

# Reincarnated With A Summoning System

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The chance that they might be run out of town does cross Cain's mind in the aftermath of the fight, but overall the crowd is supportive of the decision that Vala made to declare Purrseus the winner. While she didn't actually fly during the fight, her wings definitely helped her out a lot, and everyone could see it.

The actual rule doesn't specify 'flying' only that species with innately 'Unfair Advantages' over their competition are prohibited, so even the judges are on board with her call. The way she beat the unfortunate Purrseus made it hard to argue that she did not have an unfair advantage. That last kick across the ring cemented it in their minds. She was just so much stronger than her competition that even had they settled it by grappling, he wouldn't have had much of a chance.

That, of course, is because her stats and modifiers are based on Cain's stats and her quality, and his stats are very high. Add to that the fact that Cain has accessories on to compliment his outfit, and the overall effect puts her far above the rest of the fighters at the Mythic level without gear.

With the excitement spreading through the city for the finals beginning the next day, Cain decides to take a detour on the way back to their inn and find a proper map of the area. They now know how to get to new Muzz, but they have no idea where or how dangerous the Awakened areas of the Southern Continent are, and that is where Cain is most likely to find a quest that will let him start a new class, or find a skill tree to supplement the one he just finished.

There isn't much more that could possibly be done for his puppets, only backfilling ability ranks to increase the skills and combat abilities in the categories he already has activated. Even for his class, his summons are amazing, but now that he is going to be facing awakened opponents, high volumes of lower-quality summons to clear an area aren't really a viable option anymore.

Instead, he needs to find a way to grant them more awakened abilities. He already has [Ancient Wisdom] which allows him to grant a single spell or ability to his entire group, including his summoned followers, which could make his lower quality summons somewhat dangerous, though far from versatile. So maybe what he should be doing is finishing the Spell Crafting book and finding himself some more spells and abilities to grant to everyone.

Vala notices him smiling as they tour the city looking for a shop that sells maps, and checks his thoughts, bursting into laughter.

"What is so funny? Something about that the fight?" Aoi asks, wondering if they held back information about something fun. Aoi loves the tournaments in every aspect, so the thought that she might be out of the loop is nearly intolerable. She even studies the information available about the favorite fighters' previous matches.

"One of Cain's abilities would grant [Crushing Tentacles] the Mythic spell to all his bodyguards and group members. He was thinking of calling for a hundred summoned mages and simply filling an entire battlefield with tentacles." Vala whispers, making the tall youkai burst into laughter.

"OH EM GEE, you should have been born a Gnome, they would love that ability." She laughs out loud, grabbing the attention of everyone around them for a second before they all decide the Demon must have told her a dirty joke.

The Gnomes are well known for their imagination, and that has led to a reputation for creating what the elves view as exceedingly strange literature.

The only real cartographer in Musashi ends up being hidden in a corner of town over by the trading houses for land-based merchants and farmers. It isn't a big place, but they have a rather impressive selection of premade maps and guidebooks visible behind the counter.

"Welcome, how can I help you today? Sightseeing? Leveling? Looking for a challenge that might add to your awakened skills?" The young Elf with a bright green mohawk haircut asks them.

"Yes to all of the above. I am hoping to trigger a fourth advancement class option or quest to continue improving my abilities, but honestly, I have no idea what I might be missing to make the requirements." Cain explains.

"Well, then I would recommend a detailed map of the Mythic territories on this side of the continent, as well as a tourist guidebook, and a list of adventurer attractions. There are a number of cursed ruined cities, dungeons, and other such places that those with a taste for battle like to go and hone their skills in new ways." The cartographer informs them, his spiky hair bouncing as he flits between cubbies and pulls out the items he recommended.

"Ah, there you go. But if I can give you a bit of advice, since you're a Flesh Crafter?"

Cain nods and motions for him to continue. "Make yourself less conspicuous. The beastkin and demon are fine, but a Seraphim and a human? That's going to attract a lot of unwanted attention outside of the city. I'm not saying that we have a crime problem or

anything, but the rural areas can get a bit territorial you know? And that could well pull out an Immortal level awakened."

"Thanks, I will take a moment and tweak everyone's appearance once I'm back in my hotel tonight. We were at the arena today, so we have already brought a bit of extra attention to ourselves." Cain agrees, seeing the wisdom in the young man's advice.

"In the city, you won't have any issues, the guard is pretty intense if you upset them, and they're used to visitors, but the adventuring spots in the Awakened areas aren't for the unprepared or the faint of heart. You could start with the tourist spots first if you prefer? That way you might get what you need with minimum danger?" The elf suggests.

Even without the threat of hostile locals, that's not a bad idea. A little vacation destination hopping in the name of looking for advancement? That's right up his alley. But they seem less likely to give results, and he doesn't have forever to stay here and play around this time, unfortunately.

"I think we will change forms and try them in order. That way we don't skip anything and have to double back to check on missed opportunities. I have a Guild back home, and I shouldn't leave them unattended forever." Cain laughs, making the Elf smirk.

"My dad says the same thing. That he needs to check up on his kids regularly or we get unruly. But seriously, I'm almost a hundred now, I'm certain he could relax."

Laura giggles and mouths the word "Neffie", making Evangeline and Nemu burst into laughter.

"It's a parent thing, they will always see you as their baby, no matter how powerful you grow or how long it has been," Evangeline informs him in all seriousness, and the Elf gets a nostalgic look.

"You might have a point there. Your total today is 18 Gold coins, and 5 silver."

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

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After leaving the cartographer's shop, they all head back to the Smithy warehouses. Tickets for the final day are sold out well in advance, so Aoi needs to get back to work and start crafting some of the tons of ore that Cain brought them this week before the next ships come in and want items in trade.

Most traders to the southern continent don't want coins or bullion. They want to bring back gear. Thanks to the number of awakened adventurers and artisans, the port of Musashi is a prime spot to get extremely high-quality items. They limit the output to traders that aren't going to other awakened areas to avoid unbalancing the trade routes, but a good portion of the items that end up at the auctions started out here.

According to Aoi, they get regular ships for food and textiles from other parts of the Southern Continent, but only one or two ships a year from other Continents that are looking for gear, and it is almost unheard of for them to have more than one bin of ore that is high enough quality to be considered. The ore isn't easy to come by, and the waters offshore are simply too dangerous for many people to willingly visit the continent.

That works out well for Cain though. They have a lot of ore, and the armor and weapons that they gather can stay strictly in the Guild. It might mess things up a little as far as balance goes, but weapons at this level are so expensive that they would still only be equipping a few members every trip. The proliferation of Skill Books will likely make the biggest difference.

Assah has a great library, but the materials are pretty rare, so they don't spread too fast. Darklight Host has incredible luck getting what they need, and they work together much better than any other Guild on the continent, so highly skilled members will be much more common for them. Skills used properly can overcome an over-gearred opponent with relative ease, so there is a good chance that most opponents that would dare to go against the guild wouldn't even notice the gear.

"Have fun with the ore, and we will come to visit again next time we are in town." Cain waves goodbye to Aoi and leads his convoy back to the hotel.

Once they are settled back in the small room that the youkai managed to get them when they arrived, Cain gathers everyone together for a quick chat. "It seems that for myself and Evangeline at least, changing our forms will save a lot of headaches later on. So, Evangeline, what appearance would you prefer? Then I will consider opinions on how I should look for the duration of this trip. Elves and Beastkin are the most common species in the nearby areas marked on this map, but I do see some villages marked as mostly demons and some that are predominantly dwarves and gnomes.

We all know the Dwarves don't travel any more than they have to, not even here to the port where they could get more ore for their craft, so they're pretty much out. But an Elf or a Beastkin shouldn't be out of place anywhere we go."

Nemu's eyes light up at that one and Cain has a pretty good idea of what she is going to suggest, but he waits for Evangeline to choose first. He knows she loves being Seraphim, but they do stand out everywhere, and merging with her to avoid trouble would take a lot of fun out of the Journey. Plus, she's their healer. Not that they need a lot of healing, but still, she is a very good healer.

"I think I will try out being an avian beastkin for a change. I can take changing forms, but not being able to fly? I would go insane." Evangeline decides.

That makes sense. Once you're used to flying, it would feel like you were crippled to have to walk everywhere you go instead.

Cain contemplates the form he should choose for a while, and inspiration strikes him. There is a half beastkin, half-demon of the avian persuasion in his listings that he saw while searching for a skill one day. It has a bird head like the Record Keeper or Mysterious Disciple and the same blue feathered wings that Misha and the demons share. The one he has recorded is officially half Parrot Kin, with no name of the demonic ancestry, so that will do perfectly for Evangeline. They're even the same size, so he won't have to modify the form.

Once he has activated the ability and the change settles on Evangeline she begins to blink rapidly for a few seconds before adjusting.

"Being able to see things behind your head is weird. I can see a full circle. But now that I'm used to it this is pretty good. Plus I think I will still be able to fly pretty well."

The Seraphim spreads her wings and the other Companions smirk at the fact Cain subconsciously made them the same as Misha's in both color and shape, though these are a bit larger. The actual body Evangeline is in weighs much less than a human, since the Beastkin has hollow bones for easier flight. At Ancient Quality, strength isn't much of a consideration, but the lighter weight should help keep her maneuverability up close to the standard she is used to, even if she now only has one pair of wings.

"Since Evangeline is happy with her new form, does anyone have a suggestion for me?" Cain asks, looking forward to the entertainment of seeing what they come up with.

"Something big and sexy." Nemu blurts and Cain sees the form of Purrseus in his mind as she focuses on it.

"But not as furry as Nemu is thinking." Evangeline adds.

"But it still needs a tail." Vala suggests.

"Why don't we make him Vala's dad?" Laura teases, but the other companions all look at her like she's a genius.

"Yes, Big Daddy Blood Dancer. It would explain your strength and strange abilities. We just need to find you an ability to change your status from showing Ancient and nobody will question you being Duke Cain from the Central Continent." Nemu cheers and Cain laughs at her mental image of warm wings to curl up with. Her priorities never do change much.

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

## Chapter 403 388 The Perfect Disguise

Cain focuses on the desired form, a copy of Vala, with Bronze demonic skin, large leathery wings that fade to black towards the far edges, and a whip-like tail with a bone blade at the tip. He alters his face to look a lot like her, only more masculine, and changes his hair to the same long black dreadlocks with Golden bands around them.

Since Vala is already tall, Cain grows himself to 220 cm tall and adds a heavy dose of well-toned muscle. The cloven-hoofed feet take a second to get used to, but they're quite stable once he does. Cain switches his outfit to the Dark Elven suit in all black and Vala digs out a pair of sunglasses and puts them on his face.

Cain equips them and turns to the small mirror to look at himself. With the Golden rings in his hair and the gold plates on his wings that the gear he has equipped adds, he looks the part of a Demon Lord for sure.

"I like it. I should use this more often." Cain agrees, and Nemu snuggles up under his wing.

"Oh, this is nice. Your wings are even bigger than Vala's and they are so warm." The Felian purrs.

"That only leaves finding a skill that will convince others that this form is real. I think there should be one in the Spell Crafting book, I just need to find it."

There is no desk in this little room, and Cain doesn't want to be researching Spell Crafting in public, so he settles into the small chair where Vala was reading last night and opens the large tome that contains the learning materials for his new trade.

He finds a lead right away, and not far from the section he was already working on. It is called [I Walk Among Them] and it is supposed to keep species with keen senses from detecting your true nature. The spell itself isn't hard to learn, taking Cain only four hours to successfully complete, and he stores the hard copy in the storage chest inside his inventory.

This chest is mostly empty since it is intended as an overflow, but Cain notices that it has a wide variety of snacks and women's clothing inside it that he doesn't remember putting there. He did pass all the chests to the ladies a few days before they left though, so they must have left some random items in the spare chest. If nothing else, that will make Laura happy. Her own limited inventory has been giving her anxiety when the



snacks run low, despite the fact that she doesn't actually need to eat. Maybe they can go hunt some of the cat beasts that she thought looked tasty while they traverse the Awakened areas.

Cain activates the skill and sees that he gets an option for himself and all the Companions that are nearby separately. He sets Evangeline to Parrot Kin and himself to the generic 'Wrath Demon'. Many sizes and shapes of demons from the Wrath lineage show that way in the system, but they all have one thing in common, they are all older than the system and their particular lineage didn't have enough living members when the system activated to get a unique name of their own.

That way Vala could have been a Blood Dancer if her mother was one, and Cain can pull off the act of being her father without raising any suspicion. The Duke title isn't as easily hidden, being under the Rank instead of the Accomplishment category which can be hidden entirely or deactivated. Keeping others from seeing the Duke title would take a whole other skill, but at the very least, he now passes as a somewhat nondescript Wrath Demon Lord.

"Hey, that's pretty cool. Your status says Wrath Demon, but you have the same Life Leech Aura that I do." Vala exclaims, checking Cain over.

It seems there is more to a Mythic disguise than simply changing his status data. He also gained the essential Species Skill of the form he had chosen, allowing him to blend in perfectly with others of his supposed kin. For species with certain abilities, the lack of any one of them would be a dead giveaway that he was an imposter, a problem that Cain would usually solve with a merger, using a summon to gain the missing aura or talent to blend in. But with [I Walk Among Them] he doesn't need to bother with any of that anymore.

Cain catches a few hours of sleep before the sun comes up, with Nemu and Evangeline curled up against his sides under his wings for warmth. The sun streams straight at his face when it comes up though, so the nap is short-lived, under three hours. That's their cue to go grab breakfast and head out of town while everyone else is engrossed in the Final Round of the Beast class matches.

The fights are in the same location as last time, but more bleachers have been arranged all around the arena, holding what Cain suspects to be half the population of the town. All the shops they pass have placed signs up that they will be closed for the day, or are closing an hour before the matches start.

The guard thinks they are a bit strange to be leaving before the finals but knows not everyone can get tickets, so he doesn't give them any trouble as Cain leads his group out of town, with Evangeline happily taking to the sky to test out her new wings as they go, circled by the pixie sized Laura, who is intrigued by the shine and color of the bright blue bird feathers in the sunlight.

They leave the artificially rustic city behind them and begin walking down the rough dirt road, meeting a constant stream of local farmers heading into the city for the fights. No wonder there aren't enough tickets, everyone in the area wants a chance to come and see the last day. From what Cain can tell, it is a bit like a monthly festival for them. The city might be closed, but hundreds of stalls will be set up near the bleachers for those that can get in, selling everything you could want.

Stuffed animals are a big hit here, and Cain sends a mental message to Nila to bring fluffy textiles and stuffing the next time she comes to visit the Southern Continent since both are imported items to this region. They might not be nearly as valuable as the ores, but they are still in high demand and will sell out without issues.

It will be a few more days before they get to an awakened area, but first, there is a local attraction that the Cartographer marked on the map. A waterfall and pond that are supposed to have a mysterious healing aura to them. Looking at the tropical forest in that direction that replaces the worked fields around Musashi, just the view alone should be worth the visit. Plus, it would only be a few minutes off course. Not enough to delay their progress in any case, and a healing pond might just be the sort of place a man can pick up a quest.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

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The muddy black dirt road is cleared wide enough for two wagons to pass even long after they enter the tall ginkgo trees of the forest, marking it as a well-traveled trade route. The undergrowth looks like bamboo to Cain, which means that they must be clearing the area around the road fairly regularly just to prevent the other trees from getting overrun with the fast-growing bamboo.

The roar of the waterfall becomes obvious just after noon, but there are no hills in the area, so where the water is falling from is a mystery to them all. At least it is until it comes into view a few minutes after they have turned off the dirt path that serves as a road and begun making their way towards the noise.

A mighty river flows from further inland, passing into the mouth of a cavern system and falling thirty meters into a large pond before flowing away underground to meet the ocean. The walls of the cavern are covered in colorful layers of built-up minerals from



the centuries of falling water, and the floor of the cavern is rich with thick moss and flowers.

A few couples are gathered around at the top for a picnic, enjoying the cooling spray of the waterfall while they eat. They have most likely come from the nearby villages on their day off, and the appearance of Cain's eclectic group is both startling and exciting for them.

"Welcome. Did you hear about this place in the city? How are the fights this month? We heard that there was a huge demon that beat up Purrseus then just gave him the spot in the finals anyhow." A small Youkai girl asks, running away from her parents and the picnic they have set up, her black hair constantly dripping water and her clothes wet.

That makes Cain wonder if there is a way down into the cavern or if the girl is just a water elemental creature. It is hard to tell under the cover of the trees if her parents are similarly wet despite the warm afternoon, but the flow of the river is clearly too fast for a child to safely enter.

"It was an amazing fight. She was so fast that even the mighty Purrseus could hardly land a hit on her. She dodged and punched and then she grabbed him and threw him to the ground all \*BANG\*" Laura explains animatedly, flying around and using hand gestures to emphasize her point.

The little girl is enraptured with the dragon's explanation, and the two start talking over each other at a rapid pace, looking for and giving more details of the fight as needed. The parents are keeping a close eye on the child while Laura tells her story, only getting up to come over and retrieve her once the battle is finished and the two are giggling about the mighty warrior getting head pats.

"Thanks for entertaining her for a few minutes. Having such a high-energy child it is hard to get even a few minutes to yourself to eat." Her father explains, picking her up and throwing her into the air, water flying off her hair.

He is also dripping with water, so they are some form of elemental creature. What the system categorizes as youkai is a pretty varied group, from flying creatures like the tengu to some spirits, sentient undead, and a wide variety of elemental creatures. Cain is recording every youkai that he sees, as well as all the beastkin that he doesn't already have recorded. He doesn't have a youkai companion, and the Echoes have only just started on adding beastkin forms now that Nila has progressed, so Nemu is a long way from making it to Mythic status.

The couple from the other group having a picnic near the waterfall also comes over to chat while the enthusiastic father passes the little girl to his wife, with the two newcomers introducing themselves as the local Shrine Guardians, but not giving names. Cain looks over their abilities when he has them recorded and finds that the pair that looks like dwarves are actually stone dogs in their natural form and that this is a

transformation ability, like Cain's [Malleable Form], but on a smaller scale, only able to make various shapes the same volume as their natural form.

Cain hasn't seen much actual sign of religion, beyond some zealots, so the news of there even being a shrine to guard is a bit startling.

"Might I ask, which God is the Shrine dedicated to?" Cain pushes for a few answers from the Guardians.

"The spirit of life and rebirth. The Great Bunny." The Guardians answer proudly.

"I don't suppose that we could come to visit, could we? I am expecting children soon, and came to see if I could advance and find some new skills before they are born."

That makes all the locals happy. They explain that they worship the Great Bunny here, so all the families are large. The single little girl with the water elemental couple is one of the few single births in the village near the shrine.

"I think The Great Bunny might be smiling on our Guild as well." Vala laughs and Evangeline nods happily.

"First triplets and now twins? Multiple births are very uncommon on the Central Continent but the only two births we have seen so far among our members have been triplets and twins. Fast-growing demon children are a nightmare for a new mother." Evangeline adds.

"Oh, that is so true. Some of the demon species in the village grow up to full growth within only a handful of years. They are still big children at heart but fully grown. Unless you are used to them you can think their species is mischievous or troublemakers. But really, they are just young and energetic without knowledge of the outside world." The Guardians agree.

The village as they called it, is a small city by most standards, at least by population. Instead of being spread out, the entire village is made up of seven enormous buildings. Six very different mixed residential and industrial buildings that are twenty stories tall and hundreds of meters long are arrayed around a central temple. There are no single-family homes, but the large balconies suggest that not all the homes inside the buildings are lacking in spaciousness.

It takes Cain a few minutes before he realizes that there is a good reason for the design of the city, with no common theme between the designs of the six large buildings. Each of the structures seems to have a different climate inside and surrounding it. They are currently walking between the one with all the blacksmiths and other fire-related businesses on the lower levels and the one with the largest balconies, where Cain can see avian species taking off and landing, using the updrafts from the heat to their advantage.

"I see you understand. We don't all like the same environment, so the True Born and the transfers made this place to be a perfect home for everyone who came to worship the Great Bunny. Even the Ice Species have a home here, and there aren't many places on the continent that they fit in." The Guardians explain in eerie synchronicity.

"Oh, we learned about that. There is an island in the ocean covered in a thick blanket of ice and snow, where a large group of exiles lives. They explained the issues that those with incompatible elements face when trying to fit in with a tropical climate." Cain agrees.

"It is good to hear that you understand the necessity for everyone to have a home somewhere. Not all visitors see things that way, believing instead that everyone should adapt to a single standard and live uncomfortably at the average." The guardians tell him in a serious voice.

The Guardian leads them to the front steps of the temple and a young bunny kin girl with light gray ears that fold and flop at the top half comes running out to greet them, giving Cain a huge hug around the waist. Nobody is sure if these people are just extra friendly, or if it is a bunny thing since Daisy is also very physical.

"Change back. I saw you turn into a bunny in my visions, I know you can do it." She demands in an imperious voice, shocking everyone in hearing range. After all, why would a Wrath Demon be able to turn into a Beastkin of any sort?

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

## **Chapter 405 390 An Ancient Painting**

"Are you sure? It might mess up my disguise." Cain teases, petting the fluffy bunny ears.

"Yes. You make such an adorable bunny." She insists and the Companions give Cain a confused look, not having been present for Cain's trip to the past which the temple acolyte is basing her demands upon.

Cain activates [Malleable Form] while keeping [I Walk Among Them] active, shifting back into the mottled brown-furred form of Daisy, the former Royal Consort that they rescued from the Soul Stone.

The companions understand now and the clergy members visible within the temple look shocked to the core. Not only does the demon look like a Bunny, but the system also says he IS one. That simply should not be possible. But they are seeing it with their own

eyes. Not even the most advanced of detection skills can tell the difference between him and the real thing.

"Perfect, follow me, I will show you around the Temple." The small acolyte insists, grabbing Cain and Vala by the hands and pulling them towards the doors.

"Looks like we have gained an eager new escort if you had other duties to attend to," Cain tells the Guardians politely, and they wave him away, clearly used to such behavior.

"First, we will go to the Altar and say hello, and then I will show you the garden, and the shiny thing, and the pond." Their short journey has attracted even more small bunnies and Cain realizes that the Clergy of the Temple are all Bunny Kin of some sort.

The energy level in the building is a bit like a horde of Neffies loaded up on sugar and handed a new toy. How they get anything at all done is a mystery, but they must burn off that energy cleaning and tending the grounds at some point during the day because this place is beautiful.

It is all built of light pink colored local stone, a partially hollow pyramid with a large sacred site on top. This design is very familiar to Cain, the Eastern Continent has a Demon-filled dungeon with very similar temples, only the lower entrances to the ones in the dungeon are closed with stone and not open like these ones, and they lack all the windows and the bright pink ambiance. That might be a difference between deities, but it looks like the two sets of temples were either created by the same people or around the same era in history.

This one should be new though, or perhaps only the city around it is recently built. The stone of the floor is worn smooth from use, but with the frantic pace that the clerics keep, Cain can't tell if that took a long time to accomplish or not.

Their ten bunny kin acolyte escort has reached the Altar in the center of the bottom level, the roof opens all the way to the top of the temple, letting natural light shine down on the altar, which looks suspiciously like a four-post bed, mattress and all, but made of stone.

"Oh blessed Bunny, we beseech you for the gift of health for the growing children of our new friend and fertility for all of his companions." The clerics intone in unison, and Cain wonders if that might actually be properly called a blessing in the mind of some of his Guild Members. Certainly, Lickity is not quite ready for increased fertility at the moment.

The room bursts into bright lavender light, coming from a glowing orb over the altar, and all the acolytes cheer in victory.

"The Goddess has heard our prayers. You have her assurance that your children will be born healthy and strong. Very strong in fact, if the feeling I am getting is correct." Their lead guide informs them.

"Thank you, my Misha will appreciate it. They are our first, and having twins between different species was causing her a lot of worries and concerns that nobody really has an answer for." Cain thanks her.

"By the way, where are all the adult Clergy?" Evangeline asks, looking around and seeing only children gathered in the altar room to view the spectacle of the blessing.

"Oh, it is time for afternoon activities. All the adults will be busy for the next few hours, but after that, they will be coming out to check on the villagers and tend to the gardens. We can go visit the flowers now before they get crowded again."

Nemu tries and fails to entirely hide her laughter at the explicit implications of that explanation. If that's their daily routine, only the fertility goddess could keep the continent from being overrun with Bunny Kin. But there is no time to stop, the acolytes are all energy, leading them through the hallways, explaining every artifact and painting that they pass, until Cain catches sight of one with a familiar form.

"Wait, isn't that an ancient? Why is it glowing purple like that, was it blessed by the Goddess?" Cain asks, indicating the fresco painted on the roof.

"Oh, I know that one!" A teenaged male acolyte exclaims.

"That is a scene from the creation of the world before most of the living species were introduced. The legend says that the Ancients were pure magic given life before they had physical bodies. So they shaped themselves to better create at the will of the Gods." He explains patiently, at a practiced pace, which Cain assumes is part of their training to give tours of the temple.

It makes sense. The other legends he has heard say that the Ancients made most of the species, not the world itself. If they were originally pure Mana Elementals that evolved into living beings it would explain the strange forms that they picked. Mana often reaches out in tendrils when uncontrolled, which would become tentacles when solidified. It would also explain their immense magical power and a wide variety of their natural abilities. Mana is the core of almost everything in this world after all.

There are many other living beings in the picture, but it isn't clear if they existed at the start, or if they were created by the purple being in the picture. A camera would be a blessing on it right now, but since Cain doesn't have any similar skill, that will have to wait.

No, on second thought, he can have a skill like that. Cain merges with one of the artists from the Guild that can create an instant painting of what they see. He doesn't have a

proper canvas, but he has a collection of paper for inscription and Spell Crafting, so he grabs one of the thickest sheets he has and creates an image of the scene on the roof.

The clerics are greatly interested in that ability, since copying texts and making paintings for the faithful is part of their duties.

"Once we have seen the Garden, I will make a book that contains the skill I just used, and then we can play a guessing game. Whoever wins can have the skill." Cain informs them. The skill is usable by anyone that doesn't already have a secondary skill tree, putting them on the artist's path, or by those who already practice art-based skills.

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

## Chapter 406 391

The trip to the garden has become much more lively after that promise. New skills are not so easy to find, especially for acolytes who never leave the temple compound until their training is finished. The Bunny Kin don't like to fight, so they don't do a lot of dungeons and therefore they don't come across a lot of new things that aren't already in the temple library.

The temple village is not all that remote, only a single day from the shore, but it is well away from the main road, Cain followed the Guardians straight through the woods to get here, and he didn't see any roads leading out of town when they came in. There likely is one on the other side of the village, since it is clear that they have no fields here, so goods must be coming in, but it doesn't seem to be a major route. For all Cain knows that could be intentional. Many temples are built in the mountains or other similarly hard-to-reach locations to preserve their isolation and sanctity.

The Garden is magnificent, with the flowers and herbs arranged by scent, to complement each other and give every section of the garden a distinct scent that will slowly shift as the seasons turn and the plants pass through their life cycle. Very fitting for a goddess of life.

"These white-flowered ones mark the beginning of the fruits section. Have you ever seen anything like it?" Their tiny tour guide asks.

"Actually, my hometown, Long Fang City, grows edible plants everywhere. Every home, all the ditches, the parks, even the lawns of the manor are all edible herbs and plants." Cain explains.



The looks on their faces say that they are far more interested in a "City Made of Food" than the promised reward of a skill book, so Cain takes a seat on the grass, surrounded by children, and begins his retelling of how he arrived in Long Fang Valley, defending the farms from attackers, the design and layout of the town, the notable people he has met, and at their insistence, all about Misha. The story takes so long that the gardeners have come out to maintain the grounds by the time he is finished.

"Priestess, do you want to join in on our game? Duke Cain promised that he would make us a skill book and whoever won the guessing game could learn to make pictures on paper instantly from whatever they were looking at." One of the acolytes invites the garden crew.

"Now, little Bun, a female Duke is called a Dutchess. Keep that in mind, you don't want to be rude." The priest that was sweeping the walkway explains.

"I am actually a Duke, I just have an ability that lets me transform. One of the acolytes happened to see it in a vision and recognized me when I entered the temple complex." Cain explains, changing back into the large demonic form that he arrived in.

"Well, that is a new one. Even the system said that you were Bunny Kin." The man mutters, coming over to sniff at and inspect Cain.

"He has the aura of the species that he is pretending to be and everything, it's pretty awesome. But that is the game? How do we play? Is there a player limit?" Their pale-eared tour guide asks.

"There isn't really a limit, but those who have a trade already can't win, because they can't use the book unless they are currently practicing artists, and the book will disappear not long after creation if it is not used." Laura explains, landing on Cain's shoulder.

That position is a bit unstable, and Laura wonders if Elmira was onto something with her Pocket Pixie traveling plan. Perhaps Cain would be willing to pad up a pocket in his suit for her to travel in?

"We will play, and if one of us wins we will give it to our personal acolyte." The gardener informs them, and a few of the kids cheer.

"Alright, the rules are simple. I am going to make a Skill Book. You are going to guess how many words are in it. Once we have all the guesses I will begin. Whoever is closest will be the winner." Cain explains.

That should keep the hyper creatures from getting bored while he writes a short novel with his Inscription skill. The skill means he doesn't have to physically write every word, he only needs to pass his writing utensil over the page while focusing on what it should

say. The whole process will take about ten minutes still, since the [Instant Art] Skill is B Ranked and the book will be close to an actual novel.

There is a lot of discussion about the books they have already seen, how long they are, and then how many words should fit on a page, then a heated discussion about Cain's handwriting before any of them are ready to make their prediction.

"I bet twelve thousand and sixteen." The tour guide announces, beginning the process.

One of the gardeners has helpfully brought out paper to keep track of the guesses since he knows how to identify everyone. The acolytes don't seem to use names, even among each other, so Cain is having a terrible time trying to tell them apart, other than by appearance.

The guesses still have a pretty wide range, from six thousand to thirty thousand words, with the highest wagers deciding that such a useful skill must of course be a high-quality one, and therefore very long and hard to copy out into a skill book.

The older cleric trainees learn a wide variety of life skills, including inscription, so the process isn't unknown to them, but the writing desk is a new one to them. The students are eager to get their hands on one, but finding out from the helpful Laura that it is a lost relic of the Spider Goddess defeats their plans to obtain an inscription desk of their own.

The clergy thinks it might be possible that the residents of New Muzz would still have them, but if they could make them, surely they would have told someone right? The Spider Goddess and the Great Bunny are good friends after all.

Cain begins writing as everyone watches. The first few minutes are not all that exciting, but once he reaches the one hundred and fifty-page mark and surpasses the lowest of the guesses do things start to heat up. Cain isn't giving them any hints as to how much he has left to write, so all they can do is get excited and cheer for him to be done as he reaches their own wagers.

Cain reaches the final word and sets his pen down with a smile. "Twelve Thousand and Nine words."

The tour guide cheers and begins bouncing on the spot. "I win, I win, only off by seven words."

One of the gardeners laughs and picks her up to spin her around in the air. He had guessed the result to be exactly twelve thousand words, only off by a single word from a tie for victory.

"Now your path is set. You will be one of the Art Guides, making pictures for the pilgrims and faithful to take home with them." The elder cleric declares and the little bunny's droopy gray ears practically vibrate in excitement.

"It's one of the best jobs in the temple. The artists are busy all day, so they don't get assigned cleaning duty." One of the other acolytes informs Cain quietly.

That makes sense. Everyone wants a keepsake, and with so many historical paintings and pieces of art in the building. Of course, they would want an image of something to take home. Then there are all the images of the Great Bunny that the faithful will ask for. It doesn't seem like an idle profession, but perhaps one that is more enjoyable than cleaning floors and pulling weeds from the huge gardens and flower beds of the temple.

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

## Chapter 407 392

Cain hands over the book, which the clerics take a moment to admire before the acolyte reads it and learns the skill. The first thing she uses it for is to take a page from Cain's desk and recreate the scene currently in the garden, with all her friends happily celebrating and the flowers in full bloom.

The result is a small but beautiful painting on a cheap sheet of paper. To Cain, it is more like a print, with the image lying smoothly on the sheet, but it is not quite photo-realistic, having the style and slight blurriness of an oil painting. That's more than enough to impress the other acolytes though, and now she doesn't need to fear for her future in the clergy. She has the perfect skill for her newly assigned role.

"Thank you so much. What did you want to see next? I can show you around all day if you like. But I can't leave the temple grounds, so maybe it won't take all day." The acolyte stops halfway through her excited monologue when she realizes that she is rather limited in places she is actually allowed to go.

"Why don't we start with a name? If you're going to show us all the amazing things in the temple, I can't keep calling you acolyte, and calling you Bunny doesn't really narrow down who I am talking to." Cain jokes, making the youngsters laugh.

"Until we take our vows, we're all Acolyte though. It stops us from using family connections to try to get ahead of the others during training. Since our parents are all clergy of the Great Bunny, they all hold positions here, which could give a big advantage if they played favorites." One of the others explains.

That makes a lot of sense, it would turn into a nightmare of nepotism if parents in senior positions could nominate their own children for jobs.

"So you don't know who your parents are?" Vala asks, a bit confused.

"Not until later. I mean, sometimes you can just guess, like the bright white-eared priestess with the purple eyes. Her mom has just the same coloration, but nobody else does, so it was pretty obvious. But for most of us, it doesn't matter. We're servants of the Great Bunny before anything else." Their tour guide explains.

"Once we finish our training, we are given a name by the head of the first department that we work in, as well as information about our parents. If we don't like the name we can ask for a better one from the high Priestess." Strange, but fair, Cain supposes.

"I am Jack, and that is Jill, my twin. On the far side are Lara and Leera." The gardener explains, pointing to a few of the nearest adults.

"Most of the names start with L for some reason. I am not sure why, but the clerics all like names that start with L." Jill points out, and the acolytes all nod in agreement.

"Since we're here and the weather is good, how about story time? We would love to know about the area. Things like the story of the mystic healing pond by the waterfall, or any other local legends or attractions that might not be on our guide map. I think it's a pretty good map, but I'll bet you all know way more stories than this simple map does." Evangeline asks, using her wing to stroke the head of an acolyte, who is enraptured with her feathers.

As if she said the magic word, everyone gathers in a semi-circle by a tree and takes a seat, leading Cain's group to places of honor front and center. More and more adults come out over the next few minutes, all freshly showered and ready to start their tasks for the afternoon, until they realize that it's story time.

"We will start today's lesson with the story of the healing pond. From the beginning, since we have visitors." The cleric begins.

"Legends tell us that the Dragons weren't always on this world. According to the oldest of stories, they came to us to assist the Ancients during the war between the Gods, using their mighty magic to travel from the world known to us as the Green Star, when the two planets were at their closest. Once every three hundred years, the two worlds pass so close that the mightiest of Dragons can pass between the two with a portal, and that is what they did, coming to aid the Ancients in their fight. But they didn't come alone, their arrival brought monsters with them.

The dragons did not mind, for to them the monsters are merely food. But to the weaker species of this world, it was terror. Not all the dragons were uncaring though, and after the war, many helped the people keep the monsters under control and away from the cities until the mortal species learned to defend themselves.

One such friendly dragon was said to be a mighty green forest dragon, who made his home in the caverns under our very feet. He saw that the people struggled as he slept through the ages, recovering from a mighty blow taken from the invading gods. So he blessed the cave with his aura, soaking the healing of the Forest Dragons into the very stone of the cavern and the waters that have poured across them.

The dragon is long gone now, perhaps traveling, and perhaps gone home to the Green Star, but the magic of the Cavern remains, giving off a healing aura that we can rely upon to heal weary bones and rest our souls should they need it."

To Cain that sounds like the dragon left an artifact or a piece of a divine being behind in the Cavern, perhaps hidden deep in the rock. Seraphim feathers have a similar effect on a much smaller scale. But to remove it would remove the effect, and it sounds like a lot of the locals rely on the cavern.

"Can you get to the cavern itself without having to fly back out?" Laura asks, enjoying the story.

"Indeed you can. It is a long walk, over two kilometers from the nearest surface entrance that isn't the waterfall, but the whole region is riddled with caverns and the route to the healing pond is well marked. There are guards hidden near the cavern to make sure nobody tampers with it, but the Pixies don't come out often unless there is a problem." The storyteller explains.

"They might like you a lot." One of the acolytes giggles, and Laura gives them a questioning look.

"On account of the fact you're half pixie and the other half dragon of course." The acolyte says as if it is the most obvious thing in the world.

"A common misconception. She is a full-blooded Opal Prismatic Dragon, but she loves sweet things so much, she made herself pixie-sized so that she could spend more time enjoying them without running out." Nemu explains, and the acolytes drag her up to the speaker's position.

No way are they letting her just drop a bit of information like that and not tell the whole story. A Pixie-sized dragon is a wondrous thing, and the story of her adventures and deeds would be a great tale to add to their lessons. Which lesson depends on how the story goes, but the elders are thinking something along the lines of working to make yourself into what will make your life better.

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

## Chapter 408 393

Nemu, being a bard at heart, tells a wonderful tale of friendship, sharing, and kindness that makes the reality of Laura's obsession with sugary treats seem like a minor side effect of her gentle nature and desire to share what she has with others. In fact, she tells it so well, that she brings many of the gathered acolytes to happy tears.

The senior clerics are no less happy to have the new story, and Cain can see that one of them took the time to write it down word for word, so they could tell it again later.

The next story the clerics tell is of the awakened zone just inland of them, a cautionary tale about the purple leopards and their love of hunting bunnies. It seems like one they tell often to keep young acolytes in line, but behind the story, Cain gathers detailed information about the region, how to avoid running into the beasts, and more importantly to him, how to find them. For he is not trying to avoid trouble like the gentle-hearted clerics, he is looking for adventure and a way to keep advancing.

Following that, is another tale of the Awakened zone. This one is a tale from the Great War between the species, a historical retelling of how the zone came to exist.

"Before the war, the forest was calm and peaceful, home to the children of the Great Bunny, and the children of the Goddess of Reincarnation. The children of life and those born again into a second body when they reach adulthood. The werewolves love to chase bunnies, it is in their nature, but before the war, they did not harm them, only chased them until they were tired and happy.

That all changed when the madness of the war began. The carnivores became increasingly aggressive until the werewolf leaders had to ban the ceremonial hunts altogether. It was a great loss for all beastkin, for it ended centuries of tradition and alliance in the name of safety.

The mighty armies of the Beastkin races went to war with the elves, leaving the forests empty and unguarded. That let the monsters loose, with nobody here to stop them but the children of the Great Bunny.

Then the Demon Armies appeared, seeking to put an end to all of the senseless battles and the madness that had befallen the world. Their Ancient King had a solution, but it was seen as madness to most others. Only the Great Bunny's High Priestess and a single Seraphim Elder agreed with him that it should be tried.

But as the death toll rose, more and more leaders joined their side and finally, the great magic was cast, breaking the hold that the madness had over the world. But they alone were not enough, and the curse on the world didn't fully break. Instead, it was concentrated, and the spots of greatest madness were trapped in a time loop. One



single day from midnight to midnight, the time it took to cast the spell that was supposed to break the hold of madness on the world. Those spots became the dungeons that we know today.

The madness was strong in the awakened areas, as were the residents, but the awakened areas were too large to concentrate the curse into a dungeon. So the curse of madness never broke in the lands claimed by the Awakened, instead, the spell locked them away so that only those powerful or mad enough could enter, and none that were inside could leave."

