowly comes back online, but this form always seems to bring out Cain's sense of theatrics.

Aggron gently kisses her lips, and the Gnome stirs a little before wrapping her arms and legs around him and turning it into a full on make out session.

Even delirious and half awake, she is all over him. The Princess really was the perfect choice for Aggron.

"What are you idiots up to now?" Booms Aggramor's voice as he strides into the transport room.

The guards part, revealing Cain and a young Demon making out with a gnome. Cain thinks it might be time to intervene before clothes are discarded, but Aggramor gets to them first.

"What are you two doing in public, and how did you get in here? I'm sorry you had to see that Duke Cain. I was going to visit Neffie."

"Not a problem at all, and possibly my fault." Cain begins before Aggron cuts him off.

"Do you have no respect for your elders? Let go of my ear, you young punk." Aggron complains, making Princess Manila giggle.

"That voice, no. It can't be. Grandfather?" Aggramor stammers.

"As I said, this might be my fault. The gnomish woman was left at one of my houses, so I reset her body to the last time I had seen her. Then in the name of fairness, I did the same thing to Aggron so that they could start over again.

I'll give her a skill and see if we can't activate a system for her this time so that you can spend more time together, Patriarch." Cain informs the Demon, whose hand has stealthily disappeared inside his bride's dress while he holds her.

"What is a class? Is this Ancient Cain? And Aggramor, is that you pretending to be all grown up? Change back right now so I can see you." Manila demands.

Cain pets her head with a tentacle from his arm, and she grabs it to examine it, then looks at her husband. "You said he was ten meters tall."

"I can be. Or I can be a human in a Dark Elven suit looking for surviving Ancient Cities." Cain says, and Aggramor gasps.

"Wait, Grandmother? We left you in stasis. How is she? Does anyone have a drink? I'm going to need one for this." Aggramor complains.

Cain hands over a small cask from his inventory. "Not a problem. I've got Dwarven whiskey."

"Little Aggie is old enough to drink? How long was I in stasis while you looked for the Ancient?" Manila complains.

"There have been a few incidents during the search. Namely, he was displaced through time, according to Neffie, who is the new Demon Queen in waiting. You can meet her later. It has been over a thousand years. Aggramor has been King for over two hundred years now." Aggron says softly.

The next part will be rough, no matter how you look at it. Most of the Demon Royals died in the war between species. Cain considers running away after causing his daily chaos, but they know where he lives, so that won't help much.

"How about we discuss that later. You always wanted to be a famous engineer, right? Aggramor says, leading the conversation to a new topic.

"Oh yes. Wouldn't that be wonderful? Everyone in Muzz would be so happy to hear about it." Manila cheers, easily sidetracked.

Cain searches for good options and finds a master engineer among the dwarves he recorded wandering around Tortuga. Without a system, everyone from the past just recorded a basic template.

In a second, he has it applied, and Manila freaks out.

"What is this? I'm blind. Aggie, help, I've been abducted to a dressing room."

"Calm down, darling. It is the class selection, a blessing from the Laughing God. Find the class that appeals to you the most. If you want, you will even be able to use magic. I am right here; you're still in my arms." The Patriarch explains, used to describing things the way she will most readily accept them at face value.

"Okay. So you're saying if I want to be a wizard, I can be? Like an actual wizard?" She says, staring into space as she is immersed in the interface.

"Exactly. Whatever you want from that list." Aggron agrees.

"It did it. I am a level 1 Gnomish Wizard. Hey, I have Master Engineering. How did that happen? Are all wizards engineers?" Manila cheers.

Cain laughs. "Not at all. Do you know how Ancients were known to modify and tweak Mortal species? It is part of that. I granted you the skill, now you just need the knowledge to round out your skill set."

The room goes quiet for a moment while everyone comes to grips with what had just happened.

"Since I am here. Do you know where any of the Awakened areas are? I will need to find them to continue my advancement." Cain asks, breaking the increasingly awkward pause.

"Mostly the Southern Continent and the interior of the Western and Northern Continents." Aggramor answers, having expected this day to come eventually.

"Then I guess I will have to hold off a little on exploring them. Or maybe I should rush and visit them now before the real chaos starts."

Cain's answer makes Aggramor laugh. "With twin Ancients on the way, I'm unsure how to answer that."

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

Chapter 387 372

"We need to have a very long discussion about what is going on here, but not in public, and not while my grandparents are pretending that we can't see them groping each other." King Aggramor says sternly, making the guards smirk and Manila blush.

"Perhaps that can wait until after I have searched the other Ancient Ruins?" Cain suggests, but the look on Aggramor's face says all he needs to know.

"They didn't survive the war, did they?"

"No, the Seraphim and Dragons worked together to make sure of that. There might be some rubble under the sand, maybe. The only reason the city in the mountain survived is that we agreed with the dwarves and Beastkin to protect it as a sacred place." Aggramor confirms.

"Oh, that reminds me. Guards, get the items from the Royal Vault compartment K32. I did find a clue while searching for you." Aggron declares, cutting in to his grandson's explanation.

They return with a simple wooden broom Cain recognizes as made by the Puppets and a flat rock with faded wiring on it.

[Find me at the end of the world, home with my own among the Tengu.]

"I thought you left me a clue, but no matter how I searched, no hints of your location were found." Aggron says as Cain reads the letter.

"That's because this letter isn't from me, it was intended for me and left by the Puppets that maintained the Ancient city before it was destroyed. Once, there was an entire library there, left by the Ancients for future generations." Cain explains.

"What would happen if someone else found them? Would they awaken?" Aggramor asks, and Cain shakes his head.

"Most of them can't be used by anyone but an Ancient, though it is possible the Demon Royals might be able to use some since they have Ancient Blood. Even if I copy them out, they only form Ancient Quality spell books and skills when others touch them." Cain explains.

"That's a relief. The Awakened are nearly unbeatable, and the power they can bring to battle levels entire cities in seconds." The Demon King sighs, then gives Cain a suspicious look, to which Cain shrugs.

"They deserved it," Cain responds deadpan.

"Alright, now that we know there is no need to search through even more ruins, we should give these love birds some privacy. If you need assistance power leveling the Princess later, you only have to ask. I'm sure we can arrange something." Cain says with a smile, then steps back through the travel circle and returns to Long Fang Valley with Vala and Laura following closely behind him.

"I can't believe you did that." Vala laughs once they are home.

"The Demon King did say he wanted to rebuild the Royal Family. His grandfather is even more powerful than he is, now that he isn't crippled. He can do it." Laura points out.

"Manila isn't going to be happy when she finds out all her children are gone. The war claimed the whole generation, but many of her grandkids are still alive." Cain points out one of the unfortunate side effects of a long life.

"Did you learn anything valuable?" Misha asks as they all return to the house.

"A few things, but we will have to search much further for answers this time. The things I need to find for the kids are hidden somewhere on the southern continent, but nobody has any clue where exactly, or what all still exists." Cain explains and Misha sighs.

"Relax, I will get to level 300 first and see if I can activate a new class. Then we can decide what to do afterward."

The Echoes have learned a precious bit of information during their adventures today. They did a level 380 Forest Fae dungeon they found on the way back from their hunting grounds in the Eastern Continent and realized that nonawakened monsters take full damage from Mythic Quality skills. It was so effective that they have switched grind spots and are working to increase Cain's Fae collection.

It is an enormous dungeon, like the Demon Dungeon, but they haven't found any other exits yet, so it might not be helpful to long distance travel the way the Demon Dungeon is.

But in terms of pure variety, it is a treasure. Plus, being all second and third advancement level creatures, they are all new combinations.

They aren't the only ones making significant gains, though. With all the Epic Summons Cain has gifted to the Guild with [Benevolent Leader], everyone is increasing their levels and capabilities. A bear named En has seen the most significant benefit so far, though.

She was hunting dinosaurs for fun and profit in the jungle when she came across a male Centaur that the Guild Quest identified as the second recommended recruit.

Cid brought the Beast Hunter into the Guild, and the random reward from the system gave En a [Unique Advancement] token for her hard work, just like Cain and some others had gotten before their second advancement.

She had been holding off on her class change ever since level 200, looking for a better option, and it gave her the choice of Feral Monk as a class.

The Feral Monk is an unarmed combat class much like the Pugilist, but for Bear Kin. Not only are unarmed damage and resistances significantly increased, but it also has a large bonus to both movement and attack speed.

The formidable body of the Bear Kin can now chase down almost anything that doesn't fly, and she does more damage with her claws now than she used to do with weapons in hand.

She still has her bow, in the case ranged damage is needed, but she has become just as effective against distant targets by simply charging and attacking at close range.

The Elves that visit Port Nefheim think it is hilarious watching her chase down things that should have no issues running from a Bear. But really, at 2.5 meters tall and weighing half a ton, who wouldn't panic if they couldn't run away from her when she was in a bad mood?

Even her good friend Po has learned his lesson about teasing her. She knows all his weak spots, and with the increased speed, even his prodigious form stands no chance of sparring against her. Though, he was never a combat class to begin with.

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

Chapter 388 373

p Now Cain knows why so few people go inland on the Southern Continent. Large portions of the continent are awakened areas, locked to most, and too dangerous to travel even if they weren't.

Which, of course, means that Cain absolutely must see them. What greater adventure could there be than exploring the regions of this world that have been locked away from the public and reserved only for the elite?

