

Reincarnated With A Summoning System

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Chapter 451 451 Neffie's Victory

On the training grounds outside Port Nefheim, a thousand soldiers were assembled in matching black armor with black and white tabards over top, denoting them as allies of the Darklight Host. On each chest, a small sigil was sewn, next to their official badge. A small golden emblem, a demon head with long feline ears, tufted at the top the same way that a bobcat's ears were. This was the official symbol that Neffie had chosen for her personal guard.

"Welcome everyone and congratulations on passing the tests. As of today, you will be granted the official skill of a Port Nefheim Guardian, the [Bonded Mount]. It is an epic quality skill and will be with you for the rest of your lives. They will remember you between summoning, so treat your mount well." Neffie declares, her pride in the soldiers evident in her tone.

She has abandoned her childish true form in order to be taken more seriously, becoming an alluring Demon Princess of the Obsession Sect, with milky smooth alabaster skin and glowing green eyes. She did keep her black spiked horns and long white ears though, the signature parts of her appearance were too dear to her to be erased from her public persona.

Every soldier here knew what she really looked like, but the form she was in now did a much better job of inspiring troops, even without the loyalty aura that she had been carefully cultivating.

"Now, you all have the skill, it is time to summon your partners and prepare to meet the onslaught of enemies that threaten our dear city." Neffie declares, raising a cheer from the army as a thousand assorted dinosaurs appear on the field.

The majority of the mounts were a two-legged carnivore known as the Cerato. Between six and seven meters long when stretched out to run, their usual standing stance was roughly two meters high, and leaned well forward for balance with their powerful tail extended behind them. That made them perfect for both elven and human soldiers, as well as the smaller beastkin that had joined for the offer of wages, safety, and regular meals.

Of course, not all of them joined for such simple reasons, but the structured life had drawn most of them into the life of a city soldier, where their loved ones were guaranteed a good life in Port Nefheim.

They weren't the only mounts chosen though, they also had a heavy cavalry mount known as the Trice, a four-legged herbivore with an incredibly powerful beak and a bone frill at the back of its head that served as a shield for its rider. The trice was well known for its powers in Earth Magic, stacking multiple defensive spells on itself to avoid injury. That made it perfect for the first wave of Neffie's cavalry, with the more agile Cerato squads following closely behind once the enemy lines were broken.

Finally, there were the flying mounts known as the Quez. with a wingspan of over 8 meters, they mostly had female elven mages as their riders, taking advantage of their smaller size and lighter bodies to increase their agility in the air and launch devastating magical attacks on the enemies of the Port. They would soon be patrolling the area around the city, being able to easily chase down even the fastest of ships and scout the movement of monsters and armies in the region on land.

At the moment, all three wings were in for a trial by fire. Every soldier selected for the Port's army was over level 250 already, and though that was far from the most powerful beings on the continent even before the dungeons collapsed, it would be enough to deal with the horde of level 300 dungeon-crazed dinosaurs that were currently charging towards the city.

That incoming force was the reason for today's ceremony, pushing forwards Neffie's plan by over a month. They were supposed to have more practice with the summoned mounts and group training before they had to see combat. They had faith though, both in themselves and in their adorable leader, that they would prevail.

Not only was she over level 300 and looking for a third advancement class that was best suited to her skills, but she was also a powerful Doppelganger already, and the Guild Master had sent a pair of his helpers, known by the System as Lesser Watchers, to assist her.

Their powers were nearly unimaginable to most of the army. They could summon, transform, fight or cast nearly any spell on a whim. Rumors said that they were even capable of rewarding heroes of the city with Mythic skills that would put the recipient head and shoulders above the competition, making them nearly invincible.

They had all heard of the awakened of the Southern Continent, but they were supposed to be a legendary existence, not something that just anyone who pleased the commander enough could achieve as a gift. Even if the odds were one in a thousand that they would stand out enough, progress fast enough, or perform a deed heroic enough to be awarded such a thing, the mere possibility was enough to nearly drive them into a frenzy for their first battle.

"Form up. The monster wave is nearly on us." Neffie shouted at her soldiers, getting them ready just before the first sounds of rampaging dinosaurs reached the more sensitive ears in the crowd.

The sound of crashing trees and enormous footsteps echoed across the water as the monster tide charged towards the port, funneled in this direction by the natural river valley that the city was built along.

"Cerato, ready lances. Trice, charge on my order." Neffie shouted, then sent the Quez forces into the air with a whistle, letting them herd the tide with their magic, to keep them from spreading out and escaping.

She learned that trick from a Bear Kin transfer named Blood Moon. In his past life, he was a mighty hunter from a low-technology world without magic. They used to chase their prey into traps or off cliffs to hunt them in relative safety, and that is what Neffie intends to do today. They don't have a good cliff to drive them off, since the enemies are level 300 and would survive most any fall, but they can chase them into a wall of cavalry, and let the weight of the horde behind them drive them forward to their deaths.