The cleric pauses his story to take a short drink of water, and Cain works to understand the story. It is different than what they had heard on the Central Continent. Similar, but not quite the same. If this version of history is correct, only a handful of people in the world ever knew the whole story, while the rest of the world just did their best to piece together what happened and come up with an explanation.

"So there are no dungeons inside the Awakened areas?" Cain asks, looking for more answers.

"I am told that there are now, but that they are not permanent. Great battles inside the Awakened areas can cause a time loop for a short time, usually only once or twice, before the region stabilizes again."

That sounds a bit like the power level of the battles has gotten so out of hand that it is almost enough to destabilize the spell that lingers over the region, which would be very bad for the unawakened outside of the zones. Even a short breach that lets crazed monsters at the awakened level out would be on par with a natural disaster.

"Are there many cities inside the awakened zones?" Vala asks, finding the important point that they had all missed.

"Actually, yes. The demons know a way to keep the residents of their cities from going mad, so they have quite a few awakened cities, some of which are built around pre-war ruins. Nobody knows what they were looking for, but they searched the area for hundreds of years before the war while the madness grew without finding it before they seemed to give up and just settle into normal life."

That one Cain does have an answer to. Aggron, the grandfather of the current Demon King Aggramor, was looking for him, after Cain finished his quest and was pulled back to this point in time, leaving the Demon King with an aging and very mortal Gnomish wife that he wanted to save. The old man had said that he searched the end of the world looking for Cain after he found that note in the ruins by old Muzz.

But that also means that the Puppet he freed from servitude, the one that has the contents of the Library from the fallen ruins, should actually be somewhere in this

section of the Southern Continent. Even more than a quest to find an advanced class, finding her and the books on raising Ancient children would be amazing.

That is a lot of information for one day, even if they are all stories meant to teach acolytes about the world around them, and it is a relief when the next few stories are all just children's stories and local legends about the past. They keep it up until it gets too dark to properly see the speaker, then they light a small brazier and begin telling ghost stories until the acolytes fall asleep, piled all over their guests.

"We're fine here, you can come to retrieve us in the morning when the acolytes need to start their day," Cain informs their hosts quietly, relaxing in the soft clover of the gardens, surrounded by the smell of hydrangeas and the herbal soap the bunnies use.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

## Chapter 409 394

Sleeping in was never an option here in the Temple of the Great Bunny. The moment the sun comes up over the horizon, Chaos reigns around the pink quartz pyramid. Everyone has duties to take care of before breakfast is served, the early morning prayers will start soon, and the local faithful will be gathering in front of the temple for the daily blessing.

While the afternoon was fairly casual, first thing in the morning is peak time for the Temple of the Great Bunny. It is organized though, with everyone knowing what they need to do and Cain watches in fascination while the bunnies work.

"Do you think it is possible that they have full-duplex hearing?" he asks his companions, but they all just look confused.

"What I mean is, they can process multiple sounds while still speaking. Humans stop talking to listen, but the bunnies seem to hold multiple conversations at once, both speaking and listening at the same time." Cain isn't actually having any trouble following it, but that doesn't make it seem any less unusual to his human-attuned sensibilities.

"Dragons are the same way." Laura agrees before covering Nemu's mouth so she can't make a joke about that being a Laura-specific trait relating to talking too much. Nemu has insisted for a long time that during her first transformation, Laura's pixie aspects manifested because she talks so much, like the sugar-loving fae, and not because she loves food so much, like the dragon herself insists.

"Are you coming for the sermon? Today is a good one, about taking care of crops so they grow well. Technically, that is the nature god's domain, but her priestesses aren't here, so we cover all living things." The pale gray-eared acolyte from yesterday greets Cain as he wakes up, with her nose inches from his face.

"It's just like home. Except furry instead of scaly." Cain laughs, picking up the acolyte as he stands up.

"Except she didn't stare at you, waiting for you to wake up." Vala points out.

"Yes, we will join you all for the sermon. Lead the way, young acolyte." Cain instructs, and the bunny simply points in the right direction instead of getting down to walk on her own.

"Yup, just like home. I swear you have some sort of strange magnetism that makes small creatures want to be carried. Everywhere you go you're carrying someone." Laura jokes from his shoulder before sliding down to make herself comfortable in his shirt pocket.

Elmira definitely had the right idea, the pocket is a great way to travel.

They arrive at the back of the group of locals, who all pat the acolyte's head as they pass. There are no chairs or anything, instead, everyone just takes a seat on the lawn to wait for the sermon to begin. Many of them have brought blankets and picnic baskets to have their breakfast while they wait, and small children run wild all over the clearing.

This is not what Cain was thinking when he heard the word temple. It's more like a daycare center, or a community cookout than anything else. None of the stuffiness or judgemental sorts that Cain heard were normal in such settings. Part of that could just be that everyone knows everyone, but a large portion is definitely due to the clergy, who have started bringing around bowls of some sort of oatmeal.

"You need to try the food. They put Cinnamon and bomb fruit in it and it's really good." Their hostess informs them, taking an armload of bowls to pass out.

Cain has never heard of a bomb fruit, but going by taste, it is a form of pear. There is also coconut milk in the mix, making it creamy and fruity. The fact that breakfast was going to be vegan was just a given, since bunnies don't eat meat, but the ingenuity of their food options still startles him.

"How does the temple obtain all these things, since you don't grow them locally?" Evangeline asks.

The acolyte that is passing by with empty bowls from the first group to eat smiles. "Oh, we trade for them. We have alchemists and inscriptionists among us, and they make

things to trade with others to get food and clothing for us. The donations we get at the temple go to keeping up the temple itself, as well as the grounds."

"Yeah, the potions that we make are really popular. There is a fertility pill that only we know how to make that almost guarantees children. I'm told they are very expensive to buy, and that supplies most of our food." another acolyte agrees.

The Goddess of Life taught them a recipe for a pregnancy pill? Totally predictable, but very useful to a lot of species that have trouble in that department. Especially the dragons, who not only have issues, but their eggs often take years to hatch even if they are successful.

"Welcome everyone to the morning sermon, led by Senior Lars." One of the clerics introduces today's speaker, who launches into a long-winded story about protecting crops from pests and the best times to plant. It is all told as an anecdote, but it is evident from the sheer amount of information that the delivery is to help everyone remember the essentials of the lesson.

If you sat through a childhood of these ultra informative lectures, you could go anywhere in the world and have a good chance at making a life for yourself. Other than a few mentions of the joys of family, their Goddess doesn't really factor into the story, it is all about farming.

"Well, that was unexpected, but I feel like I learned something today." Cain jokes, standing up with the rest when the sermon is over.

The plan for the day is to head into the Awakened zone that is closest to them. Last night's stories gave a rather detailed route to the nearest demon city inside the zone, as well as advice on how to get there safely, that Cain intends to deliberately ignore in favor of trying to find purple leopards so Laura can find out if they actually do taste good. If they do, he will bring some as a gift for the demons they meet along the way. If they are like the ones on the central continent, they will appreciate a visitor not coming empty-handed. Gifts for the host are considered polite, though if he makes it into the city in a single day he could just stay at an inn.

"Do you know the deal with the head pats?" Vala asks, watching everyone rub the acolytes' heads as they pass.

"If it's the same as the Central Continent, you pat the bunnies for good luck. There is a story of a blessed bunny that causes a healing effect if you make it happy." Cain jokes and their guide stares at him in shock.

"The vision... It was you... we have endured two centuries of overly friendly visitors petting us because you didn't want to tell people you had a healing aura..." She blurts out.

"I don't know what you mean. Surely I didn't pretend to be a cleric of the Great Bunny and heal random people as I walked through the Central Continent towards the dwarven cities in the mountains." Cain disagrees, and she just keeps staring, trying to process what she saw in her vision with the reality that is standing in front of her.

"Even if I did, it really helped out, didn't it? Look how much everyone enjoys it. Plus, who knows, it might really trigger a healing aura in someone."

That gives Cain a great idea. He should give someone a healing aura and blame it on the head pats. The bunnies would never live it down if it happened again. Cain is just about to act on his idea when Evangeline stops him, shaking her head and looking at the acolyte who is now intently analyzing him. The Seraphim has a point. It wouldn't be nearly as awesome if he did it as if it happened on its own. Instead, he should leave behind a healing book. If one of the acolytes triggers an advanced healing class the aura would likely happen naturally.

"How about I make one more book before we go? You have a group of healers and midwives right? And they have acolyte trainees?" he asks their suspicious host whose face lights up in happiness to be talking about the core functions of the temple.

"We do, we do, follow me this way." She insists, before beginning a story about how they picked their location in a shop inside one of the large buildings that make up the village.

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

## Chapter 410 395

Cain takes the few minutes he needs to merge with a copy of Kone and write out the advanced Druid-only spell [Area Heal] before they leave the temple compound and head out to see the spot where the healers that come from the temple do most of their work. The building is one with a fairly average climate, though it has a smell of stone and ozone like the high mountains. The open front room has dozens of healers of various specialties assembled as well as their assistants and trainees, all getting ready for the first meetings of the morning, both here and at their patient's homes.

This is one of the professions that actually travel outside the village, visiting farmers and others who might need their help in the region, and the primary reason that the stories of the dangers of the awakened zone are told so often. Both to train their new healers in

the danger of the outside world and to encourage others to act safely, to reduce the healer's workload.

Cain stops by the door and watches, looking for a suitable candidate. It doesn't take long, because one particular bunny stands out from the rest. He is almost to adulthood, well beyond the age when he would have normally activated a system, and he is holding a magical sewing needle in his hand. If he had the potential, that would have activated his class options.

,m Before the day has officially started, he is practicing his suture technique, one of the handy first aid skills that will reduce bleeding and makes the healing easier or can even save the injured person's life if nobody with a system is around. Cain strides over to the diligent acolyte with the book in hand and a smile on his face.

"I have decided, you should use this book." He says, handing it over without elaboration.

The young man looks confused, but opens the book anyhow, automatically activating it and making it disappear. His face goes blank as the system interface opens for him, just as Cain hoped. Having one healing spell is better than no healing spells, but being stuck with no system and one spell, he wouldn't be able to cast it very often.

His sudden immobility has attracted the attention of his teacher, a burly older bunny kin woman with jet black ears who comes over to tell him off until Vala stops her.

"The boss gave him a skill as a gift and it looks like it activated the system for him." The demon explains, catching the attention of the other healers.

"Why would he do that? Skill books are exceptionally precious, especially healing ones. Nobody gives them out without expecting something in return." The practical woman states in a serious voice.

"Oh, he wants something, but it won't cost anything. I am pretty sure that this is more in the nature of a practical joke than an act of charity." The pale-eared acolyte escort giggles softly, watching her compatriot gain a class.

She gained the Truth Seer class a few months ago, and one of her first visions was of Cain in the past. Since then she has only had a few more visions, but they have all been about past events that have been misunderstood in the current time.

The first patients of the day have come in while they were waiting, a young mother with sick children, and a young worker with a broken hand. The acolyte looks around, finally able to see again now that the class selection is finished, and notices they are open for business. He focuses hard and casts [Area Heal] bringing everyone in the room up to near peak condition.



The skill is very powerful, but he is still level 1 after all, and the healing is based on INT.

It's enough for the others, and the patients though. They all crowd around him rubbing his ears for luck. All the companions and the acolyte turn to Cain with a smirk on their faces.

"So that was your grand plan? Give someone area healing to make everyone pat their head because I complained about you doing it?" The acolyte asks.

"Oh no, nothing so simple. There is a very good chance that he is going to activate the [Healing Aura] skill soon, either naturally or through a quest. If the Great Bunny smiles on him, he will recreate the legend of petting bunnies for healing." Cain declares proudly, making the healers burst into laughter.

"Do you perhaps follow the Laughing God? That seems like the sort of thing he would enjoy." The matronly senior healer asks.

"We have an understanding, I believe." Cain agrees, not going into details on all the strange and amazing things that have happened since he arrived in this world.

"We should get going soon though if we are going to get into the Awakened areas today and start our search," Vala suggests, seeing that it will be a while before the healers recover and finish congratulating the member that they thought would never gain a class.

"Good point, come along little bunny. We will drop you at home on our way out of town. Just keep those visions of yours active and you might see us again, we put a lot of effort into keeping life interesting." Cain declares, leading the way back to the temple.

There is no exit to the city on the side closest to the awakened area, at least not one with a path, so they simply head straight out into the bamboo forest that separates the temple from the awakened zone. There are a lot of people in the forests near the village, harvesting the bamboo for a wide variety of uses, knowing that it will grow back in a single season to the point that it can be harvested again.

Further in the bamboo gets much larger, until near dark it gives way to a coniferous forest that has a rather sinister feeling. They must have entered the awakened area without noticing. For some reason, Cain thought it would be like a physical barrier, either visible or something that he could feel. Instead, the barrier was marked by a change in the trees and the feeling in the air.

There are no signs of civilization anywhere near them, and Cain realizes that the scale on the map they gained from the temple is much different than the one that they got from the City. They only made it half as far as Cain was expecting them to cover in a day. That is both good and bad news though. Good because it gives them more time to hunt awakened beasts, bad because now they need to set up camp in the wilderness.

A few more minutes brings them to a small hill with a clearing, so they set up out in the open where they can see anything that approaches. That leaves them open to flying monsters, but Vala and Laura have an eye open for them and can intercept if necessary.

Before settling into sleep, Cain grants his companions the [Crushing Tentacles] ability, so they will all have a ranged Mythic attack and control ability if they are attacked. The bunnies couldn't tell them much about the difference in durability between the ranks, only about the damage reduction that he already knew. Only an actual fight will tell him the difference.

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

## Chapter 411 396 Rude Awakening

Setting up camp in the open might have been a mistake, Cain realized a few hours later, when they were attacked for the third time. The first two were just Epic Quality rodents, some sort of badger that didn't exist on the central continent. But this time there is a Mythic Quality griffin circling the camp, looking for an opening.

It is very obvious that the creatures here are mostly nocturnal, and that the madness is worse in the dark. They heard a few creatures during the daylight hours, but they weren't nearly this aggressive. Cain is tempted to just hit the annoying creature with a fireball, but lighting up the sky with a Mythic spell seems like a particularly bad idea. The tentacles are surrounded in shadows, and much better suited to the night, but the accursed griffin won't get close enough for the tentacles to hit it.

That could be categorized as a good way to defend a camp while he sleeps, but the creature is a loud one, and he is concerned that it might draw even more predators to them. It isn't the only loud creature of the night though, his hearing is picking up dozens of chittering, squawking, and howling creatures within the woods.

"You know what, I'm tired of waiting," Cain mutters, launching a Mythic Quality fireball into the air, setting the griffin's golden feathered wings on fire and forcing it to the ground where the tentacles wrap it up tight and crush the life from the half-lion monster.

"Much better. The noise was getting to me." Vala agrees as the monster dies and the area goes quiet.

It feels like the other monsters in the area are trying to understand what just happened, with the unexpected death of one of the area's top predators. Once they do, the fighting begins. With a mythic beast dead, an area is open for the other Ancient and Mythic

beasts to claim as their own hunting territory. This is a process that happens multiple times a year, with new advancements wanting more territory, and the older or injured ones being picked off to make way for their replacements.

Cain and his companions aren't going to hang around for the whole process though, they are going to pack up their camp at first light and head for a village marked on the map as being mostly full of demons and relatively friendly.

As the sun starts to come up the noise in the forest begins to die down to an ominous silence and Cain leads the group out. Laura takes to the air to try to find any tasty-looking creatures that might be in the vicinity, with the added benefit of being able to find them a trail through the woods that seems to lead towards the village that they are headed for. It is a winding route, but it should meet up with the road that leads to the temple somewhere outside the awakened zone, just as described.

[Turn left 30 degrees and transform into an ancient. I think your aura will make this easier.] Laura declares, and Cain complies, altering their course to meet up with the dragon, now in her majestic draconic form. She is only a few minutes away, and Cain's aura herds the leopards directly to where she has transformed back into dragon form and is waiting for them.

The creatures were much faster than Laura anticipated, and with the thick foliage, she couldn't chase them in dragon form and didn't want to freeze them with her breath. Despite being an Ice Element dragon, she isn't a fan of meat popsicles.

Her razor-sharp claws manage to snag two of the pack on their way by, one for now and one for later she declares while she quickly skins them and rinses the hides in a nearby puddle.

"Keep the fur. It's pretty, and it is likely worth something," she announces, giving her very best pleading look to convince Vala to make a fire to cook her catch.

They might have a destination, but they aren't in a huge hurry, so Vala makes a small fire to cook a sample so the dragon can tell if the big cats are as good as she thought they looked. They certainly smell that good, which is unexpected. Predators are usually stringy and gamey, but these smell sweet and the roasted meat crumbles in her claws. Cain steals a bite, finding that it tastes much like pineapple pork, and decides that they need to hunt even more of the leopards at some point, as well as taking the time to check any other beasts they fight.

If all awakened creatures taste entirely different than their unawakened counterparts, who knows what might actually be a really tasty delicacy?

The majority of the meat is stored in Cain's inventory, and the group heads back to the trail and onwards to the demon village. The same way that the madness snuck up on

them when they entered the awakened area, it fades away as they approach the farms of the village, doing their best to look nonthreatening.

With a couple of demons in the group, at least they're not too strange-looking for the area, and the farmers only seem a bit startled to see visitors.

"Greetings, we were headed for the city that should be almost straight south of here. Might you be able to tell us how the road that way is?" Cain asks the first demon that is close enough to comfortably chat with.

"The road itself is good, but you will want to wait and leave at first light. The crazed are pretty bad along the road. They're Bandits that have been out in the madness for too long and have started to mutate and lose their minds. They are bad news for any sort of traveler, even adventurers like yourselves. If you've got something for the soup pot, I've got a nice barn with a soft straw pile you can have for the evening." the farmer suggests.

It's still pretty early in the day to be stopping, but fighting crazy bandits all night doesn't sound like a lot of fun either. "Sure, we caught a purple leopard earlier and have some meat for the soup."

The farmer looks confused and Cain realizes that he doesn't know the proper local name for the creatures, so the man has no idea what he's talking about.

"Large feline monster with purple fur, white circular marking, about 3 meters tall and eight meters long?" Cain asks, hoping that the description makes sense to the farmer.

"Oh, you must have some skill if you actually managed to catch one. They are unnaturally fast, even the dragons have a hard time hunting them." The farmer confirms, looking at the group with a bit more appreciation for their skills.

"It's all in the technique. Like flushing out feral hogs, have most of the group spread out and chase them towards where your hunters are waiting and you can get some as they pass by." Vala explains.

"You trapped them between you? That's a bit too crazy for my blood. We set out traps along the more traveled beast routes, but something like that will just tear them apart and remove the trap from their legs." The farmer says, shaking his head at what he thinks is the bravery of the oblivious.

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

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The farmer they met was an Obsession demon, with light pink skin and black hair, so somehow, Cain had just assumed that his wife would be the same. That was not the case at all, and they were greeted by a 2.4-meter tall wrath demon in a flowered dress, sporting biceps the size of Cain's chest. Wingless and pale white, the lady of the house was roughly cubic, as wide and thick as she was tall.

Now that they had determined that the visitors weren't a direct threat, the children were released to play in the yard again, small pink forms running outside to continue a game of catch in the yard.

"Now lookie here, you brought home nobles and I don't have a single thing to wear. You might could have sent them across to the Davos house. His wife is all fancy like from the city." The large demon complains in a thick accent but doesn't stop her work.

"Now darling, don't be like that. They are travelers, I'm certain they don't mind that a farm wife dresses like a farm wife. Look at them, they are all in leather and armor like adventurers should be." The older farmer tries to console her, but she sends him a glare that sends him running back outside.

"Grab a spot anywhere and I'll get the soup started in a few minutes." She sighs, brushing flour and dirt off her dress.

"We brought some meat for the stew. From the big purple cats with the white spots. I don't properly know what they're called here. The system called them Purple Leopards." Cain explains, pulling a 3-kilo chunk of meat from his inventory.

"Yeah, that's them. The locals just call them howlers for that noise they make when they're in rut. Tasty too, are you sure you want to waste such good meat on the likes of us?"

The companions all laugh and Cain shakes his head. "These ladies will be eating too, and they would never forgive me if I skimmed on their dinner."

That makes the big woman give a bellowing laugh that shakes the windows in the house and causes all the children to turn and look back at the kitchen. Getting a mother of twelve to laugh like that was no easy feat when she is a Wrath Demon. She takes the roast from Cain and slaps it down on the cutting board to start slicing it for the stew though, getting the bone out to soak in the nearly boiling pot.

"So you're headed for the city, are you? Or just wandering about looking for things to hunt?" She asks as she works, deftly slicing the meat into thin pieces that will cook quickly and turn tender.

"We're looking for a couple of things. Mostly a chance to upgrade classes, but also an Elf that should have a very old library from the Central Continent. I don't know if she has it hidden or available for others, but it predates the war by a good bit, and there is a book in her collection that I need." Cain explains with a shrug.

"The first is easy enough. Opportunities are everywhere if you can live long enough to grab them. But finding one particular elf on a continent full of elves, Youkai, and demons? Those are mighty slim odds, even if she survived." The demon has a very good point. Their best bet is accidentally running into her or having her recognize Cain when he passes through her hometown.

Even if you go looking for someone, unless they work with the public, the odds of actually seeing them outdoors are very slim. They don't need to hide, it's just a fact that most people spend their days indoors. Normal people don't spend all day just wandering the city waiting for random people they met a thousand years ago to see them.

The smell of the stew keeps drawing the kids back to the door to ask when it will be ready, driving their mother a bit crazy. She has told Cain and the companions all about the area, and the problem with the crazed, while she waits for the stew to be ready and makes some sort of biscuit to go with it.

The city got a great idea a century or so ago that they would stop executing criminals for so many crimes. Instead, they exiled them from the city by the hundreds and emptied out their prisons. While that reduced the number of criminals in the city, it was horrible for the villages around them. The city residents look down on the poor demons of the rural areas though, so they didn't bother doing anything about it until the problem got so out of hand that farmers stopped sending wagons into town with food, determining that the roads were too dangerous for them to travel.

The prospect of starvation was enough to get the city to act, sending daytime patrols to deal with the crazed, and making it safe enough to travel in daylight, if you stayed near the main road anyhow.

They do have a bounty on the crazed, but they gather together into bandit groups to attack travelers and patrols, so one or two awakened isn't enough to safely go after them. Cain's group has three, but the farmer insists that isn't nearly enough to be safe. The patrols do come all the way to the village though, arriving not long after dawn so that they can spend the time escorting the wagons back to the city.

Not that they particularly care about the farmers, but they are under orders to make sure that the goods for the market make it there safely. She recommends that Cain and his group go with the escort. It is a little more likely to get attacked than a lone group, because of the wagons full of food, but the guards make it safer, and they will still have some chances to trigger an advancement quest.



Cain looks at the dinner spread and decides it is missing something. His group usually has at least one sugar addict in it, so there is always a dessert.

"Can I borrow your stove for a little? I have the ingredients to cook a special dish that I'm certain the kids will like." Cain offers and the big woman smiles.

"A man who comes with Mythic Beast meat and knows how to bake? I don't suppose you need a wife, do you? I know a couple in the village are at that age now and haven't chosen yet." She jokes with a wink.

"I think I'm at my quota on wives. But I'll make your dessert anyhow. I've got a barrel of apples to make an apple crumble if I can borrow that large pan." Cain indicates the cast iron skillet he needs, which is hung up near the roof, almost out of reach, even for him.

The kids have gathered around to see the visitor cook, along with their father, who is brave enough to return now that his wife is used to the visitors.

For once Cain doesn't just summon a Puppet to cook. Instead, he merges with a master Baker and pulls the ingredients out to make the sweet and fruity concoction. It is easy to prepare and can slow cook in the wood-fired oven while they eat. Both demons can use magic, but they still use wood for cooking, either out of tradition or because they're not good with fire magic. Most likely tradition, given that most wrath demons are of the fire aspect.

Dinner is a lively affair with twenty people in the rather small farmhouse, but right afterward everyone heads back outside to get more space to relax. Cain can see the evening patrols begin walking the fence lines around the village as the sun goes down, a bunch of nervous-looking demons in farmer's overalls.

"Would you like me to add a few summoned creatures to the patrol? I'm pretty sure that nothing would attack if I left a couple of Mythic Dragons sitting at the edge of town." Cain offers, bringing the same confused look to the old farmer's face as when Cain tried explaining the big cats to him.

"Where would you call the dragons from though? Could they even get here before morning?" He asks, not understanding Cain's offer, and his wife rolls her eyes at him.

p "Forgive him, sometimes I swear he was dropped as a child." she says to Cain before turning back to her husband with a look of long-suffering patience.

"This man is a summoner darling. He is offering to summon the dragons for the night so that they can help the patrols." The man's eyes light up now that he understands what is going on.

"Oh, yes that would be good. But we should tell someone first I think. If they just suddenly see Mythic dragons they might soil themselves."

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

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Even with a warning, Cain suspects that at least one of the Guards might have wet themselves when the pair of Divine Fire Dragons appeared. These are copies of the enormous red-scaled beast that guards the entrance to the dragon-filled dungeon in the Blood Sands Castle. That dungeon is still walled off since the dragon at the door is over level 400, but he is of Legendary quality, and Cain can at least summon a copy of him now.

Once the dragons appear with an echoing roar, the entire area around the village gets suddenly silent. Not just the wildlife outside, the residents all disappear into their homes and turn out the lights, afraid of annoying the mighty beasts. After a few minutes, they realize that the village isn't under attack, but that still isn't enough to risk wandering about at night. For the most part, once the sun goes down, so do the locals.

Nothing dares to approach them that night, and with the coming of morning, Cain calls back the dragons in to [Merger] with him instead of dismissing them. If they are attacked by the crazed during their journey today, he has every intention of roasting them all. They can save the [Crushing Tentacles] area spell as a surprise for later if necessary. A good dose of Mythic Dragon breath should be enough to convince even most dungeon-crazed monsters that attacking is a bad idea. Especially the Divine Fire Dragon, whose breath is a combination of holy and fire damage.

The crazed were said to be mostly demonic criminals that were exiled, so the holy damage will cause them an extra dose of agony, and bypass some of their natural resistances.

The guard patrol arrives at the outlying farming village a little under two hours after sun up, already showing some signs of combat this morning, and calls out for any travelers and wagons that are headed to the city today to join them for the journey. The farmers that set up stalls in the city usually stay there for a few days at a time until they sell out, being replaced with another farmer in the same stall, splitting the cost between them, and keeping it stocked all week.

Today, only Cain and a group of young men carrying bags of tea on their backs are leaving this village, so the trip to the next stop should be a quick one, with no heavy wagons to get stuck along the way.

The tea sellers are a fun bunch. They raise the tea leaves on their farm at the west edge of the village, and only come in for two days a month, due to the rate at which the leaves sell, and the time it takes to get more ready. They are considered a delicacy in the city, and Cain trades some fresh meat for a bag full, intending to compare them to the Elven Tea when he has time.

The second village isn't sending anyone today, though they do stop the tea vendors to make some trades. Living at the last stop along the route really pays off for this group, and Cain can see why they keep it on their backs out where it's visible instead of lightening their load and buying a wagon. The bulk bags work like a billboard to advertise their presence.

Not long after they exit the second village the trip takes a turn for the worse. Rain starts to fall and the path gets muddy, with standing water in the ruts left by the wagons. The rain makes all the locals a bit nervous, and Cain sends Evangeline and Nemu to the middle of the group, so they aren't the first targets of an ambush.

One of the patrol members leans over to whisper the explanation for everyone's nervousness to Cain. "The dark clouds feel like nighttime to the crazed. It draws them out in much larger numbers. I'm glad you're with us though, the guard is good, but adventurers are unpredictable, and that keeps the crazed off balance. They have fought us so many times now that they have a pretty good idea what to expect."

As they walk, the sounds in the woods become louder and louder until finally the Captain calls a halt and comes back to talk to Cain while the guards circle the group.

"I see you're awakened. Do you have attack-type skills or defensive?" He whispers as the sounds in the woods become discernable as a foreign language.

"Both. But I can start with offense if you prefer? My defense isn't a barrier, though Evangeline has both barriers and healing skills." Cain answers quietly and the demon gives a grateful glance at the Seraphim, disguised as a lovely blue feathered Parrot Kin.

"Ancient quality barriers and healing? Can't argue with that. If you have an area attack skill, use it on the woods when they attack, the buggers are good at hiding in the trees. Some sort of invisibility granted to them by the madness." The Captain informs Cain, finalizing his plan.

The crazed are starting some sort of battle chant, out of sight in the trees, and Nemu counters with a jaunty tune to boost morale and attack speed, nullifying the mild fear effect of the crazed's chant. The tea sellers smile, hearing the beastkin playing her tune and taunting the demons with her song. It's enough to draw the front ranks of the crazed out to attack, and Cain jumps up in the air, using his wings to hover five meters up, before spinning in a circle and filling the woods around them with dragon breath.

The water on the branches vanishes in a cloud of steam before the forest catches fire, a raging inferno that momentarily sears even Cain's durable skin a little before spreading further out.

The crazed in the front ranks are trapped now, fire at their backs and guards at the front, while howls of pain fill the area as their reinforcements burn. The guards charge at them in a well-practiced maneuver that wipes the crazed out in seconds. Seeing that the battle is all but over, Cain calls for [Acid Rain] into the forest, stopping the forest fire from spreading too much, and a few last howls of pain rise in the distance as the acid blisters the skin of fleeing crazed.

,m "That went well. I thought for sure you were going to burn half the bloody zone down though." The Captain laughs, watching as Evangeline heals the few injuries that his men sustained.

"No worries of the leaves becoming tea before we get to the city either, they are good and dry now." The farmers laugh, spreading back out into traveling formation.

News of the fire reached the next village before they did, and the Guard Captain took a moment to assure them that it had been thoroughly put out and that the rain was still falling on the region. A forest fire is a dire threat to the local farmers' crops once it spreads. Even with magic, there simply aren't enough of them living in the small village to deal with hundreds of acres of fire. At this stop, as well as the last two before the city, they pick up a few wagons full of food and goods, slowing their progress to a crawl, but brightening the mood and giving them more people to talk to as they walk.

A large group of crazed find the large and slow-moving convoy just as the city comes into sight, with a much better plan than the first group. It's possible they communicated with the survivors, because without warning a half dozen winged demons launch themselves out of the trees and directly at Cain, ignoring the rest of the group.

Without much time to respond, Cain draws his new spear and scimitar and parries the first few attacks before countering with a straight blow that impales a crazed demon. That was what it wanted though, and the dying demon grabs Cain's hand, preventing him from withdrawing and holding the spear within itself as the others move past to attack the others.

More demons pour from the woods, piling on Cain, who fires dragon breath straight into the air, killing those above him and sending ashes flying. Unable to retrieve his spear, Cain simply unequips the weapons and extends the onyx-black claws of his demonic form for a down and dirty melee.

There is screaming and clanging all around him, but Cain can't tell what his happening as he fights. His claws tear through crazed demons with ease, but those that survive are healing unnaturally fast, and Cain realizes that they must have a Mythic healer with them. There is no easy way to tell where the healer is, so Cain calls for the [Crushing

Tentacles] and the screaming only gets louder for a few seconds, before Cain finds himself back to back with Vala, finally gaining enough breathing room to see that Laura has taken to the sky and has filled the area with Ice Breath, while the remains of the guard force have encircled Nemu, Evangeline and the remaining farmers that they have picked up along the way.

Reinforcements are rushing to them from the city, but more and more crazed are charging into battle, heedless of the danger, simply intent on killing as many as they can.

"Everyone, make the field of Tentacles," Cain calls, knowing the companions will understand his garbled commands and cast the [Crushing Tentacles] all around the defenders and clear out the area.

Shadowy tentacles fill the area, tearing and throwing the crazed between them, while Cain and Vala charge past their perimeter, both deciding that the combination of Claws and Mythic Grade Pestilence is the best bet in this situation. The Blood Dancer form is one of the faster-moving demons, on par with the Oath Breakers at Legendary Quality, and the crazed are having no luck trying to escape as the two agile Wrath Demons tear them apart.

Once they have cleared the area, spearing any bodies which might only be playing dead, Cain and Vala return to the group to take inventory.

Nemu is still slowly healing from wounds, while Evangeline opted to ride Laura to get up and away from the crazed since she wasn't quite fast enough on her own wings in this form. The shimmering scales of the Opal Prismatic Dragon look fine, but the same can't be said of the other members of their traveling group.

They have all been resurrected now, but they look like they bathed in gore, and there are tea leaves everywhere, scattered through the puddles of bloody water and crushed under bodies. Not the greatest defence they have ever staged.

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

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The farmers gather what they can back into their magically repaired wagons, using a water spell to wash everything, including themselves clean again. Cain smiles at Nemu, who is fretting about the mess that the splattered blood has made of her fur and the

guards shudder in momentary fear. He might be on their side, but the blood-covered wrath demon is still a bit horrific to look at, especially when he smiles like that.

"Adventurers are really an entirely different breed aren't they?" One of the young farmers, an Incubus, asks in awe, watching Cain and Vala return and methodically finish off the survivors of the crazed.

"You've got that right son. Even if you've got a good class for it, you need a special sort of guts to go out and do things like that for a living." The other Obsession Demon accompanying him agrees.

"Is it true that you kill the crazed for a living?" A guard cadet who came out with the reinforcements asks Vala, his arms full of spare arrows for the archers.

"We actually just got here into the awakened areas. We came from the Central Continent to explore. The crazed attack was just an added benefit." Vala informs him, and the young demon looks at her like she is extra crazy.

"She's a Wrath Demon, they get like that, son. Now don't dawdle and get those arrows handed out." His supervisor, a short and portly plague demon with a large horn where his nose should be, shouts across the gathering of troops, easily able to hear every conversation in the crowded field.

"You're popular." Cain laughs, tilting his chin to indicate all the young guardsmen that were checking out Vala as she washed the blood off after the battle.

"Obsession and Wrath demons are always attracted to things that might hurt them." A plague demon jokes, turning an emaciated face their way in a toothy grin.

"Nice Pestilence though. Very equal opportunity, I like your style." He continues, making all his companions laugh.

A wrath demon that can use [Pestilence] is a rare thing, just another oddity of the Companion advancements, but one that has made Vala deadly in battle. The doubled [Life Leech] aura with her and Cain fighting side by side was no slouch either, not as fast to drain enemies as [Pestilence], but healing both of the demons at a rapid pace during the early portions of the fight while they were outnumbered. Because of that, neither was in any real danger of death today, unlike the rest of their group.

The healers are working overtime to get the dead back on their feet and functional before time runs out and the spell won't work anymore. A few have been gathered into a row and covered in white sheets though, torn apart and unable to be resurrected. That is a problem that Cain can fix though, using [Modify] to reassemble and regrow missing body parts.



Cain walks along the row, fixing the bodies while Evangeline travels behind him resurrecting them. The Demons are flabbergasted, watching all the formerly mangled bodies of their companions stand up as full and intact demons once again, their recovery having been shielded from sight by the sheets placed over them. Cain nods in satisfaction as the last of them is resurrected and double-checks the battlefield for any more bodies in Guard uniforms, not finding any that the thorough sweep by the guard missed.

"What exactly did I just watch? Did you make them Zombies?" One of the plague demons asks, looking over the confused guards who are still recovering their wits after being resurrected.

"No need for anything so extreme, I just patched their bodies back together so that they could be resurrected. I am a Flesh Crafter after all." Cain explains.

"And you can heal the dead?" The demon clearly doesn't believe him.

"No, it's not healing, I just reshape the corpses into an undamaged condition. After that, the real healers can fix them right up, as if they had just dropped dead without a mark on them. If I wanted I could have made them all Loli Succubus and left them even more confused as to what had happened to them." Cain jokes.

"Hmm, as fun as that might be, I've found a Succubus has too many other career options to end up in the Guard. Every retail outlet wants them on staff to seduce customers into buying more products." The demon finally agrees, generally understanding the nature of Cain's [Modify] ability.

"Your modifications made me weak and nerdy, I don't suppose you could fix that could you?" One of the resurrected demons jokes, before a nearby squad mate thumps him on the head.

"You were like that before. You should be thanking him for putting all your limbs back on in the right order. Last I saw you before you went under that sheet, none of them were attached." The guardsman informs him and the smaller man pales even more than the natural light blue of his skin.

"Sorry, I really do appreciate it. That wasn't a fun way to die, and I'm glad they don't have to tell my wife." He says, bowing to Cain.

The merchant convoy begins making their way into the city as quickly as they can, with wagons hastily patched from the damage they sustained. The entire cleared field around this side of the city is littered with bodies of the crazed and Cain makes a quick estimate of a few hundred dead today alone.

"Just how many did they exile from the cities?" Cain asks the Tea merchant quietly and the man shrugs.



"Not enough to account for the numbers we have seen since. Nobody knows if they are breeding and growing quickly, or if more have come from somewhere else." He says it quietly enough that others won't overhear, making it obvious that the topic is a taboo one among the guards, or perhaps among the city residents in general.

Cain also considers that a single release of convicts might not have been the end of it though. If all the cities are cleaning their prisons and streets by sending the poor and criminals into the wilderness it would explain the rapid expansion of the crazed much better than an unexplained growth spurt among their children, which Cain isn't even sure they are having.

The walk back into town is a solemn one, with all the guards stressed out about what the unusually large number of crazed they met today might mean going forward. If it is a step up in their attacks on the city, changes might need to be made in a hurry to prevent being overrun. The madness makes the crazed much stronger than they should have been, and at even numbers, the guardsmen are no match for them.

The city wall is made of the same shiny black igneous stone that the Demon Capital on the Central Continent is. Cain knows that one is made with magic, so this one most likely was too. The Bunnies said that the Demon King commissioned a lot of these cities during his search as safe rest spots for the search force.

Inside, the city is just the same as the wall, with shiny black spires everywhere, looking like a volcanic wasteland in the middle of a bamboo forest. At least it doesn't smell like brimstone though. Instead, the city smells mostly of some sort of incense. Cain doesn't recognize it, but they sell it right by the gates once he enters with the others. Labeled as ceremonial protective incense, it catches his attention, and Cain joins the others in buying a bag of the little cones.

"Those are what keeps the crazed away from the city. The combination of magical herbs that are ground and pressed into the incense counters the madness effect and makes it safe to live in the cities." The vendor explains as she hands Cain's purchase over.

Cain didn't smell anything like that on the farms, but they certainly weren't driven insane by the effects of the madness. If they have an easier and just as effective method, Cain will have to ask about it the next time he stops in a village.

"Thanks, I'll be sure to cleanse the room with incense once we find somewhere to stay, since we got covered in the blood of the crazed during the last battle," Cain informs the merchant, waving goodbye.

The tea merchants know a good Inn that should hopefully have spare rooms for everyone since it's not usually busy. It's right near the commoners' markets too, so it is cheap if you can tolerate the noise of an all-night market square.

"I think that should be tolerable. We might need to visit the night market as well. Since it's our first time in the city, everything here is new to us. Who knows what sort of fun and interesting things we might find?" Cain laughs, and Laura points to a spot where a succubus is doing nude fortune-telling. That's a new one to them, but it looks like her shop is pretty popular, even if all her customers make a point of making sure nobody they know is watching as they enter.