Of course, it is a shame he can't bring everyone with him, but that is temporary. It is possible that more of them will power up enough to see it in their own, and with his help it is all but guaranteed that most of his inner circle will be able to personally experience the adventures he is planning to go on.

The question is how much time will he have before he needs to return to see his children born and raise baby Ancients through their awkward baby phase.

Or do they even have an awkward baby phase? For all Cain knows, they could be born like Octopus, ready to go the second they emerge, or the opposite could be true, and they might be like Elves, children for decades.

Either option could be fun, but at the very minimum, he will have to leave an echo around to keep an eye on them at all times.

From what he had learned, nothing short of an Ancient can control another ancient, which might also apply to the children. Cid and Lickity have enough problems with Neffie, and her Demon King heritage only amounts to one-sixteenth Ancient.

A lot of that had to do with being born a mimic, though. The class abilities from day one were a disaster waiting to happen. Once they had leveled her up enough to be intelligent and safe with her powers, she was also high enough level and smart enough to be ambitious and curious.

Looking for a few solid answers, Cain goes to see Dana, the Elven Doctor taking care of Misha's pregnancy progress.

"Hey Doc, how is everything?" Cain greets her, startling the doctor who was in the small side room she has adopted as her office, reading over her notes.

"Good, very good. I'm sure you are curious about the due date, as any father would be, so we can start with that. Going by the progress, it will be a normal human-term pregnancy. Nine months, give or take, with seven and a half left. They are slowly growing more humanoid as they develop, so their final forms might be something in between your natural form and hers, and not entirely tentacle based." Dana explains.

"And what might the chances be that I get murdered for going to the southern continent to chase information on Ancients?" Cain jokes.

"Fairly low. Misha has been pretty busy lately with the outreach work, Guild affairs, and the pregnancy. I think you should be able to spare at least a few months to go on a trip if you tell her that it is for the children's good." Dana answers in all seriousness.

If he is leaving from here in Long Fang Valley it should take him about a month to make it to the Southern Continent by boat. The outside world doesn't have many, if any, travel circles linked to the central continent, as far as he could learn.

If Nila Captains the ship, she can bring it back afterward, maybe with trade goods. That seems like the best course of action, so Cain mentally informs the Companions to prepare for a trip. One of the clones of each can stay behind, but there is a chance that they might all be necessary during the journey.

He sets the departure for three days from now since that is when the Echoes should have him to level 300. Until he leaves, they both have permission to compete against each other in the dungeon full time, hopefully cutting a day off the required time to level.

With everyone else taking care of the day to day matters and preparations, all Cain has to do is learn this book full of essential Spell Crafting Skills.

The beginning was easy, just learning some new skills and writing them out. Cain even managed to get his talent to Apprentice 7. But then the lessons moved into completing an ability from partial information, and everything went downhill.

There was some level of common knowledge he was missing that wasn't provided in the book, as they assume that everyone should understand it from another essential subject that Ancients would have learned in childhood.

Even though the skill was [Lightning Lance], which was very similar to [Chain Lightning] but cohesive instead of arcing between targets, it still wasn't close enough for Cain to understand what he was missing.

Nothing in his Summoning repertoire could use the skill, and none he has found had any idea how Spell Crafting worked, so Cain was all alone in this.

His first thought was to try substituting in the section from [Chain Lightning] and then modifying the ability to not chain, but that wasn't it.

The next idea was to work his way through the ability like he was casting it, which at least had given him an idea of where he was going wrong. Each error led to a restart, and each success moved him further down the line.

By his hundredth try, Cain was ready to give up. But at number 107, everything just clicked.

The knowledge he had been missing about the interaction between segments of a skill pattern finally made sense to Cain. On the next attempt, he understood the little changes that he had to make in the earlier sections to have the last section flow properly, and the spell was finally functional.

Cain decided to celebrate with a few drinks, only to find that he had been working on that one skill single-mindedly for an entire day, and it was now the early hours of the morning.

Sneaking into bed, Cain found that sleep still wasn't an option; his mind was full of possibilities, and he knew that if he just had the time, he could create an entirely new personalized custom skill and not have to use [Modify] to grant it to others.

The amount missing from Lightning Lance in the instructions amounted to one page of four hundred, and it took him over a hundred attempts to make the skill functional, so surely this would not be a fast process, but he was now sure it was technically possible.

No wonder the Ancients were famous for losing track of time, with their constant experiments and ageless bodies. The appeal of trying new things is simply too high.

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

Chapter 389 374

During the final day before his scheduled departure, Cain decided to create rewards for the Guild. A book of [Sundering Lightning] and one of [Noble Steed], both at Ancient Quality, were quickly assembled and passed to Misha.

When and where to give them out was left up to her, but the decision among the Guild Officers was that making them a seasonal award would be best, so members could fully appreciate such a high-powered skill earned through hard work.

Giving them monthly would cheapen the reward, Cid insisted, making them too easy to get. Plus, if Cain were going to be gone for a while, there would be a significant gap before they could obtain more.

Not that the members were unhappy with the quest rewards that they were getting, the system was being very generous with the bonus rewards, but this was a special gift directly from the Guild Master who everyone looked up to as a symbol of power, or perhaps benevolence, depending on how long they had spent around Cyrene.

Cyrene was getting better and better at public speaking and relating to others compared to the mess she was when she first got her sight back. Her Devotion hadn't weakened at all though.

If anything, her increased social skills made her even more determined to have the whole continent see the Darklight Host as the good guys. People you could trust and those you turned to when you needed something righteous accomplished.

The hospitals that they set up in Landis, as well as the capital of Skyview, had been big hits. High-level clerics always have better things to do than wait on the thousands of systemless locals with various ailments and very little money.

Being the only ones offering the charity service full time and not just a few days a month made them a household name, and Cyrene rapidly learned that loyalty was just as important to the Guild's well being as power.

When the local gangs were going to move against the Landis Clinic, not realizing that the cute clerics working as nurses were almost all summons, the local bartender tipped them off before any actions were taken.

The attempt to abduct the sweet faced young clerics was a complete and utter disaster, leading to the survivors and all other members of the active gangs being run out of town. Not only did nobody want to risk the Wrath of the Seraphim Inquisition, but the residents also protected the Darklight Host.

p The same was true in Skyview though in this region they were recognized as the wandering helpers. The members have been traveling from village to village, helping out however they can and leading groups of guard trainees and farmers through the local dungeons using high-level summons.

Every territory needed to send recruits for the army, and having a guild going around leveling up prospects for free was very popular with the Nobles. They complained a little

that Cain rarely attended court but in general they were happy to accept Svetlana as his substitute since she was doing all the work.

The fact she was a beautiful Kitsune didn't hurt either, especially among the Beastkin Nobles.

Even King James didn't mind the physical absence since Gwen could ask Cain questions anytime she wanted. But these days, his waking hours were full of trying to balance official duties and keeping so many women happy that he didn't have time for such minor concerns.

After all, his own firstborn was only a few months away, and there would have to be banquets, international envoys received, and then a long line of marriage alliance deals that would need working out.

Nila managed to get everything that Cain and the Queen Rose could need for a journey to the southern continent ready the first day that Cain announced his intentions, so the next day was spent just going over the ship's condition and making sure that the Puppets created to crew her hadn't forgotten their training.

But puppets don't forget, so that was mostly redundant, and now that they are Cain's full level, they will be even better at their jobs than the last time she set sail with them.

Cain spent that last bit of time getting to know some of the Guild members better, especially the Bears, who were all specialists of their Clan's strongest aspect. They had a large amount of knowledge on random subjects, and Cain thought they might actually be excellent school teachers.

One thing the Good doesn't really have is an academy. They have a training program for new members, but that is personalized and limited. If they are doing outreach work, and already have hospitals, having an academy here in Long Fang Valley would be a great way to build bonds with others.

Cain suggests the idea to a number of the Bear Kin as well as Cyrene and Misha, who all agree that it is a wonderful plan, and enlist the help of a number of assistants, as well as Princess Manila, who volunteered to design the actual architecture of the campus.

At first Cain thinks they might be going overboard, designating over a hundred unworkable acres in the valley to be the site of the campus, but with the main building, plus dorms, training fields, sports facilities and an amphitheater for others to come watch shows and games, the Gnome assures him that the space will fill up quickly.

Planning all of that with the intention to make it an architectural marvel renowned all over the continent will take months, and finding enough teachers might take even longer. While the Guild Members can lead a department teaching their subject, everyone expects thousands of students to be enrolled once word spreads.

That many children will require them to bring in more hired staff, and expand the actual Long Fang City to accommodate the increase in residents and visitors.

It seems Cain don't need to worry about Misha getting bored while he is gone, there is simply too much to do, and they haven't even gotten in to how they might incorporate the local design philosophy of 'food everywhere'.

That only strengthens Cain's decision to leave half the Companions behind. A few different and trusted subordinates to look after house and home is never a bad thing after all, and the Echoes still haven't quite gotten enough Fae forms to awaken Nila.

The more they explore the enormous Fae dungeon the closer they get though. A few more days might be enough to put them over the top and give Cain a third Mythic companion, as well as reaching level 300.

Once that finishes, they have instructions to explore the various known giant based dungeons. Though Cain is visiting the Southern Continent first, the Western Continent is also supposed to have large awakened areas that will be of great benefit both to Cain and to the Guild's materials supply.

Cain and the Companions set out for the docks with a large entourage of well wishers, stopping in the garden to receive Aggron and Princess Manila, who have just arrived in person to see the location and begin the planning.