The dinosaurs mostly aren't exceedingly smart, being on par with domesticated animals, so they can be fairly easily tricked and herded with the right motivation, and defenses strong enough to survive their counterattacks.

The first wave of spells has enraged the horde, and a wave of earth spikes and water blasts flies back up at the Quez wing, which only circles back towards the city, drawing them onward in an increasingly enraged state.

By the time they realize that the Trice have built a spiked earth wall in front of them, with magical lances at the ready, it is too late to stop, and the front ranks slam forcefully to a stop before they are crushed by those behind them, in a repeating cycle until the momentum stalls with hundreds of injured and dead monsters in the vanguard.

"Trice, hold the line! Cerato, over the top and charge!" Neffie orders and the agile carnivores leap over the heads of the much larger heavy cavalry, running across bodies and tearing into the horde with their teeth, as their riders swing mighty swords and axes, using all the might of Second Awakening warriors to chop apart the dinosaurs.

Today, their arms feel stronger than ever, and their actions are smoother. Their proudest strength has reached new heights since they donned the uniform of the Port Nefheim army, representing the might and glory of the Darklight Host. Most are convinced that the effect is entirely an illusion, even the spell casters who can visually see the slight improvement in their spells, but if their new status makes them stronger, they don't care if it is a hidden effect of the uniform or just a trick of the mind.

Any bit of strength is true strength, and if believing that the seemingly simple uniform makes them better soldiers is what it takes, then they will wear the uniform with pride and gladly accept the benefits that it brings.

Spells rain down on the rapidly weakening monster wave, and the Trice begin to stomp forward over the corpses, using their mighty earth magic to crush any who are still resisting the teeth and blades of the Cerato forces.

The entire battle takes under fifteen minutes, and though they suffered some serious injuries, with the healers flying above them, the Port Nefheim Guardians managed not to lose a single soldier in their first engagement.

"Excellent work everyone. Retreat back to the base and send out the butchers, we have a bountiful harvest of Magical Monster meat today." Neffie orders, her pleasure with their skill clearly evident in her voice.

"Yes, Your Highness." The army responds in unison, making their way back to the port while an even larger army of workers and puppets comes out to replace them.

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

Chapter 452 452 The End Of The Beginning

Cain stood still in the center of the Ancient city, reading every bit of data that the Ley Line device could provide him. But nothing could have prepared him for the shock and horror of what it was telling him.

[Ley Line Capacity] 51 Percent

[Planetary Realm Change Stabilizing]

The energy that was previously being used by the spell holding the dungeons together, and keeping the vortexes active had been returned to the Ley Lines. While that would normally be a great thing, freeing so many trapped individuals, it also came with a qualitative change to the planet itself.

Formerly this world was barely in the double digits as far as the Mana Capacity of the Ley Lines went. It was enough that the most mana-dense regions of the world could produce Mythic Quality beasts and monsters, while the other regions could sustain various lower levels of development.

That was the status quo from as far back as the residents of this world could remember. Even before the spell, things had always been the same way, with more powerful

monsters and supernatural powers being concentrated in certain regions. It was only after the system that they were given formal rankings and names though.

Now, the mana density of the world had shot up to nearly five times as dense as it was only a week ago, and the Ley Line monitoring device had just informed Cain of the implications.

The mana density of the entire central continent could now support monsters up to level 400, or as the ejected former dungeon residents were classified, Legendary quality. There was no dedicated timeline on how long it would take the strongest of them to reach that level of power, but without the dungeons to build their strength, Cain feared that the intelligent residents of the continent would fall behind.

There was simply too much of a disparity between the level 100 and 200 residents of the continent and a level 400 magical beast. The damage mitigation from the level difference alone would mean that almost nobody on the continent could even hurt the Legendary monsters.

He had already contacted King Aggramor, who did have at least a bit of good news for him. The demons that were already ranked with qualities, like himself, Neffie, and his officers were experiencing rapid growth in their stats and levels without even fighting, as their bodies adapted to the new mana levels.

Which was well and good for the Demons, and the Dragons, who also had many higher quality physiques among their species, but it left the humans, elves, orcs, and beastkin in a tight spot. The Demon King's studies suggested that they would have an easier time advancing in this new environment, thanks to the additional mana, but they would still need to live and fight long enough to catch up.

The Demon Capital was reportedly Hell on Earth at the moment, thanks to the number of dungeons that were in the city. The fighting was ongoing, but the level of destruction was incredible. The only saving grace was that the former Demon King managed to stabilize the Demon Dungeon before it collapsed.