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

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The Inn that the tea merchants lead them to is a humble brick building, made of blocks of the same inky black stone as everything else in town, three levels high with a large tavern on the main floor. As promised, it overlooks the common market which shows no signs of calming down as night approaches. In fact, with the number of soldiers that were sent out today, it is even busier than the merchants say is normal, with everyone wanting something special for a victory dinner.

The slender Lamia woman behind the desk looks stunned to see the group come in together. She might cater to the traveling farmers, but demons of wealth and heritage like Cain and Vala appear to be would very rarely have anything to do with commoners like her or the farmers.

"Greetings Duke Cain, how might I help you today?" She asks hesitantly despite the friendly look on his face.

"These fine gentlemen say that you should have some rooms available. We don't mind sharing if you are nearly full." Cain informs her, and the innkeeper nods.

"We do. The whole third floor is empty. It costs a little more than the second floor, but the rooms are quieter."

"Then we will take two double rooms on the third floor after we have dinner. I'm not sure how long we will be in town, but it might be a while if the rooms are going to stay available."

Two beds to a room is common for traveler rooms almost everywhere since most business partners and adventuring groups aren't quite close enough to be sharing one bed if they can avoid it. The same is true here, and the lamia passes over the keys and gestures toward the tables

"Pick anywhere you like and my daughter will bring out your food. You boys too, I know you are hungry." She says the last bit to the tea merchants, tossing them room keys of their own.

A small lamia with black and orange scales brings them bowls of stew a few minutes later and Cain orders a round of mead for the table, passing the server a gold coin that sends her slithering away at a rapid pace.

"You know, in this city, that would buy everyone at the table's food and drinks for a week." The taller merchant with light blue horns in his black hair whispers and Cain smiles.

"And if you tip an obsession demon well they will look out for you all evening. I don't know anything about this city, but I'm pretty well versed in lamia." Cain answers with a smile as their drinks return on a rapidly moving tray above a small lamia head.

"Anything else you need, just let me know. I know a lot about the city if it's your first time here." The waitress tells Cain with a huge smile only a lamia could manage.

The farmers look on in awe at what they view as Cain's talent with the ladies, not realizing that his luck with the server is simply him exploiting a common trait to all Obsession demons and not a skill unique to Cain. They've never had the spare money to try such a tactic, plus the city folk look down on them a little to begin with.

p "Are the crazed a regular problem on that scale?" Nemu asks, stretching out on her chair once her dinner was finished.

"If they always attacked on that scale there either wouldn't be any crazed or any city residents left." A burly Wrath Bringer at the next table answers her with a grin, clearly not bothered by either outcome, as long as there was a fight.

Cain looks over his status and sees an oddity in his description. The demon known as George is Epic Quality, but lists as Awakened Mythic. All of Cain's companions increased in quality, so he thought that was the natural way, but looking at this, simply knowing a Mythic skill won't increase their body's quality, which would increase their modifiers.

Looking over the room, that is the case for most of them, only one Captain is actually Mythic Quality among the tavern patrons, other than Cain's group.

A closer look reveals that the awakened all have the same damage reduction buff though, so they must go through some level of change, even if isn't enough for the system to increase their quality ranking.

The tales that the guards tell get more and more embellished as the night goes on and the drinks flow, to the point that even Cain is almost convinced that he was on par with some avenging hero wading through the battle.

Nemu has been taking notes of the stories as they progress, preparing to make an epic ballad about their adventures for when they go home. Everyone loves a good song about heroes rescuing cities from villainous invaders after all.

The tea merchants are scheduled to take over the stall at first light, so they retire early to catch up on their sleep, while Cain and the others drink until last call.

Alternating their equipped items might have cleaned their clothes, but it didn't clean the body underneath and Cain is happy to see that there is a large shower in the room when they finally retire for the night. The water is cold, but there is a lot of it, and that is precisely what they all needed to feel properly clean again before bed.

Laura wakes everyone up just after dawn or at least forces them to get mobile since they weren't actually sleeping. Now that there is enough light to see, the Dragon wants to tour the city, and she has a plan.

There is a storage vendor in the city nearby, where they can obtain more storage boxes like the chest that Cain has. Killing the Mythic beasts has a chance to drop the item needed to enchant larger storage containers that can be put in inventory, so they are supposedly easier to get here, and Laura wants one to expand her inventory capacity.

It's honestly a great idea. The Companions' lack of storage has been a headache to them all for a while now.

After that, they can tour the area and see if there are any quests or missions available for them to do. Anything that might give them an unexpected reward. Random rewards are pretty common for the system side of the Quests and perfect for their objective here.

The same young lamia that served dinner is serving breakfast this morning, looking pretty worn out after the long night of celebrations. She is almost guaranteed to be the owner's daughter, but Cain still commends her on making it to work today.

"The full breakfast special as requested. Honestly, I'm surprised that you are not only awake but in good enough shape to eat. The other guests who stayed here until closing time are still asleep, and even the tea merchants only got up half an hour ago." She sighs.

"I have just the thing for your condition. You can only use it on occasion or your body will collapse under the strain, but it is just right for the aftermath of a special event." Cain chuckles, casting [Refreshing Wind] on their waitress and wiping away her weariness.

"Oh, I haven't felt this good in months. I don't know where you got that spell, but it is a lifesaver today." She cheers quietly, before heading back into the kitchen to grab more plates for the customers that have just come in.

Other than bar snacks, there is no menu at the Inn, the options for food are yes or no. 'A little bit' might also work, but you risk the cook thinking you don't like their food. They do offer both tea and coffee, served either in a small cup or a wooden beer stein, which seems more popular among the coffee drinkers that are headed to work.

There is well over a liter of coffee in those mugs, but to the tired laborers it is only just enough to get them functioning for the day.

Unfortunately, there are no other adventurers in this place, so they can't really find out much about quests and such, but the morning chatter has given them a lot of insight about the current events of the city, especially about the plans to improve the road that Cain and the others came in on.

It is the main trade route for food coming into the city, and the wet season is coming up. The path is already heavily rutted and muddy, Cain knows, so if the wet season is only about to start, it will soon be nearly impossible to make the journey in a day with the wagons from the far end.

Another day might not be the end of the world for the farmers, but it means the city needs twice as many soldiers on patrol if they are going to escort the wagons for a two day journey.

Last winter they did week-long shifts from the outer villages to the halfway point, going back to the furthest village every morning until another patrol took over for them after a week, but that cost the city more than they were willing to pay.

Sending out Earth Mages to build a gravel road is the plan, but it will take weeks to finish since high-ranking mages aren't willing to work for what they're paying. That will make it the largest construction project outside the walls in twenty years, according to the patrons of the Inn.

There was talk of having the earth mages stay in the city and sending the gravel in wagons to build the road with cheaper labor, but if the road base isn't good, it would be a lost cause, plus they would still need even more extra guards to protect the convoy of workers.

That gives Cain a good idea of where to start his search for rewards though. The road crew will be looking for adventurers to clear the area before they send workers out, Cain is certain. They wouldn't risk not being able to find labor because the crew got killed by the Craze after all.

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

## Chapter 416 416

The common market begins right across the intersection from the Inn where Cain is staying, and the morning crowd is already getting noisy by the time he finishes eating.

"Madam, we will need another week in your lovely rooms. " Cain greets the innkeeper when she comes out from the kitchen to take a break, lighting some sort of herbal cigarette the moment she is behind the desk.

"Hear that you ruffians? That's what a man with manners sounds like. Of course, I can reserve the rooms for another week for you, darling. One gold a night for both rooms with two meals a day if you're paying by the week." Cain turns over the coins while the breakfast crowd taunts each other about who the real ruffians here are.

The first thing they see when the companions follow Cain outside is the tea vendors. They have the prime location, a corner spot at the entrance to the market only feet from their hotel room. No wonder they recommended this place.

"Alright troops, first up we find the storage boxes, then we can explore for a few hours until it is time to go look for a hunting quest." Cain declares, causing Nemu to give him a sarcastic salute.

"If you need storage boxes for your inventory, you might as well follow me. I'm on my way to open up." A friendly voice comes from below them causing everyone to look around in confusion until they see the Gnome trying to make his way through a packed crowd that mostly pretends they don't even see him.

"Oh, there you are. My name is Cain, and these lovely ladies have all found themselves short on inventory space." Cain explains, mentally signaling the ladies to circle the artisan to keep him from getting run over.

"Four sales to start the morning and an escort to work? Today is looking up already." The small, bald man exclaims, the top of his head turning red when he gets excited.

With Cain pushing through the crowd on his behalf and the companions surrounding him, the artisan has a much easier time getting to work than usual. The inventory container maker's shop is a small place, a bit off the main row, as Cain was informed last night. Either the gnome prefers to be low-key, or the Demons intimidated him into picking this spot. If they hadn't known where they were going, there is no way they would have happened across this place by accident.

"Thank you for the escort. Getting through the morning rush can be a bit of a nightmare sometimes when you're as short as I am. Nobody cares enough to look down, so they just run right over you." The gnome explains, unlocking the shop door.

Inside, the shop contains a small variety of chests, bags, backpacks, and other containers for sale, most of which are designed to be placed out on counters or dressers. That makes sense to Cain, most people aren't adventurers, so having their stuff handy in their room makes much more sense than carrying everything with you everywhere you go. The weight might not matter much to a higher-level transfer, but it does still slow you down a little when you have too much in your inventory.

So, decorative containers that can be placed out at home, and only picked up into your inventory on occasions that you need to go somewhere make a lot of sense for the majority of the city's population.

"I don't suppose you have a pantry, do you? Something large with shelves to organize my snacks?" Laura asks, flitting around the room happily inspecting the workmanship.

"A whole pantry is a lot to ask, but I do have some that are organized inside. If you take a look at this chest here, you can see that it has two internal layers, with adjustable dividers." Fizzbert, as Cain's inspection of the man's interface says, informs the curious dragon, activating a levitation spell to come up to the upper shelves where she is looking.

The shop has a strange layout, by Cain's estimation. The most decorative and expensive items are at the top, while the simple budget priced sacks are down on the lower levels of the shelving. It all ends just below waist height on Cain, but the vertical organization by price point just feels unnatural, especially for a gnomish shopkeeper, who has to use a spell to be able to reach the most commonly sold middle-range items. Surely it would make more sense to put those ones where he could easily reach them, or provide a walkway for himself on top of the display benches?

"Laura, what about this one?" Nemu suggests, holding up a large cloth bag with a divider inside. It is among the cheapest of items, but it is reasonably large.

"A shopping bag? No, you have a point, the cloth is flexible so I can fit oddly shaped items inside and still stuff it right to the top." Laura answers after a moment of contemplation.

"Might I ask, what criterion are you using to select today? Do you need something for the home? or for travel?" Fizzbert asks, trying to decide what items would actually be best for his customers.

"We are in a situation where we have very limited inventory space and will need something to keep our snacks, groceries, and miscellaneous traveling items with us in safety," Vala explains, causing the gnome to hover while he thinks.



"If money isn't too tight, I would recommend a grocery bag and a backpack each. Everyone who travels knows how to pack a backpack, and we all know how to use a shopping bag, so that is why I made them that way. Plus, in an uncomfortable situation, they can be worn or carried instead of put in inventory, reducing suspicion that you might have valuable items in your possession." He suggests, grabbing a camping pack from the other side of the room.

These are commonly used by travelers without a system or at least their mundane versions are, and they are also used by merchants, who already have their inventory full of trade goods, and have no room to be carrying a hundred small items in inventory. Adventurers also frequently carry backpacks that they can leave by the door, giving them more room for random drop items from the dungeon, so that they don't have to sort until they are finished.

It is an excellent compromise, and the plain undyed cloth of the shopping bags would fit into any marketplace without catching any attention. You could walk around all day filling it and then put it into inventory without anyone noticing it is a magical item at all.

"You know, I really do think people are underestimating the genius of your products. We heard a bit about how the quality was good, but not a single person mentioned the versatility." Cain commends the man, picking a few more backpacks for everyone, himself included.

"I appreciate your kindness, Duke Cain. I know you're not from here, but my status in town is rather low, so it isn't often that I hear good things about myself." Fizzbert sighs.

"Because you're a gnome?" Nemu asks quietly, so the people outside won't hear even with sensitive ears.

"Oh no, not at all. The problem is that my grandfather was one of the original exiles that became the crazed. He was not a good businessman, and then one of his get-rich-quick schemes killed a passerby while he was trying to come up with a way to pay off his debts to the local loan sharks. It tarnished the whole family's name, and my mother was only allowed to stay because her husband vouched for her." The gnome explains.

That explains why nobody even bothered to look down when they kicked him. It's not that they didn't see him, it's that they didn't care. If they hadn't seen him, they would have at least been expected to look to make sure it wasn't a child they had collided with, at least in Cain's estimation.

"I'll have his debts paid off soon though. It is demon law that family must pay off the debts of their ancestors, and after that, all is forgiven." Fizzbert explains on a much brighter note.

"In that case, I am glad we can help. We will need the five shopping bags, five backpacks, and that gold and obsidian jewelry box." Cain decides while the others sort through the backpacks for colors that they like.

The price is quite steep, almost a thousand gold, which severely depletes Cain's personal savings, but the happy look on the Gnome's face when the money is transferred is well worth the shopping. Plus, with the shiny black magical stone that makes up all the buildings in the city, the expensive little box will make a great souvenir to send home. Just looking at it reminds Cain of this place.

As they are about to leave, a group of large demons in suits much like Cain's barge in, then stop and give him a confused look, thinking he might be one of them. But after a moment, they scanned his system details and realized that he is a customer, who only looks like an enforcer for the local loan sharks.

"How is business, shorty? Six months left on the loan and only 500 gold left to pay off your family's debts. You've been doing pretty good." The leader commends Fizzbert in a much friendlier voice than Cain had expected.

The gnome only smiles and tosses him a large bag full of gold coins, not saying anything.

"You really did it. Just wait a few minutes here and we will get the boss over to clear out the contract." The goon smiles, happy that for once someone actually paid in full when he showed up at their door and didn't even argue about it.

That's not something that happens often. You don't take loans from his boss if you can actually afford to pay them off, but the boss was fond of the Gnome's mother, who married a friend of his, so he had bought out all the other debts that the family owed and waived most of the interest so that they had a reasonable chance to pay it all off. It took them almost a century and well into the second generation, but they did eventually get it all paid. Today is a big day for the boss, as well as for Fizzbert the Gnome.

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

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## **Chapter 417 417**

Cain decides to wait around for the show since it is always a nice change to see people happy and moving forward in life instead of dying horrifically around him. Even if he was the one killing them most of the time.

He only has to wait a few minutes, and a large demon, looking almost exactly like Cain and Vala currently do, comes in carrying an elderly Gnomish woman, escorted by a half dozen more goons. The boss does a double-take when he sees Cain, then realizes it's not who he thought it was and turns to the shopkeeper.

"I got the notice, the last 500 gold of your debts have been paid off. Verified by my men. I thought your mother should be here to see that you have finally redeemed your good name, so I picked her up on the way." The boss greets Fizzbert, who bows deeply in front of him.

In fact, everyone in the area dips their head when the boss and his entourage pass by. This loan shark must be more than just that if he is getting such a high level of respect in the city, so Cain asks everyone to keep silent for now, until they learn more about him. Powerful people have powerful connections and the best leads on interesting things.

The contract comes out, and both signatures are added, making the old gnomish woman burst into happy tears as her son flies over and grabs her into a tight embrace. It's a touching moment, best left to family, and everyone else files outside, closing the shop door with a closed-for-1-hour sign in the window.

Once they are outside, the boss pulls a parchment from his pocket and places it on the glass, the embedded spell fastening it there, and Cain can see that it is entitled "Debt Free Business". There are more details and the boss demon's signature on the sheet, but it is mostly just a business license. Looking carefully, Cain can see that it is present in about a third of the windows of the shops along this side street, and they are the ones that get the most business. So either this is a mafia-style seal of approval, or having a good reputation for operating without debt is very important to the locals.

"Duke Cain, I see. I never thought I'd see another descendant of the Progenitors in the city, and one who has brought family with him as well. To what do we owe the pleasure of your visit? I am the Mayor here, but you can call me Sal, everyone else does." The boss informs him in a pleasant voice, well suited to politics.

"I have reached the limits of my class abilities, and I was looking for a chance to gain a fourth advancement Class. They aren't easy to come by in the Central Continent, so we all went on a little vacation while I'm waiting on my firstborn to be ready to enter the world." Cain explains with a fond smile at the thought of the twins.

"That's quite the ambition. I can count the number of fourth advancement Demons I have heard of on a single hand. But the madness holds a lot of opportunities, for those

willing to put in the work. I heard your group has the use of a very versatile Mythic Magic though, so you just might find that chance right here.

We will be issuing quests to eliminate a large number of the crazed to make road work to the outlying farms safer before the rainy season. You and I both know that status in society isn't linked to the value you provide to society, and it has been a long battle to convince the bean counters in city hall to approve funding for such a large-scale expedition to the more impoverished regions, even though they grow almost all our food." Sal informs him, the annoyance at the council clear in his voice.

"Small minds are universal I'm afraid. Especially when they have plans for other people's money." Cain laughs in agreement and all the enforcers that came with the Mayor grin. A good understanding of the way the world really works is a sure way to get in good with their boss, and he is always in need of able bodies these days.

"I also see that you're a Flesh Crafter. I don't suppose you have the ability to resurrect a soul stored inside a gem, do you? Not as an undead, but properly back to life." The boss asks hopefully.

"I do actually. I take it someone precious to you was put into stasis by a necromancer until you could find a good way to bring them back out?"

"Not exactly. My predecessor was a Lich Lord. When he was killed with his simulacrum destroyed he hid his soul in a stone. The stone itself is indestructible, I know, we've tried. But he was set to face charges of crimes against demonkind before his death, and it would please me to no end to see him suffer a long and agonizing death for his crimes instead of sleeping soundly in stasis."

All the enforcers and a few shoppers, who were trying to be discrete about their eavesdropping all nod their agreement, disgust for the former leader clear on their faces.

"You can see the records of the trial if you like. It was held without a defense since he was only a soul in a stone, but the evidence was incontrovertible." One of the enforcers adds, seeing Cain's reluctance.

"Let me think on it a while. I will ask around to get some more opinions on whether bringing him back is a wise move before I agree or decline, but you can bring the paperwork of the trial to the Inn at the Western Gate of the common market, the one run by the Lamia. That's where we are staying.

Before that though, you mentioned quests to eliminate the crazed. Are there any for wandering monsters as well? We could use a good bit of exercise now and then, so we might as well make the most of it when we do head out of the city."

The Mayor is liking Cain more and more by the minute. The mayor himself is a politician, not a warrior, but this visiting Duke has excellent combat skills, and he is willing to help the city out for just the quest rewards, without asking for any further conditions due to his rank. Many nobles get very snobby when they gain a Mythic Skill, and almost all of them will become obnoxious once the System ranks them as Mythic Quality, as it did for his daughter, as the Mayor believes Vala to be.

For those older than the system, they didn't get a Quality Assignment. They simply were what they were, but if their children are born with an inactive system, they sometimes do, signifying that their modifiers and stats have exceeded what the system considers normal for a mortal. Of course, many demons are far from average, so it is fairly common with them, but among the shorter-lived species, and the elves, who are physically very mundane without the system's help, it is almost unheard of.

"I, unfortunately, have to get back to business, but I will send Marcus here to go with you to the Quest Hall and find what you're looking for. He was headed there anyhow to issue the new quests for the road safety crew." Mayor Sal sighs, looking across town to a black stone building glittering with gold.

That uniform architectural design is making it very hard for Cain to tell what is where in this city. It is like a giant cookie-cutter suburb, every single building looks basically the same, with only signs and small details to tell them apart.

Their arrival at the Quest Hall causes quite a stir among the crowd gathered in anticipation of seeing the reward for the new quests being posted by the city, as they thought at first that Cain and Vala were the Mayor and his wife. That dies down quickly though, as they realize it is just a visiting noble, possibly a relation of the Mayor that is accompanying his right-hand man.

"Alright everyone, clear the way, let the man through so we can get these quests logged and posted." The staff calls, spreading a cheer through the crowd and opening a path for Marcus to walk through, motioning for Cain and the others to follow him.

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

## **Chapter 418 418**

[New Quest Available: Road Safety]

In order to facilitate the safe development of improved road infrastructure, the city council has approved the extermination of the crazed within an 80-kilometer radius of the Gurp city walls. Duration extends until road work is completed.

[Rewards: 1 Gold per 2 crazed killed. Additional Scaling Rewards every 24 hours]

"Looks kind the system has put out a daily kill count bonus on top of the gold. Plus it is scaling." The Quest Hall announced calls to the crowd who screens their approval.

The money from the city wasn't the big deal, since it just comes from their taxes anyhow. Everyone that assembled here in anticipation was hoping that the system would add something good on top to make it worth their risk, and it didn't let them down. Scaling rewards are popular because they aren't linear. The system realizes that fighting fifty targets a day is more than ten times as hard as fighting five, so it rewards you appropriately.

This is very much going to be in Cain's favor, even if the bodyguard looks a little concerned about Cain going hunting. His class is best known as a life skills class specializing in disguises and plastic surgery after all.

"Will your group be alright? The crazed travel in packs, not small groups. I can recommend a few assistants if you need them." Marcus suggests when he sees the Duke intends to leave right away.

"We will be just fine. Despite appearances, I am rather fearsome in combat." Cain assures him, making the demon laugh.

"Oh, I don't doubt that. But keeping your companions safe can be difficult without numbers on your side. This group here are all exceptional hunters."

The group he is referring to looks over, and Cain can see that they have formed a twenty-person Raid Team, all Mythic awakened. They are very well equipped, and evidently skilled, but Cain doesn't want an audience for what comes next.

"How about we compete? The hunter team against my family? Just a small daily wager to keep things lively?" Cain suggests and the hunters' eyes light up.

"You're right, a small wager creates no hard feelings, but increases motivation. How about a hundred gold? If the battle is close that will hardly be a day's wages." The succubus who leads the healing for the hunters suggests.

Do they think they can get two hundred for the day? That shouldn't be a problem for Cain, once he sends out the summons.

"Certainly. The gold was never the point of this adventure, the scaling Reward is." Cain responds and the hunters smile.

They are absolutely sure that they can win, doubling their cash reward, and as the foreign noble said, the real goal is the scaling Reward. The extra money has the group

all fired up though, and once their healer shakes hands with Cain they head out to plan their day's activities.

Nemu notices another group leader looks like he would like to get in on this bet and she is about to make the offer when his group's tank thumps him on the head.

"They have two area attack type Mythic demons and a Mythic dragon. They might not beat the hunters, but they just might if they can find the right pack." The tank-type transfer whispers and the group leader comes to his senses.

He wasn't at the battle yesterday, being on the wrong side of the city when it started, but everyone in town who paid attention to adventurers had heard about it by now. The small group that Cain leads might be weak to ambush, but in an open field, Mythic Pestilence was just too dangerous, even by the standards of Mythic abilities.

"Let's head out. We can go shopping tomorrow." Cain tells the others and leads them back through the crowd, while Marcus returns to the mayor to fill him in on the crowd's reaction to the Quest.

A lot of groups are heading out to hunt today thanks to the Quest, so their departure doesn't attract any attention. Cain wishes his Echoes weren't needed to look after Misha, they would love it here. But then, they're alternating dungeons, so only one is actually guarding her at a time.

Plus she has the companions around her all day, well except Nila.

In short, there's no good reason he couldn't call his Echoes here to cause mayhem.

[Everyone guard Misha to the best of your ability. I am going to call the Echoes to me here in the awakened area. Except for Nila that is, you can enjoy your sailing trip.] Cain informs his companions, knowing they will understand despite the distance.

[Got it, boss. Nothing will happen to her or the twins. I'll pass on the message that you're thinking of her.] The copy of Nemu that is in Skyview responds, and Cain calls the Echoes to where he is standing in a clearing just out of sight of the city walls.

"Alright, here is the plan. We are hunting only the crazed. Though if a wild monster is dumb enough to attack and you think it might taste good, you can kill that too and bring back the meat. The Quest area is up to 80 kilometers from these city walls, but the Quest didn't specify only one direction, so we will split up.

Report back to me if the crazed seem to be more than simple dungeon mobs in the wild. If there is hope to rehabilitate them, we will try that as well. But don't jet your hopes too high on that, they were pretty feral last time they attacked."



It isn't a difficult plan and the Echoes are about to take off when Cain stops them. "I get the feeling that more subtlety is going to be needed. Ten-meter-tall ancients are going to cause more problems than we solve."

In response, they shrink themselves to five meters, and Cain sighs. They chuckle and take on the demon form Cain is currently using before flying off low through the woods, looking for a spot to start their day's battle.

The hunters' raid team sees a shadowy clone of Cain fly overhead a few minutes later and frowns. "Looks like Doctor Cain used to be a Shadow Mage. Let's get a move on, Mythic Shadows are going to be hard to keep up with."

Cain entirely forgot to mention the others who would be out here today, other than that they weren't targets, so the Echoes aren't hiding as they travel, and they don't even try to hide when they come across the first cluster of Crazed.

Nearly two hundred have gathered together, and a full Raid team is getting ready to attack when the echo flies overhead and fills the area with demonic summons cloaked in shadow.

The team thinks the Summon is an idiot, calling the lower quality summons against awakened targets until absolutely everything starts casting Mythic rank fireball as fast as they can. Once they are satisfied that the crazed are dead, the summons disappear and the echo flies away, leaving a smoldering clearing behind for the raid group to stare at in shock.

"What in the seven holy hells was that?" The raid team leader shouts as the shadow-cloaked demon flies away. Poaching kills is considered bad manners, but after seeing that, does he even have the standing to complain?

The second echo is having far more fun. He found a farm village getting attacked and stopped in to rescue them. His entire summoned army is Catgirls in skimpy outfits, wielding [Crushing Tentacles] to mutilate and pulp the Crazed, pulling them out of buildings they have breached and throwing the corpses in the streets.

"Is scaroused a word? Because I don't know which one I am supposed to be." One of the teenage farmers asks, watching a beastkin in a miniskirt grow Tentacles from her arm and decimate a group of Crazed in an instant.

Watching their expressions is the most fun the echo has had in weeks, so it is in no hurry to finish things off, having his summons use the area spell as if it were extra limbs until the crazed begin to flee, at which point it ordered the summons to finish them with brutal efficiency.

Unlike its partner, this one has the summons run through the woods looking for targets and making noise to attract more of the crazed.

Cain sees that they are working hard on his behalf, so he leads the main group at a jog, looking for a valid target. His luck isn't as good though, too many other groups passed this way and every threat has been cleared out.

He decides to take a path through a river valley lined with steep cliffs, a likely hiding spot for anything that might have been missed.

There is only one person here though, an old woman fishing in the river next to an ancient wooden shack that looks like it belongs in a horror movie.

"It took you long enough to get here. Stupid visions should come with a time stamp." The old woman mutters to herself, turning a toothless smile at her visitors.

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

## Chapter 419 419

"Alright, so the summary is that the effects of multiple global spells in the awakened areas are mutating and cloning the exiles into the crazed." The old lady begins her story without explanation or any form of clarification as to what exactly she is talking about.

"Wait, back up a bit. How? Where? Since when?" Cain asks, trying to understand her rambling.

"I've been waiting here forty-three years for you to show up. If you can't be punctual, at least try to keep up." The seer complains, rolling her eyes at Cain as if her statement should make perfect sense and need no additional details.

"Madam, I've barely been in this world for two years." Cain points out, but she waves away his argument.

"Because they were trapped in the vortexes and driven crazy before being cloned and scattered through the zone, the Crazed are irredeemable. They're not even real people. But if you find the originals you can cut down on the number of crazed that are being created." She continued as if Cain's counterpoint never happened.

Cain is starting to get the basics of what she's talking about now, and the implications of it are more than a little bit horrific. It's a wonder that the entire awakened area hasn't been overrun, but perhaps the number generated daily is low, or a lot are killed by various causes. That description she gave sounds a lot like what was happening with

the ogres in Sunnyvale, but because the dungeons never fully formed here, the crazed are spawning in the outside world instead of needing to be brought outside the dungeon to rampage.

"That is a very valuable vision. Can we offer to cook dinner for you in thanks?" Cain offers.

"Finally, you got a little sense in your head. I made a bench over there so we can sit. You can leave that handsome chef Puppet here when you go as well. I'm sure we will get along splendidly."

Cain hadn't made a Puppet to cook yet, but the old lady seems to approve of whatever he was going to pick. It is a strange sort of mental pressure, not knowing what she was expecting him to decide upon, especially since she expects it to be left behind for her benefit. Deciding to mess with her a little, Cain creates a middle-aged alligator-type beastkin with a thick gut and a wide range of culinary skills, then hands him a collection of ingredients to start making dinner.

The old lady grins and slaps the chef on the backside as he goes to the fire to begin his work and the burly gator winks at her. It seems she was right, they do very along well. Cain decides he will free the Puppet when they go, so the two can have their happily ever after down here in the hollow of the river valley.

Cain doesn't leave them totally defenseless though, he gives the gator the [Area Camouflage] skill at ancient quality to go with his cooking skills. If the old lady lived here for over 40 years, she can take care of the rest.

"Do you have any leads on where some of the vortexes might be? The sooner I can find one the sooner I can start working on a way to remove the exiles trapped inside." Cain asks while the old woman watches the gator cook.

She has a hood up over her head and a scarred and wrinkled vaguely human face, so Cain has no idea what species she actually is, but she seems to be really enamored with the big beastkin.

"I haven't found any myself, but I saw in the vision that one should be straight south of that nearby city, in an abandoned quarry between two jet black stone faces. Not shiny like obsidian, but not granite, do you know what I mean?"

Indeed Cain does know because the entire city is made out of it. "I know the stone, and we can search for the place. If we can remove the exiles and block off the vortex to keep others from coming in, do you think we could really solve the problem? Or will we need to do something about the vortex itself?"

"Just getting them out should be enough. But I haven't had a vision on how to do that, only that I should tell you to try to do it." The woman shrugs, accepting the hastily prepared bowl of deep-fried vegetables from her new chef.

"At least knowing that it should be possible is a start," Cain assures her, before ordering one of his Echoes to go look for the vortex, but not to enter it or allow a Summon to enter it.

Who knows what kind of mayhem would ensue if the vortex cloned a bunch of Crazy Ancients. At the rate that the Echoes have been tearing through groups of enemies that have made life difficult for the city, if the echoes were the template for the crazy forces, it would be a disaster.

The sun begins to drop towards the horizon faster than expected, while the Echoes hunt down every crazy they can find on the way to the place where the seer believed the disturbance that caused the crazy is. By flying up above the forest, they believe they have found the quarry, though they haven't seen any sign of the vortex yet, and are still a fair ways away.

Cain's walk back to the city gates is a relaxed one, now that he knows for certain that there are no crazy in the area. Too many groups went out today for anything to have survived this close to the city. But if the information Cain gained was correct, that might not be true by tomorrow morning.

For the most part, the mood in the city is elated, celebrating the fact that finally the issue of the crazy might be temporarily solved. Cain doesn't want to dispel that feeling by mentioning that more are being created every day, so he keeps silent and joins in on the reverie. It sounds like the crazy don't reset at midnight, only grow in numbers, which matches the description that the villagers gave Cain of the crazy being more active at night.

Why nobody had noticed the vortex is a mystery to him as well. But that one will be solved as soon as the Echoes reach the quarry.

"Did you do well today?" The shorter of the tea merchants asks as Cain passes by the market to go claim his daily quest reward. Free money is free money, so maybe he will treat the Inn to a few rounds tonight courtesy of the Quest Hall.

There should also be the gold from the hunters, assuming that the Echoes killed more crazy than they did. Cain and the companions might have spent most of the day with a somewhat crazy seer, but at least the Echoes took their job seriously.

The locals do their best to hide the stares and whispers, but while Cain makes his way across town it soon becomes clear that there are a lot of rumors going around about him today, calling him an awakened Shadow Mage, despite what his interface says. Since they made no attempt to hide and even stole kills from other groups, the Echoes

really drew a lot of attention, and people are formulating their own guesses as to what Cain's Progression path to the Flesh Crafter class was.

The echoes currently also look exactly like him, except with a layer of shadow over them, which was a dead giveaway as to who they belonged to. There's no chance he will be able to blame their misbehavior and kill stealing on someone else today, or likely at any point in the future, at least not in this city.

"If it isn't the exalted Duke Cain, Awakened Lord of Shadows." One of the hunters greets him with a sarcastic smile and a bow.

"So you met my friends too, did you? I instructed them not to harm anyone but the crazed, but they have a bit of a mind of their own you see." Cain smiles back and the hunter begins to laugh.

"After seeing them in action, we prepared the gold, but some of us wanted to wait here and see how you did overall. Finding large groups to hunt could have been difficult today."

There is a long line for the quest reward redemption, but once Cain steps into line he is ushered forward, with the others either glaring at him or thanking him for the assistance as he passes by.

Cain feels like he has become a minor local celebrity for the day. He might only be recognized by adventurers, but almost all of them do recognize him.

"Greetings Duke Cain. Let's see here your total kills for the day are... still changing? Can you have your summons stop fighting for a moment so that we can get a count?" The worker greets him, raising laughter through the crowd.

[Almost finished?] Cain asks the Echoes and gets back an affirmative grunt before the combat feed suddenly stops again.

"There you go. That one was my fault." Cain apologized to the Quest Hall worker, who brought up the Quest scroll again.

"One thousand three hundred and thirty-seven. For a total daily gain of six hundred and sixty-eight gold, with one kill transferred to tomorrow's count." The worker answers, trying to be professional in the face of such a massacre.

"Well, that should cover the bar tab for the evening." Nemu laughs, and the worker hands over the money with a smile.

More than a few locals want to drink with them tonight, so Cain sends Evangeline flying ahead in her blue feathered beastkin disguise to warn their hosts to find a second

server, and possibly a third for the night. Everyone is hungry, and they all have a pocketful of gold.

If the other groups that he met at the Quest Hall are surprised that Cain is staying beside the common market, nobody says anything, but there isn't nearly enough room for everyone inside the Inn. It seats fifty, they brought five hundred. Fortunately for them, the city doesn't prohibit drinking in the streets, so the entire common market quickly turns into one large party, with every food and drink vendor getting in on the festivities.

The party continues until well past midnight, with the crowd slowly thinning out as the night progresses. Not all the groups will be going out tomorrow, but the quest is ongoing, so many of them will be doing their best to make as much money as possible before the quest is ended due to lack of targets in the area. Cain and the companions will also be headed out again, but not so much to hunt ancients as to find the vortexes and see what can be done.

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

## Chapter 420 420

While the Companions were partying, the Echoes were preparing to invade the Quarry. On Cain's orders, they had stopped antagonizing the other hunters and stealing kills, so instead, they decided to wait until after dark when everyone had gone back into the city to go all out and hunt.

The quarry was enormous, almost a square kilometer, and completely packed with the Crazyed. They weren't coming from here, the Echoes had been watching for hours and none of them left, but a few dozen more had arrived, pushing and jostling for space to get down the ramp and into the quarry. That made them think their Ancient wasn't as incompetent as he seemed, he had sent them to a spot where they could find a real challenge and not just some under-leveled dungeon where the best they could hope for was a time trial against each other.

This place positively exuded power, suggesting to them that something stronger than a mythic creature was in here somewhere. With a bit of luck, there would be two or more so that they could both test themselves against a real enemy.

The first step to finding their challenge will be to eliminate the trash. The easiest way to do that is with flying beastkin, given Mythic Dragon Breath. They realized yesterday that dragons themselves are inefficient for most fights. They are simply too large to

effectively blanket an area. But if you use flying beastkin, or other medium-sized flying creatures, they have room to maneuver and layer dragon breath over an area.

Transforming themselves into bat type beastkin for the efficient leathery wings and sonar that can give them a good reading on the status of the fight below a sea of fire, they call forth their armies, with one single pair of Mythic Divine Fire Dragons and activate [Ancient Wisdom]. The blessing of [Divine Fire Breath] spreads through the beastkin army and the dragons give a cruel laugh, understanding what is to come.

"Ancients never do change, do they? Even half-alive they still seek to rule over the world and all within it." The dragons taunt their summoners, who only smile back at them in response. After all, these might be Mythic Dragons, but they are still summons, and can't do anything about their status.

"Our master ordered that we clear the quarry and then find the vortex that is creating the Crazed humanoids. The faster we can get it done, the sooner we can find the real challenge that I can feel hiding inside the crowd." One Echo informs the dragons, who nod in agreement.

"What is life without a challenge? Let's get going then. I have no intention of being here all night."

With that, the dragons lead the army forth in a wave of fire so intense that the residents of the city think that the sun has risen early. It might be out of sight due to the hills in between the quarry and the city, but the Divine Fire lights up the sky like a vengeful star, so intense that it is hard to believe that anything could have possibly survived.

But as the Echoes hoped, something did. Two crazed launch themselves out of the quarry in their direction as the quarry burns and the stones melt in the inferno. Both are on the Immortal level, but they have a strange aura. They do not feel like an individual, but like many individuals compressed together. The Echoes noticed clones entering the quarry, could this be the outcome of many of them merging together? Between the two of them, they might have enough mythic summons to accomplish the task.

But that experiment can come later, first, they have finally found the fight of a lifetime.

The echoes spread to opposite sides of the quarry, each leading one of the Immortal Awakened Crazed away to duel. The echo on the south is first to engage, shifting back into its natural Ancient form and activating [Crushing Tentacles] to lock the crazed in place and begin crushing the life out of it. The Immortal takes as little damage from them as they do from unawakened, and even dozens of tentacles barely make a dent in its life before being shredded apart by the claws of the Wolf Kin Crazed, its silver fur now soaked in black ichor.

Laughing in Joy the Echo activates [Superior Mental Domination] and orders the beastkin to its doom.



[Kneel before your betters, Dog.] roars through every mind within a hundred meters, bringing the immortal momentarily to its knees, while the Echo adds [Lightning Lance] to the [Crushing Tentacles] surrounding each in lightning and adding a spike to the end of the mighty black ropes of flesh.

The damage done increases exponentially, and the wolf kin roars in pain, breaking the Imprisoning command and tearing free of the tentacles again, before ripping a chunk of the Echo's wing off in his jaws as the enormous Ancient struggles to dodge the increased speed of his foe.

A string of fireballs rushes out of the Echo's body towards its opponent, who surrounds himself in a shimmering purple barrier, letting them impact without concern as it rips free of the pernicious tentacles, clearly becoming annoyed at the constant attempts to immobilize it.

The smell of burnt fur fills the air as the beastkin activates an ability and floats into the air, now even with the Echo's head and not as easy for the tentacles to hit. But that isn't going to stop the shadow cloaked manifestation, who simply casts the [Crushing Tentacles] spell on his own body as a base and flies up to meet the beastkin head-on, drawing a shield and one-handed ax from its inventory.

The sight is a bit comical, the shield is three times the size of the beastkin, but his claws leave deep furrows on the surface, which almost immediately vanish, eliciting a snarl. The shield is enchanted with [Indestructible] so no matter how much he damages it, the defensive barrier will heal in seconds.

Instead, the beastkin grabs the shield the next time he gets close and uses it for leverage to get closer, clawing at the mighty Ancient's face.

Every strike he lands takes a healthy chunk of the Echo's health, which is quickly refilling, but not fast enough to bring it back to full. With the Lightning effect on the Tentacles, the Immortal is in far from pristine condition himself but feels he is slowly getting the upper hand.