Cain suspects much of the motivation was Aggramor finding reasons to not have to watch his grandparents fawning over each other, since he was the one to tell them about the plan when it was relayed to him by Neffie, who he was having lunch with at the time.

It has been days since they were reunited, and the two were still so over each other like teenaged newlyweds. Though, given the amount of time they were apart, that description of their relationship might be fairly accurate.

Once they reach the docks, Cain unwinds Cyrene from around his waist and wraps her around Misha.

"Take good care of her while I go out working, alright? I won't be gone for too long, probably only a few months, and I'll come back with a new class and check on your progress with the outreach program and building the academy. I have already heard many wonderful things about the Guild, so keep up the good work." Cain instructs the Lamia, who gives him a happy Salute.

"Got it, boss. You won't be disappointed. By the time you return, Darklight Host will be a household name all over the continent." Cyrene declares, thinking of the recently unearthed dungeons they have dug up in the desert and the ones the Guild has moved to secure in the former Niman Territory.

At Ancient Quality, and using her Bonded Forces, Nila doesn't even need Cain to Summon anyone to help with the wind and water spells to move the ship through the canal and out to the ocean, carefully maneuvering to stay in the middle with their heavily laden ship.

The Wave Riders visiting Port Nefheim mentioned that the south was short on mines, so they always wanted rare crafting materials and paid top dollar for them. They had an entire gravel pit full of ore at this point, so Nila loaded up the Queen Rose before they left, doing double duty for the Guild.

Seeing the loaded ship moving deep in the water made Cain realize just how much wealth they had accumulated, so he requested that more warehouses be constructed as they expanded the Port area of the city, and made sure that they had at least a few members worth of summons on guard duty around the ore pile at all times.

That was already taken care of, so all that was left was to enjoy the scenery and to wave to the locals they passed.

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

Chapter 390 375

As they leave the bay and head out into the open ocean, Cain decides to spend a little time in the sun. Even with the speed that Nila and her Summoned helpers plus the Puppet crew can manage, they still have a week or so before reaching the southern continent.

,m The hammocks come out on the deck, and other than the working puppets and Nila, who insists she has her dignity to maintain, they all spend the next few days removing tan lines and generally living their best life.

The sea shifts from turquoise to a Royal blue as they enter deeper waters, and Cain calls out a group of Kraken. They should be able to keep up with the ship and offer protection against monster attacks.

Evangeline keeps a defensive shield up on the hull for that reason, but her specialty is healing, not barriers, so it is better if nothing gets close enough that they are in danger of being rammed or bitten.

It is almost lunchtime on the fourth day before they spot anything but open ocean.

"Pants on everyone; there is a Wave Rider vessel on the horizon. Protocol says we go say hello." Nila informs the swarm of lounging nudists on her deck.

"Problem solved." Vala laughs, equipping a swimsuit without getting out of her hammock.

Cain equips a pair of shorts, knowing the Wave Riders don't care if he's all dressed up. They don't get their amazing tans by being covered up all day.

"Greetings, to the Queen Rose." The other ship calls as they approach, and Cain stands up to greet them.

"Well met. What news of the southern monster zone?" Nila asks, standing beside Cain once her puppets have all the sails down and secure.

"Not much to report this trip. But there have been complaints that the merfolk are getting violent with ships and sending out those Demonic Whales." The other captain informs them with a long-suffering look.

That must be an ongoing issue in these waters, but it could be a good opportunity for Cain; one more dungeon run by the Echoes should have him over level 300, which means he will be officially on the hunt for events that might trigger a class advancement.

"How tough are the Demonic Whales that the merfolk send out?" Cain asks, considering how much of a benefit they could be to his collection.

"They're Legendary Quality, not the toughest thing you'll ever meet, but they can destroy a ship in a hurry and move in pods." The other Captain explains. That sounds like just the sort of thing Cain always needs for his collection, so he informs the Kraken that he has summoned to ensure he gets a chance to record them should one appear.

Nila explains the events that have occurred lately in Skyview and what she knows of other world events, and the Wave Riders are on their way again, headed for the Central Continent.

Getting the sails up only takes a few seconds with this new and improved crew, and they are back up to full speed before Cain can even get comfortable in his hammock, settling in for another day in the sun.

"Do you think having a conversation about the merfolk is enough to jinx us and trigger a flag?" Evangeline jokes, making Nila laugh.

"One hundred percent guaranteed. Even if we stood a chance of not meeting them before, we're going to see them now. We never go anywhere without meeting the most dangerous locals, do we?" The Wave Rider responds, making both Vala and Laura nod in agreement.

"It's not that bad. Sure, we meet many interesting people and things along the way, but I wouldn't say we always meet the most dangerous locals. Look at the Demon Kingdom; we haven't met anyone but a handful of people from the Royal Family and the Palace Guards." Cain points out.

"You mean the Black Guard, the Royal Assassins of the Demon Royal Family that inspire terror in everyone that sees them? We meet them constantly, and everyone agrees that they are the most dangerous group on the continent. Except maybe the Darklight Host." Vala points out.

"Maybe the problem is with the threat scaling? Cain is so dangerous that nobody attacks him on the Central Continent, so he can't tell who is dangerous and who is just a brown noser." Laura suggests, sticking her tongue out at him.

"Keep it up, and I'll Merge you until it starts raining, then put you on guard duty until it stops." Cain jokes, and the dragon in Pixie form raises her hands in surrender.

"No need to do anything drastic now."

"We need snacks. Boss, can you make us a proper chef for the ship?" Laura asks after a few minutes of silence.

There isn't a good reason not to, all the puppets can cook to some degree, but a proper chef is always a benefit.

"What do we want for a chef this time? Types of food, maybe a particular personality?" Cain asks, curious what the Companions think would make the trip more exciting.

"Why don't we do something extreme. Something that we don't usually do?" Vala suggests, just as a movement in the water catches Cain's attention.

[Did I not say to warn me if anything was getting close?] Cain sends to the Kraken, who only sends back confusion.

A light gray-skinned humanoid with the lower body of a bright blue beta fish leaps out of the water, and Cain takes the opportunity to record the form. Just in time, too, the merfolk man vanishes before he reaches the water again, disappearing without even a splash.

"Do you think that counts as a warning that we're in their territory? Or do you think that it's an invitation to come to say hello?" Cain asks Nila, who has much more knowledge about the seas than he does.

"Honestly, it could be either, but I think that particular one was a warning. You should probably call off the Kraken before the Merfolk takes them as a real threat and attack us to make them disappear."

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

Chapter 391 376

Nila has a point; having a group of Legendary Quality Kraken wandering around the ocean when you're in a sentient species territory likely wouldn't go over well in pretty much any scenario, so Cain cancels the summons and decides to assign an extra puppet to watch duty, checking for shadows or movement in the water as a warning that they might be under attack.

"Alright now, back to the chef. Why don't we try an Ancient body? Yours has a hand and Tentacles that should be perfect for grabbing things from the cabinets and holding them while the ship rocks." Laura suggests getting back to her favorite topic: food.

"You really want me to cook dinner for you, don't you?" Cain jokes.

"I mean, it would be different. Since you can always Summon something to do the cooking instead of doing it yourself."

"Alright, Ancient chef, it is." Cain decides, and a vision fills his mind of an alternate Ancient form. It is more humanoid than his, but with a shroud covering most of the body, including the face. Instead of wings, shadows extend from the back, and Cain realizes there are four additional arms hidden in them.

The wings themselves are an ability [Solid Shadows] that Cain can easily add, so he creates the body with his eyes closed, focused on getting every detail of the vision correction.

[Modify] and [Solid Shadows] are added, and Master level cooking. With two remaining skills available due to his increased secondary ability levels, Cain decides to make the chef a defender for the ship as well. [Horrific Perfection] Increases its stats to match his own and [Balance] gives the chef both damage and healing capability.

Once it is created, the Puppet moves over to place a hand on Cain's face, and he could swear the Puppet was smiling at him under that shroud. The actual head under the shroud is much like his Ancient face, with Tentacles as an upper lip and large black eyes, but more slender.

[Dinner will be ready soon.] A childish female voice Echoes in everyone's head, and Cain realizes someone had been messing with him again. Of course, following the vision exactly led to a female creation.

The meal made from the supplies on board turns out to be sweet oatmeal cakes with fruit filling and a side of fried ham. A simple sailors meal, but with enough sweetness to make Laura happy and enough meat to keep Nemu and Vala happy.

For a few days, dismissing the Kraken is enough to keep the peace, but one day out from the Southern Continent shoreline, their luck breaks, and the watch reports a pod of Demon Whales. That's exactly what Cain had been hoping for though, since they are said to be Legendary and work well together.

By pattern, they would have been called Orcas in Cain's previous life. They're almost an identical match, with only the glowing red eyes to give away the difference.

It's not a small group either; over thirty of them are circling the ship, mainly at Epic Quality, but led by one that is Legendary and twice the size of the others.

"Do you think we could ride them if I came up with a water-breathing spell? Just strap a harness around them, like a rodeo horse?" Cain asks, making Vala smirk.

"You know they can hear you and understand you, right?"

Cain nods his head; of course he knows. But that doesn't change the fact that it looks like it would be a lot of fun to ride a Demon Whale.

"Evil Being, come away from the ship and meet with us if you dare." The voice of a merfolk male calls from near the Legendary Demon Whale.