Unlike most other dungeons, it was originally a separate realm, created by a spell and linked to the world for the Demon's convenience. A pocket dimension of sorts that they called their homeland. When the dungeon spell collapsed, the two versions of the realm merged together into their original form and he took the opportunity to have the senior forces of both dungeons plus the Demon Army in the real world work together to stop the realm from shattering.

The demons inside were only kept in check by the [Authority] ability of the Demon King, but Aggramor had high hopes that his father could help the dungeon resident regain their sanity through mind control, as he learned that the Darklight Host had been experimenting with.

From what Cain learned, the capital now resembled the ruins of the lower level dungeon, with almost every building destroyed to some degree, but the demons were still working together to eliminate the enemies.

The dragons had honored their age-old agreement with the Demon King and come to his aid, cleaning up much of the mess in the countryside, but they were unwilling to extend that aid to anywhere beyond his borders before returning to their nests in the mountains.

The question was what should Cain tell the Guild. 'Hey, get to level 400 asap or you all die' just didn't seem like the sort of thing a guild master should be telling his people, even if it was likely true. Plus, even if he told them to, how would they even do it? Without the dungeons resetting every day, those who wanted power were down to nonlethal training or meditation, both of which were immensely inefficient ways to gain system experience.

They could still do quests, but the experience granted was at the whim of the system, so that wasn't a variable that they could control either.

The entire structure of the system-based society seemed to be falling apart all around him, and Cain didn't know what to do about it.

Cain released the copy of his companions that he had been keeping in [Merger] with him and looked around the room for answers. The hints of panic and sadness in his eyes were clear to everyone, even if they couldn't read his thoughts.

"Ideas anyone? We can clear out the monsters easily enough, but what do we do after that? I can see here that the mana of the world will continue to create them no matter what we do. The magical beasts are a manifestation of the power of the world itself, like a defense mechanism, and one that suddenly got five times more powerful."

The companions fell into deep thought for a moment before Nemu came up with a suggestion. "We can continue sending groups, four lower levels with one higher-level transfer. If we set them simple quests, the system should help us get their level up without too much trouble. Once there are enough of them to form city defense teams we should be alright again for a while." the Felian bard suggested.

"Raid teams with the Lesser Watchers would be the best call. They have your experience bonus, don't they? If they lead the teams then we could realistically get things stabilized on the Central Continent fairly quickly." Vala added after a few moment's thought.

"That's well and good for the Central Continent, and maybe the Eastern Continent, which this display says should stabilize only a little bit higher than where it is now. But what about the south and the north? They both have awakened areas, and the Western

Continent is going to be a nightmare once the Frost Giants stabilize." Moana sighs, looking at the screen.

She's the only one old enough to read everything on her own, without needing system translation or Cain's help to decipher what the runes mean.

The leviathan taps here and there on the display, bringing up the projections for the Southern Continent, showing that it will end up as mostly Spirit Beasts, with a small core of Immortal Beasts advancing from the population.

There simply aren't enough sources of Spirit or Immortal grade skills and spells to be able to deal with that. Even with the might of his personal summons, Cain would be hard-pressed to deal with more than a few Spirit Beasts at a time.

That might not be true for much longer though. He has been studying hard at his Spell Crafting, and he has learned a lot about the ways that he can boost and modify his existing abilities, plus he now has [Versatility] available to him, letting him choose an ability to boost for a fight to bring his power up to near Maximum.

His level has also been increasing on his own, adapting to the environment in the same way that Demon King Aggramor described himself and Neffie doing. It is a slow process though, and it might be a long time until he reaches level 600 to match the Mythic beings ejected from the vortexes if he only relies on the adaptation abilities of an Ancient.

That does give him an idea though. If he increases the actual quality of their bodies to match their level and class, it might be possible to trigger the same sort of advancement for others. Or maybe he could find a way to trigger a System Quest to do the same thing?

The Laughing God might like to troll the entire planet, but they didn't seem to Cain like the sort of God that would let the majority of the world die for a prank.

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Chapter 453 453

After carefully considering his options, Cain decided to take a moment and check his system status.

[Name] Cain

[Level] 380

p [Class] Watcher From Beyond

[Race] Ancient

[Awakened] Mythic

[Physique] Mythic [adapting]

[Stats] +510

[STR] 575

[DEX] 575

[CON] 575

[INT] 575

[HP] 92,000

[MP] 115,000

[Skill Points] 45

He had quite a few Status Points available, but more importantly, he now had 45 Skill Points. That was enough to grant him two more ranks of [Versatility].