Not knowing Ancient Physiology, the wolf kin aims for where he thinks the jugular should be, only for the head to turn, lifting the barrier of tentacles and bathing him in a wave of Divine Fire. Unlike when the actual dragon uses it, the version that comes from the Ancient is cloaked in shadow instead of light, but it still sticks to the beastkin, doing far more damage than it has any right to.

Retreating away from the fire to find a more vulnerable angle to attack the tentacle monster with a humanoid core, the Awakened Immortal dips himself in the nearby river, then sees his attack point, directly under the Echo's feet. There is a clear path up his back to attack the base of his wings. In a streak of fur most mortal eyes could never hope to follow, he charges the vulnerable back side of the Echo, rending one wing clear

off and sending it crashing to the ground, where it roars again, commanding the Immortal to the ground.

The command is broken in seconds, but that is enough for the mighty ax to smash down on the Crazy beastkin, removing the right arm just below its elbow. It is a specialty of the weapon called [Trophy Taker]. With only one claw at the moment, the beastkin is greatly limited. It will grow back sooner or later, thanks to the regenerative effects that Awakened beings share, but not soon enough.

The Echo has launched a vicious barrage of attacks, each only doing a little damage, but the chance of the weapon's special effect succeeding in taking a limb again is an ever-present danger.

His health is getting low, thanks to the combination of the tentacles and the ax, so the Immortal goes for a desperate gambit, attempting to drive his arm through the Ancient and rip its heart out. The attack is a bit too predictable though, and the Echo twists at the last second, catching the opponent in [Lightning Lance] coated teeth and soaking it in [Divine Fire Breath] until the smell of roasted meat replaces singed fur and the announcement finally appears in the kill feed.

[Echo has Killed Immortal Awakened Crazy]

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

## Chapter 421 421

When Cain wakes up in the morning to dim light and shouting from the market, something feels very different, but he can't place just what.

[Good, you are awake. Call Loser back so we can return to work.] The echo's voice sounds in his mind.

Cain is momentarily confused then notices that he only has one Echo active. What on this wide world could have even killed one, with all the summons and Mythic abilities that it can call upon to defend itself? Did they find an Immortal Awakened?

[Not just one, we found one each. Unfortunately, Loser ended his fight in a draw, dying two ticks before [Pestilence] finished off his target.] the Echo informs Cain with a smug tone.

[I will have to head out of town to summon him since you appear in your default form every time. What did you find in the quarry?]

The echo thinks for a moment about the best way to answer that. The quarry is no more, the summons melted the rock to a smooth sheet of lava that is still smoking and bubbling at the moment, as the echo enjoys the warmth, holding off on using ice breath to solidify the surface again.

[There is definitely a vortex here. But I can't see it. Nor can I touch it. It was drawing the Crazy to it, like a beacon, they had amassed by the thousand inside the quarry, and the duplicates that met each other managed to merge until two of them became Immortal Awakened.] The echo finally decided to tell Cain.

It is invisible and untouchable even by the Ancients? Putting aside the fact that Cain is certain he directly told them NOT to touch it, the implication is fascinating. No wonder others were stumbling into them, if they couldn't see or feel them.

[Watch over the area and don't let anyone else stumble into the vortex. Bury it in rock or something if you have to.] Cain instructs while opening his Spell Crafting book to see if there is some sort of solution in there.

[Got it, boss. Nobody will try to enter the vortex when I'm done with it.] The echo declares, now content to wait for its twin to return so that the unfortunate Echo could be mercilessly taunted for being the first to taste real defeat.

p The battle gave them an incredible amount of experience in combat though. System experience as well, but the practice of fighting a target that could actually kill them one on one was an invaluable learning experience. When returned, the other will remember everything, since they share memories, and be an even more formidable combatant than he was yesterday as he adapts to his skills and learns new ways to do battle that Cain was unable to teach them, having never fought such an enemy in Ancient Form himself, or at all.

While Cain searches the Spell Crafting book, the Echo gets to work making sure that none would ever set foot on the spot where the vortex lays. Being an Ancient at heart, while sharing Cain's memories, the plan is grandiose on a level suitable to the Ancient Species. Cain is going to love it, the Echo is certain.

Cain finds that there are actually a few abilities that might help him out with the vortexes, with the easiest of them being the elementary sensory augmentation [Mana Vision]. It will allow him to see the Ley Lines, as well as active enchantments. That sounds like the sort of thing that might let Cain see a vortex, so he gets to work writing it down while the city slowly goes crazy outside.

At first, everyone thinks it is the normal Common Market morning rush, but slowly the topic of conversation becomes clear. An early departing group passed near the cursed

quarry and found that it is gone, replaced by a field of lava and a thick fog that fully obscured all attempts to pierce it with sensory skills.

That has everyone's attention, almost causing Cain to fail his Spell Crafting attempt. The Echo is doing his best to block his thoughts from the Companions so they can't ruin his surprise, but they all knew he was fighting there last night. Once the book is finished, Cain grabs Nemu, puts Laura in his pocket, and takes to the air, jumping out his hotel room window to save time, and heads straight for the former quarry.

Coming towards the quarry from the air, Cain can see that the fog is unnatural, the effect of Ice Breath on a hot surface. But he can't see much more. He knows where the Echo is though, so he renews the spell, returning the clone to the survivor's side.

[If you come through the fog layer, I made a present for you. It's perfect, they will never find the vortex in here.] Knowing the echoes as he does, that sounds a bit ominous, but Cain lands anyhow, followed by Evangeline and Vala.

What he finds is a glorious temple built in the Ancient Greek fashion, except in obsidian black stone instead of a light-colored marble.

Walking through the front doors, Cain sees that the entryway is decorated with carvings of the Ancients, and then every pillar beyond that is of a different species group. The prominent member of each species is very clear though, the pillars honor the Companions. The last three are left empty for now, and there is a raised podium at the front, with the long-bearded and hooded visage that this world uses to represent the Laughing God taking up the place of honor, filling the wall behind the podium, separated by a recessed section and a large stone altar. Or maybe it's a table? Really, it could be used for either purpose.

"Care to explain the purpose of this?" Cain asks, wondering what the Echo is up to.

[It is perfect camouflage. The vortex is buried in the stone below our feet, where nobody would even think to go looking for it, and the world never had a temple to the Laughing God.] The Echo says proudly.

"But all the carvings are of us." Laura points out, flying out of Cain's pocket to check out her image carved into the pillar. It is her own Draconic form, but in the black stone, nobody would recognize it as her unless she was right next to it, and even then they might think she was just the model for the sculptor. The same goes for the others, they're vague enough to be nondescript, but recognizable by Cain as his own group.

[That's the best part. They are going to be SO confused.] The voice doesn't come from the Echoes, it is just a whisper of a voice carried through the temple.

"Laughing God? Have you come to see your temple?" Cain asks but receives no answer. That shouldn't be surprising. He has never heard of a God directly interacting

with mortals, other than during the war between the Gods, plus it is the Laughing God. Giving Cain a direct answer would be way too boring for him.

"Alright, let's see that vortex. I got a skill to see mana, so I'm hoping to get some details." Cain insists, and the Echo shrinks down into an Elf and leads Cain through the hidden back rooms and down into the basement.

They turn a corner and Cain sees it, a mass of swirling Mana within the stone. The vortex is like nothing he has ever seen, and Cain can clearly see the differences between the natural Mana of the area, and the spot where the centuries-old spells intersect to create the unstable vortex of spell effects.

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

## Chapter 422 422

Looking over the vortex with his new [Mana Vision] skill, Cain can see that it is missing something, and that missing something is what is making it unstable. For now, he doesn't know exactly what it is though, so fixing the vortex is beyond him. The principles of Spell Crafting say that it can be modified though, which means he will eventually be able to fix it, or at least stabilize it and hopefully remove the people that are trapped inside.

If nothing else, maybe he can modify it a little and turn it into a dungeon.

At the moment, the best he can do is an experiment. The damage looks to him like the vortex has been pulled apart, leaving it in barely attached pieces. The obvious first thing to do is separate them and see if the whole thing collapses. Cain pulls at the strings of runes, trying to break them at a weak point by destroying the runes, but the harder he tries, the stronger they get. Once he stops exerting pressure, they seem to relax back to their original form though.

That's an unexpected result, but maybe the opposite is true. If he tries to mend the closest bits together, perhaps they will weaken even further?

Cain attempts to attach portions, together again, but only finds a few small spots where he can attach a single rune. The spell isn't just torn, entire sections of it are missing, and the remaining portions won't bond to each other.

Today, they don't have unlimited time to experiment, soon the fog from the Ice Breath on lava will dissipate and a lot of awakened adventurers are going to show up here

looking for answers. With their images posted all over the building, it's best if Cain and his companions are not here for that part.

Without mana vision, even those who find their way into the hidden catacombs of the basement won't find the vortex and nobody will stumble into it, so as long as they don't actually destroy the entire region to get rid of the newly created temple, it should be relatively safe to leave things as they are.

They lingered too long though, and by the time the group reaches the top of the stairs, faint voices can be heard as transfers make their way through the rapidly thinning fog.

"Play it off like we were simply the most adventurous group and reached here only a few seconds ago," Cain whispers, moving to stand just inside the main doors and look over the black stone splendor of the main room of the Temple to the Laughing God.

It is complete, but it is definitely missing something. There are no adornments of any sort, only the building itself. Cain hopes that won't be an issue, but then a great idea comes to him. He got an exceptionally worthless item last night, dropped while the Echoes were fighting the Crazy. A staff that boosts magic damage done by 40 percent, but can't be used by anyone who can use Mage, Cleric or Warlock books.

There is a tall recess in the wall, where a statue might go, if there were any in the building, so Cain stands the staff up in it with a smirk, just as the first group to reach the temple opens the doors.

"Hey, you! Stop right there. Don't you dare loot this place dry before it can be catalogued." A voice calls.

"Fear not. There wasn't anything here but the building to begin with, so I am leaving the Laughing God an offering." Cain replies, his smile not shrinking at all.

The leader of the group, who is wearing a cloak that marks him as a member of the local archaeology department comes over to inspect the staff that Cain left on the shelf. He looks it over with laughter in his eyes, and then reaches out to grab it, intending to inspect it more closely, to see if it really were a relic or if the Wrath Demon had been telling him the truth.

,m The moment his hand touches it though, it flashes with blue light and he is thrown to the ground in a heap. Embarrassed but not injured.

"Well, that was unexpected," Cain says, turning the staff so that the better-looking part of the carvings is facing out.

"You are able to use mage-type books, right? That must be why you can't recover the relic from the shrine." One of his companions suggests.

"Hmm, I wonder." Another one mutters, pulling a pair of gauntlets from his inventory. They are plate gloves, with a bonus to all physical damage done, but can't be used by warrior, ranger, or hunter subclasses.

The Gnarled youkai, with bark-like skin, places them in a suitably shaped alcove with a smile and steps back to admire his handiwork.

"That's just about right. They are very very good gloves, but I don't know if anyone alive can and would use them." He explains, and the rest of the archaeologists begin to understand his and Cain's logic in their offerings.

One of the warriors reaches for the gloves, getting the same blinding flash of blue light that the mage did before being thrown to the ground, but the youkai who offered them can pick them up without issues.

"So whoever makes the offering can take it back, but otherwise only those who can make good use of it can." Cain theorizes.

None of the others have an item suitable to the theme, but looking around at the way the building was carved, there are thousands of places to leave tributes. The echoes are looking at them with great curiosity though. They didn't carve these alcoves into the walls, and they weren't there when the group went downstairs, so they must have formed sometime in the last ten minutes.

More and more adventurers are making their way into the enormous building, designed with the Ancient's body size in mind, as Cain pretends that all this is new to him and continues his exploration. The echoes really did a number in here, the place is beautiful, and there are carvings everywhere. But he is certain that it isn't the same layout as the first time he looked at it. For one, it is bigger, and there are upper-level balconies, with human-sized floors off to one side. Those definitely weren't there earlier.

The two relics on the wall garner a lot of attention from the dozens of new arrivals, and every few minutes a new item is placed, as the amused adventurers donate back the most laughter-inducing items that they have come across. There seems to be a criterion though, and one offering is immediately rejected, throwing both the item and the donator across the room with a flash of light.

"Looks like the Laughing God doesn't like trash drops." One of the transfers laughs, looking over the item. It is class restricted, but otherwise useless. Cain can see that the restriction isn't the point though, there is a beautiful and delicate mage robe hung beside a lower floor window that has no class restrictions at all but adds damage to unarmed hits and adds a [Bleed] effect. Perfect for that rare subspecies of Mage that can cast Fist.

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



## Chapter 423 423

After a search of the building, Cain leads his group back out to make way for the influx of visitors intrigued by the shrine to the Laughing God. There has never been one that anyone remembers, but not because of some taboo. It was simply a case of nobody really knowing what the Laughing God would like, and a temple full of practical jokes just seemed tacky and irreverent.

After all, pranks are not the essence of the Laughing God, the ability to mock fate and laugh at others' designs for you is. It's not the easiest concept to put into a shrine, so there simply wasn't one ever built.

All through the walk back to the city, Cain is immersed in thoughts of Spell Crafting, and the possibilities that lay in store for him once he manages to master the basics. They are definitely going to need a bigger space though, because he is going to need room to work and study, and the one small chair in their room isn't going to cut it.

So, once they reach the Inn, Cain goes looking for the proprietress, who was cooking lunch in the back when they walked in.

"I don't suppose you know where we might find a house to rent or buy for a reasonable price do you? I need a lot of space for a project that I'm working on, more than a single room can provide." Cain asks politely.

"I recommend a rental. The only ones that buy in the awakened zones are staying in them for good since you can't use travel circles to come in or out of them. But there is a property manager just down the street. Look for the Tengu woman with bright pink hair. She's pretty hard to miss, and she likes to sit out front to call out to travelers who might want one of her short-term rentals.

"But first, what's for lunch? We got sidetracked this morning and missed breakfast." Laura asks, poking her head out from where she was napping in Cain's jacket.

"Grilled water buffalo sandwiches with spicy bean soup. Ready in fifteen more minutes." The lamia informs her, pointing to the soup pot that she's working on.

They aren't the only adventurers here today for a change. Some of the newer awakened only discovered this place yesterday after the Quest party, learning that they had been greatly overpaying for everything in the only slightly better-appointed districts where the rest of the hunters stay. So today they have returned to try the food, and decide if they are going to change their lodging arrangements the next time they come through the city.

That made the usually quiet lunchtime extra lively, much to the joy of their young server, who was glad to see all the extra business her family was getting. At first, Cain wondered why there were just the two of them, but then it dawned on him. There are no male Lamia, so whoever the girl's father is, he will be of a different species, so Cain might have totally overlooked him during the previous days.

"I don't suppose you guys know much about the Vortexes do you?" Cain asked the table of hunters seated next to them, trying to chat up Nemu and Evangeline. Cain had expected them to start with Vala, but it seemed that she was simply too intimidating for them.

"Vortexes? I've heard the legend, that they swallow unwary travelers who pass too close to the hidden points of power. But that's about all I know." Their leader, a lanky obsession demon with a ridge of spikes down the top of his head answered with a shrug.

It looked like he had painted them with nail polish, making them glitter and matching them to his outfit, which Cain thought was a pretty cool fashion statement, but he really stood out in a crowd, so it might not be the most tactical choice for a hunter.

"If you ask the Bog Witch she might know a thing or two." One of the others answered, making his companions shudder.

"Hooded old woman, lives in a river valley about twenty kilometers from the city?" Cain asked, and they all nodded in agreement.

"She's the one that told me about them in the first place. She's of the opinion that they can be forced to spit out the people that they have captured if you have the right skills. Since she seemed to know what she was talking about, I thought I'd ask around and see if there were any more clues." Cain explains.

"To most of us, it's just a legend about the Crazy that started just after the great war when the first of them appeared. I don't think anyone knows for sure what the truth is, or why they didn't appear before that." The hunters explain, not having much detail to add.

"Thanks for the help guys, this round is on me."

If nobody knows anything, and there aren't any rumors floating around about them, then there is a good chance that it is an extremely rare ability to be able to see them. Some mages might be able to, since Cain had heard rumors about the Ley Lines from mages before, but if any here have seen the vortexes, they either got trapped in them due to curiosity, or they never told anyone else.

"Once we find a larger place, we will need to examine more of them," Cain says softly to his companions, then mentally instructs the Echoes to look for more vortexes while they hunt. Perhaps the differences between them might lead Cain to some sort of discovery.

As promised, the property manager was extremely easy to find. In fact, they didn't even need to look for her, she found them the moment they came around the corner near her shop.

"Greetings, I hear you're looking for a larger place to stay? Maybe something out of town a little where you can make noise without disturbing the neighbors?" She greets them with a waggle of her eyebrows, her bulbous nose twitching in time with the movement.

"Where doesn't matter too much, but somewhere with a high roof, or a large storage barn would be the best. I will need to do some magical experiments, and they are best not done in extremely small spaces." Cain explains.

"I know just the place for you then. It's not one of my personal properties, but I know the owner, and they have been trying to rent it out for a while now. The problem is that it's outside the city, and you know how city dwellers are about the rural demons and beastkin." That they do, the disdain is mostly subtle, but Cain recognizes it as the same way people in his last life looked at addicts and the homeless as if they were less than those around them.

The tengu has rent to collect today, so she gives them a map to the property she has in mind, with directions to come back and tell her if it wasn't what they were looking for, so she can find them something more suitable.

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

## Chapter 424 424

The location that the property manager referred them to turned out to be a dilapidated farm in the woods, nearly at the edge of the Quest range, much further out of town than she had implied. But that isn't necessarily a bad thing for Cain and his party. There are no neighbors, with a property this rural being viewed as unsafe by the vast majority of the population.

The owner is waiting there for them, accompanied by two of his sons, all awakened Mythic and geared as hunters.

"What made you consider moving this far out into the woods? Even we moved to the other side of the river so that we were closer to town when the Crazy problem started getting bad a few decades ago." The farmer, one of the same species of water elemental Youkai that they met at the waterfall asks curiously.

"There is a high reward quest going on in the city, to hunt the crazed and make the roads safe for construction crews, but we were planning to do some magical experiments, and that isn't the wisest thing to do within the city limits. Out here, I can experiment all that I want and not risk damaging anything. Plus, if the experiment goes as well as I hope it will, there are plenty of Crazed available to volunteer for my attempts to break their curse." Cain answers happily and the Youkai laughs, a gurgling sound like a flowing river.

"Well, that's one way to do it. Do you think you really can break the curse?" One of the younger men asks, with a heavy dose of doubt clear in his voice.

"The Bog Witch says that it is possible. I don't really have much evidence, but after following the hints that she gave me, I have at least some hope that I might be able to fulfill her vision." The mention of the Bog Witch seems to actually bring some confidence to the Youkai, unlike the hunters in the city, who all reacted to her with revulsion and doubt.

"What did she want you to do exactly?" The older man asks, his face showing pure curiosity. They didn't react poorly to the mention of the old woman, so Cain decides to give them at least an inkling of what he is up to, in case they have ideas that might help him.

"She only saw the start and the end, but she thinks that we can close the vortexes that have formed at the Ley Line intersections and expel the people trapped inside, which will stop the Crazed from spawning. Then the hunters will only have to kill the ones that are wandering around and no more, or at least a lot fewer will appear every night."

"So she did give you a good clue. We have a great sensitivity to Mana flow, so all three of us have seen the vortexes, but doing anything about them is way beyond our abilities. Nothing we tried with water and earth magic affected them in the least, and none of us were brave or stupid enough to risk touching them to manipulate the mana directly." The more outgoing of the sons shares a bit of their knowledge with Cain.

"We buried one underground, to stop any more from entering it, but I couldn't do much to it. I tied a few of the damaged sections together again, but huge chunks are ripped out of the spell. I don't know if that is because they never formed or because something ripped its way out."

The owner of the farm nods. "Could be either. They had been active for a while before anyone noticed what was happening, so the cause of the damage remains unknown. There were intense battles here during the war though, so it is possible that a very powerful awakened was trapped inside when the spell that caused the dungeons in the rest of the world took effect."

"But more importantly, let us show you around the farm. Despite appearances, it isn't in terrible shape. It is a skill of one of the Earth Guardians to make a structure look

abandoned, which helps keep people away instead of ransacking the place looking for treasures." The formerly silent son suggests.

He is proven to be telling the truth once they step inside. The actual house is sturdy and in decent interior shape. It was never a fancy or opulent place, but it has been recently cleaned and the furniture is in good condition. With three bedrooms plus a sitting room and kitchen, it isn't large, but the barn next to it has all the space to work that Cain could want. Under the faded red paint, thick, and weather-beaten boards, and a lingering smell of animals it hides four large side rooms plus a loft on half of the upper level. The open space was likely intended to allow the workers to throw down bales of straw and feed, but for Cain, it is a spot to summon larger creatures if he needs to.

He could actually do the practical experiments with his spell crafting outdoors since there is nobody around to see them, but just in case someone is paying them more attention than they should be, it is best if he does the more sensitive things out of easy sight.

"We will take it. Here is the month's rent, and we will be around most of the time if you need anything from us. I have some skill with summons, so it isn't often that everyone will be gone while I study over the next couple of weeks." Cain explains. The rural farming villages often suffer losses during attacks by Crazy or awakened monsters, so being available to help them out in an emergency is usually a highly appreciated service.

The Youkai leaves after a short farewell and Cain looks over the forms he recorded. Surprisingly, one of them is of the Earth element, at least by class specialty. So, it was likely the boy that cast the spell on the farm that makes everything look like it is in much worse shape than it is. That particular spell could come in very useful to Cain later to camouflage Guild assets.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

## Chapter 425 425

For the first two full days that they were at their new residence, Cain did nothing but study Spell Crafting. Though he had managed to learn a few spells in advance, he was really only a sixth of the way through the book. Unless he could master the principles to the very end, he didn't think that he could manage to fix or destroy the Vortexes.

So, he set his mind to study as he had never in two lifetimes done before. The first section of essential skills that he had made it through so far was more like a tutorial, an introduction to Spell Crafting where the student was walked through step by step. Even the bit where he had to fill in missing sections of spells was still very clearly laid out for him. Cain had hoped that the entire book would be that way, step-by-step learning that he could follow with relative ease. Unfortunately, there was a very large step in the middle, and he wasn't quite sure how to overcome it.

[Using the principles of life force manipulation, the following spells can be modified to alter physical attributes at the Mythic Level] the page in front of him says. But he doesn't know the principles of life force manipulation, and they aren't in this book anywhere.

Cain had considered skipping it and moving forward, but they are mentioned multiple times in the following sections, as well as other theories he has never heard of before. It might have been common sense to the author, or part of a standard syllabus, but things like Nyarla's Theorem of Light Decay are no longer taught in this world. In fact, he didn't know that light did decay. Doesn't it just kind of travel until it hits something?

Perhaps a serious change of the vortexes might be overly optimistic for his abilities. But for now, Cain is comparing what he knows of curses and the [Life Leech] ability to try to work out the intricacies of Mythic level physical enhancement.

Even if it doesn't help with the Vortex, that's a class of spells that he can't afford to overlook. Going by the expected outcomes, he should be able to temporarily enhance even a common barn owl to Mythic Quality equivalent. The book predates the System, so he doesn't know if it will actually categorize them as Mythic, but even if it doesn't that level of buff on Vala would absolutely destroy anything he has fought so far.

"Maybe if we gain a few more mythic healing skills it might help us understand?" Victor, the victorious echo suggests.

Cain forbid him from calling the one that was called back "Loser" so instead he renamed himself to bask in the glory of having won the ultimate challenge against his clone. Cain was going to point out that they are identical, so neither is actually better, but the motivation of a challenge seems to be the best way to get them to do things in the most efficient manner without micromanaging them.

That seems like a good idea, so Cain merges with a Legendary Forest Dragon, and his skills upgrade it to Mythic. Both its aura and one of the healing spells it can use qualify as mythic rank spells, so Cain has a variety of methods to test their theories on life force. The Dragon unfortunately had no idea what they were talking about, so either dragon doing things instinctively is the issue, or they simply have a different name for it that the Dragon didn't understand.

The two echoes exchange Mythic Fireballs, then heal each other as Cain watches. There is certainly something there, but he just can't quite grasp what it is. They seem to

be enjoying themselves though, so Cain lets them repeat the process over and over until he understands.

The first day isn't quite enough, but he did manage to get a bit of insight after dinner. When the healing spell restores the body, it doesn't bring the essential "Life Force" with it. The newly grown flesh and tissue are in a type of stasis until the body's energy flows into them. This is the reason that healing spells don't work on the dead. Without the life force to bond to, the spell can't finalize.

Keeping that in mind, and after looking over the Spell Crafting book for most of the night, Cain tries to actually create one of the enchantments the next morning. He understands the basics of enhancing stats, that part was easy, and with this bit of new knowledge, Cain hopes that he can make them attach to the target body and take effect.

In case targeting the echoes is interfering with the process, Cain borrows a wild rabbit for today's experiment. Much like its humanoid equivalent, rubbing its head calms it right down, and Cain sets it in a stall in the barn while he writes out the ability.

The completed work looks like it should function, so Cain crosses his fingers and rubs the bunny for luck, then casts it.

[Skill Learned: Mythic Fortification]

"Yes, it worked!" The echoes cheer in unison, looking down at the rabbit happily nibbling on leaves in front of them.

"Did you manage it? Nemu asks, rushing into the barn, stopping when she sees the rabbit.

[Species] Rabbit

[Level] 90

[Quality] Ordinary

[Effects]

[Mythic Durability] Reduce damage taken by nonawakened abilities and attacks by 99 percent.

"So it wasn't enough to make it Mythic" The beastkin sighs, looking over the bunny, then getting a suspicious glint in her eyes.



Laura flies in while she is admiring the rabbit and whispers in her ear. "If you set it loose in town, imagine all the fun you could have watching the townsfolk try to kill it for dinner."

That has to fall under cruel and unusual punishment. Even if they trapped it, they would be unlikely to manage to kill it until the buff wore off. The two of them are clearly planning to try it out until Cain gives them a look that has them both reconsidering putting the rabbit in danger.

"Why not keep using this one? With a Mythic Rank damage increase buff maybe it would upgrade?" Nemu suggests, amused at the thought of a super bunny, until it occurs to her that it would actually become more powerful than she currently is. Without anyone farming beastkin dungeons or traveling, the number of new forms has come to a near stop. Unless they find a beastkin Village, she might be stuck at Ancient for even longer.

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

## **Chapter 426 426 Jurgen's Bear**

By the end of the month, nobody is sure if the rabbit should be considered lucky or unlucky. It has suffered through dozens of failed experiments, but as Cain gets closer and closer to fully understanding the principles behind the enhancements his furry test subject is becoming more and more impressive.

While it is still living in the barn, it gets regular meals, head rubs, and protection from predators. Not a bad life at all.

It also wasn't alone, since word of the reclusive Flesh Crafter doing experiments in the woods had spread among both the hunters and the rural residents, volunteer number one now gets daily visitors.

It all started with a young Youkai who wanted to be beautiful for her wedding day. She came to beg Cain to help her out, an idea he agreed to under one condition, to be his guinea pig for the day's enhancement experiments.

That day just happened to be the first one where Cain was working on a charm that affected both physical and mental faculties. Both offensive and defensive buffs of Cain's own making were now easy to apply at Mythic Quality and in their current format, they were stable enough to last an entire week.

With more practice Cain was certain that he could make them permanent, he was just missing knowledge, so he moved on, hoping to get insight as he progressed through the lessons on Spell Crafting.

The Youkai wasn't disfigured or injured or anything, she was just not conventionally attractive, and much taller than most women of her species. At first, Cain tried having the companions give her the "love yourself in the body you're in" persuasive talk, but she was adamant.

If she was certain she wasn't going to regret it, he didn't see a reason to refuse and verifying the increased mental capacity of a rabbit was not going to be easy. So she became volunteer number two.

One day obviously wasn't going to perfect the spell, but it was enough to give Cain a basis to work from, and at the end of the day Cain sent her home with an extreme makeover.

The next few days were quiet, with the Echoes doing some hunting and some improvements to the farm. They share Cain's skills, so they are fully capable of doing their own experiments and he can read their minds to see the results.

Their target was the cultivation and breeding of higher-quality crops. Mythic beasts have proven to be exceptionally tasty, as well as being high in both energy and nutrients, so logically Mythic Quality fruits should be the same.

Of course, the idea wasn't their own, it started with Laura, who was despairing about the lack of new sweets now that they weren't living in the city. The Echoes had a soft spot for the Dragon and agreed to grow her some watermelons by merging with druids. One thing led to another and they were now trying to grow Mythic peach trees.

After only a few quiet days, the first of the hunters came to visit. Their group had found a cluster of Crazed, much like the one near the vortex in the quarry, and their tank wanted some extra durability before they attempted to clear it. One of his group members had been at the wedding and heard about Cain from the bride, so they came to bargain.

The deal was the same, let the one gaining the benefit become the practice target for the day and Cain would buff the volunteer before he left. Since it wasn't a permanent buff they were initially reluctant, but once they saw their member's damage reduction skyrocket and his HP triple under the effect of the Mythic buff for an entire week they changed their minds and began telling their friends about the unusual deal.

"Good morning, is anyone awake?" A deep but gentle sounding voice calls out the next morning, while everyone is having breakfast.

"Come in. We're in the main house." Cain calls back and the door opens to reveal a two-meter tall dryad male with broad shoulders and papery white bark for skin.

If Cain had to compare him to anything, it would be a birch tree with eyes. Even his hands are animated branches. Most dryads the group has seen are much more human than that, but Cain can't exactly claim to be an expert on their lineages and physiology.

"How can we help you?" Cain asks politely as the large visitor ducks to enter the room.

"I have lost my partner. You see, my class takes a wild beast as a partner and enhances them with our skills to hunt. But mine was shredded beyond resurrection and I can't find a suitable one to tame. I was hoping that you could modify or create a custom one for me."

That sounds like much more fun than another day of studying Spell Crafting all day.

"What did you have in mind? An ability, a particular species or combat type? Cain asks, hoping that he has something good planned out to keep them all entertained. Too much studying gets monotonous, even if it hasn't actually been that long.

"Have you ever seen a moon bear? Black and White, 4 meters tall when they are standing on all four feet?" He asks, while Cain reads his mind to see what he means.

[New Form Recorded]

Well, that was unexpected. He learned enough about them to Summon one just from reading the Dryad's thoughts. Their visitor must know the species very well.

"That's what you're after? Any particular abilities?"

The man thinks for a few seconds before replying. "Their innate ability is damage reduction, but beasts don't usually have more than their species-specific abilities. The next choice would have been a Howler for the bleed effect their claws apply."

[So he needs tough with a bleed effect? I wonder why he didn't ask for a dragon unless he can't use them?] Victor the echo asks in Cain's mind.

"Is your skill limited to beasts?" Cain asks and the dryad nods his agreement.

"Alright, I think I know just the thing for a custom follower. But you will have to claim it yourself." Cain informs him and the dryad smiles.

"That's always the fun part. The bonding spell requires that they be at full health, and if either of us is under the effects of an outside ability the spell will cancel. So we either need to make friends, or I have to avoid being eaten.

My class gives a lot of benefits to my partner, but the stronger that they are to begin with, the better they will be in the end."

Oh, that's even better. Do they get to watch him try not to get eaten by a three-ton bear afterward? That's the peak of cultured entertainment right there.

If Cain gives the beast [Maul] and [Rend] both at mystic quality, that's two bleed effects. It will naturally have [Iron Hide] due to its species, but Cain can add a few more skills to the Puppet before releasing it.

The best options seem to be [Dominating Roar] and Mythic rank [Regeneration] which will let the beast heal from nearly dead to full health in under a minute if it isn't taking damage. No, [Horrific Perfection] would be better, increasing its modifiers to the theoretical maximum, but a bear that tough and fast might actually be impossible to tame.

Cain begins the work, forming the body of the bear as a Puppet and focusing on making it as durable and physically powerful as possible. [Iron Hide] takes effect, letting Cain know he is close to complete and he gives the beast one last tweak, giving it unnaturally dense muscle tissue for a little more added strength.

Then he adds the four Mythic skills and steps back to admire his handiwork.

The moment he activated the Puppet it ran over to give him a head bump, then turned and licked Vala across the face. Taming this guy might be easier than expected. He's really quite friendly.

"Come over and say hello," Cain suggests, scratching the beast's side, making one leg twitch.

The moment the dryad gets close the bear roars at him, almost driving the man to his knees.

"What exactly did you do to it? Was that a Mythic Roar?" He gasps, trying to catch his breath.

"[Dominating Roar] to be precise. He has [Rend] and [Maul] as well. You did say you would like a bleed effect after all." Cain smiles, while dryad and bear have a stare down.

"He is still under my control, so maybe take a moment to get acquainted. I'm not sure how much he will understand, but he won't attack without orders."

"In that case, hello, my name is Jurgen." The dryad informs the beast in a polite voice but is deliberately ignored by the Enormous bear in favor of throwing Evangeline up in the air with his snout. When she reaches the peak of the toss, she opens her wings and

glides down so they can do it again. Neither one seems to care at all about the poor Dryad, who only wanted a new friend.

"I am almost one hundred percent certain he just rolled his eyes at me." Jurgen points out and Vala smirks.

"You're going to have to do better if you want to be partners. I don't think he is taking you seriously at all." The demon laughs and a hint of malice shines in the beast's eyes.

"Maybe it's because of the Puppet effect that he only likes your companions?" One of the shadows suggests.

"That is a possibility." Cain agrees. A very slim one, but a possibility.

"Perhaps if we move to the field? Then you can release him and I will begin the taming process." Jurgen says confidently.

The beast seems exceptionally docile as they go, allowing Jurgen to touch him without complaint. The dryad nods and Cain frees the bear, changing it from a Puppet into a living, Mythic Quality beast.

It gives Cain a toothy smile of gratitude, then leans towards Jurgen like it wants a head rub. Only at the last second does it lunge with incredible speed, attempting to eat him alive.

"Dammit," Jurgen shouts, rolling backward, bleeding from the face where the bite grazed him.

A giant paw came crashing down on the grass of the field as the dryad activated a movement skill and jumped out of the way of certain death. The jump gained him a bit of distance to work with and Jurgen activates his skill to begin the taming.

Checking the bear, Cain sees the status slowly taking effect, but Jurgen is on the run, only inches from death as claws race his way and giant jaws snap at his head.

He rolls under the bear, getting away from the jaws, but a hind leg kick sends him crashing into the barn thirty meters away. Somehow he keeps the spell going and struggles to his feet, catching his breath as his target charges him.

The taming is getting closer to complete now, Jurgen only needs to dodge a few more times and he will have his new partner. But the bear knows that too, and it is determined to test him. It unexpectedly cuts its charge short and lifts up on its hind legs, letting his front claws drag over the hastily erected barrier that Evangeline placed over the barn to prevent Jurgen's body from punching a hole in the wooden structure.

The barrier collapses as the Dryad again leaps between the beasts feet, but this time he climbs its back to get away from the claws and teeth. With a barrel-shaped build like the overgrown panda that it looks like, the bear simply flops over and rolls about, Crushing the unfortunate dryad into the dirt for a few seconds until the spell finally finishes.

[Jurgen has gained a new partner]

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

## Chapter 427 427 Hunting Trophy

As Cain learns more about life force Manipulation in his attempts to perfect Mythic buffs, more things about the vortex become clear to him. In specific, one of the sections of broken runes has become very familiar from his Spell Crafting lessons. It is a much more complex version of the portion of a spell that bonds it to a target.

That gives Cain a great idea. The next section he will be learning after what the book calls an introduction to enhancements is an introduction to curses. They are fundamentally the opposite, in terms of structure, so Cain is hoping that he will learn a structure that will cause the target to reject buffs.

If he applies something like that in the missing section he might be able to force the vortex to eject its occupants.

With that goal in mind, Cain works his way through the buffs section until one day news reaches him that the City is planning to end the Quest for Crazy. The numbers are under control for now, at least in this region, so they are going to begin the road work.

When they're not busy with the fruit trees, the Echoes have been culling Crazy, so Cain should have a rather hefty reward coming.

"I guess we have scaled up the secondary Quest Reward as much as possible, let's go to town and see what we can get," Cain announces, pulling the companions away from their morning tasks and games.

"We will remain here to welcome guests and look after the orchard." The Echoes declared in unison. That's no surprise, they are very close to reaching their goals. The last round of seeds that they produced grew legendary peach trees, and they have tweaked these ones even further.

They plan on keeping the existing ones instead of removing them this time since the volunteers have expressed a love for the fruits. Despite their careful cultivation work, the

Echoes can't guarantee that a new strain won't be poisonous or terrible tasting, and these Legendary fruits are both delicious and provide a refreshing benefit stronger than most health and mana potions.

It's not exactly what they were going for, but in a way, it is even better. Instead of being a complete meal, the fruit is a life-saving snack. So, they will start the process over with other plants once these reach their full potential.

Mounted upon a Mythic Forest Dragon, the eighty-kilometer journey to the city takes under ten minutes. At those speeds, a wind barrier is needed to avoid taking damage from bugs and other such nuisances, but the thrill of flying at speeds comparable to a jet line is well worth the effort.

Laura is the only one not impressed. Now that she's reached Mythic Quality as well, keeping up with the Mythic Forest Dragons is no problem for her. With these speeds, Cain is even reconsidering calling for the ship to take them home when the time comes. Sure, it is thousands of kilometers, but the forest dragon could make it in under a day.

The city guards are unusually polite when they arrive, lining up to greet him with salutes while Cain dismounts in the grass outside the walls before giving the Dragon a belly scratch and dismissing it.

"Greetings Duke Cain. It has been some time, what brings you to the city today?" The guard leader asks while the others on duty clear a path through the line of travelers waiting to enter the city for his party to enter.

"Of, you know, we culled a few crazed in the last month, so I came to collect my rewards and see if they're still bidding on the road work," Cain informs the guard Sergeant politely.

"You want to guard a road crew?" The soldier asks, confused.

"Oh, nothing so boring. I was going to improve the road to the village near my house on the way back."

The looks on the faces of the people in line are priceless. Didn't they just spend a month clearing the area for a season-long project and now this man is suggesting he will take care of one branch alone, in only a few days?

"If you're serious, I believe they are still accepting bids for that section. There should be a limited Quest at the hall."

"Thanks, we will be heading there now. " Cain thanks the guards, leaving them in shock as he walks away.



The Echoes have made quite an impression on the hunters in the area, and by extension so has the man who summoned them. The locals don't know how he is planning to rebuild a road alone, but after a little thought they are thoroughly convinced that he could actually do it, even if it takes a fifty-man crew half a season without specialized magic.

Cain is drawing the attention of even more people as they get closer to the Quest Hall since everyone who has grouped with his volunteers recognizes his group and this is the home district for most of the City's hunters.

There are scattered whispers as Cain approaches the Quest Hall and he can see the panic in the workers' eyes. The Echoes killed an awful lot of Crazy, enough that they might have to issue a special tax levy to pay out the gold that is owed.

There is a way around that though. The Quest portion of the system gives the option to be rewarded with an additional bonus in lieu of the reward owed, but the one who issued the Quest must pay a system-generated penalty and the System is merciless.