"Evil Being? Well, that's just rude and uncalled for. But if you want to be sociable, I can come to visit." Cain agrees, jumping into the water and changing into a full-sized Ancient Form before anyone can stop him.

Surprisingly, he finds that he has no problem breathing in the water. The moment his face entered the water, the instinct to breathe differently came to him, so Cain just went with it and found this body had no problem processing water. It is also surprisingly agile, using the wings to move through the water the same way it flies through the air.

The Merman seems utterly shocked when Cain appears in front of him, unarmed, and then stops.

[You did say you wanted to meet. My name is Cain, and I am leading my friends to the Southern Continent on an adventure to trade precious metals and crafting goods. At the same time, we are looking for an activity that will trigger the fourth advancement

awakened System Class.] Cain mentally projects as the Ancients form can't speak any better underwater than it can in the air.

[I don't know what to say. Everyone attacks when we show up and challenge them. Nobody ever got in the water to introduce themselves before, and I haven't read that part of the training manual.] The merman explains.

Cain does his best to hide his amusement. [Why don't we visit someone more senior? Maybe they will have practice talking to outsiders, and we can come to some agreement that doesn't involve spending large amounts of energy attacking each other every time I pass between the Central and Southern Continent?]

That seems to be a good enough explanation for the Merman, but Cain is pretty sure that the way the Demon Whales are flipping their tails as they swim down deep into the water is their form of laughing at him.

The whales aren't gone long, though, they come back with an older man with the lower body of a Demon Whale, and now it's Cain's turn to pretend everything is normal. He is doing pretty well at the polite introductions so far, and starting with insinuations of the man's father bedding whales isn't going to help anything.

[Greetings, I am the Ancient Cain, headed from the Central Continent to the Southern to trade with the Youkai.] He greets the elderly Merman.

[Welcome to Merfolk territory, Ancient. The whales say you have members of the forbidden species with you that shouldn't be passing through our territory.] The elder responds.

So they weren't talking to or about Cain when they said 'Evil Being' then? That's new.

[Which species do you mean? I've got a Seraphim, a Demon, a Dragon, a Wave Rider, and a Beastkin with me on this trip. They are my summoned Companions, utterly loyal and amiable if you give them a chance.] Cain explains.

[Demons, Dragons, and Seraphim? How did you even make it this far with an intact ship? None of them are welcome in Merfolk territory after the war. For an Ancient, we can make an exception, but please keep them below decks when passing this region in the future.] The elder speaks it as a demand, with only a hint of civility between his request and outright hostility towards other species.

[I can agree with that. But more importantly, I can see a fantastic city below us; what are the chances of a tour?]

Sure, it might be a bit too forward and blatant, but Cain wants to add more merfolk to his collection.

[I'm sorry, the city is off-limits to outsiders. Even Merfolk from the other Clans aren't allowed in the Sacred City.] The elder declares with a note of finality.

Well, that's no fun, but the bit about there being multiple clans gives Cain hope for the future. All he needs to do is take a different route home, and he is bound to find another Merfolk clan, maybe a less guarded or more friendly one that he can explore.

The elder is about to swim away when he stops and turns back to Cain. [Ancient, what might your Class be? Or do you predate the system by too much?]

[I am a Flesh Crafter and a First Generation transfer. Before arriving on this world, I was not Ancient.] Cain offers, wondering if the older man will change his mind about that tour.

[Flesh Crafter? Damn you; you want to clone us all as your puppets to experiment on and fight your battles, don't you?] The younger merman accuses.

What's the polite way to say only the cute and powerful ones? It seems like an outright denial would be too obvious of a lie.

[Not ALL of you. Though a few skilled merfolk would be a welcome addition to any aquatic environment, wouldn't they?]

The Elder snorts in amusement, shooting a jet of water mixed with a bit of ink like a squid.

[Even when they are transfers, Ancients don't change, do they? Take a long way around; thirty Kilometers will move you safely clear of the city. You've collected the two of us and the Whales; that is enough for one day.]

With that, they swim away, and Cain returns to the ship, swimming straight up and then flying over to pass on the requested detour route.

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

Chapter 392 377 Landfall In The South

After detouring around the merfolk city under the ocean, they make straight for where their map says the closest port should be. Details about the continent are hard to come by, so Cain's plan is to make landfall first and then find someone who can tell him what he needs to know. Failing that he plans to just wander around until he finds something fun to do.

It might sound silly, but it has worked quite often in the past to get him powerful advancements and new items.

According to the map, this city should be called Musashi, with a population made mostly of Elves and Youkai, though as a Port City, there are a wide variety of species represented.

That sounds hospitable enough to Cain, and it's fairly well known as a welcoming trading port, so at the very least they likely won't chase him away when he arrives. They can see it on the horizon now, spires of a developed city rising above a shallow beach. The weather in the area wasn't included in the details that they have but if this is a warmer area it might make for a very good vacation spot.

As the Queen Rose nears the mouth of the channel that leads to the docks and the city itself, they are approached by a small sailing skiff with an emblem on it that Cain takes as the city logo.

"State your business here and intended duration of stay. Dock fee is 1 Gold coin daily, mooring in the port is one Gold a week."

"We have precious ores to trade, but it is our first visit. Do your crafting material warehouses have barges or do they require dock usage?" Nila asks.

"The dock is best, they charge a fee if they have to come to you to get it. If you have higher level ores, the Blacksmith's Guild near the docks will give you the best price, if they're lower grade, the merchant's Guild is your best bet." The dockmaster explains.

"Then we will start with a day at the docks and a week in the moorings. If we need to stay longer I will pay up before our week is up." Cain explains.

"Very well then, I will pull you in. Drop your sails and spells and throw over a mooring rope." That seems a bit odd to Cain, but maybe the little skiff is used as a tugboat?

Looking at the dockmaster, his system doesn't list him as awakened, but he has very effective water magic that is pulling them smoothly into the docks. The puppets throw lines to the workers waiting for them, and the dockmaster beckons over a member of the Blacksmith's Guild.

"Wotcha need then?" The elf asks in a distinctly Dwarven accent, making Cain smile.

"We brought a load of higher level ores to sell. I am told you are the man to speak to about large volumes." Nila informs him with a sly wink.

"Large volumes you say? Now, why don't we go take us a quick look at your hold and see if we agree on what a large load is?"

The two disappear below decks for a few minutes and then the Elf returns above deck with a big smile. "Send over all the ore carts. Every single one of them. We hit the motherlode."

The workers scatter to go grab what he wanted, and Nila rearranges the interior level of the ship to open up the floor so that the hold is accessible from above, using the blocks and lines of the rigging to pull bins of ore up onto the deck. The first bin is Frost Iron, which they have a huge excess of back in Skyview right now, and the dockmaster's grin goes slack at the two-meter cube of ore.

"He wasn't joking, that's more Frost Iron than I've seen in an average year." The man sighs, clearly planning to have something made, possibly a refrigerator.

This end of the continent at least is similar to Skyview in climate, temperate and not insanely hot like the Eastern Continent was. Cain can't tell if they get all four seasons, but looking at the houses, they either get a cool wet season, or something resembling winter. At the very least, enough that the beach houses need walls and windows.

The carts they come back with are the size of shopping carts, and Cain bursts into laughter.

"How about I summon something big enough to bring the bins to you, so you can weigh and value them?"

The Elf with the dwarven accent nods rapidly and Cain summons a squad of Granite Golems to carry the bins. The Giants make the stone dock shake as they walk, but they can carry a full ore bin without issue, and only need a few trips each to move the entire cargo from the Queen Rose to the warehouse.

The spectacle has drawn hundreds of local residents to the scene, whispering and pointing as the giant Golems bring the ore to the buyers. None of it is particularly precious to the Guild, they only picked the things that they had so much of that it absolutely needed to go to make space for more. Frost Iron, Shadow Bronze, Agapite and a single bin full of assorted gems.

The gems aren't the ones in the highest demand, but they are often used in smithy recipes, as they have elemental aspects to them, which Cain hopes will make them easy to sell for a good price. Dimnys and the others already made up a sheet of what everything would be worth in Skyview or the Eastern Continent, so Cain will know that he isn't getting ripped off, but he doesn't actually know how much they will pay for all of this, and what they will want to pay with.

Bars of Mythril and Platinum are obvious, but it could be gear, skill books and other unique items. The Guild is looking for all of the above and willing to take decent terms in order to obtain them.

"So, most of this is in the level 200 to 300 range, and epic quality with a few legendary Gems in the mix. Are you fixated on money, or would you like goods?" The Elf asks hopefully.

They are the Blacksmith's Guild after all, if they can trade in items that they themselves have made it is a huge bonus to them. Much like selling off part of the mountain of ores that the Guild has mined is a benefit to Cain, who isn't trying to rebuild a legendary city of Gold in the middle of Skyview.

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

Chapter 393 378

"We aren't too particular about the coin since it's easy to come by. But gear related to summoned creatures damage, healing on hit, or any Skill Book is in particular demand among our Guild. We have a rather varied membership, so the exact details and levels aren't the most important part, and we can accept a good bit of it and not suffer." Cain explains to the Blacksmith's representative.

"You are easy to please. I like that. Why are you so fixated on damage by Summons, though?" The elf questions, not understanding why such a niche ability would be in demand.

"Our Guild has a skill that allows every member to call for a small group of summoned creatures to assist them during a Guild-only dungeon run, so extra damage for them is useful to every single member," Cain explains. The [Lesser Demon Army] Guild Skill might not get as much love now as it once did, but it is still an extra bunch of summons for Guild groups to use.

"Well, if that is the case, I'm certain we can help out. The attribute isn't entirely uncommon on equipment, it just isn't in high demand, so if it is interfering with the overall balance the item is often reworked." The smith nods and Cain sees his eyes go a bit vague as he starts going through either his inventory or their Guild Bank.

The pure volume of ore that they brought with them will be an issue for the Guild, who doesn't have enough suitable gear to cover what amounts to half a year's work worth of ore. For them, the big question will be the amount of additional money owed and the discount that both sides will be willing to accept. At wholesale, it won't be terribly unbalanced, but the smiths are loathe to part with Mythril bars.

"You said you were willing to accept Skill books, correct? The Inscriptionists are willing to cut you a deal for some of those materials as well." Comes a voice from the door of the warehouse, and the Elves inside give the new arrival a dirty look.

"Come to claim all the good stuff for yourself have you? We won't be giving the gems up without a fight this time old man." The head negotiator informs the equally youthful looking Youkai outside.

Both species live an exceptionally long time though, and a few hundred years old is still well within what would be considered youthful to either of them, so the whole thing might be an inside joke between two locals born at nearly the same time.

"Fine, I won't try to take all the gems this time, but I do want a lot of them, and some of that shadow ore as well, it is exceptionally useful for binding priest skill books to balance out the light energy they emit."

Cain lets the two locals bicker for a while before they come to an agreement about distribution.

"Name your opening price and we will see what we have to offer." The inscriptionist suggests, taking the lead in the negotiation.

"Wholesale price straight across. Epic or greater quality gear and no F or D ranked skill books unless they are class-specific and particularly useful." Cain offers, knowing they won't have much reason to turn him down.

The two negotiators nod and start pulling items from their inventories.

As expected of a higher level area, they have quite the selection of high quality skill books, with an Ancient Quality Priest subclass specific skill book of [Mass Resurrect] making up the majority of the value of the trade goods from the inscription side.

That will come in incredibly useful for any and every Priest in the Guild, and it looks freshly written, so the Guild likely just finished making it. Sure enough, the Youkai negotiating with them knows the skill, and Cain happily records his form and that of everyone else in the room. With both [Spell Crafting] and inscription, Cain is certain that he will be able to record copies of the book as well, given a bit of time.

Of course, it might be in the Spell Crafting training book that he is still slowly working his way through, but he hasn't gotten nearly that far yet. Healing skills are mostly in a later section of the book and will be among the last ones Cain records before the final training on creating more niche and extremely powerful combat skills.

The Smiths haven't disappointed either, coming up with a wide variety of high-quality armors and weapons over level 350 that have summon damage bonuses on them. Some of them also have other very desirable qualities as well. One of the spears not

only has attack damage that scales with strength and dexterity combined, but it also has an additional effect called [Piercing Fires] that burns enemies behind the target on a successful attack.

That's enough to actually replace the Five Tigers Spear that Cain has been using for such a long time. It might feel strange to start using a new weapon after so long, but the damage is simply so high that there is no good excuse not to switch. His old one can go back to the Guild Bank once he returns to the Central Continent.

There are also enough armor pieces for an entirely upgraded suit for Cain, totaling an even 2000% damage when paired with his existing jewelry. It will also add 60 percent of his damage as area damage, which seems to be a favorite skill among the items made here in Musashi.

"Are there a lot of monsters that travel in hordes or packs in this region?" Cain asks, looking over all the items with area damage.

"Honestly, not really. Almost all of the wild monsters of Awakened quality are solitary creatures. The area damage is more for the Battle Royale phase of the Beast Class in the tournaments." The Blacksmith's negotiator explains.

Cain's eyes light up with enthusiasm, and he can see that both Vala and Laura feel the same way. Challenges against others with intelligence are much better than halfwit ogres or dungeon-crazed opponents. If they can get in on these tournaments the risk of boredom and monotony during this trip will be very low.

"Can you tell me more about these tournaments? Are they individual combat? Or perhaps between pets or summons of Awakened Quality?" Cain asks, and a tall, slender Youkai among the Smiths runs up eagerly. They have clearly turned the conversation to this young woman's obsession, the look she has is exactly like the one that Cyrene gets when Cain calls her a good girl and pats her head.

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

Chapter 394 379

"I don't know too many people who have a summoning spell that is on the awakened level, but taming beasts for the role is really common. There are two categories, fights between the True Born and Transfers, and those between trained or summoned beings. The summoners are viewed as the Elite among that class since they don't have to wait for their partner to be trained, or worry about it breaking free of their control.

The real fun is the True Born Class though. The fights are unarmed and unarmored, just a straight test of skill and raw power. Plus most of the men fight topless. The eye candy is totally worth the admission price." The Youkai, Aoi winks at Vala with that last bit, suggesting to Cain that Mythic level demons are common competitors or at least men that the Youkai thinks Vala would be interested in.

"So they're like a bare-knuckle boxing match?" Vala asks, personally enjoying such forms of entertainment when she isn't reading.

"Not really, most Mythic beings can use very powerful magic and combat skills, making the battles so much more than a simple boxing match. The lower-ranked unawakened amateur fights are often a boxing match with skills though since the magical classes get knocked out so easily with a punch while they are casting." The tall youkai explains, sand falling from her dark blonde hair as she nods her head happily. She doesn't look dirty, so it must be a result of an Earth elemental aspect to her nature.

"Once the deal is finished here, you should show us around. We would be very interested in seeing such a spectacle, and if we have time we might even compete ourselves." Cain smiles and she gives a fist pump at the joy of finding like-minded individuals.

In addition to [Crushing Tentacles] Cain also has [Crippling Blow] which can be used with a kick or punch, and Cain knows a lot of ways to land those from the Dark Elven Offensive Techniques book he made back in Muzz. A few more martial arts might be a good start, but with a couple of mythical attack and control skills in addition to his stats, he might do pretty decently in an unarmed battle.

Vala is clearly thinking the same thing. She is Mythic Quality and has both attack skills and [Pestilence] at Mythic quality, which could damage her opponents.

The rest of the negotiations about the ore are fairly straightforward. They take all the gear and books they can get, and offer the last half a cart of ore as a good faith discount to buy them some goodwill the next time they come to visit. The plan is to send Nila back to the Central Continent with the Queen Rose to return the trade goods. Really, she only needs to get close enough to activate the Guild Bank, but if she returns all the way she can reload the ship for another merchant trip. Mythryll has been looking forward to a nice long journey alone with the Wave Rider for a while, so a trade trip between the Central Continent and the western shores of the Eastern Continent with the gear the Guild makes would be a nice vacation for them.

That puts their destination all the way across the Continent from Port Nefheim, so it won't mess with their usual shipping lanes and flow of goods, but it will help spread the name of the Darklight Host even further than it already is. They also likely have a few pieces that would qualify for the Tortuga auction as well, and Port Nefheim is still in negotiations to get an intercontinental travel point added to the Free Port.

Nila doesn't have a problem with that plan, so Cain orders that the trade goods, other than the set of armor and the weapon that he wanted for himself be loaded into the hold. Since they will be entering an awakened area after this to go explore and try to trigger an advancement, Cain is planning on sending Nemu and Evangeline back with the ship as well. They can provide extra security on the dangerous leg of the journey and not have to feel like a total deadweight in the meantime.

According to Cain's interface though, Nila only needs a half dozen more fae forms to advance and join the ranks of the Mythic, and he is hours away from level 300 when he will be able to get the final skill of his secondary tree and see if anything comes after that.

His proposal meets with more resistance than expected though, neither companion wishes to leave his side, citing abandonment issues and boredom with the stuffy Wave Rider. By any reasonable measure, Nila is not stuffy, but to a pair of nudist practical jokers, she probably does seem a bit boring.

[Fine, Nila is headed home with the loot. We will stay here. After you make it home and reload, you can take Mythryll on vacation and go visit Tortuga to drop off items for the auction and then sell the rest to the East.] Cain gives his final instructions just as the locals get the official paperwork ready.

For such a large transaction, there is a lot to go over, and that takes them well past the point when Cain reaches level 300. Unfortunately, there is no automatic quest or anything to indicate what he should be doing right now, but he is hoping that just being among other Awakened transfers might trigger something.

Likewise, his Secondary Skill Tree simply completes, with no indication of an available upgraded rank, until Cain double-checks his Interface and sees a new line.

[Tertiary Skill Tree] Empty

So now, not only does he need to find himself a new class, he has to find another skill tree type book or quest reward that can open up another set of skills for him.

The Echoes don't stop to celebrate at level 300 though. They have found a hidden underground section inside the Fae Dungeon, and they are determined to get the last handful of forms to push Nila over the brink and on to natural Legendary status, which will Immediately become Mythic thanks to Cain's skills.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

Chapter 395 380

The Queen Rose is still visible on the horizon when Nila advances, and Cain can swear her whoop of joy is not only in his head but audible across the ocean.

The advancement changed her form subtly. She is still a Wave Rider, but she gained a proper class of her own beyond the basic skills granted to her as a Companion. The Class is called Void Shaman and specializes in Transport based magical spells. Much like the Dark Phoenix, she can drag her ship into the void and travel at immense speeds within the darkness of the weightless realm in between realities.