It doesn't easily forgive those who default on debts, and that is why the employees of the Quest Hall officially post most quests. If the cost gets too great, some random employee takes the fall and the dignitary who ordered it is protected. Then the Quest Hall discretely goes after the one who reneged on their deal, with penalties and interest of course.

The superstition in the Hall is that the more upset the one who completed the Quest is, the more strict the penalty. Of course, it is rarely more difficult to fulfill than the actual penalty, and the Hall prides itself in best practices that lead to the clause very rarely being used.

This one was officially posted by the Quest Hall leader's apprentice, while the boss announced it to the gathered public, so she is the one who comes out to meet Cain's group.

Cain inspects the girl, finding that she is called Lilly, a level 201 Earth Caller of the Bog Witch species, a type of earth element Youkai that has an affinity for muddy swamps.

To Cain, she just looks like a pretty woman with long black hair, wearing a black Quest Hall uniform kimono. But looking closer, the face is actually a doll mask hiding her facial features. That isn't all that unusual for Youkai, for some the mask is part of their body.

"Greetings My Lord Cain. I'm certain you know the favor I have come to ask." The apprentice says nervously, wringing her fingers.

"I do, and I don't have a problem foregoing most or all of the monetary reward. It really isn't a big deal, but the progressive reward from the system could be very valuable to

me, so I will ask to complete the Quest." Cain explains and she looks somewhat relieved.

"That's great news. If you're not mad, maybe the System forfeit won't be too bad." Her boss says, coming forward.

"Of course, we will help her with it in every way possible, as per the terms of employment."

She hands Cain a scroll, and a pair of notifications pop up in front of Cain.

[Rewards Pending Resolution of Forfeit Penalty.]

[Please Choose: Strict, Vengeful, Fair, or Gentle Punishment options.]

"What's up with these options?" Cain asks.

"It asked you if you wanted to be strict or fair, right? That changes the three choices she will get to choose from." The boss explains.

"There are also vengeful or gentle." Cain shrugs and Lilly the Bog Witch looks confused.

"I've never heard of those options before. But Gentle sounds even better than Fair. Maybe it's because he really doesn't care about the money?" Lilly suggests.

"You have a point. I'll select Gentle then, and your options should appear soon." Cain agrees.

Her face goes pale when she sees the options appear on the Quest scroll and the boss looks like she might pass out. Cain walks over to see what the system came up with and what he sees leaves him speechless.

[Option 1] Loving and Gentle: Personally Provide 1 [Blood Heir] for the debtee. Debtee may not harm or deliberately allow the debtor to be harmed before the debt is paid.

[Option 2] Caring and Gentle: Debtor shall work as Debtee's domestic staff for continuous days until the debt is paid at the standard rate of 1 Gold Coin daily. Missed days incur a 1 Gold coin penalty. Debtee may not harm or deliberately allow the debtor to be harmed before the debt is paid.

[Option 3] Random: Act of Kindness

"Why doesn't the last one have a description?" Cain wonders out loud and Vala comes over to inspect the sheet.

"I believe that one is the system randomly picking a punishment." She says, pointing at the lack of detail.

"Ah, yes, if it's random then we really do have all the details it can give us. How much is owed?" The Quest Hall boss stammers, her cheeks flushing bright red and her eyes still focused on the first option. She is a Succubus, and the first proposal would most likely have been her instinctive first choice if she had been the one choosing.

"The total is One Hundred and Seven thousand gold coins," Vala informs her dryly, looking at the page. That's nearly three hundred years as a maid if Lilly chooses option 2.

"I am not even seventy yet, I'm not ready for children." The Quest Hall worker sobs and Cain pulls her into a hug.

"You don't need to pick option one. Or number two, since it's a really long time. Why don't you check number three and see what Act of Kindness it asks you to perform?" Cain suggests.

"If nothing else, it looks like these options won't allow you to be tortured until the debt is paid like so many of the strict punishments require." Her boss consoles the youthful acting Bog Witch, who is apparently in her sixties.

"Well, that's a start. And the rate to work it off is much better than the Fair options usually are, but there's no option to have others pay for me. I knew it would be harsh, but these are, how should I put it? Very unexpected." Lilly manages to say before going silent again, looking at her options.

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

## Chapter 428 428

"I choose Option 3." Lilly, the Bog Witch Quest Hall worker declares suddenly, startling everyone.

[Option 3: Random Acts of Kindness] chosen.

[Generating Mission]

[Mission Created] Assist debtee to obtain a suitably upgraded class. The average distance to debtee must not exceed 100 meters over any 24-hour solar cycle.

[Current daily average distance 76 kilometers]

"So, what tier is your current class?" The Quest Hall boss asks, willing to put a lot of money and effort into helping her employee. After all, the employment contracts go through the system, and if she doesn't live up to her obligations, she too will face a penalty. Only her level of punishment will be chosen by an angry former employee and not a forgiving Duke who didn't care about the money.

"The species exclusive version of Flesh Crafter is a Third Advancement class, and a rather powerful one." Cain replies with a shrug of his shoulders.

Lilly looks like she is thinking hard about something, then transforms into a large black cat with leathery wings before flying over to land with her head on Cain's shoulder, draping most of her lower body across the base of his wings.

"I don't want to find out what the penalty for being too far away is. Zero distance is the quickest way to reduce the average." The demonic feline informs him.

The spell is a Bog Witch racial ability. Most of them end up as a newt, alligator or snake, but she got the Nergal, an evil spirit of the swamp, as her [Secondary Form]. Once it is used the first time, that Form is theirs for life. For some that is a good thing, but not every Bog Witch gets the form that they would have preferred to spend a great deal of their life in. Their magic is varied and powerful, so those in need often come looking for them, meaning that the Bog Witches spend a lot of time hiding from annoyances.

"It won't be easy to upgrade you then. Let's go somewhere private to talk, the crowd has enough to fill their gossip for months." The boss decides, leading them all into a secure back room with a set of couches arranged in a square for informal meetings.

"Do you have any options at all for class advancement right now?" The Quest Hall leader asks hopefully. If he does, they just need to find a complementary skill to turn it into a better option.

Cain double-checks his interface before shaking his head. "Nothing at all, not even a lower quality side option."

Both the boss and the Bog Witch on his shoulder sigh, but then the Nergal form of Lilly makes a noise that is somewhere between a purr and a yelp that Cain takes as a sign of inspiration. "What is your specific species? I can tell that you are transformed, but that's as much as I can see with my skills."

The boss looks shocked, she truly believed that the Wrath Demon was Cain's true identity. The fact that it matches with Vala, who she took to be his family member stopped any doubts she initially had, but if Cain really is in a transformation, then things could be very different.

"Can you see through the others as well?" Cain asks curiously.

"The lovely blue Parrot Kin is a Seraphim. Not that I can see through the disguise, but she doesn't turn her aura all the way off, and I recognized it." Lilly explains and Evangeline facepalms.

"Not bad detective work. I'm guessing that you're thinking of finding a race-locked exclusive class like Ancient Flesh Crafter is?" Cain asks and the demonic cat nods.

The boss looks a bit confused, then goes over to a shelf and pulls out a book, flipping through the pages for a moment before looking at Cain again.

"I don't see any sort of Flesh Crafter subclass in our records that is a species exclusive. and I don't see Ancient Flesh Crafter either, is that because you are so old that you inherited a third advancement class when the system was implemented?" She asks, double-checking their records.

"I'm not that old, in fact, I'm an actual transfer, brought here by the system. You know what? It will be easier if I just show you." Cain explains, shifting into the three-meter tall version of his natural Ancient form and dropping the disguise.

The silence in the room is palpable. Nobody is speaking, or moving, in fact, they are barely breathing, just staring at Cain, who uses his facial tentacles to pet the kitten on his shoulder.

"But they're a myth, a story told about the creation of the world, not living breathing transfers." The Quest Hall boss sighs, her eyes slowly turning to bright pink hearts as her Succubus instincts to couple with the most powerful of beings and claim their essence for herself take over.

At her age, that would very rarely be an issue, but the Demons have a lot of stories about the Ancients, and despite their reputed cruelty and lust for domination, the Demons don't see them as inherently evil or unredeemable. Instead, they see them more like a force of nature, unconcerned about the lesser beings and the havoc their actions might cause. The demons themselves are often like that, and many groups claim to have some measure of Ancient heritage.

The younger generations take that as a joke, since it has been so long since the Ancients went extinct that there is no way to prove the claim either way, but still the notion that they are the descendants of the world's natural rulers persists.

"So that is what the Ancients looked like?" The bog witch asks, enjoying the warm tentacle on her fur.

"Yes and no. This is much smaller than my natural form, and even that is not fully grown. But from what I've seen, the species had a wide variety of appearances, though

almost all depictions I've seen that they made of themselves were as Eldritch Horrors with tentacles." Cain elaborates, thinking of the carvings inside the Ancient cities.

"This could be harder than anticipated. The Flesh Crafters aren't known to have an advancement path, that's the end of the line, there simply isn't anything better in their field of study. Plus, as an Ancient, we don't have any information on exclusive classes that might actually become available to you that would complement your existing classes. You said you transferred in, right? What did you start out as that led you here?" The succubus asks, working hard to control her instincts.

"I started as a Puppet Master, and stayed with the class for two hundred levels, learning every skill on both sides of the skill tree. Then I advanced to Flesh Crafter after a Quest reward made it possible." Cain explains, giving the short version of the story.

The look on both faces is even more shocked now than when they found out he was part of a mythical species from their legends. If it wasn't for the fact her body weight was fully supported by him, Cain was pretty sure the Bog Witch would have fallen to the floor, paralyzed by shock.

Everyone is silent for almost a minute while they gather their thoughts and then Lilly speaks slowly as if speaking too fast might break whatever illusion she is under.

"So, you are saying that you became an Ancient Flesh Crafter after being a Lord General Puppet Master? Wouldn't that mean that you have actual Mythic Summons and not Epic Summons with a Mythic skill?" She manages to eventually stammer out.

"Yes, and with the additional abilities that I have gained, I can have a dozen of them if I need, plus all the other summons that I can rely on." Cain agrees, expecting another round of shocked responses.

This time he is surprised though, and the Bog Witch flies off his shoulder and out the door, her Nergal body simply phasing through the solid wood as if it was not there at all. She returns only a few seconds later with a book in her paws and drops it into Cain's waiting tentacles.

"Open that and read it. I'm pretty sure you can." She almost shouts at him, while Cain looks at the unadorned leather cover.

It is clearly an Ancient Quality skill book, but it doesn't even have a name on it. Even the ones that he creates with Spell Crafting get a name when someone else touches them.

Cain opens the first page and sees that it isn't a Skill Book at all, but an educational tome like the one he is using to learn Spell Crafting.

[Welcome to the theory of Ascending Created Species, Volume 1] the first line reads in the Ancient language, made readable by the system.

That is amazing, and it is exactly the thing he needed, this book is supposed to contain many of the theories that are referenced in the Spell Crafting book. It isn't a large one though, and Cain quickly but gently flips through the ancient pages, finding that it is no more than an introductory primer that explains a few theories and then refers you to volume 2 for the practical work. It is more like a set of study notes to be referred to while doing other lessons. But for Cain, that is more important than the actual study guide.

[New Quest Available: Ascended Ancient] Grant the wish of one Mortal Being to Become a True Ascended using only Species Exclusive Skills. Reward: Class Advancement Token.

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

## Chapter 429 429 The Rise Of Lilly

"It gave me a quest to upgrade a Mortal to Truly Awakened, with the reward of a Class Change Token," Cain explains, staring at the book.

"That was left here by an Elf, well over a Millennia ago. She said that she had seen a vision that it would be needed here one day, but until today, not a single soul had even managed to open the cover, much less understand anything about it." Lilly explains.

So the corner Puppet has been through here with the library. That was a promising lead for Cain, who was eager to get his hands on the child care portion of that library.

"You sound way too optimistic. Truly Awakened is someone like Vala, who the system calls Mythic and has a Mythic Quality innate skill." Lilly, the Bog Witch points out.

"That's alright, I've got a plan that I'm pretty sure can accomplish the necessary task. If I just give you a Mythic Innate Ability and then change your species to match, you should register in the system as a proper Mythical being. Tell me, did you have a plan in mind for your progression?" Cain responds, while Lilly just stares at him open-mouthed.

"Who said anything about me?" She demands, the body of the Nergal Form making her voice raspy with a bit of demonic echo.

"I'm like 90 percent sure you volunteered," Laura says, looking up from her spot in Cain's pocket.

"Yeah, the Punishment says you have to help, right? Who else could it be?" Nemu agrees, enjoying the Bog Witch's discomfort.



"Do we know a Mythic Bog Witch? It would make things really easy." Evangeline points out, and Lilly finally sees a bit of hope for her future.

"Now I understand why everyone was afraid of the Ancients in the old stories. It's not that they're evil, it's that their power is so alien that it makes no logical sense at all." The Quest Hall boss says before her eyes glaze over as she sends a message to someone.

"Back up a second. Are you saying you could actually just change my entire species?" Lilly asks while the others wait for the boss to finish what she's doing.

"Yeah, that is the plan. It might not work, but it's the easiest place to start. The only question is if the System will recognize you." Cain informs her, rubbing her head as she absorbs this new information.

[Why don't you use my ability?] A voice appears in Cain's mind and a floating shadow appears in the corner of the room.

It is a Male Nergal, level 396, classified as a Beast, so it has no class. But it is Mythic and has the Mythic Racial ability [Shadow Form], an upgrade from the [Shadow Protection] That Lilly currently has.

[That would likely keep the Bog Witch in this form though.] Cain informs him, and the shadow lightens for a second. He's not sure, but Cain assumes that is the equivalent of a shrug.

[She's cute. I would take good care of her.]

"We could make you a Nergal full time. A Mythic Nergal is pretty powerful." Cain suggests and Lilly leans forward to simply stare straight at him.

"Who gave you that idea? Would it be a Nergal named Xxiactix? Tell him he's still not getting a date until he completes the task I set him." The Bog Witch growls, looking around for the shadow that only Cain seems to be able to see.

[You heard the lady, you have to complete her task to get a date, she won't go for it.] Cain tells the shadow, but it is already moving around behind the couch that the boss is sitting on.

The oddly named demon cat stops in the shadow of the couch and shifts into a humanoid form, becoming a Male Bog Witch of Mythic Quality, with a bouquet of fragrant blue flowers in one hand and a box in the other.

"Did you know that these flowers have been extinct for over three thousand years? I had to find ancient seeds in a ruined city and cultivate them. Only I found out that the blue ones only appear when the plant first blooms under the light of a lunar eclipse." The oddly named man tells Cain with a smirk.

It seems he has come prepared for today, and Lilly has moved to hide behind Cain, like that will stop her suitor from remembering that she is there.

"Our parents arranged our marriage when we were younger, but she set us an impossible condition to begin the courting process, hoping to drive me away, but see how silky that fur is? How could I say no to such a beautiful wife?" Xxiactix smiles, moving around Cain to hand Lilly the flowers.

"Only her fur is beautiful?" Vala asks teasingly.

"Well, you see, I've never actually seen her human form, every time we are supposed to meet, she transforms and tries to run away. But today, she needs to stay near you, so she can't run too far and I can finally give her the flowers I grew." He replies sheepishly and Cain bursts into laughter.

"Lilly, there's playing hard to get, and then there's just being cruel. You could have just told him no instead of having him spend years growing flowers for you." Cain admonishes the Bog Witch on his back.

"I just needed a little more time you see? I wasn't even forty yet." She whines.

"Wait, how long did you spend on the flowers? Nemu asks the man holding the flowers.

"Twenty-six years. I actually finished them last year, but I couldn't find her. She didn't tell her parents she had moved and gotten a job here." He tells her proudly.

"You two really do need to talk. Lilly, please accept the flowers. He did everything you asked, it's only polite to accept his efforts, even if you don't accept him." Cain suggests.

"Well, he does seem to be rather handsome. For an old man." She sighs and her suitor shakes his head in amusement.

"Six Months. I am six months older than you. I just happen to have the same name as my more famous uncle." he replies and Cain can feel her freeze.

"As great as this daytime drama is, I have another option available. Another volunteer, who will gladly be your test subject." The boss informs the room, while the two Bog Witches just stare at each other.

A few seconds later a small girl with shimmering opal hair comes running into the room, searching frantically for someone before her eyes land on Laura, who has moved to the top of Cain's head to watch the show.

"It really is a Mythic Opal Prismatic Dragon!" She squeals, transforming into a tiny version of Laura.

Her dragon form is roughly the size of an Iguana, no more than a meter from the snout to the base of her tail, and she is of ordinary quality. Cain has never seen an ordinary quality dragon. Even most of the drakes are Greater Golems, Ordinary quality makes up the lowest grade of Lesser Golem summons. Cain inspects her to see how that is even possible, finding some very strange results.

[Name] Defect

[Race] Opal Prismatic Dragon

[Class] None

[Skills] None

That shouldn't be possible, every dragon has at least a breath, claw, and bite attack at birth. If they are unlucky they might have to wait on a class, but they always have the basic species skills. Cain has thousands of variants of dragons in his listings thanks to Aggramor, and not a single one is like this. She can't even fly properly, being wobbly in the air before Cain catches her with a tentacle and holds her up at his head height so she can talk to Laura.

"Hi, I'm Defect, it's good to meet you Your Majesty Laura." She greets her peer and Cain can feel the dragon in Pixie form stand up straighter at the praise. This little dragon might not have combat skills, but she is a master brown noser. Not many things could have gotten Laura on her side as fast as that.

Vala clearly agrees, petting the tiny dragon in Cain's grasp as she looks her over. "She's good. I suppose we could put in a good word to get the boss to help you out."

Defect makes a happy purring noise and gives Cain an amazing pleading look that Cain recognizes very well from every time he has tried to bypass a candy shop in the past.

"Fine, we will run the experiment twice. Lilly, talk to your fiance. Defect, come here so I can tweak your system a little bit."

Cain puts the dragon down and she shifts back to human form and runs over to stand by his feet while Cain thinks of the best way to accomplish what he has in mind. Honestly, the best option in her situation would be to make a Puppet Body and then use [Living Dolls] to transfer her into a fully formed body with a full set of skills, then give her one more skill with [Modify] to activate the system.

There's only one small, minor, inconsequential issue with that plan. In order to use [Living Dolls] to transfer the dragon to the new body, he has to kill her and transfer her body into a Stasis Gem that the spell will create. Or, maybe he can do that without killing her first? The description of Living Dolls says that it will resurrect a soul into a

Puppet body and put the body in a Stasis Gem, but it doesn't actually specify that they must be dead first.

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

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Behind him, Lilly and her suitor seem to actually be getting along well, as he goes all out to impress the bride that has been hiding from him for nearly three decades. Cain isn't an expert on feline sex appeal, but she must be seriously attractive for him to have gone so far to woo her.

Since she is busy, Cain starts on the dragon body, making one the same size as Defect's immature dragon form, then imbuing the Puppet with [Draconic Resistance], [Ice Breath], [Claw], [Chomp], and [Tail Slap] from Laura's abilities, all of which ascended to Mythic along with her.

That gives the Puppet the Mythic Quality tag and [Awakened Mythic] buff, just like Cain hoped.

"This part is a bit risky, are you ready?" Cain asks the little dragon, who nods happily while staring at the copy of herself.

[Living Dolls Activated] Stasis Gem placed in inventory.

It's not in Cain's inventory though, so it must be in Defect's. Speaking of which, she needs a better name. Cain knows his shortcomings and decides it's best to ask her before he goes changing things about the Puppet body she is in.

[Defect, tell me what name you would prefer to be called by.] Cain orders, subconsciously using [Noble Command] to reinforce his request.

[DeeDee. Everyone Calls me DeeDee.] she answers automatically, and Cain adjusts the name of the Puppet body she inhabits.

"Alright, one more step, and we are done. Hopefully." Cain announces to the room, pulling everyone's attention to the tiny dragon in front of him.

Cain releases the Puppet from his control, making DeeDee an independent person again.

She blinks rapidly and looks around, the fog that the Puppet effect places over her mind fading as she regains her freedom.

[Now, tell me what Class you would like to have.] Cain orders again, and she simply blinks at him.

"I can have a class? I don't think that is possible. I mean, defective dragons don't get classes right?" she asks, resisting the skill.

Cain just raises an arm tentacle in her direction, tapping her on the head as if he's waiting impatiently for her to give a proper answer to his question.

"Um, Can I be a mighty warrior? One of the ones with the shiny armor and the big shield. You know the ones I mean?" The dragon asks and Cain nods.

Scrolling through his summons, he gets to King James and selects the [Detect Falsehood] class-exclusive skill of the Crusaders.

"Gah, there's something in front of me," DeeDee calls, swatting at thin air.

"Just say or select yes to finalize the acceptance of the skill." Cain laughs as she panics at seeing the system interface for the first time.

"I have one class option. Crusader. OH! They're really pretty. Yes, I can be a crusader. Okay. Change to humanoid form? Why would I do that? Oh, so I can use the shield. I see. Thank you." The little dragon narrates her interactions with the system screen out loud while everyone does their best not to laugh at her naive joy.

[Quest Complete: Advancement Token Gained]

She transforms and the simple dress that she was wearing when she came in becomes a tunic and trousers.

"Now all I need is a sword and shield and I will be a mighty warrior." She tells herself out loud before looking at Cain and giving his legs a big hug.

"Thank you. I'm a proper dragon now, with dragon breath and everything. I even have an item in my inventory." She tells him in a very serious voice.

"Never take that item out of your inventory unless you are going to put it somewhere very, very safe," Cain tells her, and the dragon nods in understanding.

Lilly and her suitor have stopped their conversation to see the dragon, realizing that she is in fact a Fully Awakened Mythic Being.

"That should have completed the quest though shouldn't it?" Lilly asks, confused and not seeing an update in her Quest Log.

"My quest completed. I think I just need to pick the new class to complete yours." Cain shrugs, but the Bog Witch looks panicked.

"What if it doesn't think that I helped enough? Maybe I should have done something while you were upgrading the Dragon? If this doesn't complete what will I do?" She is nearly in tears and beginning to have a panic attack when Evangeline moves to give her a hug.

"Relax, it will be fine. Worst case scenario, you need to wait until Cain reaches the fifth advancement, and spend a couple of millennia as his pet Nergal." The Seraphim consoles her and the Bog Witch begins to relax for a second before the words actually sink in.

"Has anyone ever mentioned that your friend is actually quite evil?" Xxictix whispers to Cain, making Laura laugh.

"Many times, but she just has a strange sense of humor." The dragon whispers back, but loud enough that Evangeline can hear her, sticking out her tongue past the large rounded Parrot beak of her current disguise.

Cain takes a moment to look through his inventory for plate armor pieces, finding that he has some bright Golden pants and a chest plate, with some silver gloves and boots. Not a bad start for a fashionable young dragon. The bonuses on them are honestly garbage, but there is some life-on-hit and added damage absorption for blocked attacks. Then a one-handed sword and a shield finish out the kit and Cain trades it to DeeDee.

"Um yes, accept, gimme the shiny objects?" She says, still using verbal commands to activate the menus.

Once she has them she immediately equips them, then struts around the room in her new armor.

"See this boss? I'm a mighty warrior now. No longer will anyone be able to bully me." DeeDee announces proudly, thumping her armored fist on her chest and making the Succubus laugh.

"I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you're still level 1. You're in an advanced class, and I think it might be a Second Advancement class, or a really strong first advancement one, but you are only level 1. You will have to work hard to get strong enough to not get bullied anymore." She points out and the little dragon looks like she might cry.

"You have Mythic Dragon Breath though, so you will be able to level up really quickly once you get to a dungeon under level 100. Or maybe you can hunt Crazy? How do people even level up in the awakened areas anyhow?" Cain asks, just now realizing that he has no idea.

"There are low-level beasts in the wilderness. The hunter's school takes them on field trips to level up." Lilly informs him with a knowing smile. DeeDee never went to school, she was too afraid, and unqualified even if she had the courage to apply.

"Well then, we should send you off to school. Hall Master, I will return your worker in the morning, but I'm afraid that the little one will be gone for a while." Cain laughs, taking DeeDee by the hand and scooping up Lilly with a tentacle.

"What happened to advancing your class?" Lilly wails as her fiancé follows the group out the door, waving goodbye to the Quest Hall manager.

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

## Chapter 431 431

To say the Hunter's school is shocked to see them is an understatement. Only one of them is of school age, plus it is the middle of a semester. But the young one is naturally Mythic, so she must have just turned five years old or activated her system, the minimum qualification to begin training at the school. Species that powerful get special consideration since they can easily keep up with students that are a half year more advanced than them.

"A Mythic Dragon, and a Crusader? As impressive as that is, I'm not sure we have space at the moment. The Shrine Guardian species Youkai guarding the gate greets them in a grumpy voice. Like the first ones they met, his is rather short and stout, with exaggerated facial features, but this one has the sense of timelessness to his aura that often happens with the very old.

"Lie," DeeDee says quietly.

"What was that young girl?" He says, insulted at being called out.

"Sorry, the system informed me, and I just read it out loud. I'm not used to keeping things inside," she informs him much more happily than the situation calls for.



"Ah, yes, you can't lie to a Crusader, I forgot that extends to evasion and bargaining." The Shrine Guardian sighs, rubbing his large ear with one hand.

"How much is Tuition? I will take care of her fees." Cain informs the head teacher, who gives him a satisfied look now that he knows they aren't going to push for the Mythic Dragon to be a scholarship student like so many high-ranking species do.

"Fifty gold coins a year. That covers lodging, tuition, food, and excursions as well as all necessary medical treatments." The teacher informs him, pulling out a contract for education.

"She belongs to the Quest Hall, so I'm not sure how long she will need to be trained for, but here is one year's tuition. After that, she can decide what to do going forward." Cain smiles while the Shrine Guardian pulls out a little wicker offering basket to collect the coins. It seems to count them for him because he doesn't so much as glance at the coins before putting them away again and passing Cain the contract.

It's pretty straightforward, so Cain signs it and passes it back.

"Now DeeDee, you be good and learn as fast as you can. I'm sure you're eager to level up and show everyone your amazing talents though aren't you?" Lilly says, giving the little Crusader a hug, causing the dragon's shimmering hair to flutter in the wind.

"I feel like that was more of a good deed than a punishment," Lilly says as the Shrine Guardian leads DeeDee away.

"If you do it right, it can be both." the other Bog Witch tells her with a wink, and she casts a shadow arrow at him, making him laugh and dodge.

"Let's head back to my place and we can find out if you are going to work tomorrow or if you're spending a few centuries as my pet cat before you can repay that debt," Cain says, turning to walk to the city gates.

"Wait, you're not going to finish the quest here?" Lilly asks, chasing after him so she doesn't end up increasing the average distance and taking an additional penalty.

"Do you think it would be wise to cause that much of a commotion here? The last time I advanced I went into my full ten-meter tall natural form and the aura of an Ancient hit the area at full force." Cain tells her, glad that the little Crusader is gone so he can have fun scaring the Bog Witch.

"You have a point. Let's go somewhere more private. Like the middle of the woods, or maybe the moon or something." Lilly agrees, not eager to find out what the aura of an Ancient feels like, since they're reputed to be terrifying.

Once they reach the gates Cain calls for a pair of Mythic Divine Fire Dragons outside and the crowd in line starts screaming in panic, thinking they're under attack.

"That never gets old," Vala smirks, walking to the dragon and hopping up on its back.

"A little show of force goes a long way to keeping people in line." Cain agrees quietly, so only Lilly can hear him.

That makes sense to her, dangerous people mostly prey on the weak. They aren't looking for a challenge or a duel to prove themselves, they want rewards. Knowing that the group has something that powerful available at a moment's notice should keep almost anyone from daring to bother them.

The flight seems much shorter this time, with the two Bog Witches flirting. Now that he has had a chance, it seems that the three decades he spent growing flowers to meet the challenge weren't entirely wasted, and his bride-to-be might actually be almost ready for marriage now. The only part that is really holding them back now is the power imbalance. She has spent her years as an underling at the Quest Hall while he became a powerful hunter. He was also born Awakened, while she was not, giving him an innate head start on the skill growth.

Lilly is very proud of her job and doesn't want to feel like a kept woman, despite the fact that he easily could keep her in luxury for millennia without much issue or having to work. Listening to them talk, it seems that the Mythic Bog Witches are very long-lived, and he has been making plans accordingly. Lilly is clearly flattered, but she is being stubborn for reasons best known only to her.

They arrive back at the farmhouse to see that the Echoes are just finishing up the growth of a new set of peach trees, using nature magic to accelerate multiple years worth of growth to a single day so that they can try out the fruits right away.

The fruits are visibly glowing with faint yellow light, looking otherworldly as they mature before the eyes of a dozen spectators. They have a few other guests today, who chose to wait instead of heading home when they found out that Cain was gone for the day.

"All that's left is the taste test. We checked them for poisons and curses already." Victor the echo informs Cain, plucking a peach from the tree.

Cain looks it over carefully, checking it for damage, and making sure that the quality is Mythic even after it is plucked from the tree. Low-quality fruit from a high-status tree was a problem with one of the previous batches that they created. Everything looks good, so he hands it to Lilly.

"Eat this, it will help with your advancement," Cain instructs and she obediently takes a bite.

Her face puckers up instantly, but she still swallows the bite of peach without complaint before washing her mouth out with wine. Her whole body begins glowing and Cain sees that she has received very powerful healing and mana regeneration effects from the one bite.

"Still a bit sour. Mix it with honey and water and try again." The echo says eagerly, and hands over a juice pitcher.

Mixing the juice is easy, and even watered down it still glows just as brightly. The whole peach was juiced and placed in the jug, which was sweetened and filled with water while the echoes planted the seed into a fresh section of the farm and began casting spells on it.

"How about now?" Cain asks, and Lilly pours a shot glass sized portion into a potion bottle and hands it to Xxictix, who downs it without question. The effect is the same, but the duration is much shorter than taking an actual mouthful of the fruit.

"Duration varies with dosage," Cain informs the echoes who give him a thumbs up.

"Excellent, thank you for your help." He congratulates the two who bow politely before wondering why they're thanking him. After all, they weren't injured or low on mana in the first place.

"How is that supposed to help me Awaken?" Lilly asks, wondering if she missed something.

"Oh, the juice is just juice. I require everyone who wants a modification to volunteer for an experiment first." Cain answers, walking towards the barn while the Bog Witch gives him a glare that promises him great pain in the future when she isn't obligated to the Flesh Crafter.

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

## Chapter 432 432 The Watcher

,m Lilly reluctantly follows Cain into the barn where he stops dead center and his face goes blank.

[Welcome to the Class Change Menu. 1 Class available]

[Class] Watcher From Beyond

[Requirements] Mythic Awakening, [Spell Crafting], plus [Flesh Crafter] or [Biologist]

[Skills]

[Blessed Being] An Awakened Ancient may advance ranks without changing classes

[Versatility] Choose 1 skill per level to use at your maximum current Awakened Rank  
0/5

20 Points Per Level

[Dominion] Increases Maximum Casting Range to Maximum Sensory Range. Increase Area of Effect Spells Radius at a cost of 100 mana per meter.

20 Points

[Pet Sitter] Summon Up To 5 [Lesser Watchers] to Supervise Lesser Beings on your behalf. Watcher From Beyond may observe the world through the senses of the [Lesser Watchers]

Innate.

[Spirit Awakening] Advance Ranks to Awakened Spirit. Requires [Versatility]5/5, [Dominion], 1 Spirit Rank item.

80 Points

The rest of the abilities are grayed out for now, likely only becoming visible after reaching Immortal Rank. This Class is absolutely insane if he is reading the abilities correctly.

[System, can the radius of Crushing Tentacles be increased with Dominion?] Cain asks, hoping for an answer.

[Increasing the Radius of Area spells costs 100 mana per meter using the [Dominion] ability.]

Cain selects the class with a sense of reverence, feeling the power flow into him as the System alters his abilities. He has already reached level 335, so he puts points into Dominion with a sense of great satisfaction. Now he really can do all the insane things that Ancients are supposed to be able to do. But looking at his points, he still has 25 skill points. Since he upgraded the puppets' intelligence and autonomy using his secondary skill tree, he completely filled the tree at level 290. Cain adds a rank of Versatility to his abilities and smiles at the options that open for him.

It might only be one single skill, but that one skill can be [Summon Lesser Golem] which is 36 Golems even without using [Ancient Resistance] to triple them. Three dozen Mythic Lamia Scourge Casters? Who wouldn't think that sounds like a lot of fun?

Cain opens his eyes to see that Lilly is in happy tears, hugging her long estranged fiancé. Her Quest must have been completed while Cain was checking out his new class. For a punishment that seems remarkably lenient, but then the system scales on its own criteria, and since her punishment helped him so much, with so little effort on his part, it is only fair that she gets off easy. A Fourth Advancement Class appears to be the endgame for him, or maybe this is like the First Advancement, where he could leave the Beginner's Valley and he is only getting started in a world he knows next to nothing about?

"Why don't we get you a new skill and Awaken you as well Lilly? That way you can match with your new beloved and do whatever sort of naughty things Bog Witches get up to in the privacy of the shadows?" Cain asks, interrupting their lingering hug.

"What sort of impression do you have of our species? I assure you, nothing like what you are thinking is going to happen." Lilly scolds Cain, who is trying not to laugh at her reaction.

"The last one we met did want an exceptionally large Crocodile Kin as payment for her services." Cain points out, once he is sure he can maintain a straight face.

"She doesn't count. That old woman was crazy even before she went to spend decades waiting to deliver a prophecy. She was drunk when she had the vision, and forgot what date she was supposed to deliver it, so she has just been waiting in the swamp for someone who looked right to show up." Lilly insists.

"You managed to find a Crocodile Kin to stay with her?" The other Bog Witch asks, impressed.

"I made one actually. It's a class specialty. But that's not the point, I had just assumed that with the swamp creature transformation and all, most Bog Witches were more like her. Eccentric, like the Dragons are."

"What sort of skill would Lilly need though? She's got one for moving through shadows, and more from her class." Vala points out, ignoring the fact she is right there to give her opinion.

"And it's too soon for a Mythic Fertility Charm," Nemu adds, enjoying the way the Bog Witch's face turns bright red at the idea.

"We already did area camouflage for the exhibitionists in the river valley. How about something fun, like [Divine Light]? Lilly doesn't have much combat magic." Evangeline

suggests, referring to the Seraphim Spell that both heals and damages based on the will of the caster.

"A Bog Witch using Holy Magic? That could be fun. What do you think, Lilly?" Cain asks as she gets more and more flustered.

"Can't it be something normal? Like a Nature Spell, or a transformation, or something?" She begs, hoping to escape the whims of a bored Ancient unscathed.

Without anyone else around to bring sanity to his ideas or tell him no, Cain really was just a bored Ancient, running wild with whatever popped into his head that day. He hadn't noticed his lack of control yet, but the Companions and Echoes were unable to defy him, so all they could do was suggest new ideas, which was really no help at all because only Vala was any more sensible than Cain himself was.

"How about [Verdant Growth]? It's a spell that Forest Dragons know, on the Mythic level, that repairs damaged plant life and causes healthy plants to grow much faster? It's what the Echoes have been using to cultivate Peach Trees." Cain suggests.

That sounds amazing to Lilly, who dreams of having a proper bog garden one day, perhaps one day soon, now that she has agreed to start dating Xxictix.

"Yes, that one, please. It would make such a lovely bog, with all sorts of flowers and trees." She responds before Cain can suggest something else, her eyes dreamy as she considers all the possible uses for such a skill.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime spell to alter your abilities, are you sure there isn't something you want more?" Cain confirms and Lilly gives him a wink, seeing no downside to that limitation.

In an instant, the ability is used and the Bog witch smiles, pulling a damaged flower from her inventory and bringing it back to full health.

[Lilly has Awakened]

[Status Upgraded to Awakened Mythic.]

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

## Chapter 433 433

The two Bog Witches make their excuses and head out as soon as they believe is polite, returning to give the good news to the boss that she won't be on the hook for a fourth advancement class.

That gives Cain to really think about his new class and how he's going to use it. If he can upgrade one skill for now with another coming to him every twenty levels, he can slowly make his way through all of his summoning skills until he has his full army again. Doing things that way, he can use his Spell Crafting to create the buffs and attack spells to complement them, bringing his combat potential back up to the level that it was before awakening.

The only real difference would be that Awakened attack spells grant much more damage increase than Awakened defensive spells do armor. It's very uncommon to be able to tank more than a few direct hits as a Mythic Awakened. This makes both the weight of numbers and healing ability much more important in the grand scheme of things.

Actual Mythic Quality creatures have it a little easier, not getting one-shotted by ten thousand damage Mythic [Fireball]s, but even then a half dozen of them will take down most Mythic beings if they don't have a shield or healer.

That makes it much more worth it to simply assign everyone a Mythic attack skill and resummon them when they die, with only a few durable targets among his forces. Then he can focus on defensive abilities and area attacks to mitigate the losses.

"What about seeing how a lower grade ability scales? Maybe a lower level damage absorption shield with an area effect?" Evangeline suggests, having a few of them herself.

There is one in particular that she has in mind, it's an S Ranked shield, that self-repairs every second. Bumping it up through Legendary and Ancient to Mythic should make both the total damage capacity and the refresh rate pretty impressive.

Cain takes out the inscription desk and starts writing out her skill, hoping that his change of class didn't mess with his ability to use books. Again it didn't specify what he can use, so he's in a 'make the book and hope for the best' type situation. With the spell book complete a few hours later, Cain uses the book and looks over his new skill.

[Indomitable Barrier] Grants damage absorption equal to ten percent of the Caster's Maximum Health to all friendly targets within [Users Level] Meters. Recovers 3 percent of lost capacity per second. Lasts 5 minutes.

Evangeline uses this one all the time because you only need 30 seconds without taking damage for it to be back at full capacity without being cast over again, which was a big help when her mana pool was smaller and more targets needed actual healing after the barriers were down.



Cain uses [Versatility] to enhance it and casts the skill.

[Impenetrable Barrier] Grants Damage absorption equal to Caster's Maximum HP to all friendly targets within [User's Level] Meters. Recovers 3 Percent of lost capacity per second. Lasts until Cancelled, even if fully depleted.

With Cain's current health pool, that's over two thousand damage absorption per second that can be recovered. But if he uses some of the enchantments from Spell Crafting, he should be able to increase his health pool even further, until he reaches the point where even a Mythic Fireball a second wouldn't be a real concern for his summons.

There might be a similar spell in his Spell Crafting textbook, but Cain hasn't gotten nearly that far yet. Barriers are in with the holy magic and healing, which are at the end of the book.

"Good call, Evangeline. With this everything will be able to take a hit or two, even the lowest rank summons." Cain congratulates her.

The lowest grade of his summons at the moment are the Epic Quality ones from [Summon Pet], the upgraded form of [Summon Lesser Golem]. Adding another 75,000hp worth of durability to them is a huge thing.

They should go visit one of the vortexes again, and see what they can do to neutralize it, or hopefully reverse the effects. Cain hasn't quite gotten through every part of what he wanted to study, but he has enough to get a few ideas that will help guide the rest of his studies. There is one not too far from here. It was outside of the Quest area, but that isn't important now that the Quest is ending and the road work is beginning.

Wait, he forgot to sign up for road work. Oh well, he can do that later.

Cain calls a pair of Forest Dragons and they take off in the direction of the vortex. It is in the middle of a rock pile, not a spot where too many people will cross voluntarily. But it is an intersection of two very minor Ley Lines, and Cain can feel the unstable power when he focuses.