For a ship's Captain, that is a huge addition to their safety margins, even if it does use a lot of mana with a loaded ship, but it also means she can make it home to her beloved in a mere two days instead of seven if she summons assistants with mana totems to keep the effect up. Cain is certain that Mythryll will be overjoyed at this news, just as he is certain that Nila will downplay the utility of it as an excuse to spend endless hours simply sailing the open oceans with her.

Aoi, the battle-loving Youkai has brought the remaining members of the group to a local barbecue restaurant, which surprised Cain. He was expecting a seafood place to be the local specialty, given the oceanfront view of the city, but instead, they liked to grill meat over a small fire pit built into the tables. The restaurant is really charming, covered in local trinkets and artwork, and the sauces that the food comes with are definitely being added to the repertoire of at least one of the cooks the next time Cain sees them.

"So, it is a bit of a walk, but this is a big city, and the arena is on the far side of town. There are True Born category fights tonight if you would like to go watch? It's too late to enter if that is something you want to do in the future, but you will get a good taste of the battles just by watching." The Youkai, who Cain learned is born and raised right here in Musashi, informs them.

Looking at her, she appears to be mostly human, but misshapen, the way witches were in the stories of Cain's previous life. Her fashion sense is much better though, a pair of artfully torn tight-fitting jeans with a sky blue blouse that matches her eyes.

"As long as you think we can still get tickets. It would be a shame to walk that far and not be able to get in." Cain agrees.

"Oh, this is the middle of the week-long tournament, they only usually sell out during the finals. Tomorrow is the semi-finals of the Beast Category though, which might get pretty packed since the fights have been really close."

The buildings here are all dark stained wood that reminds Cain of the Transfer Village in Beginners Valley, but with more magical lights and much cleaner streets. It feels

deliberately rustic, like a historical city or a tourist attraction. That might be exactly what it is though. With the interior of the continent locked off to visitors, this place has been chosen specifically to do trade with the outside world, so it would make sense to put on a show for them.

That doesn't make it any less fun to visit though, and Cain finds a Ramen stand along the way, getting everyone a bowl since they have over an hour to kill before they need to be at the arena. Sure, they just had lunch, but Cain hasn't had a good bowl of Ramen since he got here, nobody on the Central Continent really knew what it was. That makes them even better people in Aoi's books. Anyone who buys her food and likes both ramen and the combat tournaments is a good person in her mind.

She was also right about the arena. There is a small lineup, but it is moving fast even fifteen minutes before the first fight when they arrive. Cain buys flagons of ale for everyone as they pass a Dwarven drink stand inside the seating area and Aoi leads them to a spot along the side and a few rows up that she insists is the premier viewing spot. It's not too low, and not too far up to watch from, and being along the side has a mostly even view of all the arenas.

The competitors are starting to come out to greet their fans, and Cain is reminded of a sports team, or a wrestling match, where part of the job is to hype up the crowd. Their group is attracting a lot of attention from the competitors who are down in the pit, and Cain sighs, knowing that trying to avoid excess attention in a place like this is a lost cause.

He's got all the ladies with him after all, so attention is expected. But that's not what caught their attention, someone who was checking them out looked over their interface, which shows them as [Cain's Companion]. Which brought him to their attention, and despite looking like a human, he is well aware that a full scan of his status will show that he is a transformed Ancient to a transfer their skill and level.

Even Aoi notices the stares and scans him for the first time, gasping at the revelation. "I totally thought you were a human. I mean, that's what your nameplate shows, and a Mythic Awakened human is already pretty remarkable. But to have the system just outright call you an Ancient? How awesome is that? You didn't even slip up one time and let the Guild know you were Royalty."

Like with the Demons on the Central Continent, the Royal families here must have some level of connection to the Ancients, which makes complete sense, given the power level advantage that those with Ancient blood get over the rest of their species. Cain decides to simply play it off and tease the Youkai instead.

"Nope, I'm pretty sure they're checking you out. Should I get their contact information for you?" He teases, laughing as she blushes an unexpected shade of blue.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

Chapter 396 381 My Kind Of Place

The chatter about Cain dies down as the announcer takes the stage to begin the formalities before the day's fights.

"Welcome everyone to day four of the monthly Awakened tournament. It seems we have some esteemed guests in the crowd today, so I am certain every one of our contestants will be doing their very best to impress. The matches are the same as always, three rounds at two minutes each. No skills which restrict resurrection or cause decapitation are allowed, with a death penalty for violations. By now we all know the rules, so let us get started."

That makes sense to Cain, if accidental death is a risk, it only makes sense to prohibit skills that will prevent the healers from bringing the defeated fighter back to life.

The fighters are going all out against each other, revealing that every ring is surrounded by a barrier to keep the spell effects inside as well as preventing combatants from being ejected into the crowd by the force of the attacks that are being leveled against them. The rings are ten meters across, but that isn't nearly enough space for fights at this level to happen without running into the barriers.

Aoi clearly has her favorite, a Fallen Angel who is fighting in the second round. This one isn't as naturally strong as the child Cain met back in Blood Sands Castle, having only one set of wings, but he has progressed to Mythic Awakening through hard work. He is a favorite of many of the women in the crowd, who scream and cheer when he takes the stage, spreading his wings and flexing to show off for them. Now Cain understands why they fight shirtless, it's all part of the show.

Nobody cares about a winner with no style, they come to watch the ones who are the most entertaining.

Being a Demon, he is quite strong and fast in his own right, even before the class advantages of being a Shadow Assassin. The class itself is not particularly special and that makes Cain take a better look around the rings.

Most of the fighters are between level 300 and 400, with some higher, all Mythic Awakened, as that is the class fighting now. According to Aoi, there are Spirit, Immortal, and Divine Awakenings above this, but seeing them here on the Continent is a rare thing. During the war between the Gods, many of the higher awakenings decided they wanted nothing to do with such foolishness and isolated themselves in a separate

realm, a Mirror of the world Cain is currently in, created through the efforts of the Gods and thousands of Divine warriors working together.

Come to think of it, the little Seraphim mentioned something about a different plane, but Cain had assumed that it was something unique to the Seraphim. Listening to Aoi, it seems that it is not, instead it is reserved for the more powerful Awakened. That seems like the sort of thing that the Laughing God would approve of, creating a mirror of reality so that once mortals reached the very pinnacle of the world he could transport them to the mirror and have them start all over at the bottom once again.

Cain briefly wonders if he would use the old faithful transfer system and start them in the Beginners Village again. Likely not for him, as he wasn't human anymore, but it would be a great laugh for the champions of the mortal realm to end up starting all over exactly as they did on their arrival here.

If he gets a chance, Cain decides he will ask the Ley Line activation machine in the Ancient Ruins about the mirrored world. Perhaps not all the ancients are dead, only gone. If that's the case, maybe he could one day meet more like himself? Though, with their reputation and what he has heard of them, they might well have fought to the last to protect what they viewed as theirs instead of running away when the foreign Deities invaded.

The Ladies Champion, as Cain has dubbed the demon with the feathery black wings, made short work of his opponent, pummeling him unconscious in the first round. A good portion of the crowd, Aoi included, is on their feet cheering for him, and the referee is trying to chase him out of the ring to get the next fight started, making the rest of the crowd laugh.

His performance seems to have increased the level of showmanship among the winners though, so Cain decides to ask Aoi about the reason it would even matter.

The Youkai looks at him like he is a bit dense, before laughing and answering. "Because they get a split of the bets placed on themselves of course. The tournament circuit decided that was the fairest way to pay fighters. Instead of a flat fee, the fighters get a share of the gambling profits. You will also see some that sandbag, making their fights look tight to increase their own betting odds in the next round, hoping for a heavy upset victory and a big payday."

Now that's the way to do it. Knowing that it was really a show put on for prize money and not just some fight for pride makes the tournament a hundred times more interesting to Cain.

"What do you say we pick up tickets in advance for the rest of the week ladies? I wouldn't mind watching this one through."

There are no objections, watching the matches seems like a good way to unwind, and they need time to learn about the continent before they just go running blindly into danger, especially knowing that there is a rank of awakening above Mythic that could be wandering around out there, taking just as little damage from them as they take from the unawakened. Finding a hungry Spirit Awakened beast could be a very bad day for them if the damage reduction scales the same way between awakenings.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

Chapter 397 382

After a long day watching the fights, Aoi leads them to a local hotel to book a room for the rest of the week. It's a good thing they agreed to go with her since the innkeeper initially denies having any extra rooms available, but with the good word of the Youkai, her whole attitude changes, and she finds them a small single room on the third floor.

The inn doesn't like renting to fighters, most likely because of all the drinking and violence that goes with it, and seeing the awakened stranger, that's what she thought Cain was, a fighter who got kicked out of his previous accommodations.

Nila sends word that night that she has made it safely out of the danger zone around the Southern Continent using her new Void Travel skills, and is nearly halfway back home. The Guild will be ecstatic to see her back with all that gear so soon, so Cain wishes her well and lets her get back to work while he makes a plan for the day.

Today the contestants will be fighting with their summons and trained beasts, which should be a very different experience than yesterday. These battles also aren't in the main arena, they are on an open field outside town since some of the creatures are simply too big or need too much space for their fights. A Drake in a ten-meter box is hardly a fair fight after all. It might be fun to watch the fire burn inside the box, but that's about all you would see, and neither fighter would really be able to move.

When Cain learns that one of the abilities that Awakened Beast Lords and similar classes can learn creates a red and white ball that contains a pocket dimension where tamed animals and mounts can be held in stasis he laughs himself to tears.

There is no way, not a single chance, that such an item was not created by a Transfer, no matter how many times the locals at the inn insist that they had been around since the war between the Gods.

These fights start much earlier in the day than the regular fighters since they aren't in an arena that can be well lit for the battles. But that's fine by Cain and the others, who are happily loading up their inventory with local snacks and liquors in preparation for a long day of entertainment.

Since this is the semi-finals, there won't be many fights, and they will have an intermission between each match, with entertainment and vendors selling merchandise. Aoi insists the stuffed animals are horrendously overpriced, but the chocolate-covered soft pretzels are to die for, the perfect mix of salty and sweet. With Laura the foodie Dragon along, that theory will be put to the test, but getting to watch a local music concert one short set at a time between monster fights sounds like a great way to spend a day.

The first match is a pair of Feline beasts with purple fur and white spots. Both are ferocious, and predictably evenly matched. The crowd is loving the mirror match, which ends up going to the Judge's decision in the final round.

That's the point when Laura realizes that no flying creatures are allowed, their participation prohibited in the name of fairness and her hopes of dominating the division with Dragon Breath are doused. Aoi thinks it's hilarious though. Dragons customarily treat these creatures as food, with all the benefits their species gives them at Mythic Quality. The fact that one would want to get into an actual fight with them never crossed her mind, even after seeing the diminutive pixie form that Laura takes on.

[They do look tasty, now that she has mentioned it. We should take some time to find some when we get out of town.] Laura insists silently, making the others chuckle.

After the fight, a musical group that Cain would call an Orcish Heavy Metal band takes the stage between the crowd and the fight, plugging in their instruments and sending a magical charge into the amplifiers. Supposedly they come from the Western Continent, but the mostly elven crowd isn't particular about their origins, only the quality of the music. The band ends up being more popular than any of the three fights they play their sets between today.

The next two are lopsided blowouts Cain called the moment he saw the matchups, but the final matchup of the day is a vicious-looking Bear against some sort of Cyborg. According to the announcer, it is entirely mechanical and Cain searches out both the controller and the Gnome who appears to be the creator in the crowd to record among his forms.

Cain has a lot of things among his myriad of abilities, but combat-capable Cyborgs with Mythic level enchantments would be incredible when used as the basis for his puppets. This one needs someone in charge to give it commands, though he isn't carrying a full controller, just a microphone. It is possible that he is magically controlling it through a single small device, but the robot seems to have some level of autonomy.

,m The gnome working the controls sounds much like a boxing coach to Cain, shouting directions, but the bear outmatches the robot in everything but durability. The shielding around the robot holds for two whole rounds, while the claws of the robot have heavily injured the bear. The third round spells the construct's demise though with a mighty crushing blow breaking the shielding spell and crushing the head of the robot, causing it to collapse into a crumpled heap on the ground.

That isn't nearly enough for the bear though, and the trainer is losing control of the beast. Cain can see it fighting the commands and refusing to return to its containment, preferring to smash the fallen robot a few more times. Even when the Beast Lord comes in to try to subdue it physically, it doesn't go peacefully, beating the Elf half to death before he can get it back into the pocket dimension.

For the crowd, that is the highlight of the day, except perhaps the final set by the band that follows the match, but Cain is much more interested in the design of the robot.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

Chapter 398 383

Cain notices that the gnomes are still in the staging area looking over their mangled robot when the final set of the concert ends, so he makes his way down out of the stands to go see them. They seem to be having a deeply involved discussion on the input lag of the command system and the capacity of the shielding system, with each of them blaming the other for the failure.

For what it's worth, Cain is on the side of blaming the input lag, because if the robot was attacking and blocking at the proper times it could have defeated the bear without taking nearly as many hits and overloading the shielding system.

The field has been swarmed with spectators going to see the victors and congratulate them on their performance, wishing them well in the finals two days from now.

"Gentlemen, might you have a moment for a potential customer?" Cain asks with a big smile.

"You are interested in helping fund our research? I think we are doing pretty well already? After all the Smashinator Mk 312 made it to the semi-final round." The engineer Gnome informs him in a squeaky voice.

"On the contrary, I was greatly impressed, and I would like to purchase a number of units from you. I think they would make excellent escorts for dangerous journeys through the Awakened areas." Cain informs him and the gnome gets so excited he is practically vibrating.

"They will be excellent escort bots once they are finished, but the data set for the combat processors is currently incomplete and needs to be updated with practical experiences. I am certain that the capability is there, but we don't have a way to transfer knowledge between units beyond practical data, and the adaptive subroutines need experiences using the data before they are fully combat capable, as you saw today. All the data is there, but something is missing to allow it to take initiative."

Cain suspects what is missing is consciousness. Or a facsimile of it. It takes a fairly advanced data set to make an NPC in a video game unpredictable and therefore dangerous to a skilled opponent. Trying to apply that to a robot that needs to function in multiple environments, and against a myriad of opponents is certainly not an easy task for even a skilled programmer.

"If you can sell me a similar model I can suggest to you a highly effective method of having them become more autonomous and better apply their combat capabilities," Cain suggests but the Gnome shakes his head.

"Unfortunately, this was the last functional unit that we had. But if you make it New Muzz, the engineer's Guild has a number of unawakened options to choose from that have similar functionality."

That doesn't do Cain a lot of good without the ability to fight the sorts of opponents they are likely to face in the awakened areas, but New Muzz? That's a place he simply must visit.

"I am newly arrived on the Continent, as you might have guessed already. I don't suppose that you have a map of some sort that could point me towards New Muzz?" Cain asks and the Gnomes both nod their agreement, pulling out pamphlets for their design firm, which specializes in transport striders and mopeds.

The mopeds actually look identical to the ones Cain saw in Muzz, and the spec looks like it is nearly the same. The Dark Elves said that the Gnomes lost a lot when they were forced out, but to think that transport technology has advanced so little in a thousand years is a bit depressing. Looking closer, the materials are all different than the original, so it isn't all a lack of development, but trying to replace rare materials that weren't available in their new location and getting stuck while technology became obsolete for lack of spare parts.

Still depressing, but it gives him hope for their capabilities.

"Thank you. Hopefully, I have a chance to catch up to you there and see your latest inventions." Cain says politely, before leaving to rejoin his group.

He shows them the pamphlet with the directions to New Muzz and Aoi looks vaguely concerned.

"You're not planning to actually go to a Gnomish city, are you? I mean, it's not in an awakened area, but Gnomish cities have their own level of dangers." She asks, genuinely concerned for their safety.

"Maybe, but we didn't have a map at all before, and this one at least gives us a few waypoints along the way. Maybe we can find something interesting along the way. I personally am hoping to trigger a Class Advancement quest." Cain explains.

That is something that the Blacksmith understands very well. Smiths often trigger various quests by creating new and high-quality items related to their trade, so the idea that other classes would do the same is just a given to them.

The next day is the semi-finals of the Transfer Class, and Aoi insists they all get there early for a special treat. She is outside their hotel room just as the sun comes up, not even waiting for them to have breakfast before eagerly leading them towards the arena.

"Trust me, it will all be worth it once you get there and see." She laughs, as Laura yawns from Cain's shoulder.

The location of the surprise is obvious. Even at this incredibly early hour of the day, four hours before the fights start there is a lineup at a shop near the arena. A young Tengu couple is selling buns from a stall that smells absolutely amazing. The sign has one single item on it [Sweet Barbecue Pork Buns 1 Silver per bag while supplies last]

"It's a monthly special, only available during the semi-finals of the tournament. For the finals, they give up the spot for the local baker, who sells victory puddings. The name is misleading because nobody eats them to celebrate the victories, they throw them at the losers if their performance is particularly embarrassing, and only eat them at the end of the day if all the fights were good."

That's a bit cruel, but every sport has its traditions, right?

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

Chapter 399 384

They manage to get the same seats as last time, with three bags of meat buns to accompany them. The shop had a very strict one bag per customer rule, but after seeing that they had cooked hundreds of bags with six buns each during the overnight hours and stored them in insulated boxes, the group decided to limit themselves. A half dozen meat buns was still a pretty good meal, and they knew from experience that a vendor would be coming around selling random food products and flat beer all day long.

The true downside to that shop had to be the line though, they were so early but it still took over an hour to get food, which had Laura complaining about hunger, even as she snacked on candies she purchased the day before. Cain suspected that it was the lack of access to the Guild bank getting to her. The Dragon was used to trading and requisitioning snacks from all over the continent using the Guild Bank to make the transfer, but that isn't an option while they are here.

They only just gotten seated in their preferred spots when an event organizer came over with a used car salesman smarmy smile on his face, eager to talk to Cain.

"Greetings, greetings. How are you enjoying your stay in Musashi Duke Cain?" He asks, extending his hand.

Cain gives the man his most polite political smile and shakes the organizer's hand. "It's a wonderful city you have here. I was fortunate enough to find myself an enthusiastic local guide on the first day of my visit and we have been greatly successful in finding the attractions of the city ever since."

"That is wonderful to hear. If you need anything else, just let us know. As I'm sure you have noticed, the visit of foreign Awakened Nobility has caused a bit of a stir here in our humble Port town, and the event organizers were wondering if you would be interested in a bit of an exhibition? We will have an odd number of contestants for the finals you see, and the options are to give someone a bye in the first round or to promote a defeated opponent to even the numbers up again. That is where you would come in. If you are up to a bit of sport, we would like to offer one of them the chance to challenge you for the position with the winner moving forward."