This one doesn't have the power and presence that the one under the temple does, but going by the square cut of the boulders here, it looks like at one point there was a rather grand structure constructed on top of the intersection, with the ruins forming the rock field.

Nothing about the weathered stones gives a hint at what they once were assembled for, but the spot where the vortex is remained totally clear of plant life, the smooth white stone looking undamaged by the years, or worn smooth by use, which Cain knows can't be right, or this vortex would be more powerful due to the transfers trapped in it.

Looking with Mana Sight, this one is less damaged than the other one as well, with a much smaller section missing.

"Alright, we can do this. I know enough of the theory now that I can repair this." Cain gives himself a quick pep talk, then gets to work repairing the edges of the damaged spell, mending them back into a cohesive enchantment.

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

## Chapter 434 434 Mistakes Were Made

Cain began by stitching the edges of the vortex back together, which seemed to stabilize the effect somewhat but also diminished its presence. The remaining portion of this one was actually recognizable as a portion of traveling magic, much like Cain's [Recall] spell, so that is what he used to fill in the blanks, setting the destination for just beside where he was standing, should anything be able to escape once he was finished.

Getting everything to line up wasn't easy, but by the next morning, Cain had a fully woven spell created on the ruins of the vortex. All he had left to do was add mana and they should be able to see if all that hard work was going to pay off.

It was the pulse of power at midnight that made the final connections possible, during that moment when the Crazyed were cloned and expelled, the vortex did seem to push out, reversing its effect from normal, just as Cain suspected that it was doing. He could feel the presence of the people trapped inside for an instant, and then it was gone and they were trapped again. For that instant, it was whole and complete, and Cain could see what he needed to do.

"Here goes nothing," Cain whispered, activating his changes to the Vortex. Screams filled the air and all the plant life in the area died in an instant. Cain felt a huge pull at his mana, trying to suck him dry now that there was nothing else to draw from, until a half-second later, the Ley Lines themselves collapsed with a twang that felt like someone had torn a chunk of his soul away.

Cain grasped at his chest in pain, nearly collapsing as he felt the mana from his companions being drained to refill the Ley Line. They were mere threads now, instead of the invisible river that they once were, but the companions and Cain combined had enough mana to keep them from fully destabilizing.

The problem was that Cain's modification worked. There were now a large group of Soldiers in archaic armor standing at the point Cain designated. Why was this a

problem? Because they didn't know that the war was over, and Cain's entire party was out of mana. Not a single point remained between them for the first few seconds before their regeneration kicked in.

This force was made entirely of beastkin and despite their confusion, they were raising weapons and preparing to do battle with Cain and Vala.

Evangeline, still in Parrot Kin form, and Nemu rushed forward to stop them from attacking and the soldiers gave them a confused look, not understanding why they would defend a pair of demons in the middle of a war.

"Wait. You were trapped in the vortex for nearly two hundred years. The war is long over." Nemu called out, stopping their attacks for a moment.

"What are you saying? We camped here last night and were sneak attacked by an imprisonment spell. We had been fighting all day to get out until the spell duration ran out just a few seconds ago." Their leader, a Turtle Kin that looks a bit like the snapping Turtles that Kone loves so much, except with a blue and yellow shell, demands.

"We broke the spell just now, it didn't wear off. You have the System, just look at us and you will see that things have changed." Nemu does her best to convince them while Cain recovers his mana. At least the barrier that Cain cast on them all is still active. They are out of mana, but they didn't take any physical damage.

The mana in the area is almost depleted though, and they can all feel their bodies struggle to recover with only internal energy. It's not a pleasant feeling, but if they can buy a few minutes they will still recover enough that they would prevail in a fight. Then again, they have Laura, if she simply freezes the area it would likely kill almost all of these soldiers. But the effect knocked her out cold, and she's not conscious yet, sleeping in Cain's pocket.

"How did you know I was brought here by the System? Are you one of the Blessed too?" The leader asks, while his companions look shocked.

At the point in the war where the spell that created the dungeons was cast, only a few dozen Transfers had gone to species other than the humans. Finding another one at random was extremely unlikely.

The Turtle Kin gasps as he uses his interface to inspect them. He frantically waves at his companions to stand down, putting away his own weapon.

"They are all Mythic and Ancient Quality. I have never even heard of Mythic Quality creatures, but my [Battle Odds] Skill says our chance of winning the fight is zero. Not less than a percent, just zero." He explains quietly.

"But what happened? Where is the fort? Why is everything dead?" One of the others, a werewolf with long silver hair, asks with a note of panic clear in their voice.

"We needed all the mana we could get to activate the spell that let you loose. It drained us, the plant life, and even the lines of power that converged at this point." Cain explains, seeing that he now has enough mana to call out at least some of his summons if needed.

"Lines of Power? Like the Mana Veins of my old world?" The transfer asks and Cain nods.

"As I understand it, that's exactly what they are. Not all the transfers come from the same world, though most of them are similar. My world didn't have them, so all I know I learned after arriving here." Cain agrees and the man's demeanor turns more friendly.

They might not have been on the same side of the war, but at least they had something in common, and most of the transfers were happy to see the war end as soon as possible. That made Cain not quite an ally, but not an enemy.

"Are there more places like this? It felt like the spell covered the entire world." The werewolf asks.

"There are thousands more, but not all of them are the same. Some trapped the people near them in a time loop one day long and drove them mad. Some, like yours, trapped everyone who stepped inside. Look at your group, were you all together when you entered?"

That makes them do a double-take, as they realize that not only were they not one group, but not all the beastkin in the group were wearing the same army's regalia. That doesn't fit with what they remember, the feeling of being stuck fighting against the weight of the spell for a single day.

"I see what you mean, things aren't what they appear. Will you be freeing the others after this? Surely they all would be thankful for the demons' kindness if that cruel spell were reversed." The turtle kin transfer nearly begged Cain.

"This was the smallest one I have come across, and the process is still an experiment, but it took half a million mana points and still killed all the plants in the area and left the Mana Veins as a mere thread. I don't think I could do it at all on a more powerful vortex without killing everything on the continent." Cain explains and the man's hopeful look fades.

"But that doesn't mean I'm not going to try to find a better way to get it done without depleting everything in the area, even if I have to assemble every Mythic Being on the Continent next time to provide the needed power to stabilize the vortex."

That thought is disturbing, but it also begs the question "What exactly did they do that allowed this spell to be cast in the first place?"

Maybe the answer lies in the Ancient cities if any of them except the one in the mountains still survive.

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

## Chapter 435 435

Cain was also left with another issue. There was a large group of Beastkin here, who didn't know the war was over, or anything that had happened in the last two hundred years. Only one of them had a System interface that Cain has seen, and he hadn't even reached the first advancement.

They obviously couldn't be left alone here in the woods, but they would definitely freak out if he called a group of dragons to fly everyone back to the city.

"Would you all like to come to my house and we can catch up on everything that you've missed?" Cain suggests, and they all seem eager to get away from the place where they were imprisoned. Or perhaps it was because everything in the area was dead after being deprived of energy by the backlash of the spell.

Seeing no objections, Cain motioned for the Companions to take defensive positions around the group and gestured back towards the house. "Alright then, follow me, and we should make it back to the house tonight, even walking."

That statement would quickly prove to be rather optimistic on Cain's part, as the area between where they are and the farm is still full of random wandering Crazy as well as Awakened beasts. The crazy mostly stay away, as their numbers are insufficient to challenge a group this size, but the nearby beasts are another story. They smell the beast on the beastkin and come to investigate. Some are looking for a mate, and some sense an interloper passing through their territory, but none of them are happy with what they find.

"I don't remember them being that strong." The turtle kin whispers to Cain as Vala sends a large bear flying through a stand of bamboo, which it simply shrugs off and wanders away, upset that he's not going to get any bear on bear loving today.

The bear-type beastkin woman in the group looks a bit shocked by the actions of the wild monster and is looking to the nearest Companion for answers. That turns out to be Nemu, and with the Felian's prank-loving nature, Cain is eager to see how that conversation goes.

"I don't know how things were two hundred years ago, but nothing short of a Mythic creature could even hurt that bear. Until you get more powerful, it's best that someone is here to watch out for you, or you move into a city. We can talk about it when we get to the farm since I don't know what sort of skills you all have."

Cain looks over to see that Nemu is making suggestive gestures to go with her explanation and that the group looks somewhere between dying of laughter and horrified at the implications of the bear's actions.

"The beasts can't tell the difference in such a big group. They will think we have one of their kind held hostage, so when they realize it's just a beastkin they tend to get upset." Cain explains, a bit less colorfully than Nemu did.

"We should really get a move on then. If only we had some horses." The turtle kin sighs and Cain realizes that his constant use of exotic animals made him overlook the incredibly obvious. There are under three dozen in this group, and he can summon more Lesser Golems than that, so Cain stops everyone to prepare to mount up.

"It has come to my attention that I have forgotten that you all could ride horses. With the System, I haven't done anything that normal in quite some time, so it actually slipped my mind. I will call some mounts now, and we can get going at a much higher pace." Cain calls, loud enough for everyone to hear.

Horses aren't really a thing here, as they are so delicate and easily eaten, but Cain can call nightmares, which will appear at Epic quality. They're tougher, breathe fire, and much faster than horses as well. An all-around win.

Cain summons mounts for everyone and the group gasps in shock, having never seen such a feat of magic before. They will have a lot to get used to though, so maybe it is best that they get through the shock and awe part now, so they can get through the day-to-day magic use more normally later.

Riding without saddles doesn't prove to be too large of an issue for the group, as the long manes of the Nightmares give them something to hold on to and as summons, they make no attempt to dislodge their passengers. The path through the bamboo still needs to be cut though, with no road and since Cain and the others flew here. Being the fastest among them, Vala and Laura lead the way in clearing the path when the forest gets too thick, and in only a few hours everyone is safely back at the Farm, preparing to cook some form of water buffalo that Laura caught along the way.

The mythic grade meat should be a good tool to help these people adjust to the fact the world has changed since the taste and energy level of it will be so much different than anything that they have experienced in the past.

They are not alone though, the procession attracted attention as they passed through town on their way back, and a half dozen villagers have come to see what was going on that Cain had brought dozens of hunters home with him. It was not until after they arrived at the farm that they realized that these were not hunters, but lost ancestors and the local beastkin elders were sent for.

Most beastkin struggle to live much longer than humans, but some like the Tortoise Clan and the Bears have little trouble reaching their third century, and so have elders who were alive when these people went missing. They might have been soldiers and not form local families, but the elders will be able to do a much better job of teaching them about the world than Cain ever could.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

## **Chapter 436 436 Side Story Not A Cult**

Back on the Central Continent, things are going very smoothly for the Darklight Host. The outreach program has been well accepted everywhere they have gone, and the reputation of the Guild is beyond compare.

Much of that has to do with the Guild Skill of [Benevolent Leader] that has let them all call for eight summons at the Epic level. That single ability has allowed them to turn the recently recovered dungeons of the Great Desert into a Mecca for travelers.

Ever since the Guild Master went to the Southern Continent to further his advancement, they have been hard at work building shelters at all of the dungeons that aren't currently claimed by any city. They have found eight of them so far, each with a pair of Guild Members stationed at them full time, providing adventuring service to those who come to visit, as well as keeping a small stock of supplies and food as well as water available, an essential service in the desert, especially to the merchant caravans who often don't have a spell caster capable of making water with them.

That is quickly changing though. Among the items that they recovered was an enchanting recipe for a [Bottle of Endless Refreshment], an Epic grade item that makes a constant stream of water when mana is applied. Now any transfer at all can provide



for the group's water needs. They are being bought up by caravan guards as fast as they are made for an exceptional sum of money or crafting materials.

Materials are always the preferred tribute, as the Guild calls it. Since they don't have set prices, they ask for a suitable tribute to the Guild in exchange for the items they make.

In addition to the eight waystations in the desert that guard the dungeon entrances, they also have three hospitals now. One in Landis, and two more on the western side of the Continent. One is run out of a former warehouse next to the Manor in Long Fang Valley, and sells a wide variety of medicinal herbs as well as offering free treatment of injuries and illnesses, while the other is in the Nyanko territory, at the former capital, before they merged into Skyview as a Dukedom.

Some Skyview nobles are happier than others with the ascendancy of the Guild, and their wandering do-gooders. Some believe that it makes them look bad, having people from another Skyview noble on their land doing things for their citizens that they themselves were unwilling or unable to do. But the majority are happy to see it, because they are helping with anything they can, and it is increasing both the happiness of the locals and their own tax revenue.

Only King James has realized the truly insidious nature of Cyrenene's plan for Skyview. Now that his period of isolation after his coronation and coming of age is over, he has returned to his habit of visiting his Kingdom in disguise, and what he found is that more of the commoners are loyal to the Darklight Host than to the Kingdom. Nobody would openly admit it, but if the guard patrols are mentioned, someone will invariably mention that the Darklight Host has been training locals up at the nearest dungeon so they are strong enough to provide for the village's defense.

If you ask them about the rate of attacks, they will mention that the emissaries take requests to exterminate the Gnolls and goblins wherever they are found, so they don't make it inland as far anymore.

The Guild doesn't see a problem with it, the Gnolls and green-skinned Goblins are very good for experience gains, and often trigger quests. Why wouldn't they want to clear them out? Looking at the situation one piece at a time, things are looking up for Skyview with no real downside. But after the purge of his family, James can't help but wonder if being an outside party and friends with the Guild Master is enough to ensure the loyalty of the Darklight Host?

In terms of pure power, they are off the charts, sending trainees back and forth to the Eastern Continent on a daily basis, venturing out from Port Nefheim, where King James has heard that the next Demon Queen is building a power base under the flag of the Darklight Host. They have even built their own merchant ships, with the Pink Oak hulls becoming their signature look. The unwanted material grows all around Port Nefheim, so they have made at least three new ships out of it and sent crews to trade goods and hunt sea monsters over the last few weeks.

It is time to personally make sure that things aren't getting too out of hand, so King James organizes an outing with his Harem to go visit the Spa at the Long Fang Valley Manor.

[Come by anytime you like. We have rooms reserved for you and the girls anytime you show up.] was the reply he got from Cyrene when he asked.

She isn't a Guild officer, but the former beastkin turned Lamia is the easiest one to get ahold of, since she puts so much effort into dispatching all their wandering emissaries, using her visions to guide them to the places she thinks they need to be.

A spa day was an easy outing to convince everyone to agree to, and in the middle of the same afternoon, King James finds himself looking at the familiar Manor house, with a very different feeling than it used to have. The travel circle has traffic multiple times a minute, there is a small mountain of crafting materials out back, and there are Bear Kin and Werebears everywhere, all wearing the black and white of the Guild.

"Welcome, welcome your Majesty." Misha greets him, making her way over, very visibly pregnant, but still at least five months from her due date. The twins have made their presence known, and James is well aware of how annoyed she is about the weight gain.

"It's good to see you again. It looks like things are going well here." King James greets her with a polite hug.

"It is chaos, but in a good way. We recently received a large group of new Guild Members. Well, two groups of them to be exact, the bears and the graduating class of the healer's College in the Dwarven Mountains. So we now have fifty clerics to work through first and second advancement, as well as the nature-loving bears who are determined to fix every crop issue that they hear of." Misha laughs, pointing to where a dwarven woman with sun-reddened tan skin is arguing with a golden-furred bear kin about the direction that they should take on their next mission.

Everyone bows politely as he passes with the Royal Harem, but James suspects that most of the reverence is for Misha, and the twins growing inside her. They have always been that way though, even Cain never treated him as a monarch, but as an equal that deserved respect for the good work that he was doing.

The spa is as amazing as ever though, and James takes full advantage of his status as a Crusader to ask some questions and get honest answers.

"Do you think the Guild is actually planning to take over the Continent as the rumors say?" He asks Luanne, his elven consort after not getting much out of the Puppets.

"I don't think they are trying to be monarchs. See how they don't set up anything that requires military forces other than their own? It's like the disciples of the Nature God

back in the Serrah Woods. I think they're slowly becoming a cult. A cult dedicated to the Ancients and the Laughing God." The elf whispers back, making Khali, the petite human Princess from Nyanko giggle.

"The cult of dungeon runs and hospitals? I can see how they would catch on." She jokes lightly, then turns serious.

There are only a few hundred of them in total, so I think the threat of political rule from the front is just hysteria. The real test will be once everyone else starts getting as close to them as we are. If you've got every King on the continent on your friend list, there isn't much you can't do. Maybe they really can stop all the unnecessary fighting and act as mediators on a large scale, as they do for the commoners."

That really doesn't make them sound less like a Cult to James though. Especially with the healing and the temple-like shelters that they keep building next to dungeons.

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

## Chapter 437 437

The displaced soldiers are much more willing to listen to the words of the beastkin elders than they were to believe Cain. Their age gives their words a sense of truth that someone young enough to be an enemy soldier didn't have.

That brings them to a unique problem. Most of the nations that they used to belong to no longer exist, and their families are multiple generations removed from them, plus without a system in the Awakened zone, even getting home would be an adventure. If Cain is going to try to fix any more of the vortexes, they are going to have to consider what to do with the people who come back out.

He is also going to have to inform the mayor of this development and explain the process to the local Mages. The chances they can replicate what Cain did are extremely low, but they might have ideas that he hasn't come up with that might prevent the backlash. If he is really lucky, they might even know something about how the power was gathered to cast the spell in the first place.

The landlord has joined them today, wondering what sort of party was enough to drag his neighbors out into the middle of nowhere, deep into the dangerous territories that belong more to the beasts than to the sentient species.

The old man seems shocked to hear about what Cain managed, and the damage that the backlash did to the surrounding area, but not nearly as surprised as he is when he sees one of the Badger Kin men.

"You, you were from this area weren't you? I am pretty sure I know your family." The landlord declares and the man looks at him in shock.

"That can't be. My family was taken by the slavers a few years before I was trapped in that vortex. Surely they are all long gone by now." The soldier says sadly, but the landlord isn't letting it go.

"Elder Mooney, you know them too. From two villages south of here, their boy is the spitting image of him." He insists, and the old beastkin cocks his head as he thinks.

"The boy as you called him is a good bit older now, but you're right, they did look just the same when he was younger." The elder finally agrees.

After a few more hours of storytelling, the decision is made that everyone will head into the city with Cain the next day to meet with the Mayor and explain the situation to him. The city might be almost all demons, but he knows the leaders of the neighboring cities and towns, so he can arrange a way to get these people to somewhere suitable for them to settle down.

Almost all of them were craftsmen of some sort before they were drafted into the war, so they should be able to get set up again with a little assistance in learning modern culture and preferences. They might be skilled woodworkers or glass blowers, but if they don't know what the locals like these days it will be hard to sell their products at a decent rate.

Cain leads them all to the main road the next morning, to meet up with the daily patrol group heading back to the city. This is a larger group than they have had in years, and with the Crazyed culled to such an extent they have been a bit bored lately.

The road is pretty horrible around here, so Cain decides to stop the group for a moment.

"Hey, can we get everyone to move to the side for a little bit? I have summons that can help sort out this road situation as we go in. It will be just as fast as slogging through the mud with the wagons from the end of the line." Cain promises, and the guards cheer, willing to entertain any idea that leads to them not needing to push wagons through the mud to keep the convoy moving.

Cain calls out a group of gravel golems and sets them to work. First, the golems strip away the soft dirt of the roadway, then they transmute most of it to large rocks and use magic to push them back onto the roadway. Then a thick layer of soft gravel is put on top and settled with their mild version of [Earthquake] that they use as a vibrating compactor. Cain summons a smaller group of Granite Golems afterward, who summon

large blocks to set on top of the new base, creating a heavy-duty version of a cobblestone street.

With three dozen gravel golems plus the two dozen larger Granite Golems, they can lay the roadway at a fast walking pace, moving smoothly along in front of the traveling patrol, while the recovered beastkin marvel at the use of Earth Magic.

The guards assure them that this is not a normal everyday sort of thing and that Cain is in fact ridiculously overpowered, but they don't care. When they get to the city they will be able to tell everyone that they watched a great mage summon golems and build an entire road in a day.

The residents of the next village are stunned speechless when this road crew passes through town, now slowing their progress and only adjusting the width to the wider main street of the village. For centuries, they had placed boards across the road to cut down on walking through the mud when it rained, and now their little village had a fancy stone main street.

The novelty is so great that they even manage to attract extra farmers to the city's market today, all eager to be the first to try out this new road. The dark gray stone is laid wide enough for two wagons to comfortably pass, instead of the old single-track trail, making it one of the region's finest highways, despite the fact that it was only going to lead to a few small farming villages. The irony was not lost on them, but with such a fine road, they might attract a few new residents who wouldn't see the trip into town as so daunting of a task anymore.

New blood was a good thing for the small towns, bringing new businesses, and keeping them from dying out when the children of those living there wanted to travel or move into the city to escape rural life.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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## **Chapter 438 438**

The groups they meet up with once they reach the main branch of the road are just as happy to see Cain's Golems hard at work as the first group of villagers was. The main road might be wider, but it was still dirt, and still turned to thick mud during the rainy season. Now, for the fifty kilometers between the branch that leads to the farm Cain is renting and the city it has a solid base and a sturdy stone block top layer.

The larger villages are along the main road as well, so the connection is a cause for celebration, drawing them from their homes to enjoy the luxury and making the city guards briefly wonder if they are being invaded by a mass of farmers and golems.

Cain continues the road right up to the city gates, where the convoy stops to celebrate a job well done, bringing out sweets and drinks to have a picnic at the city gates.

More groups are following behind them, marveling at the new infrastructure, and it isn't long before someone notifies the Mayor, who comes over with his entourage to congratulate the crew who made this road.

That's precisely what Cain wanted. The Mayor has come to him, and that means he can get him to commit to looking after the people rescued from the vortex publicly, without a chance to back out of his words.

"Oh, Duke Cain, welcome. Did you come out to see the new highway?" The Mayor greets him when he sees the elegant form of Cain's demonic transformation.

"I didn't just come to see it, I built it. Now, I know I don't have the contract for this section, so this is all free of charge, but I do have a favor to ask of you. You see, I was doing an experiment with the vortexes that create the Crazy, and I managed to free a group of people who have been trapped since the Great War. Those few dozen beastkin over there in fact. They will need help getting settled, or meeting up with any remaining family they might have. I'm hoping that the City's generosity might be able to take them in for a while." Cain explains, and the Mayor nods.

"A few more refugees won't be an issue, they all look like they have a few skills to fall back on. Wait, did you say that they came from the vortex?" The Mayor's polite political answer makes a hard turn at the end of his thought.

"That's right. It caused a little damage and killed most of a square kilometer of plant and animal life, but I stabilized one of the smallest of the Vortexes and it ejected its occupants. That should cut down the number of Crazy that arrive in the area every night by at least a little bit." Cain agrees.

"Come with me, all of you. I simply must get this recorded for the official archives, and the Mages Association will want to hear all about the technique that managed to stabilize a vortex. Most of them believe that the vortexes are immune to modifications the way the dungeons are.

The Mayor leads the group back through the streets and away from the party that is slowly turning into an outdoor market by the city gates. Such a thing would have never happened a few months ago, but now that the transfers have gone so overboard on killing the Crazy, it is relatively safe to just hang around outside the city walls for a morning. It's a good feeling both for the farmers and the city residents, to not need to hide behind walls for safety.



It's still easy to tell who is who though since the city residents all smell like the incense that they believe keeps the Crazy away, while the farmers don't.

"Here we are, the Mage Association. I have warned them that you are coming, and what your experiments have managed to accomplish." The Mayor informs Cain as they pass by a large spire, in the uniformly black stone that makes up most of the city.

"Come in, come in. Real living soldiers of the Great War, fresh from the battlefield. We simply must bring the historians over. Too much of the documentation that we have was altered by the propaganda departments of the various nations, but you all should be able to tell us the truth of at least some of the more obviously altered parts of history." An elderly Youkai mage greets them. The old man looks almost human, but lopsided, with one arm and leg much larger than the other, and one side of his face almost flat, not even having room for an eye socket to the left of his nose.

"I can't guarantee that what we know isn't war propaganda, after all, most of us were just soldiers, but we are from a few different nations, and didn't all enter at the same time so we might have different versions of history for you to work with." The Turtle Kin, who has been silently chosen as the spokesperson for the group, thanks to his status as a transfer, informs the Mage Association leader.

A second mage comes out to greet Cain and escort him to another room while the history buff asks the new arrivals all about their experiences during the war. It's not that he is too young to know, but that the Youkai kept to themselves the entire time, so he never knew firsthand what was going on with world events until much later when the Youkai of the Southern Continent decided that keeping up with the world was vital to their long term safety. They didn't choose to interact with it much more and keep most of the continent isolated, but they do at least keep up with the news now.

"So tell me all about what you did to the vortex that you managed to get it to hold together long enough to actually change the way it works." Cain's interrogator, a youthful tengu Man with long black wings and matching hair asks eagerly, a notebook in his hands.

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## Chapter 439 439



"Have you heard of the Skill known as [Spell Crafting]?" Cain asks, wondering how far back in the story he is going to have to start.

"Is that some form of Inscription? Or enchantment?" The Tengu asks, writing his notes.

"Neither, or perhaps both. Spell Crafting is the core skill to create and modify magical spells and System abilities. With it, you learn to modify the rune patterns that make up a spell, or an enchantment, which is the relevant bit today.

The edges of the enchantment that should have created dungeons here in the Awakened Zone tore, and pieces were lost entirely. I suspect it has to do with the relative power of the residents against the Ley Lines in some way, but I haven't had time to properly explore that yet.

The experiment that we did the other day was to create a form of curse to fill in the missing parts of the spell at the vortex. When the Crazy are created every midnight, the vortexes change, and I tried to reproduce that, but in a stable form. What happened was that the vortex did stabilize, as it does at midnight, but without the reversal in flow that keeps the occupants trapped. Instead, it spit them out at the point that I designated, but it sucked up the entire energy storage of the two Ley Lines, plus my companions and all the surrounding vegetation."

It takes the man a moment to finish his notes before he looks up again. "So is this dead zone still present and unrepaired? Can I see what remains of your spell?"

Cain nods his head. "The Ley Lines are mere threads at the moment until they recover, but I did get enough energy into them to stabilize them. The spell should still be there and stable, keeping new people from stumbling inside the vortex as well."

"And how much mana do you think it took to stabilize the area after the vortex used it all up to eject the occupants?" He asks professionally.

"Half a million, plus what it took from the surrounding area." Cain estimates and the man sighs.

"This isn't going to be an easy test to recreate is it? We don't know if the effect will be smaller or larger with a change in Ley Line strength, or even at what scale it might change between vortexes. It might even be scaled based on the number of occupants. What if we need tens of thousands per occupant and that's why the Dungeons can't be affected by our tests? If we needed tens of millions of mana to remove a dungeon it simply wouldn't be possible, since they aren't unstable like the vortexes are."

It is clear that this topic has been a longtime favorite of the researcher, and he ends up spending hours in conversation with the group before the Mayor comes in to interrupt their session.

"Duke Cain, about those new arrivals you brought. I believe we can help a lot of them out, and we have already tracked down the descendants of a few of the families thanks to the region's record keeping. How are things going on the topic of fixing or stabilizing the vortexes?"

"We have come to two possible outcomes. Either a large vortex on stronger Ley Lines will be proportionally easier to close thanks to the available mana, or the backlash will be proportionally larger, killing everything within hundreds or thousands of kilometers until millions of mana have been absorbed to restabilize the vortex and eject the current occupants." The researcher says happily.

"You really don't know how to break things to someone easily do you?" The Mayor asks, used to the idiosyncrasies of the city's mages.

"There wasn't enough data for that. We could try on a slightly smaller vortex next. The available information suggests that one on weaker Ley Lines with fewer occupants is more likely to be easy to stabilize. Of course, it could be exponentially worse, but that does seem unlikely, thanks to what we know of the size scaling of the vortexes." The Youkai shrugs, not sure what to tell the Mayor that will make him happy.

"Well, carry on then. I will take care of the others, so the mad scientists can do whatever it is that you all like to do for fun. Just please try not to kill off large areas of farmland, or multiple people in the area with your experiments."

With that, the Mayor heads back out, and the Mage gets an extra excited look, taking the man's sarcasm as permission to do additional experiments, as long as they are fairly certain that they won't cause mass death or destruction. That's a low bar when his expectations for success are so high, and the Mage doesn't see much of anything stopping them from trying again, except finding a suitably sized vortex and ley line intersection that is.

"We have a map here of the vortexes that we have managed to find. I will need to mark yours as altered to keep things current, so we can take this time to find a similar one and make plans to try again. Do you have any ideas on how to reduce the damage done? The Mayor seemed pretty adamant about that part, like Bamboo forests won't be regrown within the year anyhow.

"I think if we brought even more True Awakened with us, the extra mana should be able to reduce the collateral damage and stabilize the Lines before they get too out of control," Evangeline suggests, thinking hard of better ways to do this that don't risk killing half the Mage Association.

They can always use the summons as a spare mana pool, but that might not work as intended. It should, since the last time didn't hurt any of them, it only drained the Companions' mana dry, but there are no guarantees.

"We can try with my summons. I will call for a number of Mythic creatures to stand with us in the area and we will see if their mana pools will be enough to stabilize the lines. But first, we need to find one just as small and secluded as the one I tested, so we aren't risking local lives and livelihoods. You will see what happened when you visit the first site, everything is dead, drained of nutrients, not a single sign of life left." Cain explains to the researcher, who has moved on to checking his schedule to see when he will be able to travel without interrupting his ongoing tests.

"How about the next full moon? We are one day from it now, so that's four weeks' time." He suggests, not in a huge hurry, and wanting to gather as much data as possible for his report first.

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

## Chapter 440 440

While they have time before the next experiment, Cain decides that a bit of traveling is in order. The former puppet left him a single book here in this city, which suggests to Cain that she had no intentions of staying nearby. The problem is that it has been so long that the Quest Hall had almost forgotten that it even existed, much less where it had come from or where the donator might have gone.

So, without a lead, the best that Cain can hope to do is simply visit more and more cities within the awakened areas and hope that he comes across more mysterious books, and maybe a clue or two.

Thinking about it logically, it does seem a little bit hopeless, but fate has always favored Cain in this life, so he is certain that given enough time he would find something about her, even if she wasn't still alive.

Not that he has that kind of time right now, but there should be more than enough to go see a few more sights. The major cities can almost all be reached within two or three days of each other by wagon. By dragon that means that the next one should only be a two-hour journey. That is workable for him, and visiting a city every day or two should give him time to look around, see what the awakened zone has to offer, and maybe even pick up something new and interesting to send home.

With that in mind, Cain makes his way out of the Mage Association, saying his farewells to the recovered soldiers, who are already looking less stressed than they did a day ago. They won't be ready to go anywhere for a while, with the number of questions that

the Mages have for them, but they really don't mind. Especially with the catering service that is so far beyond the field rations that they had been living off during the war.

The most logical direction to search was to continue south towards the center of the continent and then possibly East, where he had heard that a large number of very reclusive Youkai had chosen to make their home, sheltered by mountains. If there are no clues along the way, that would be the best place to go hunting for an elf that didn't want to be easily found or bothered.

Once he made it out of the south gate of the city, Cain called for a Mythic Forest Dragon and get everyone securely seated.

"Just follow the road south to the next major city. If we see anything interesting along the way we can detour for a while, the trip shouldn't take too long." Cain informs it and the dragon nods its head in acknowledgment.

They haven't even made it to the edge of the last quest's search zone when they spot something that Cain would qualify as "interesting", a collection of carnival tent-style pavilions, in bright colors set up in a clearing, with what looks like a fairly steady stream of visitors.

What they could be selling way out here in the middle of nowhere is a mystery to Cain, and a little mystery is exactly what this day needs.

He orders the dragon to land out of sight along the road, and then dismisses it, only to replace it with a group of Pegasus for everyone to ride. They don't fly as fast as the dragon, but if there is an issue, they can easily take to the skies and not have to worry about ground-based enemies. The fact that most of them can actually fly on their own isn't lost on Cain, but he really doesn't feel like running the rest of the way under his own power. It's much better to let the summon do the work on his behalf.

When they got close to the pavilions they saw that the group had put signs out. Madame Curie's Pet Sales and Oddities was written on the sign in a delicate script. That certainly wasn't what Cain expected. How could a knickknack shop even survive out here? Or perhaps it is selling tamed and trained beasts of higher qualities as pets? They are about to find out either way, as the bright red and green tents have come into sight.

"Welcome traveler, won't you stop in for a while? We have a most excellent chef here, as well as a fine selection of items for sale, sourced straight from the Spirit Woods, home of the most dangerous beasts within a thousand kilometers." The woman standing beside the road greets them.

"It couldn't hurt to have a quick look around." Cain agrees following their greeter to one side of the field where the rest of the mounts are.

"You can tie them up anywhere around here." She offers, and the Pegasus all give her a disgusted look. They are intelligent magical creatures, not horses, they're not going to wander away.

"They'll be fine. But if you bring them some apples as an apology for calling them stupid, they might refrain from kicking you the next time you walk by." Cain laughs stroking the Pegasus back after he dismounted.

The woman finally realizes her mistake and pulls a basket of fruit from her inventory before apologizing to the group of Pegasus. "I am very sorry, it's just habit, I didn't mean anything by it."

Pegasus are kindhearted by nature, and Cain can tell she is mostly forgiven even before he reaches the first tent, which has a collection of jewelry in cabinets scattered around the carpet-covered floor for customers to browse.

"Welcome. It's this your first time here?" The attendant, a plump and friendly human woman greets them. No, make that a vampire, not a human. They look the same at first glance, and for some reason, Cain can't search the description of anything in here using his interface. They must have put some sort of restriction over the tent.

"It is. I was traveling between cities, looking for books that had been left behind by an Elf about a thousand years ago. One of them should be on child care for rare species, and I'm hoping it is more than just a rumor." Cain answers, hoping she might have information. Vampires are functionally Immortal if they aren't deliberately killed after all, so there is a good chance either her or one of the other workers here might have been alive at the time, or soon afterward.

"I heard that rumor many years ago. But I didn't hear that she left them in more than one city. Just the mystery book of the Quest Hall." She shrugs, then continues her Welcome speech.

"As you can tell, all item descriptions are hidden here. We have often been called scam artists in the past, thanks to our flamboyant sales technique, so now we are selling items based on appearance alone. What we do guarantee is that they all come from the awakened area." She explains, her whole body jiggling in time with her hand gestures.

Cain hadn't noticed how wide the variety of items was at first, only seeing that they were various pieces of jewelry, but this game of chance looks like it could be a lot of fun.

"Well then, why don't we find a new set of jewels for my bodyguards and for my wife back home?" Cain suggests, making the large woman give a happy clap.

If all the items here come from the awakened zone, none of it should be utter garbage, at least not to the lower-level guild members, who are always short on accessories, since they take so long to make. Even if the stats are mismatched, they should still have

one bonus that is enough to make them worthwhile to someone on the Central Continent, but in case they don't Cain is planning to pick them out by sets, so they can be worn as a simply decorative accessory.

Every class will make them look a little different, but if they match, then they should still match when worn, even if the design drastically changes, as it often does for Spirit Folk and Forest-loving classes.

Cain activates [Mana Sight] and takes a short stroll around the room. He might not be able to see the stats, but [Mana Sight] will allow him to see the approximate quality and overall power level of the item before he picks it up.

"Boss, I found Cyrene, but in a necklace." Laura laughs, pointing at one of the cases.

The item she is looking at is one of the more powerful, most likely a Legendary grade item. Going by the aura of the items doesn't help in a place like this, because it more easily indicates level than quality, and a lot of these items are Uncommon Quality drops that Cain routinely discards as crafting materials. But the lattice of the spells embedded into the item is dense and steady, so it is above average, Cain just lacks the experience to more perfectly assess it.

Looking more closely at the item itself, it is a long and curving piece of White Jade, with Rubies embedded in it on a white gold necklace. It really does look like Cyrene's body hanging from a chain, even the odd shape of the rubies looks like the runes on her scales.

"Are there matching earrings, or maybe a bracelet?" Cain asks, pointing at the necklace behind the glass cover.

"Oh, that is a lovely one, for sure. Not the most precious of materials though. Are you sure that your wife won't get upset that it's not a rare and precious gem?" The saleswoman asks and Laura bursts into laughter.

"One of our good friends is a Lamia with a scale pattern that looks just like that pendant. The quality of the materials doesn't matter, this one will have sentimental value." The Opal Dragon assures her.

"In that case, yes, I've got both earrings and a bracelet in similar materials, that would make a great set." The motherly vampire smiles, showing a hint of fang as she digs through a box under the counter.

"Here they are love. Remember, I can't guarantee anything about their abilities, but they do look wonderful together." With that, the vampire sets them all out on the counter and writes a price on a small piece of paper.

5 Gold Bars. That is the price they want, and Cain wonders if they also didn't bother to check the description of the items before they put them up for sale. The whole set is matched in quality, and most likely both Legendary and over level 300, but any single piece of the set would normally go for that much.

"You've got a deal. She will love them." Cain declares, handing over the gold bars before taking the items into his inventory and again searching the room for shiny objects.

After a lot of searching, he finds four more items that he likes. Two of them are large rings sized for hands even larger than the ones of Cain's demon form, both made of solid white jade. They're exquisitely carved and have a very dense pattern of enchantments on them, but otherwise, look quite ordinary. The other two items are completely plain black bracelets that contain an incredible level of mana that Cain hasn't seen before. They are either very powerful, or they are mana storage items, which are equally invaluable to the right owner.

The shopping has made them hungry, so Cain thanks the clerk and heads to the tent that smells like food, only stopping twice along the way to buy bolts of cloth in an unusual material that he is sure the Tailors will appreciate, as well as one huge block of chocolate fudge for Laura. That's much more efficient than letting the Companions wander alone, Cain decides, recalling times when they have spent all day in markets only a little larger than this collection of pavillions.

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

## **Chapter 441 441 Trinkets And Floating Friends**

Once they got seated for lunch, Cain decided it was time to check out the jewels that they bought from the first pavilion.

The matched jade items give him the feeling that they belong together, so Cain is leaving them for last and instead starts with the plain black bracelets. As he suspected, they are mana storage devices and fully charged, but the inspection reveals that they are usable only by a demon. Each of them can hold ten thousand mana, an enormous amount for the average transfer.

Honestly, it feels too good to be true, and Cain knows item descriptions can be altered, so he calls a Record Keeper into [Greater Merger] with him. The demon has the ability



to see through all sorts of enchantments, so Cain takes a closer look, using the Demons sight.

There are two more hidden enchantments on both items. [Vitality Transfer] and [Cloaking]. The first one transfers one day of lifespan daily to the creator of the enchantment when the item is worn, and the second hides that ability from view.

It's a rather ingenious scam. Most demons wouldn't notice that they are aging at double speed for years or decades, and the vampire would get a constant influx of life energy, which increases their power level.

Cain breaks the additional enchantments using the Record Keeper's powers and places them back in his inventory with a satisfied sigh. That's two very good finds from the bunch.

Next up are the two plain white rings. The bonus on this pair makes Cain smile to himself, and the companions laugh quietly.

[Ring of the Wayward Lovers] Allows the wearers to locate each other at all times. If the wearer has intimate contact with another, the third party will suffer the effect of a spell designated by the uninvolved wearer. Both rings must be equipped and unequipped at the same time.