The man is speaking fast, fearful of being interrupted, but Cain is smiling. "I could do that myself, or perhaps they might be more at ease against one of my equally talented Personal Guards?"

The organizer looks a bit startled but quickly realizes that both Vala and Laura are of a suitable quality to compete. He seems to discard the idea of the Dragon Pixie in a second, but the idea of having Vala compete is too tempting for him to pass over. You don't see many pretty women in these competitions, and a victory against a foreign noble's Personal Guard would be a great bragging point for whatever popular but defeated fighter they gave the chance to.

"Your Demonic Guard would be an excellent option. Vala is it? You don't mind terribly much do you?" The organizer practically begs and Aoi gives him a disgusted look.

"Of course not. We are traveling to gain experience, so of course, I will put on a good show for your audience. If the competitor is truly talented but was unlucky in his matchups, he might even have a chance of winning."

The man looks a bit pale at her confidence and produces a copy of the official rules from his inventory, handing it to Vala with shaking hands. "Thank you for your consideration, I will go inform the others of the challenge fight to be scheduled for the end of the day."

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" Aoi whispers as the spectators around them start gossiping and preparing their bids for the exhibition match.

"Of course it is. The question is if we let Vala pummel them or if we throw the fight." Cain whispers back, making Laura giggle.

With her healing on hit and the incredible bonuses from Cain's equipment and skills even when she is fighting unarmed and unarmored, there is very little chance that she would lose a tournament fight, even if she was currently low on Mythic skills.

The event doesn't even need to officially announce the fight before the entire audience knows, and the stands start getting more and more packed. The semi-finals are a decent fight to start with, but with the chance to see foreign nobility fight, everyone in the city wants a seat. Local pride is on the line if they lose after all.

The crowd is getting rowdier and louder with every fight as the day goes on, and Cain is making out like a bandit at the betting stand. He hasn't lost a single wager yet, and it is annoying the spectators behind him to no end. They are down on the day so far and betting far more than they should be to try to keep up with Cain when the ticket seller comes by between fights. Most of the time you go to the cage to place a bet, but for those who bet larger sums, they will send someone to the section you are seated in for your convenience.

That combination is a dangerous one when they head home at the end of the day and have to explain themselves to their families, but that's not really Cain's problem. He isn't hiding who he is cheering for, if they wanted they could just match his bets.

The last fight of the day seems to be the one everyone is looking forward to, where someone will get a chance to redeem themselves. Almost all of these matches have gone the distance and ended by decision, with more than one poorly received result.

The final regular match ends and the announcer takes the stage with a huge grin. "I know you are all aware now, that one of our local fighters will get a chance to redeem themselves against the Personal Guard of Duke Cain of Skyview. She is an unknown

factor, a Blood Dancer, long thought extinct after the great war. But she will be fighting without her armor or weapons today, against the fighter with the highest combined score.

Now, they all have one loss, so scoring was done like this. One Point for a third-round win. Three for the second round and five for a first-round knockout. The scores are coming up on the board now."

As he says that, a group of workers run to write the scores on a board at the end of the arena, showing that the lucky recipient will be Purrseus, a Tiger Kin War Mage, which is a type of close combat magician exclusive to their species.

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

Chapter 400 385 Vala Knows No Mercy

"That's it everyone, our most skilled among the defeated semi-finalists has been determined. Purrseus, please come to the stage and meet your opponent. Facing him will be a mighty Demonic warrior from the Central Continent, a Blood Dancer known to us as Vala, the personal guard of the Ancient Duke Cain of Skyview."

The announcer's announcement causes a wave of questions through the crowd. Did he say an actual Ancient? The Elves have a lot of stories about them, but not a single one is a positive story. Where is this Ancient? What sort of disguise is he wearing to have infiltrated the Southern Continent? But when Vala leaps into the air from beside Cain all their questions are answered.

The referee looks concerned though, sharing a confused look with the organizers, as no flying species are supposed to be competing, which could be an issue should the Demon win the fight. They also neglected to notice the fact that she has wings when they proposed this battle, but hope that she understands that flying during the fight is off-limits.

Many of the spectators think that she is actually one of Cain's children, given the rumored Ancient species bloodline in the Blood Dancers, but if she wants to claim a position as his bodyguard, who are they to argue?

Vala is rather tall by human standards, over 190cm, but Purrseus is a head taller than her and much more heavily built. The look on his face is pure confidence, despite losing a battle to the heavy favorite to win this tournament, he has no doubts that he can beat this slender female demon in unarmed combat. In fact, despite her quality showing as Mythic when he scanned her with his [Deep Knowledge] skill, he couldn't pick up a

previous class, so there is a good chance she is simply riding along on her birthright and has never even advanced.

"You both know the rules?" The referee asks as they take positions across from each other, being given the entire arena for their battle.

"Of course." Purrseus sneers.

"Discipline the misbehaving kitten. No problem." Vala replies with a smile and her opponent's enraged roar echoes through the arena.

"Oh, it is on now. Nobody calls him a kitten and lives to brag about it." Someone a few rows behind Cain laughs, causing the spectators around them to chuckle before looking over at Cain to see if he is worried.

Cain is relaxed in his seat, flagging down a vendor selling fried octopus in preparation for the fights.

"Keep it on the ground." The referee reminds Vala who nods her agreement, causing him to jump back and blow the whistle to start the fight.

Vala wasted no time going on the offense, ducking low under Purrseus's first strike and aiming her left fist directly at his family jewels, making her much larger opponent jump back and roll away. He snarls at the underhanded tactic and Vala just shrugs, leveling a kick at his head as he flips to his feet. The big feline is much faster than he looks and even faster than he was during his last battle, sending cheers through the crowd as he avoids the hit again.

He charges in with his claws out, but Vala makes no attempt to avoid him, deciding to trade blows instead of avoiding taking damage. His claws cut deep gouges into Vala's left wing, hastily raised to protect her face, and her return strike hits Purrseus squarely in the chest sending him flying backwards to skid across the ring.

The roar of the crowd is incredible, deafening Cain, who has finally gotten his food. He takes that as a good sign; if they are going to cheer that enthusiastically when Vala lands a blow they aren't holding a grudge against her working for an ancient. But the fight is still on, and Laura is stealing his fried octopus, so Cain brings his focus back to the world around him.

With a wing-assisted leap, Vala is on Purrseus before he even hits the ground, kicking him in the same spot she hit with the punch and driving him hard into the ground. A cloud of sand and dust raises from the ground with the impact as Purrseus makes a two-meter crater in the sand of the arena floor, but avoids taking any serious damage by using a Lightning type skill to knock Vala away so she can't crush him.

He is slower to get up this time, looking fine but damaged internally from the two hard strikes. Then he begins to look a bit ill and the crowd gasps.

"That's Mythic rank Pestilence! Look at his debuffs. No wonder she was certain she would win, Purrseus was doomed the moment she laid hands on him." Aoi cheers, fully enraptured with the fight between Mythic Demon and Beastkin.

The claw marks on Vala's wing are already healing, but so is her opponent. The debuff only lasts a few seconds before he manages to resist it and his healing starts again. But Vala isn't totally helpless to stop that, thanks to her speed. She rushes forward again, throwing a flurry of attacks at her opponent, driving him backward as he burns mana blocking using skills, to avoid the effects of [Pestilence].

The crowd loves it. Purrseus's main element is lightning, so every block throws off sparks and arcs of electricity where they meet the agile Demon's strikes. Once he learns the basics of Vala's attack patterns, he manages to get back on the offensive, pushing Vala back towards the crater that was created where he landed earlier. Such damage to the arena is totally normal and intended to soften the impact on the ground. A mage with Earth Magic can level the sand back out and paint new ring lines in only a few seconds after a fight.

He roars in victory when Vala trips, tumbling backward into the crater, then leaps after her, going for the pin to lock her down and beat her unconscious. But Vala has other ideas, spreading her wings to break her fall and throwing a kick up towards his groin.

The experienced fighter isn't falling for that though, leaping past her kick, but the strike was a feint, and Vala grabs his arms, using him as leverage to get up off the ground and headbutt him, refreshing the [Pestilence] Debuff. The blow dazed her opponent, and Vala followed up with a double strike to either side of his head and a kick to the chest, sending him across the arena to crash against the wall, unconscious.

But the referee isn't ending the fight, and the crowd finally notices why. Pestilence is an area effect ability, and the referee couldn't resist it. He is too sick to move and very nearly dead. His bosses are certainly going to get an earful about the fact nobody even noticed he was down because they were so into the fight, at least they will if someone does something about his condition soon. Dying due to proximity might be an occupational hazard, but it is not a pleasant experience.

Another referee, a healer, enters the ring in order to rescue his coworker and is about to call the fight when Vala speaks up.

"I concede. Victory to Purrseus. As the rules dictate, wings are an unfair advantage." she calls loud enough for everyone to hear, shocking the crowd.

That upsets a lot of gamblers and cheers up just as many, but what comes after her announcement has the entire stadium laughing.

Vala walks over to her fallen opponent, removing the Pestilence debuff, and gently pets his head.

"Good boy. There, there, enjoy your nap. I know how the Cat species love to nap." she says softly, but the words carry in the shocked silence of the arena.

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