These items did not have any additional effects on them, being exactly what they appeared.

[You can't curse an already cursed item] the Record Keeper informs Cain, enlightening him on the subject. That makes good sense, contradictory curses would negate each other, and the system wouldn't want to make things that easy, since cursed items are often spawned that way as a form of balance by the system.

The last group is the four pieces of jade and ruby jewelry that reminded Cain so much of Cyrene. Just like he hoped, they are a set, with an extra bonus for wearing more of the pieces. But the set bonus is very strange.

[Regalia Of The Beloved Leader]

Set item: 0/4 pieces equipped.

[1/4] Increase All Damage by 5 percent for every loyal follower that the wearer has

[3/4] Grant all followers openly wearing a Mark of their loyalty 5HP and 5MP per second Regeneration

[4/4] Increase all Stats by 1 Point for every Loyal Follower. Grants all Loyal Followers 1 point to their highest stat for every 10 points in that Stat that the leader has.

"Since we all get a tag that we are your companions or summons, that should give all your summons increased damage and Stats plus a bit of Regeneration." Evangeline pointed out as they looked at the set of items.

5 percent damage per Summon isn't bad. With a full force deployed, that will even be an increase over his current equipment. There are no extra curses on the items, so Cain decided to equip them. The earrings turn into small ruby studs, while the necklace retains the thin chain and the Serpentine body shape of the amulet. The bracelet is hidden under his sleeve, but a quick check showed Cain that it also looks like a delicate piece of white jade.

Not exactly his style, but still a good-looking piece. Any amulet he wears is hidden under his clothing or armor anyhow, so only he knows about the odd-looking item set, but the effect it has is immediately felt all through his body.

The actual bonuses from the scaling abilities are always hidden, a minor annoyance, but Cain can feel that he has become significantly more powerful. He didn't have many Summons out though, so Cain suspected that the set was counting his distant Puppets towards the bonus, thanks to their loyalty.

Cain was so used to being stared at that he didn't even notice when the looks he was receiving changed. At first, he was a curiosity, a Mythic Demon, with a very eclectic group of friends, but with the new jewelry equipped, he gave off a natural sense of suppression. Not an actual aura effect, but the dangerous presence that makes others nervous around a predator. Despite being mostly at the awakened Mythic level themselves, the visitors couldn't help but feel that this demon was an existence far beyond their abilities.

The companions didn't notice anything out of the ordinary though. After all, why would they feel threatened by Cain?

The change to Cain's base power level wasn't only noticed by those nearby. Meditating in the bottom of the deepest abyss on a nightmare world where even the divine beings such as the Seraphim feared to tread, an Eldritch Horror opened one curious eye, looking through the barrier between realms and across thousands of light-years in an instant.

[We have found a survivor.] The being sent into the shared consciousness of its species.

[We will go welcome them back.] Another stream of thought joined the conversation.

[Not yet. That one is still on their way to recovering. But there are others, too weak to defend themselves.] The first being decides, looking more closely at the planet that has been hidden from casual observation by the Gods themselves.

[Yes, we see. That world is not developed enough for growth, the weak ones will not survive there.] A third set of thoughts joins them.

[Then we will recover them. The wounded one will rejoin us when they are ready.] A mind with unfathomable wisdom decides, shifting between realities even as it informs the group that after Millennia they will have newcomers among them.

"How about we go see what they have for pets at this pet store?" Cain suggested as he finished his lunch. They have already gained a lot from this stop, and a few minutes to admire small animals isn't going to hurt anything.

Just when they get close to the tent that according to the greeter should have pets for sale, the happy animal noises are interrupted by an ear-shattering screech and a youkai man with black feathered wings came running out, holding his mangled left arm.

He only made it a few steps before collapsing, and the staff came running out behind him. One of the vampires used basic cleric magic to heal him and stop the blood loss, while the others quickly cleaned up the mess. That stabilized him, but he is still unconscious from the shock, so the cleaners carried him away to be treated out of sight of the public.

"Well, that's not a bad omen at all." Cain joked, making the worker who healed the man blush and stammer out her answer.

"You see, we've got a juvenile Nekoma in our nursery. He tried to pet it from back to front." She finally manages, and Nemu gives an angry glare in the direction that the man was carried away.

You can do a lot of things to a Felian, or a Nekomata, and they will play along. But petting is strictly one-directional. That should just be common sense, especially with Mythic creatures who are fully willing and capable of eating you.

"I understand. How about we step inside and I'll try to calm our furry friend down?" Cain asks.

"I'm not sure that's wise. She is pretty mad." The worker begins, but even her vampiric speed isn't enough to catch Cain before he is inside.

The two-tailed cat was indeed very angry, and out of its enclosure, but Cain walked forward without hesitation, pulling a piece of smoked fish from his inventory. The Nekomata hissed at him in warning, so Cain let a bit of his Ancient aura slip, silencing every animal in the room instantly.

After that, the cat meekly accepted Cain's offering and allowed him to pet its head before placing the soft black animal back in the magical cage and closing the door. Cain handed over the fish and the Nekomata purred happily, nibbling bits off the end.

"How did you do that? Were you a druid subclass?" The vampire asks eagerly. Vampires can't be druids, the class isn't available to undead or most demons, so having one with Mythic skills available would be very helpful to them.

"No, I'm not a druid subclass. In fact, I'm not a healing class at all. But I am pretty good with angry women." Cain jokes, and the Companions chuckle.

In reality, that's far from the truth, if the women get angry he either runs away, offers a bribe, or both. This time it was a bribe, and the Nekomata is easy to please.

"I guess I can't say that the pets here are tame, but they're not entirely unwilling. They are all semi-intelligent species that have signed magical contracts. If you agree to their terms and agree to raise them safely to maturity, they agree to be your pet in the meantime." The pet keeper explains.

"It's a System contract, so don't think it will be easy or painless to break if you do agree."

The beasts had heard these lines many times before, and they all looked hopefully at Cain, wondering if he was here to take someone in, or just to discipline the Nekomata.

Cain looked over at a silver forest fox who was giving him the most adorable pleading look, then reached between the bars to tickle its nose.

The vampire gasped in horror and moved to stop him, but Cain ignored her concern and moved on to visit the others. With a confused look at the big demon, the Vampire extended a finger to touch the cage, getting a mind-numbing shock. The cages are all magically warded and electrified, but to Cain, it was only a mild tingle, so he didn't stop playing with the pets.

[Moana requests to join you as a companion] the system informs Cain as he walks past a clutch of eggs in an aquarium.

That's not how he remembers it working. Can you just request the status? Cain looks around and sees that the request came from a partially hatched egg in the aquarium. He can't see what they are, but the eggs are fist-sized and in a variety of colors. The one that wants to join him came from a shiny black egg with white spots that remind Cain of stars in the night sky.

"Miss, I will take the young lady who is about to hatch in the aquarium here," Cain tells the clerk, who looks confused.

"One of them hatched? Those eggs are decorative, I've had them for years already." She explains.

[Companion Accepted] the system informs him and a small creature appears in front of Cain, swimming through the air with a tiny trident in her hand that is clearly an attack ability.

She almost looks like a mermaid, with a whale's lower body and a humanoid upper torso, her lower body's midnight black scales contrasted against bone-white flesh. Only where mermaids have human hair, she instead has a ridge of scales atop her head that runs down her spine and most of the way to her tail fin.

She ducks into Cain's coat pocket and Cain turns to the vendor. "I guess I was mistaken. The black egg looked like it was hatching."

Cain gestures for the others to leave while the vampire carefully looks over the black egg for signs of damage. None is visible as it sits, but Cain knows there is a large hole in the back that she just can't see from where she is.

"I'll excuse myself now. We have a lot of traveling left to do today." Cain informs the clerk as he leaves, and she simply waves, still wondering what Cain saw in the aquarium.

The man who sold her those said they were abandoned Leviathan eggs and would never hatch. But looking closely, the demon was right. At some point one of them did, but where did it go? As infants they're basically whales, they should still be in the aquarium, eating everything they can.

Outside, Cain can feel that the creature in his pocket, who called herself Moana, has been cloned, and that the two are playing rock paper scissors.

He will greet them soon, but first, he needs to get away from prying eyes.

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

## **Chapter 442 442 Moana**

Cain calls the flight of Pegasus to them and the group quickly mounts and trots off down the road.

Once they get a few kilometers away Cain orders the mounts to take flight, moving them to a quiet spot in the woods to talk.

"How about a round of introductions. I suspect you are no ordinary Companion, little Moana." Cain says reaching into his pocket to rub her scaly head.

The seahorse-sized creature that looks more like a mermaid than a leviathan flies out into the open, leaving her clone inside Cain's pocket.

"Right, yes. That does need an explanation. Hello everyone, my name is Moana, Queen of the Starry Night Leviathan Clan. I suppose you've never heard of us since we went extinct during the war between the Gods. This naturally isn't my proper form, but a convenient transformation, like most of you are using.

When the energy of the Planet was mostly used up and the Ley Lines collapsed at the end of the war between the Gods, the last few survivors of the Great Leviathan Clans, myself included, transferred our essence into an egg to wait for the planet to recover.

Like our allies, the Ancients, we require mana to live, only we need much more of it than this planet can currently provide on its own, and they exude it to make a suitable habitat for their young. But then, you might also know that. I'm rambling."

Everyone waits quietly for her to continue while the tiny Leviathan gathers her wits.

"There is still not enough mana in the air for me to mature on my own, that's why I chose to transfer my essence to your Summoning Spell and I'm only Mythic, but hanging around you, I should be alright. I can teach you a technique to exude more mana later, but if you're powerful enough to awaken me, then it won't be long before the evil ones notice."

Cain gives her an alarmed look. "Which evil ones?"

"The Human Gods of course. They bear a grudge against all that the Creators made, you, me, the other Ancients if any lived through the war. They even try to kill off the Dragons and Beasts to take over everything they see. They are pure evil." Moana rants.

"We heard the Ancients were like that?" Nemu asked her, confused.

"Not the same way. They tended to treat everyone like children, just because they were so old, and after the Bunny God said she had things to do other than hang out with them, they started making new things to keep as pets. It was a childish protest at first, but some enjoyed it so much they just couldn't stop.

We watched the whole thing in action but didn't have the power to do anything to stop them. We were still exhausted from our journey then. The Leviathan Clan didn't start here, the God of Rebirth and the God of Magic came to our planet while we were fighting the Human Gods and offered us sanctuary."

So the Gods that rule over the humans are bigger jerks than the Ancients? Cain can understand that since he used to be human. There is a lot of evil in humans, and it really comes out in some of them when they get power.

"Hopefully we have some time before Human Gods show up again. We're not exactly on a level that could challenge them." Cain points out.

"True. What do the others say?"

"What others?" Cain asks.

"There are no others? The Ancients have or had two levels of consciousness. Themselves and the whole. They operated both as individuals and as a collective, sharing power, knowledge, and even thoughts. If you don't know, then there are none left, At least not anywhere that can be easily accessed from this dimension."

Despite the fact that it is terrible news for the Ancients, it is good news for child-raising. They will be able to understand his thoughts, so they can start out with at least that level of knowledge.

"You mentioned that you transferred your essence to my Spell. How exactly did you do that?" Cain asks, eager to find out how she altered his passive ability.

"The Starry Night Clan has an Innate Ability to alter a single line in spell effects that target them. When your System recorded me, I simply altered the spell to add "And a one hundred percent chance of summoning Queen Moana on the first encounter."

Everyone looks at the small creature in shock. What sort of broken innate ability is that? She could reflect spells, make them heal her instead of doing damage, all sorts of things. Cain inspects her with his interface, seeing that it is exactly as she described, but that it takes ten seconds to cast. So it isn't great in combat, but if the enemy is casting some grand magic that could actually hurt a Leviathan above Mythic Level, she would have a chance to alter the effect to her benefit.

"What does your natural form look like?" Laura asks curiously, wondering if she is still the largest and mightiest of the Companions.

"With the Mana that I've absorbed so far, I could grow my Leviathan form, much like the Blue Armored Whales of this world, if you have seen them, to about ten meters long. This body is still very much a newborn, despite having a very old mind." Moana shrugs, unconcerned by such petty concerns.

At her age, time is almost irrelevant. Even if it takes a century to grow to adolescence, both she and her new master are Immortal Beings, so they're not going to die before she has time to catch up.



"I saw a device in an Ancient City that said the Ley Lines had recovered to 9 percent. How much more did they need to recover before the Leviathans could survive and grow here on their own?" Cain asks his new companion.

"About thirty percent should be good enough. Anything lower than that and the Leviathans and Ancient Children will suffer from Mana deprivation and either starve in the case of my people or be trapped as eternal children in the case of yours. I mean, look at yourself, you are almost matured, but still Mythic, and your form can't be more than maybe fifteen meters tall at full growth. If the planet had reached a proper level, you should have reached Immortal by now, bypassing Spirit Awakening by the time you finished puberty, and you would be a hundred meters tall in your natural form."

"So this low mana level will be an issue for my children when they are born?" Cain panics.

"We can supplement them with magical devices to gather mana into them. It's what the Ancients do when they create magical beings in sealed environments to prevent interference from outside influences. That shouldn't be a problem. But it looks like a lot of knowledge was lost in the years between the war and now. It's unavoidable if the Ancients and their cities are gone, but it is still sad to see. They could have made things so much more interesting." Moana pouts.

"Well, now I have you. If you know about things I should understand, just tell me and I will work on them. I managed to get a book on Spell Crafting, and I have followed the path of the Puppet Master and the Ancient Flesh Crafter before becoming a Watcher From Beyond." Cain suggests, making the little Leviathan's eyes glow with an excited blue light.

"That would be great. There were so many great spells in the world before. Can you make the Puppets that take care of daily chores? Those were so amazing that even we had them make a few for us." Moana asks and the other Companions smile at her enthusiasm.

"That I can, I also have a pair of echoes, half-power clones of myself, as well as the newly gained ability to call for a [Pet Sitter]. It is a [Lesser Watcher] and I don't know what its ability is, but I have a pretty wide variety of abilities available to keep from having to do things myself." Cain explains.

"Oh, the watchers are nice. You should call one when you get a chance. They get their own helpers, like your Puppets, that take care of chores and lesser species. They can even summon food and water if it's needed and grow plants to create terrariums." The way she happily describes creating terrariums for beastkin and humans as something normal makes it very hard for Cain to keep a straight face, but if they come with that knowledge it will be a great help to the Echoes who are attempting to perfect the fruit trees.

"What all can you do, other than swim in the air?" Nemu asks, tilting her head as if it will reveal more about the Leviathan if she just looks at it from a new angle.

"Honestly not much. I can control water and space, and I can eat almost anything if you have failed experiments or enemies that need to be disposed of." Moana sighs, lamenting her lack of powers.

"Well, we are heading to the next city to inquire about an elf, a former puppet that should still have most of a Public Library from an ancient city with her. It survived right until a few hundred years ago, when the city was destroyed and she fled, but I don't have a way of tracking her." Cain informs the small creature, who thinks a while before replying.

"Give me some time and I can find the books I think. I'm good at finding really old things in space, and if they're on this planet it shouldn't be too hard. But if you just want to go to the city, here we are."

A shimmering circle opens in front of them and Cain sees the image of an unfamiliar city reflected through it as if viewed through a heat haze.

"That only works for a few hundred kilometers, but it is very convenient for short trips. If I want to go further, I would need a marker. Do those still exist at least?" Moana asks.

"Both the ones that go between cities and the ones that go between continents are still in use, though maybe not the same as before. Most things now have been altered to comply with the System that the Laughing God set up after the war between the species a few centuries back. The humans were summoning Heroes from other worlds, and the Laughing God altered it to give them to most species."

"Oh, well that is good news anyhow. Yes, looking through the interface I see that you have a bunch of locations marked. That's a relief, I thought we would actually need to fly home. You have no idea how much effort that would take in this tiny body. Before I died or transferred, whichever you prefer, I was more than a Kilometer long. Compared to that, this tiny body is a nightmare of scale."

Cain laughs at her tiny angry face, unable to take her anger seriously in that body. "It is going to take you a while to adjust for sure. Hop back in my pocket with your clone and we can use the portal to visit that city. Maybe they will have a clue for us, or at least something worth seeing."

The group all steps through the gate, but they have forgotten one small detail. The gate faces the city entrance from inside the walls, and it isn't visible from the other side. Seeing a group of assorted transfers appear out of nowhere, but inside their security perimeter, causes instant panic among the guards stationed by the main gates.

"Halt, who are you and how did you get into the city past the anti-transport wards?" The guard sergeant shouts as soon as he sees them.

The group shares an embarrassed look with each other, not having expected the city to prohibit magical travel, and forgetting that Travel Circles don't work inside the Awakened Zone.

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

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"My apology, we didn't know you had a regulation against void travel into the city. We did stop here at the gate in case you had an entry fee though." Cain offers an apology, causing the Guard to stop in confusion.

Awakened Transfers have a wide variety of abilities, and if he had never been here before it is only reasonable that he wouldn't know. There isn't currently a line at the Gate, and they did stop next to the guard station for inspection, or at least that is what they claim. Really, he only has an issue because they appeared inside the city, and that is a security risk.

"I will let you off with a warning this time, but know that almost all cities have a rule against crossing the city walls before checking in. Whether you fly, run, or whatever you did that sent you through the void. But there is no entry fee for the city. You are free to enter, but we will be keeping an eye on you." The guard agrees, not seeing a good reason to work harder than necessary.

This city has very few demons for some reason, though Cain had heard that most of the cities were founded and filled with demons. Instead, the population seems to be Youkai and Beastkin. That's a relief to Cain, he needs more of both recorded for his abilities, both to try for a Youkai Companion and to upgrade Nemu, who is very close to upgrading.

[Let's wander around, I want to record as many new forms as possible.] Cain sends the mental direction to his Companions, and Moana moves to sit on the opposite shoulder from Laura, hungrily eyeing her snacks.

"Since you're new, I will share." Laura agrees reluctantly, handing the Leviathan a piece of hard candy.

"They make food from sugar? This new world is interesting. I thought it would be condensed bone marrow or perhaps a smoked meat item." The tiny Leviathan mumbles around a piece of candy a third the size of her head.

Her analysis makes Laura instantly like her even more. Not because they share tastes in snacks, but because they don't. Laura loves roast meat but has an immense sweet tooth. If the Leviathan doesn't that means she isn't going to compete for the rare snacks and will help the dragon hunt for tasty-looking meat animals.

They have almost completed a loop of the first market near the gates when Nemu starts looking dizzy and finds a porch to sit down on.

"What's up? Did you get hit with a hidden spell effect?" Cain asks quietly, in case he is right and the perpetrator is still watching.

"No, I am advancing. You finally collected enough forms to raise my quality." She whispers back.

It's too late to do anything about it but merge with her, and that might attract even more attention. A handful of beastkin shoppers have been drawn over by the aura of Nemu's advancement, staring in awe as her presence increases from Ancient to Mythic, while her base quality reaches Legendary.

"Oh, that's neat. She's just going straight to true Mythic." Moana claps happily, flying around the resting Felian.

"I've been wondering this for a while, but what is the difference between Mythic Quality and Mythic Awakened? All the stats look the same to me." Cain asks his newest follower, who has brought a wealth of knowledge with her.

"The quality denotes their modifiers. Have you noticed that your Mythic Quality granted you ten times the HP and Mana as the regular awakened around you, and how much harder it is to kill Mythic beasts compared to Mythic awakened? That's the difference. It is small at Mythic, with not much extra effort needed to overcome the change. But a true Spirit Beast has a hundred times the modifiers of a Mythic one, and a true Immortal has a hundred times that. After Mythic, the merely awakened might as well be pretenders, relying on a single skill and a buff to play like they are adults." Moana explains and the Echoes, who are listening in to everyone's thoughts from the farm exchange an angry glance with each other.

They were so proud of killing those awakened Immortal Crazy, but a proper Immortal Beast would have one thousand times as much health and mana? How could they hold their heads high with such a puny accomplishment? They silently resolve not to tell anyone else about that outing, to avoid embarrassing themselves in the future. Instead, they set the goal of overcoming a Spirit Beast solo. With the new abilities available to

them, they will be able to come up with the firepower using summons, so it might be possible already with a little strategy.

Sure, they each have half the stats of the original, but they also get the bonuses from his gear, so they aren't all that inferior in raw numbers, and who could say that they were anything but his equals if they had greater accomplishments than him? That's the motivating force behind almost everything they do, including their efforts to perfect these Mythic fruit trees.

"Is there anything else I should know about the changes above Mythic?" Cain asks while they are on the topic, and Nemu's body is still adapting to her change in Quality.

"Immortal is such a wide rank that it is split into ten portions to give a better estimation of the power level of those within it. The ranks above were the same when I was alive last time, but I can't guarantee that the System still categorizes everything the same. You haven't seen any true Immortals, so I don't have enough data to actually verify my reasoning."

Vala smiles at her facts-based mannerisms. "I think you would get along well with Svetlana. She's one of Cain's Commanders, created by his Puppet Master Class abilities, and she loves data."

"Math is an essential truth of the world. People lie and evade, but numbers either add up or they don't." Moana agrees, eager to meet all her new peers.

"We can meet up with them in a few weeks when we go back to check on Misha and make sure her pregnancy is going smoothly. I've got puppets and Guild members watching her at all times, along with the clones of the Companions, but it's better to see things with my own eyes than looking through others' memories."

Their conversation is cut off as Nemu's transformation finishes. Unlike when the others reached Mythic Quality, she looks exactly the same, and it isn't until Cain inspects her that he can see the change. Nemu's class has changed to Siren, and she has gained compulsion bonuses for her singing abilities, as well as improved versions of all her buff and debuff abilities.

Nemu stretches out, letting the feeling of power flow through her body, no longer so envious of Vala who has gotten to enjoy this for so much longer. There is a small girl singing as she skips down the road, oblivious to the spectacle that drew the attention of all the adults and Nemu calls out to her in a gentle and lyrical voice.

"Little Fox, won't you come to sing and dance with me?" Nemu calls and the girl's face turns overjoyed, her long fluffy tipped white ears flicking as she runs over. Cain can see her eyes are a little vacant, Nemu's voice compelled her, but even after she arrives she doesn't calm down much.

"Do you know [The Ballad of Maggie Jane]? I love that song." The little girl asks, and the locals all laugh. The ballad is a drinking song about a jilted lover, best known as a bar song among the more seedy taverns, due to its bawdy language.

"But of course I do. What bard doesn't know the classics. Do you want to sing with me, or dance?" Nemu asks.

"You sing, I will dance!" The fox-eared Youkai laughs, giving a twirl that makes her patched skirts flip up off the muddy stones of the road.

The road through town should be stone, but lack of cleaning has caused a layer of muddy soil washed off of wagons and from the surrounding green areas to slowly cover it. Neither of them seems to care, as they launch into the tune, amused shoppers joining in on the song and dance, entranced by the voice of the Felian Bard's song.

"That's impressive, she's got over a hundred people in a light trance with just a song, she isn't even using an ability. Any tavern owner would kill to have her on staff." Vala whispers before being pulled into the dance by Nemu's fluffy partner in crime.

The song ends and everyone cheers and tosses silver coins at the duo, thinking that they are street performers. In a way, Cain supposes that they are today.

The Youkai girl, who is either very poor or one of the local street urchins, collects all the coins and then carefully splits them in half. "You sing I dance, that's fifty-fifty, right?" She asks hopefully, holding out one of the handfuls of coins.

"That sounds right to me. Good work little one. I will see you again one day when we come to visit again." Nemu tells her, taking half of the coins and petting the fluffy ears before the girl runs away.

"Now we have local coins to donate to the needy, or buy candy." Nemu winks, giddy with the success of her latest advancement. In fact, it was so effective that the crowd has entirely forgotten about it, and is only talking about the song.

"Now, let's see what we can find out about the Librarian elf. Vala, you can go with Nemu, I will go with whoever is riding on me, and we will meet back up here in two hours." Cain suggests.

Moana, splits up, one clone going with each group, while Laura moves from Cain's shoulder to his pocket. It's more comfortable for a day-long excursion, and until they get close to the food stalls or that magical item shop again, there isn't much for her to do.

Then she has an epiphany. There were multiple bookstores in town. If she checks all of those while Cain checks with the local Quest Hall they should both be done at the same time, since the bookstores won't have a lineup. Conveniently, the path from the bookstores to Quest Hall runs right through the farmer's market.



Cain smirks at her transparent logic and motions for her to go even before she can voice her idea out loud. He doesn't usually listen in on their thoughts, because all the voices will give him a headache, but lately the problem doesn't seem to be as bad, with only the more exciting moments overwhelming the background track of his thoughts.

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

## Chapter 444 444

Cain heads straight for the Quest Hall, making good time until he realizes that this place is even more crowded than the last one he visited. They seem to only have two beastkin working the counters, while there are hundreds of adventurers waiting around for their turn to pick up quests or turn in the ones they have already finished.

It's a nightmare of mismanagement but there isn't anything that Cain can do about it, so he simply takes his place in line and inspects the transfers around him, looking for powerful or interesting forms that he might want to use as Summons later.

What he finds is that the people of the awakened areas don't put great stock into class advancements. Once they find one they like, they don't worry too much about changing it. Instead, they look for Mythic skills that are compatible with their class and supplement themselves that way.

While a level 85 with a single Mythic skill might technically be awakened, and get the benefit of the damage reduction buff, they are laughably weak in front of an actual experienced and skilled fighter. Comparing it to his past life, it is like playing a DPS class with a seriously overpowered Ultimate ability, but not really putting points into anything else.

Of course, for everyone else, getting levels is not nearly as easy as it is for Cain, so the logical route is to get a mythic attack ability and go out to face mythic beasts. They are often much higher level, giving very good experience per kill, and Awakened skills don't suffer the high rate of damage reduction due to levels that unawakened skills do.

In practice, this leads to a large number of hopeful young hunters picking the wrong target and becoming a food product, but that's just the way things go here in the Awakened zone.

"You new to town friend?" The Youkai in front of Cain asks, looking back over his shoulder, revealing a white Oni Mask mostly hidden under his hood.



"Yeah, I came through to inquire about some ancient books. It's a quest I'm on, an elf left a bunch of them over the continent, but I don't know where." Cain explains and the creature in front of him gives off an aura of curiosity.

"That sounds like quite the quest. Doing the same thing every day gets too boring, so once in a while, I will take missions to other cities, but I've only heard of the one relic book."

That's what Cain expected. Having them so close together was a long shot, but if he doesn't ask as he travels, how will he know if he missed one?

"If you get to the far east, there is one in my hometown of Eda. It's just east of the barrier mountains, in the deep mist. There is a monastery there with an incredible library that is said to have existed for over a thousand years." One of the other men in line mentions.

"Eda, you say? Thank you, that sounds like a very good lead to me. It might take me a while to get there though if it's on the other side of the mountains." Cain smiles, making both men laugh.

"A bit of luck too. The guardians don't let just anyone through the barrier mountains, or the name would lose its meaning. But for someone like yourself, I think they might make an exception. They have a soft spot for people with potential, and I've never seen that class before." The transfer agrees with a smile, while the man closer to Cain nods, his expressions hidden behind the mask.

There seems to be a bit of excitement going on in front of them, which distracts their conversation for a short time, while they watch a man get brutally beaten by a woman with a torn shirt. They are at least fifty people away, and those closest to them are laughing at the man's misfortune, so Cain decides that he most likely deserves whatever is happening to him. The man has fortitude on his side though, and when the woman gives him a moment's reprieve, he immediately holds up a coffee cup and makes a milking motion in her direction.

He might be brave, but it seems he isn't particularly bright because she has started beating him again.

Soon after the companions of the two troublemakers break up the fight, pulling them both off in different directions, while the crowd mostly ignores the fight that just occurred.

With the humor finished, the wait for the teller goes pretty quickly. The beastkin on duty hands Cain a pamphlet with today's quests on it to look through, but Cain is more interested in answers about the books. They don't have any idea what he's talking about, making Cain glad the guys in line were feeling chatty.

"Thanks for the help. If you can sign me up for the bandit control mission, I will see if I can get that cleared up this afternoon." Cain informs him, pointing at the relevant mission.

"Um, are you sure, sir? That group is over twenty members strong, all Awakened. If you fall into their ambush it will be over in an instant." The beastkin points out, frowning at the Transfer in front of him.

"Relax Pup. Let him go play, there's more to this one than his status." The Youkai in the mask, who is still collecting rewards for past quests at the next counter laughs.

"I'll take your word for it then. But if they turn up dead, you'd better fork over the extra reward." The worker grumbles, holding up the quest for Cain to accept.

Since they're both finished now, Cain and the masked Youkai both walk away and let the next in line take their places.

"I take it you can see through the disguise?" Cain asks curiously.

"I can see through almost anything, including fate. I can even see your skill trees." The man says quietly but casually.

That is a seriously overpowered detection skill. Being able to see the skills available to an unknown opponent is a huge advantage in combat. Even Cain would have a hard time dealing with an opponent like that without duplicating his skill to be able to strategize at the same level, especially if the man also has a way to counter the skills he sees. Cain has already recorded his form, so he will have to inspect it later to see what this man is fully capable of.

Vala and Nemu are the first to return, shaking their heads in defeat. Laura isn't far behind, but her happy smile has more to do with pilfering the Farmer's market than any luck she had at the bookstore, though she did get a few childcare books of the more mundane variety. That way Cain couldn't accuse her of slacking on the task he set her. Even though Companions can't directly disobey him, they are smart enough to find loopholes in all but the most carefully worded directions if they wish.

"Well, it has been a pleasure meeting you, but now that we're all together and our search of the city has given a hint on the location of the hidden books, we should take care of the bandit quest and get on our way," Cain says his goodbyes to the Youkai, who waves and turns to head back to whatever he was planning for the day.

"They are set up only twenty kilometers east of town, but the guard patrol isn't willing to attack again after the last few ambushes. So we will go clear out the bandits and turn in the quest before we head to our next destination." Cain informs them with a grin.

Vala is a battle maniac, Evangeline loves attacking evildoers and none of them have seen the baby Leviathan in action. It should be an interesting excursion to kill a bit of time.

They walk out of the city gates and Cain calls a flight of Mythic Divine Fire Dragons, then transforms into the Golden Proto Dragon himself and triples their numbers. That makes Moana laugh in joy.

"Oh, they are so screwed. This is going to be awesome." Her shout breaks the guards from their reverie. They aren't quite sure what it is that they just saw, but they know for sure that whoever these people are hunting is in for a very bad time when they are caught.

The dragons take to the air, with the Companions riding on the back of Cain. At the speed that Mythic Dragons can hold, the flight is only a few minutes long, and the Dragons' enhanced eyesight detects the bandit camp a full thirty seconds before that. They have set up an ambush to attack a group traveling down the road with heavily laden wagons.

As the Hall indicated, they are all Mythic awakened, and all Demons of various sorts, but better dressed than any bandits that Cain has seen before.

[Does that look suspicious to anyone else? They look like nobles playing at being bandits.] Cain sends the thought to the others as he watches them set up for the attack from his position in the clouds.

[Those are no bandits. They have an evil aura, but my senses detect large amounts of precious metals in their outfits.] The Divine Fire Dragons agree.

One thing bandits would never do is wear valuables. If they are forced back, they wouldn't want to lose treasures because they had to ditch a damaged coat. These must be nobles from a nearby city that are staging attacks for some political reason Cain couldn't be bothered to learn.

[Take them out, but keep as many alive for ransom as possible.] Cain directs. The mission is dead or alive after all, so there is no loss if he brings them in, and it would let the Quest Hall or the city guards interrogate them.

Seven enormous dragons descend from the clouds in a rush, their shadows on the ground scattering every form of magical beast in the area. They instinctively fear the dragons, who treat them as food, and six Dragons that size aren't something any of the local Beasts can take on.

Divine Fire burns down most of the bamboo forest near the road, sending burning bandits running for the relative safety of the road, where Laura is waiting to envelop them in [Ice Breath].

"Do we have a paralysis skill? It's been a while since I tried to keep an enemy alive." Cain ponders out loud, making the Companions chuckle.

"You have a Paralysis rune in your debuffs. It came just before the [Sunder Armor] one you had so much trouble with." Vala points out and Cain sighs. This is the difference between academic and combat learning. He spent days learning them, and then totally forgot about them when he got into combat.

Making proper use of his new skills from Spell Crafting is going to take not only time but a bit of creativity to break free from the rigid thought patterns he is currently stuck in.

"Who are you and what was that?" One of the merchants shouts, the damp trousers he is wearing informing everyone of the terror that a dragon attack can inspire, even when you aren't the target.

"The next city over has a mission for these bandits, and we thought we would take them alive. Well most of them, I can smell that some of them roasted before we had time to freeze them." Cain informs them, his voice a deep rumble thanks to the draconic body.

"Um, carry on then?" The man says, still in shock, and Cain nods, asking Moana to put out the last of the fires and ensure there are no survivors while he considers a good way to carry these prisoners.

He has a large chunk of sailcloth on him, which he has forgotten the original reason for having. It's the same color as the sails on Queen Rose though, and that reminds Cain that he was once intending to make uniforms for the crew that matched the ship. That's not a big deal, especially now that he doesn't need it to travel anymore.

Cain creates a paralysis rune on the forehead of every survivor, then tosses them onto the cloth and bundles it up into a sack. That should hold until they get back to the city.

"Enjoy your trip gentlemen."

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

## **Chapter 445 445 Disaster At Home**

With their prize safely bagged and ready to be transported, Cain leads the group back to the city, transforming back into the Wrath Demon form once everyone is safely set down outside the gates. The guards are giving the odd scene a wide berth, not wanting

to get in the way of whatever is going on, but the sight of the unconscious fake bandits being unwrapped from the sailcloth bag brings them running.

"What have you brought us? Is that a group of bandits?" The guard asks, before doing a double-take at their outfits, which look more like high society cosplay than an actual impoverished bandit group. Not only are they too clean for bandits, but the high-quality materials, precious metals, and tailored fit all give indications that these are no normal thieves.

"I think they're new at it. Powerful, but they don't even know not to wear their valuables while doing a raid." Cain shrugs.

The guard looks them over carefully, checking them against a set of notes he had made in advance. "The descriptions match the reports from the surviving traders though, so this should be them. I will have the guards take them into custody and the higher-ups can deal with this. But I can give you the writ of completion so that you can turn the quest in to the Hall."

Cain nods his agreement. "I appreciate it. This was my last task in town before we travel on to our next stop, so getting it sorted out means we can relax for the rest of the day."

After thanking the guard, Cain collects his cloth and leads everyone into the city, dismissing the Dragons, which are currently drawing a huge amount of attention from everyone with a view out the gate, as well as those who were waiting in line but moved out of the way when he landed. None of them wanted to anger the dragons after all. Any creature with teeth the size of your torso gets an instinctive level of personal space without having to ask for it, at least to the Beastkin.

In the middle of the day, the Quest Hall lineup is almost nonexistent, letting them reach the counter in only a few minutes, where the same clerk is on duty. They definitely weren't expecting Cain back so fast, much less with a completion note from the guard for an entire bandit group that was recovered alive.

"How did you even do that?" The Quest Hall clerk asks in amazement. This would be a story that could be retold for years, a bare handful of transfers took down a notorious Mythic Awakened bandit group, without killing any of them and without taking any casualties.

,m "It might not be a particularly fair fight, but I used Mythic Dragons to set fire to the forest, and then froze and paralyzed them when they ran for the safety of the clearing around the road," Cain explains, causing the people in line to give him a skeptical look.

"You think he's joking, but he's really not. I saw the dozen Mythic Dragons fly in. Enormous red and silver beasts a hundred meters long, with teeth bigger than my leg." One of the men at the back of the line confirms loudly.

"Man, I wish I had awakened a dragon taming class. I would be so much stronger." One of the rogues in line sighs.

He has just reached the first advancement and moved from the classic Rogue to Assassin Class. It isn't a great first advancement class, but it can lead to some very good second advancement classes if you have the right skills. Elmira was an assassin when she started out, though her class progression was Pixie-specific, so not one that this adventurer could follow.

"The dragons would likely just eat you. When was the last time you succeeded in a beast-hunting quest? You're the worst carnivore I know." One of the others in line laughs.

Cain has just collected his reward and stepped away when an urgent Guild Message comes through to him, followed quickly by a half dozen private messages, all saying basically the same thing.

[You need to be here now. Something has gone wrong.] Is what the clone of Vala that is staying in Long Fang Valley sends to Cain.

Cain pulls everyone into [Merger] and uses the [Recall] traveling ability to instantly shift himself to his bedroom in the Manor house, where Vala and Evangeline are staring at a black bubble of a defensive barrier that covers Cain's bed.

Cain inspects the bubble closely, assuming that it is the reason Vala is panicked. He draws a sword and taps on the barrier, eliciting a metallic ringing noise. The bed is inside, but the room the bed is sitting in looks to be some sort of white marble building with multi-toned hardwood floors that form a labyrinth pattern on the floor.

Cain decides to give it a solid hit, using one of Vala's Mythic Attack Skills to no effect. The barrier doesn't weaken or show any signs of damage at all, only a louder ringing sound from his attack lets him know that he even made contact. Since that isn't working, Cain tries simply putting a hand on it, wondering if it only allows certain objects to pass through, but it is smooth and cold, like frozen glass.

"That's strange. It almost looks like a portal, but it has formed a solid barrier over the entire bed. Do we know what caused it?" Cain asks and Vala nods numbly, pointing into the portal opposite the direction that Cain is looking, towards where the wall should be if the other side of the portal was still in his bedroom.

Looking out, there is a more feminine version of his Ancient form, seated at a table nearly identical to the ones in the abandoned ancient city in the mountains.

[Your world is too weak for the young to mature. They will be safe with us.] Sounds in Cain's mind from a half dozen different voices at once, as if responding to his confusion, but then the portal closes and the voices are abruptly cut off.

One final voice comes into Cain's mind as the bedroom returns to its original appearance, but without the very pregnant Misha that should be on the bed.

[The oracles say disaster is coming again, and that world is too weak to survive. Find us when you have regained the power to ascend.] One final gentle feminine voice sounds in Cain's mind.

"A fat lot of good that does me. Give me back my Misha you bunch of Ancient psychopaths!" Cain shouts at the empty room as the enormity of what just happened begins to sink into his mind.

There are still Ancients alive somewhere, and they have taken his kids. If the voice wasn't lying, they were rendered unable to reproduce after the War Between the Gods, so they probably won't hurt them, but somehow that's not a lot of consolation.

Cain tries sending Misha a message but only receives a failure message. [Member Misha Not in Range.]

She still shows in the Guild Roster, so Cain is assuming that she is unharmed so far, but nobody knows how the system will work if a transfer is pulled out of this world entirely. Perhaps her status is only stuck at the last point it could be recorded.

"What happened?" Cain asks, looking at the two Companions who were in the room when everything happened.

"Vala was picking an evening story since Misha had been trying to memorize every species' collections of fables, and I went to grab spare blankets because the weather is cold and wet tonight. Cyrene is still downstairs getting drinks, I don't think she knows what happened yet." Evangeline explains.

That won't last long, She is already on her way back, and Cain can feel her approaching. But it doesn't feel like she is coming up the stairs.

Moments later a small portal opens and a battered and bloody Lamia appears in the air in front of Cain, falling into his arms. Evangeline heals her almost instantly, but Cyrene's wounds seem to be closing very slowly as if there is a hidden debuff preventing rapid healing.

"I'm sorry boss. I saw the portal open in my vision, but there was no way to stop it. I went to the bottom half of the portal, where it opened into the floor below us, but they caught me almost instantly and threw me back out of their world. That place isn't normal, the air feels strange, and my battle visions were constant for the few seconds I was there like they have been at war for all time." The Lamia says softly, struggling to remain conscious.

"What else did you see while you were there?" Cain asks gently.



"Ancients. The room I was sent to had dozens of them around a dinner table. They are so incredibly powerful. They didn't even touch me, this damage is from their auras." The effort of speaking is too much and she has to stop and spit up a mouthful of blood, so Cain silences her and lays her down on the bed.

It should be safe enough, Cain suspects the only reason that spot was targeted was that it was Misha's bed, and that was where they detected her. Even with a Mythic Demon steps away, there was no time and no way to rescue her. Even with her visions of the future, Cyrene almost got herself killed in an instant trying.

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

## Chapter 446 446

There really doesn't seem to be any way that Cain can get Misha back without becoming powerful enough to go to that other world and get her. But just as importantly, the feminine voice said that disaster was coming for this world, and the world itself was unlikely to survive at its current power level.

Cain isn't sure what that means, but there are a lot of possibilities, given the little bit that he knows about this world's history, and none of them are at all good for him. Especially if it's the human Gods or someone else at that sort of level that is returning. The ley line device in the Ancient City said that the planet is currently below ten percent of what it took the Ancients to even fight to a stalemate last time before those who could flee did, and the rest were annihilated.

This says to him that he needs to start working not only on his own power level, but that of his friends, and the world itself. The obvious first option is to go visit the ruins again and see what he can learn from the Ley Line device. It's been over a thousand years since the point in time that the quest sent him to, so there is a good chance that the lines might have recovered somewhat.

Of course, there is the possibility that the Great War set everything back again with the creation of the System and the spell that created the dungeons. The System seems to be self-sustaining, possibly powered by the Laughing God, but the Dungeons appear to be running off the energy of the Ley Lines to sustain themselves. That might be helping draw mana to the lines, but it might also be slowly bleeding them dry, there really is no way to tell unless he can do a full set of tests on one.

That's hard to focus on though, Cain is simply too enraged at the audacity of stealing his family, no matter what they said their intentions were. Who are they to say that their location is better for children to grow up in? The Companions can all sense his growing rage, but it is Moana, the newest addition to his group that moves first to help calm him down.

"They would never hurt a member of the collective, it is the greatest sin to the Ancients. If they said they will protect the children they will, down to the very last of their species. That's just how they are, I don't even think they are capable of lying. It certainly hasn't ever occurred to them to try, they much prefer horrifying people with the honest truth."

That shouldn't be reassuring but somehow it is. They said they would keep the children safe, and that this world was in danger because it was too weak, so he will take that as the truth for now. They also said that he just needed to gain the power to ascend, whatever that means so that he could be reunited with them. Gaining power is Cain's forte. He might not be able to do much from here in the Central Continent, but he shouldn't have much trouble in the South.

The locals talked with fear about a place called Spirit Woods. To Cain that suggests spirit awakened fighters and Spirit Beasts. Even if they take 99 percent less damage from him, he should still be able to take them out one at a time, and it is bound to give him a decent amount of experience. There's also the crazed to deal with. They are all over the awakened zones, so he can send the Echoes hunting for them all day every day until they no longer exist. And then they can do it again in the morning when they spawn again.

The Guild Members have heard of the incident now after a few members saw Cyrene heavily injured and discretely listening in on the conversation and incident in Cain's bedroom. In her position as Guild Officer and organizer of events, she has become much like a mother figure to many of the transfers, and the loss of her is a severe blow to them.

They don't know the full details, only that someone dared to abduct her from her own home, and that is a direct insult not only to the Guild but all that they stand for. They have been working so hard to get everyone to like and accept the Darklight Host, who would actually do such a thing to them?

The question goes through the whole of the Guild over the course of the afternoon while Cain is working on a plan to increase his strength.

Cain's presence is inspiring them to do better, thinking that they missed something important that led to the incident. But a large part of the feeling of strength and inspiration is Cain's presence on the Central Continent. Accessories don't have a stated range limit, but moving between continents put him out of range of the Guild while he was in the South. But now that he's back the [Regalia of the Beloved Leader] is affecting

the entire guild, stacking a large amount of bonus stats on every single member, as well as many of the unguilded followers who are working for them.

The tension of the members is obvious to everyone who talks to them that day, and most don't make a secret of the fact that someone attacked their Guild Headquarters, though they don't divulge any details to outsiders.

It doesn't take long until the news makes it back to the Capital of Landis, where Carlos is at the fairgrounds with his daughter. He obviously knows at least the basics of what went on, but the rumor is that someone has assembled a force in an attempt to wipe out the Guild that has set up all the hospitals and the Dungeon escort services for the commoners. In a nation that is still on edge from a rebellion, the news is almost enough to start witch hunts against anyone who has openly spoken against the Guild in the past.

It might not be their center of power, but the public outreach work that they have been doing has made the Guild the heroes of the commoners in the nation. Carlos watches them looking suspiciously at those who have been against the guild and sees a familiar glint in their eyes, the dedication of a religious zealot whose faith was insulted.

"I will have to go to Skyview and talk to the Guildmaster tomorrow. If this keeps up, things are going to get out of hand." Carlos tells his daughter who nods her agreement.

"Would it really be that bad though? It's just one Guild." She asks, confused.

"Something else has changed. There are locals without systems challenging the low-level dungeons and succeeding without any skills. They are telling people that their faith in Cain has given them a bonus to their abilities as strong as a level ten transfer. Until I know what is actually going on, it's better if someone tries to keep the people from going hunting for whoever attacked Misha." Carlos explains and his daughter sighs.

"May the Gods help them. Of all the stupid things they could have done, they enraged Cain and injured his pregnant wife." She responds, shaking her head and a number of bystanders turn her way, not having heard the full details. But since it is coming from an actual Guild Officer and his daughter it should be true.

Back at the Manor in Long Fang Valley, things had already switched from somber to lively though. The locals decided that the best way to break the mood was to hold a welcome home festival for their Duke, a tradition that many regions maintained when their liege lord had been away for an extended time.

"So, are we going out to say hello? Everyone has gathered in the city to welcome you back." Cyrene asked Cain, wrapping herself around his waist after he switched back to a human appearance.

"It should help calm them down. I can see how the rumors have spread through the Guild Chat logs. It's good to feel wanted." Cain gives a strained smile, patting the Lamia's head.

"Plus, it's all-new food to Moana." Laura points out, indicating the spot where the Leviathan was staring out the window at the tables that were being set up in the city center.

"I like how your people celebrate your return, boss. Putting out a huge feast shows just how much they appreciate you." Moana nods happily, not taking her eyes off the tables. Cain isn't sure if the rumors in his past life about Leviathan appetites are true, since Moana has been eating fairly regular meals so far, but she does look at the buffet the way most people look at their lovers.

"Alright, let's go make an appearance. All of us together, to show that we are unified and that the locals aren't in any danger from what happened in the manor. Just keep the details to yourself and things should blow over." Cain decides, getting ready to go socialize when all he really wants to do is smash something.

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

## Chapter 447 447

Cain wakes up the next morning with the sun shining directly in his eyes, gathering his wits to recall what happened at the party. The dwarves had a new and improved whiskey for high-level transfers that Cain sampled an entire cask of, and things got a little blurry after that.

Cyrene is still wrapped around his waist, and Laura is sitting on his shoulder, playing cards with her clone, so Cain is pretty sure that things didn't go too sideways while he was drinking, but he realizes quickly how easy it would be to slip back into his past life's bad habits after a little setback like this.

He stayed mostly sober for Misha's sake so that he could prove to her and everyone else that he was a better person than he was before he arrived in this world. But without her here he needed someone around him who was sane enough to ground him and who could say no. That clearly wasn't Cyrene, who Cain was fairly sure had become a cult leader in his absence. The way the locals responded to her gave her a position far too exalted for her to be a stranger or even a friend. So either something incredible

happened and nobody told him, or the outreach program had been gathering more devotion than they had intended from the masses.

When Cain arrived back at the Manor he found they had even more visitors than usual, all of the Guild Officers were here, plus Neffie and a Bear Kin named Po, who claimed they were representing Port Nefheim. Even Maggie, the Orcish Lieutenant from Blood Sands Castle had come to the Manor for the first time so she could attend the meeting.

Cain wasn't sure what exactly to tell everyone, Misha had been taken somewhere that they couldn't easily get her back, but she shouldn't be in imminent danger.

It didn't take long for Cain to explain what he had seen, and then Vala and Evangeline, plus Cyrene filled in the gaps, with the Lamia's visions giving a bit of insight into the event. Her visions focus mostly on combat now, but as she was previously an Oracle, the visions of tragedy and misfortune still occur.

"So, with the warning that you got, are you going to try to awaken even more people?" Cyrene asks eagerly. Mythic skills everywhere would make the Guild the undisputed benevolent rulers of the Central Continent.

"Not quite yet. First I need to see what state the world itself is in. Then we can see what to do about it. There is a device in a ruined city that might give me some answers." Cain explains and the Lamia shrugs, still thinking that Mythic Skills for everyone would be more fun. Or maybe they could change the Guild Skill from [Summon Pet] to something that would summon Mythic Dragons and demons? That would be good too.

While Cyrene is daydreaming of Mythic Dragons, Cain is making plans to go traveling to the center of the continent again, visiting the city he has been made Mayor of. The trip will be a short one with his current traveling abilities, so he intends to leave at once.

He still has a clone of the Companions merged with him, so there isn't much planning to do, other than informing the Guild officers that he will be away for a few days to get answers to exactly what is going on in the world, and why the Ancients would give them such a dire sounding warning.

Distracted as he is, Cain doesn't even notice that Cyrene is still wrapped around him when he summons a pair of Mythic Forest Dragons for the journey. In fact, he forgets about her presence entirely until she starts making a happy giggle as they race through the air. While she has done some traveling, flying on the back of a Mythic Dragon is an experience unlike any other. They covered over six hundred kilometers in the first hour, and that isn't considered to be straining themselves to the Forest Dragons.

"What is so special about this city? Is there a relic there that can predict the future?" Cyrene finally asks, unsure as to why Cain would leave again so soon after getting home.

"Not foresight, but data analysis. There is a device there that measures the power level of the world and its Mana capacity. At one point it was much higher than it is right now, so the Ancients could use it to fend off the Human Gods. I don't think the planet has any chance of that right now, but hopefully, the threat we face isn't that extreme." Cain explains as they enter the mountain ranges that hold the dwarven kingdom and hide the Bear Kin Clans.

Flying between mountain peaks is a great stress reliever, and Cain's mood has improved a lot by the time they reach the false mountain that hides the city. Cain orders the dragon to slow, just in case it doesn't pass through the barrier as easily as he does, but all three of them travel past the barrier without meeting any resistance, finding the city exactly as Cain left it, but with the city gates closed, keeping explorers out.

"The Mayor's house is this way, I'll drop you outside so you can look around." Cain offers, but he can see in Cyrene's eyes that she has no intentions of unwrapping herself from around him.

That's fine, she can stay as a belt. At least that way he knows she won't get lost.

[Welcome Back, Mayor Cain] the city interface greets him when he enters the sitting room where the control tablet is masquerading as a coffee table.

"City Status." Cain orders, finding everything in order, with no unwanted inhabitants this time. There are regular logs showing that the former Demon King and his Gnomish Queen have been visiting for a bit of privacy, but other than that, no other living beings have entered the city.

"Everything looks good here, let's go to the center of town and go look at the device the Ancients left behind," Cain tells Cyrene, transforming into the demonic form he was using on the Southern Continent so that he can fly over.

This time there is a note on a small golden sheet sitting on the controls. It is written in the Ancient Language, but the System is kind enough to translate it for Cain.

[Ley Lines need to be over 60 percent to support Immortal Realm Beings. Good Luck in your adventures.] Cain can't verify who it was that left this note for him, or even when it was left since the room is sealed and doesn't collect dust, but it does offer him a clue.

If the Immortal Realm needs a certain mana concentration, and they saw fit to mention it to him, then either that is what is likely to be attacking this world, or that is what is needed to escape it and join the rest of his adopted species in exile.

Cain waves his hand over the controls, lighting up the holographic display, and asks the most important question on his mind.

[System, display all global spells currently draining the Ley Line Network.]



[3 Global Spells are currently Active. 1 Using Ley Line Energy]

[Divine Rank Group Spell: Peaceful Resolution] currently active, using Ley Line energy.

[Warning: Supply Insufficient for current Planetary Encirclement range of effect, spell efficiency at 62 percent and falling at the rate of 1 percent per year.]

Cain frowns at that news. The spell is most likely the dungeon spell, but if it is failing, that will be a nightmare for the common citizens when it fails.

[What happens as the spell degrades?] Cain asks, hoping for good news like the dungeon residents are going to be released totally sane and rational back into their natural habitat on some other planet.

[When efficiency reaches 60 percent, the highest-powered zones will be deactivated. All barriers and lingering spell effects in regions with Awakened power levels will be removed. At 50 percent, Spell Effects in areas above First Awakening will be removed. At that point the spell will stabilize under its own power, at original settings.]

"What's it say?" Cyrene whispers, curious but trying not to disturb Cain while he reads the glowing green runes floating in front of him.

"It says the dungeon spell is collapsing, and within the next two years, the Awakened zones will no longer trap their beasts and monsters inside. In twelve years or less, the dungeons outside the Beginner's Valley will all release everything inside them." Cain explains.

"Um, that sounds pretty bad. Like every dungeon monster from every dungeon just dumped outside by the entrance? I know that the cities that have grown around them are capable of cleaning them up, but that could be bad." Cyrene stammers, shocked at the news.

[Analysis inaccurate. The power levels of those trapped within the dungeon spells is limited by the local Mana supply. When the Peaceful Resolution spell ends they will be released at their full and original power, with the excess mana being drawn from the Ley Lines.]

[How far above current power levels would that be?] Cain asks, his tone turning a bit defeated as he realizes that he has no idea how to fix this.

[Results will be variable. Current data predicts 100 standardized power levels for every category above Elite.]

That would make the Mythic Beasts that are due to be released somewhere around level 600. That is not something that most beast hunters are going to be able to deal



with. Especially since they won't be expecting the sudden change in power levels when the spell effects end.

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

## Chapter 448 448 Global Warming

"Is there anything we can do to affect the rate of spell decay?" Cain asks the device out loud, for Cyrene's benefit.

[Affirmative. Deactivation of Dungeons, Vortexes and pocket dimensions will rapidly destabilize the spell.] The device answers.

He should have come here earlier. This device is a treasure trove of knowledge if you just know the right questions to ask. Cain considers the problem for a few minutes while Cyrene waits patiently. He had originally intended to close the vortexes to release everyone trapped inside and reduce the number of Crazy that are being created daily. But doing that is only destabilizing the region even more. While that would help with the crazy problem, breaking down the barriers that keep the awakened beasts in the awakened zone would not help his popularity anywhere else on the planet.

The neighboring zones in the Southern Continent might be the first to be affected, but a flying beast can cross the ocean in a matter of days, or even hours for the more agile. Even a single one reaching the other continents would be a natural disaster as terrible as the Great War.

While Cain is thinking of a way to either warn the awakened areas of what is happening, or if it might be possible to cast a new spell that would keep them confined after the dungeons were gone, a steadily increasing number of red lights began to shine on the map of the Northern Continent floating in front of him.

Cain hadn't been paying attention to it or the western continent at all, looking instead at the three continents he was at least familiar with, so it wasn't until a large area had turned red that it caught his eye.

[What is that red region?] Cain asked the device, turning the globe on the interface around with a gesture of his hand.

[Data indicates that a Spirit Level spell locally known as Nullification has been used to destroy a Spirit Level dungeon in the Northern Basin. The effect has caused a ripple of unstable Ley Lines to spread.]

"Projected Outcome?" Cain asked out loud, startled. Who would have thought that after all this time, someone else had the same idea that he did?

Or perhaps many people have in the past, but this was the first transfer who grew powerful enough to actually do it?

[Collapse of the spell to natural stabilization within one one hundredth of a rotational cycle.]

Cain does the mental math quickly, twenty four hours of sixty minutes divided by a hundred... That's about fifteen minutes from now.

Cain panics and sends a Guild wide message. [All Guild Members prepare for combat and home defense. The Dungeon spell has destabilized beginning in the Northern Continent, and every dungeon monster is likely to be ejected into the real world, possibly hundreds of levels more powerful than they are at the present moment.]

That's enough to get the whole Guild mobilized, and Cain sees hundreds of Guild Requests being sent by members trying desperately to pull close friends and allies into the Darklight Host to bolster their power level.

[Officers, quickly vet every applicant that you are familiar with and trust. Members, you will be responsible for your recruits, since there is no time for the usual procedures.] Cain sends in Guild chat, and a flood of notifications start.

"Echoes, get to the Southern Continent as fast as you can and notify our friends and neighbors." Cain instructed them before they suddenly vanished.

Cain sent a thought to their location, finding that they were already at the farm, which made him smile. Victor was so attached to his magical trees project that he set the rented farm as their home base.

What else could he do for now? He has Pet Sitters that he has never tried out, they might be of some assistance.

Cain tries to cast the spell, and a menu notification pops up on his interface.

[Please select region to babysit.]

First up is the Manor house, then the Castle, then Montauk at the entrance to the Beginners Valley. The device in front of him said it should stabilize before the Beginners Valley region collapses, but he sends one to Char at the house in Sunnyvale anyhow.

That leaves him one Lesser Watcher to work with. Assah has a bunch of high level transfers from the north there already, so they don't really need one, so Cain sends the last to Port Nefheim.

The port isn't fully populated yet, but it is growing fast, and will likely become a haven for refugees once the particularly high level dungeons collapse.

Neffie sends a message in Guild Chat the moment that he adds the last Lesser Watchers. [Oh, you sent me a cute pair of twin butlers? Even at the end of the world, you're so good to me.]

The little demon queen's antics make a lot of the members laugh, while Cain recalls that the numbers would have been doubled the moment that they appeared.

The spell itself didn't give much of a description, but he can see what they are seeing and hearing, like ten television sets in the background of his mind. It is distracting unless he fully tunes them out, but his mind doesn't seem to be having an issue comprehending the influx of information. Looking at their stats in his list of summons, Cain can see that they are basically Echoes, which makes him inwardly sigh. Just Victor and Lou are enough of a headache, having ten more just like them, but not cloaked in shadows? That's just a disaster in the making.

Unlike the Echoes, the Pet Sitters changed their appearance to match either the first person they saw, or the majority of people in the area. Neffie's are Demon Kings, Char's are Spirit Folk men, while the ones at the Manor are Wolf Kin.

Cain also finds that using the effects of [Dominion] which increases his spell range to anywhere his own senses can clearly perceive allows him to cast spells anywhere that his Pet Sitters, or Lesser Watchers as the system called them, can see. It seems to take a lot of mana for the ones further away though, so there is some hidden cost that wasn't mentioned in the ability.

[You just got tired of writing Tooltips didn't you?] Cain complains in his mind.

[Given the option, the System would not have contained tooltips at all.] The system answers him cheekily, making Cain smile as the soft laughter sounds in his head.

At least it fully fleshed out the status screen for the transfers. Learning by trial and error become easier every generation, as the base of knowledge plus the tips, tricks and exploits come to light and the old generation teaches the new. Assuming that they all survive the next few months that is.

[Boss, there are Bunnies.] Victor sends Cain a cryptic message.

[Of course there are. Bunnies are everywhere. Why is that relevant now?] Cain responds, annoyed by the message while he is trying to think.

[No, they are here. Lots of them, and more are coming.] The echo sends back, adding a mental image of a convoy of Bunnies in everything from priestly vestements to farmers overalls and servants livery stretching as far as the eye can see.

Oh, there are BUNNIES.

[Ask what the Goddess told them, and help as much as you can. I'll bet they would even accept if you started giving them combat classes at this point. Or just give them all a summoning skill for all I care, but look after the bunnies.] Cain instructs, snapping at his Echo before sending a wave of instructions to his Lesser Watchers to send one clone out into the area near the closest dungeon in an attempt to mitigate the damage done, should the occupants prove feral or hostile.

They might not know that the Great War is over yet, since they are in a time loop, or they might be as insane as the Crazed, though not as mindless, since they can use their abilities while within the dungeon.

Something else on the globe is changing as Cain watches and sends directions. The ice of the Northern Continent is melting rapidly, and the view shows nothing but fire.

[Can you tell me what is causing that heat wave?] Cain asks the device, indicating the fires over the Northern Continent.

[Sensory logs indicate that the usage of Nullification caused a backlash, and sections of the Fire Elemental Plane that were previously accessible through stabilized portals have now manifested in this world. The spaces are stable, but the heat emitted has caused widespread fire damage.]

Cain sighs as he looks at a Continent in ruins. [Where else is this likely to happen?]

[Analysis shows that only the Northern Continent had been experimenting with Dimensional Portals previous to this incident.]

That's a bit of good news, but did they have to make one to the Fire Elemental plane, where very few mortals could survive? Though, as experiments, they might not have been able to target them properly yet, and that is the first place that they happened to come across.

[Is there a way to see casualties?] Cain asks, and a number of columns pop up on the projection.

Cyrene looks at the data and begins softly crying with her head on Cain's shoulder. The device displayed them in the common language this time, and the results are horrific.

In most zones, the death toll is in the tens of thousands, as the collapse is ongoing, or only just finishing. But in the north and the northern sides of the Eastern and Western

Continents, the deaths are already in the tens of thousands and climbing. Broken down by species, Cain sees that the Gnomish population of the Northern Continent has been reduced by 98.7 percent. They must have been the ones experimenting with the portals, which would mean that their cities are at the heart of each of those lakes of fire.

[Guild Master. Bad news, the dungeon residents are just as insane now as they were before, possibly even more aggressive. I'm not sure how long we can deal with this, the dungeons in the desert are pushing out level 250 and higher monsters and crazed fae.] One of the members sends in Guild Chat.

[Regional Officers, organize reinforcements. Members, if they are too much for you, withdraw back to a safe location and we can deal with the fallout later. Now that they are back in the world, the scaling damage reduction of the Dungeons should have dissipated though, so we should be able to damage them.]

At least that's what Cain hopes.

[True for the Fae and Beastkin, not for the dinosaurs and other monsters.] Neffie answers, and Cain shifts his attention to where she is fighting next to the Lesser Watchers that he sent to her. She has called Summons, and is using Mythic Rank Fireball, so Cain guesses that they have shared the spell with the group. They are currently under attack by a wave of Dinosaurs, but the city residents are holding strong, and the Mythic magic is making up for the difference.

The only real upside is the Southern Continent. The residents of the Vortexes have been spit out with their sanity intact, and those who had systems before they were trapped all got a boost to level 200, which is what the elite monsters in the dungeon started at, progressing from level 200 to level 299 after which the Epic grade monsters started.

That might not be much consolation, but many of them were new transfers when they were trapped, and this gives them a headstart of a whole advancement or more. They might lack the ability to deal with Mythic Monsters, but they are adding a lot to the cities that they have taken shelter in. Cities that currently need all the help they can get, because the number of magical beasts that have flooded the continent is overwhelming. They too got trapped in the spell, but unlike the Crazed, they weren't cloned daily, only imprisoned, waiting for this day when they could hunt again.

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

## **- Chapter 449 449**

## **Chapter 449 449**

[Intruder alert] The device in front of Cain notifies him, showing a magical visual of a line of beastkin heading for the city, the first few attempting to find the legendary entrance to the mountain to keep themselves safe.

[Open the gates and let them in.] Cain instructs, receiving an affirmative beep from the device, and he can see the Bearkin in the lead stumble as the doors open in front of him, dropping him through the illusion.

"Drape yourself over my shoulder. I'm going to transform." Cain tells Cyrene, waiting for her to comply before shifting into his full and gloriously oppressive ancient body.

Cain runs out of the central room, locking it behind him and leaps into the air, flying over to greet his guests.

[Welcome everyone to my humble city. I am Mayor Cain, and I will be your host for this apocalypse.] Cain welcomes them, his mental voice echoing through every mind within a hundred kilometers.

"Honorable Ancient Cain, we beg of you, will you take in the beastkin while we work to retake our lands from the monster hordes?" The lead Bearkin, a burly and furry old woman a little over three meters tall with golden hair and bright blue eyes asks humbly, prostrating herself before him.

"Of course I will. I opened the city gates to let you all in, the least I can do is allow you to stay. I will even assign you some staff to help you get settled in." Cain agrees and the old woman's eyes light up with hope.

His puppets can do a little bit of everything, thanks to his skills in the secondary tree, so Cain gets to work making more of them. He has almost a hundred and eighty out right now, of a possible 335 to match his level, so he makes another twenty, bringing him to a rough two hundred active puppets. These ones are all Bunnies, in the robes of Acolytes of the Goddess of Life, and Cain grants them all four abilities.

First is a Mythic ability called [Mana Core] that many magical beasts have as an innate ability. It adds a large reserve of constantly replenishing mana to their bodies letting them use magic. The second is [Noble Command] so they can make people obey them in an emergency. Third comes [Holy Light] To heal, cleanse and defend their charges, and finally Cain adds [Summon Pet], so every one of them can call eighteen summons at Epic quality, selected from the Lesser Golems list.

They can use the extra summons to help with their work, and they know how to do everything that should be needed, since his skills grant them Apprentice level knowledge in everything that he hasn't added more points to.

They are still on the Central Continent, where anything over level two hundred is very uncommon, or was before the monsters started leaving the dungeons, and at level 335,

the puppets can even deal with the Epic Quality former dungeon bosses. That's enough to convince everyone that Cain truly does intend to help them, despite the reputation that Ancients have on this Continent and pretty much everywhere else.

As expected, everyone loves Bunnies, but this city feels like it is missing something. Even with all these new people, it feels like an exploration team inside ruins. It needs an air of home, of life. While Cain thinks of that, he can feel an aura of interest begin to form in the air, and the Spider God's Blessing fills his mind with thoughts of webs and silks and spider companions.

[Alright, you have a point. It might give the beastkin the creeps though.] Cain agrees, letting the bunnies take over the welcoming duties. They're puppets, they can just ask him if they have questions, and he sent them the basic layout of the city with a thought.

At full capacity it can hold a million humanoids, and about thirty thousand ancients. That should be more than enough for their purposes, since the ancient homes will be mostly empty, while the smaller species move into the former pet houses.

There is an empty courtyard over by what Cain believes to have been a school, going by its layout, and Cain has decided that this is the perfect spot for a Tribute. Merging with a Granite Golem, Cain creates a large statue of the Spider Goddess, and then creates two more puppets just like the others, but in the form of an Arachnid Queen.

The moment they are fully formed, Cain receives a notice.

[Control of Puppets Ceded]

They are quickly surrounded by a dark aura, changing their bodies subtly, and Cain realizes that they are now carrying a large sack of eggs, and wearing the mark of the Spider Goddess. They don't say anything, but they do bow politely to both him and the statue before they vanish into the basement of the nearby building, setting up their nests before their eggs are ready to hatch.

Soon the city will have actual priestesses of the Spider Goddess, plus a healthy population of arachnids, a type of Beastkin with spider bodies and humanoid upper bodies at the front of their torso. They're not often seen outside of Underwood, but they are still beastkin, and should hopefully get along with the rest of the local population.

The city doesn't really need Cain's help to come alive though. Everyone is picking homes, gathering in Clan or extended family units to entirely fill buildings, making as much room as possible for more refugees to arrive. They are also setting up laundry lines, having grabbed everything they could in a hurry to leave without being attacked, which meant that most of their belongings are random and dirty from the trip.

The enchantments that make water in the city still work, though they haven't been used since before recorded history, and the beastkin are making the best of it. They have



supplied mana to get the public fountains flowing, they are washing down the houses they have chosen, doing laundry, and even setting up stalls to barter items. None of them is thinking in coins at the moment, coins are neither edible or useful, so it is all by barter, and the impromptu market is busy.

Cain calls for two dozen Seraphim, from the Greater Golem Category, using [Summon Helper]. He gets twice as many of them as other species, thanks to his equipment, and he wants them to go hunting edible beasts.

If he searches, Cain is certain that he can find or create a spell to make food, but that would be a lot of work. Instead, he will send the Seraphim hunting and help clear the area, as well as bringing back dinner for the new arrivals. Letting them just huddle in misery and hunger doesn't sound much like he's being a good host, so it's the least he can do for them.

On the Eastern Continent, things are much the same. The locals have flocked to Port Nefheim after their villages were overrun, since the port is the only city in the region with walls. Neffie and the Lesser Watchers have cleared the first waves of Dinosaur attacks for the most part, though Neffie has hypnotized and captured some Raptors from among their numbers. She has not given up on her goal of Raptor Cavalry, even though she has modified the plan to have the cavalry summon their mounts.

They will still need to know how a real raptor fights though, so they can properly coordinate when they are dismounted. That's where the captured ones come in. She can have them fight in an arena, and the soldiers can watch and learn while the masses are entertained.

She heard about a thing called a coliseum in the old books that Ungle Aggie, better known as King Aggramor of the Demon Kingdom, showed her. It was a place where humans and monsters fought each other for the entertainment of the crowds, with people betting on the outcome. According to the King, the fighters were all prisoners sentenced to death, but if they could win ten straight fights they would be pardoned and released. Not only that, but they would get a small cut of the gambling winnings on their tenth fight, giving them something to start over with.

The idea stuck with her, even though Port Nefheim doesn't have any prisoners, much less ones sentenced to death. They caught a few petty criminals, but they used the Wave Rider punishments on them, publicly whipping them and then making them stand in neck deep salt water for the rest of the evening so they would learn their lesson. It seems pretty effective, nobody has reoffended in the city, not a single time.

So, she's not planning to change anything up, but unlike the old Demon Kingdom, she has summons available to her. She can call for fun and unique combinations to fight the monsters of the day. Nobody gets hurt, the monster population gets controlled, and the crowd gets entertainment. It's a win all around as far as Neffie is concerned.

The construction of the coliseum has already started, and with the influx of new viewers and Reptilian volunteers, Neffie has high hopes of pushing her timeline forward and getting right into the shows.

The only area currently having real issues is Blood Sands Castle. Montauk has the Beginner's Valley at its back, which is stable and still has its dungeons, with not many other dungeons around. But the castle is in the middle of the desert, and every dungeon formed from the mighty battles that destroyed a quarter of the continent has opened at once, and dumped a huge number of insane combatants of a dozen different species out into the sand.

With the two Lieutenants on duty, the castle itself isn't in any danger, but they had a lot of members out at the rest stations in the desert next to the new dungeons that they had found, and the sudden influx was making it hard to ensure their safety. They hadn't abandoned most of the locations yet, fearing that if they did the death toll would be much higher. The locations staffed by the Darklight Host attracted those fleeing the monsters, and those looking for allies to fight back, so every post was important to them today, and likely well into the future.

Instead, they had the Tengu Lieutenant Sora send out Seraphim scouting squads and fly from site to site herself, dropping off higher level volunteers. Two Guild members was enough to form a group, letting them use the Guild Skill of [Demon Army], which only summoned Lesser Demons at their level, but a lot of them, as well as the two sets of Epic Quality summons from [Benevolent Leader]. With that many summons, and a member near or over level 200 they stood a much better chance of holding off any sort of attack, even if the only people they had taken in were low level, or merchants without Systems.

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

## Chapter 450 450

It was Sora, the trickster Tengu that first learned of the best method to defeat the hordes released from the dungeons. The intelligent species weren't mindless like the crazed, only driven insane and forced to the peak of rage by the effects of the spell. So, her first idea was to mind control them and turn that against each other. But what she found when she tried was even better.

The four dungeons within Blood Sands Castle had opened at the same time. The dragons had immediately flown away, maintaining enough of their sanity to realize how much time had passed and wanting to regroup and recover, and the Synthetic Seraphim that the two mischief makers had left behind simply flew to the top of the tower to watch

the show while the humans, dwarves, and elves were all tossed into the castle grounds in utter confusion and battle lust.

The appearance of Sora and Maggie, the two Lieutenants stationed at the Castle, along with their army of summons, backed up by two dozen first awakening Guild Members, was enough to make even the dungeon-crazed armies pause to consider their next action. That's when Sora tried for mass mind control and things took a drastic turn for the better.

The Tengu quickly realized that using [Mind Control] on them had a high chance to break the effects of the dungeon debuff now that they were outside. The more intelligent the target, the higher their mental resistance and the more likely it was to succeed. This also had the side effect of turning their former allies against them, but the confusion was more than enough, and the soldiers that were now free of the spell fought valiantly against their former comrades.

Once the castle grounds had been secured, Sora began her travels to drop off reinforcements, stopping along the way to mind control groups that looked like they might be reasonable after the debuff was removed. She explained to every group what had happened, and a bit of history, which was enough to convince most of the Fae and humans she found that they were not dead and that this was their old world, only dead and lifeless in this region because of the intense ferocity of their battles.

The truth was a nightmare to many of them. What was the point of a war to defend their homelands if there was nothing left for them to live on afterward? The war destroyed their homes, their entire nations, and everything else.

Sora did her best to convince them to take shelter in the Darklight Host, giving directions to Blood Sands Castle, which now had a large refugee population camped inside. They were mostly travelers who were caught up in the chaos of the dungeons closing, but there was room for more, and the Tengu sensed that these soldiers had potential, even the ones that didn't have an active system.

She knew that if they were granted a Skill, they would awaken a Class if they had the potential and that the Watchers that Cain sent to them were like his Echoes, having the ability to use most of his skills at reduced power. If she convinced them to grant all these people a skill, they would have a much stronger force at the castle, sufficient to hold against all threats, and even begin to take back the desert from the monsters and others that couldn't be reasoned with.

That wouldn't solve the problem on a grand scale. Too many groups wouldn't be willing to cooperate even without the dungeon effects, but it gave the lower-level areas a bit of hope for their future.

The capital city of Skyview was in much worse shape by the end of the first week. The dungeons that had opened released occupants much higher level than the locals,

thanks to the difficulty that made them so valuable before. They had a lot of Epic monsters inside, and Legendary bosses, which most of the residents could barely injure at their current level.

Plus, the two dungeons inside the walls suddenly dumped their contents all over the capital city, and the sudden turn of events took the city guard and the stronger factions by surprise, allowing the monsters to destroy a large portion of the buildings before they were chased out or brought under control.

,m The two Dukes Archibald and Chen had banded together in time to prevent total catastrophe though, becoming the heroes of the common people. The city guard under Duke Archibald secured safe spaces for the residents to evacuate, while the fighters of Duke Chen's Sect worked with the Transfers in town to clear the streets.

With communication, they laid traps for the insane former dungeon residents, herding them into well-prepared defensive points to be wiped out.

In contrast, the Long Fang Valley only had one dungeon, while the surrounding territories had a combined total of four. With everyone working together, plus travel time, the Darklight Host had the entire area cleared in under an hour.

When King James heard of their good fortune, he immediately sent a message to Svetlana, who handles the city's affairs on behalf of Cain, asking for assistance to be sent to Skyview's allies. He has a lot to deal with, and he couldn't send anyone to help small territories like the Nyanko Confederacy with their monster problems.

Some regions already had Guild Members in them, some didn't but teams were sent in all directions to help wherever they could, including no fewer than ten members who volunteered to go help Nyanko, home to over a million feline-type beastkin. Officially it is because Princess Khali, the petite human girl who became part of King James's harem is such a good friend to the guild, but Svetlana suspected that it had more to do with the fact the population was over 70 percent female catgirls with a strong fitness culture.

The Darklight Host would never stoop so low as to pick who they saved first based on how cute they were, right?

On the Southern Continent, one small farm had suddenly become a refuge amongst the chaos. Those ejected from the vortexes weren't insane like those trapped in the time loop of the dungeon. But there were hundreds of thousands of refugees suddenly appearing, and the power level of the Mythic Beasts all over the continent had suddenly skyrocketed.

The only saving grace was that Mythic abilities don't suffer the same level of degradation that lower-quality spells do. The higher-level monsters were much tougher, and physically more powerful, as well as having higher spell power, but they still took

just as much damage from the Mythic spells as they always did, so the difficulty wasn't overwhelming.

The Echoes had granted all their summons Mythic Fireball and Mythic Ice Breath, the two applications of [Ancient Wisdom] balancing each other out well. What was immune to fire was rarely immune to ice, and vice versa.

With hundreds of summons in the area capable of Mythic level attacks, there wasn't much fear of wandering monsters at the farm or the nearest village, so they naturally became a gathering point for those who escaped the vortexes.

The Echoes were happy to help those in need. Not because they suddenly became selfless, but because the ever-growing camp provided them with the much-needed manpower to replant crops for their experiments, now that their summons were busy keeping the area clear of beasts. Without all these new people, they would have had to do it themselves or make puppets to take care of it for them. Instead, they got thousands of volunteers happy to help, and they even gladly ate the experimental foods without asking too many questions about what had been done to it, simply accepting the excuse that the Echoes were trying to increase the quality and output.

The cities of the Southern Continent weren't enjoying things quite as much as the Echoes were though. The extra strength emboldened the monsters, and many of them lived in packs. One or two at a time, the extra levels were manageable, since they were using Mythic abilities anyhow. But dozens at a time, with their increased durability and seemingly neverending mana pools, turned many less defended small towns into monster dens.

The monsters didn't seem as interested in the farming villages though. The small groups and widely spaced houses didn't trigger the hunting instinct like a large group with aggressive guards did. The Echoes were studying the reason why in their spare time, but the preliminary decision was that the fault actually lay with the incense that the cities used to repel the monsters. It contained a magical equivalent of a pheromone that deterred them, but now that they were so much more powerful they were willing to challenge what they thought was a rival monster pack.

Since the farmers didn't use it and didn't actively hunt them, they weren't viewed as a real threat, more like a food product that sometimes did a good job of fighting back. The monsters were overwhelmed with newfound power, not starving, so the farmers simply didn't matter enough to attack.

In Landis, utter chaos reigned. The city was still recovering from the civil war, and the outlying regions were occupied by Orcs, who barely knew where the dungeons were to begin with, so the entire nation was flooded with a wide variety of combatants, now enhanced to their full previous power.

The residents were a bit higher level than the desert, but not by much, so the elites at level 200 were pushing their skill level, while the Epic monsters that used to be dungeon bosses were completely beyond all but an elite few of the military. The only saving grace was that Carlos was there, and managed to call for reinforcements from the Guild. Svetlana sent him a combat patrol of Bearkin, all over level 200, and they took back the capital city in a single day.

Over the course of the week, they slowly started securing the outlying villages that survived and still had residents, while the Bears passed on the news of what happened to the ecstatic Orcs, who decided that what the residents of Landis viewed as the end of the world was nothing more than a blessing from the Gods. A return to the glory days of the continent-wide war.

The bears thought that viewpoint was quite admirable, as they had quite a few combat maniacs among their own ranks, so they simply told the humans to leave the Orcs alone and they would do their very best to take care of the problem themselves. Working in raid teams, and fighting almost every waking hour, the strength of the Orcish nation began to creep upward at a noticeable rate, greatly alarming the humans of Landis.

There was only one thing to do, they decided. They must join in the battle, and strengthen themselves to handle both the former residents of the dungeon, as well as the threat of Orcish invasion after they ran out of other targets to fight.

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