[Class Skills] 45 ->5

[Blessed Being] A Watcher From Beyond may advance ranks without changing classes
[Innate]

[Versatility] Choose 1 skill per level to use at your maximum current Awakened Rank
1/5 ->3/5

20 Points Per Level

[Dominion] Increases Maximum Casting Range to Maximum Sensory Range. Increase Area of Effect Spells Radius at the cost of 100 mana per meter. [Learned]

[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

With two more ranks into [Versatility], Cain was now confident that his summoning abilities would be at least up to the task of defending himself, but more importantly, it could also be used to increase only one of his summoning skills, plus an ability that would benefit those around him. He could use a wide variety of buffs and debuffs now thanks to [Spell Crafting], but he really had no experience with them.

As with most skills learned in an academic setting, it would take practical use to integrate them into his fighting style to the point that they were not a hindrance or an afterthought. And he would need to get them to at least that point, or he might as well simply give up on getting Misha and his children back. The ones who took her literally wrote the book that he is studying from, how could he hope to challenge them if he didn't even learn what they were willing to teach?

While his body would eventually adapt high enough that he would be able to get all of his skills without any real issues, being able to use [Spirit Awakening] Needed him to acquire a Spirit Grade item.

A month ago, that might as well have been a bad joke. Even when he got the class Cain thought that he would have to search some ancient ruins or get lucky in the awakened area with a System Quest to get such a thing. But now that there are going to be Spirit Quality beasts over half a continent, the odds that Cain can acquire one have gone way up. He just needs to get his level up and hone his combat skills.

[System, now that the Dungeons are gone, will items begin to drop in the wild?] Cain asks hopefully.

[Mythic Grade and higher opponents have always had a chance to form a treasure on death.] The notice comes back, making Cain feel like he missed something incredibly obvious.

Of course, they must have dropped from monsters and beasts in the outside world. He had seen a few Mythic items during his stay on the Southern Continent, and there were no dungeons there at all.

Cain's planning is disrupted by Moana shooting water at his forehead to get his attention. It's actually pleasantly cool, and Cain realizes that he now has a reliable source of much better drinking water than the self-refilling magical bottles that never seem to actually get cold, despite their promises.

"Thanks for the shower, but why was it necessary?" Cain asked the small form of the transformed Leviathan.

"One, because you needed it. Two because there is a new notification on the globe." The Leviathan in the form of a miniature mermaid informed him in a smug voice, pointing to a spot on the Western Continent.

[Protective Barrier Breached. Interplanetary activity detected.]

That's not a good sign at all. This planet has more than enough of its own troubles without outside interference, so the news that they had invaders from another world was the last thing Cain needed to hear. But then it occurred to him that it might be the other way around. Perhaps the Frost Giants had opened a portal that led off-planet? A few Frost Giants leaving was not nearly as terrible of news as an invading alien army, or any of the other scenarios that Cain's mind had conjured up in the seconds since he read the notification.

Unfortunately for him, the Ley Line Device only showed that the energy pattern of the lines had detected a dimensional portal, the device didn't provide any sort of surveillance capability that would let him actually know what was going on.

The assumption seemed to be that whoever was watching this device would send someone there, likely via teleportation, to go investigate. But to teleport you needed to know where you were going, and be in range. Cain met neither of the conditions with his current knowledge and power.

[Send me an alert if any more interplanetary activity is detected.] Cain instructed the device before returning to his thoughts.

According to his Watchers, things were slowly starting to stabilize on the Central Continent, as well as at Port Nefheim, though the Guild messages about the success of the dinosaur cavalry were at least a little concerning. Cain had forgotten just how serious Neffie was about her obsession.

There wasn't much more to learn from the control room right now, so Cain headed back out into the Ancient city to see how the refugees were adapting to their new home.

He didn't see any fighting, or conflict about residences, despite the fact that they had filled nearly a fifth of the number already. The population was almost all Beastkin, though he did see a few dwarves who must have been living in the valleys with them, as well as a suspicious number of Bunnies.

Every time one passed him, he took a moment to pat their head, enjoying the soft ears. The actions made his companions laugh, recalling what they had learned about the practice of patting Bunnies for luck being entirely his fault to begin with, but these ones didn't seem to mind as much as the young acolytes at the temple. Or perhaps they simply didn't dare to say anything against him.

"Is there anything that we need here in the city?" Cain asks one elderly beast kin who seems to be in charge of making sure things run smoothly.

"Other than food and clothes? Not much. But the city doesn't have any farms active, so there isn't much we can do until I track down some Druids and get them to tend to the gardens." The older woman informs him, her round ears flicking with annoyance at the duties that have been pawned off on her.

"We sent out hunting parties into the surrounding valley. There are no dungeons nearby, so it is pretty safe, and the leader said that they intend to bring back as much food as they can find. The valley itself has quite a variety of edible plants." A second elderly beastkin woman adds, walking over to the strange grouping of species.

"The pilgrimages used to bury the seeds from their meals as an offering to the mountain, so there are all sorts of fruit trees nearby. The fruit draws animals, and over time, it just spread all through the area." She continued, her tone indicating that she is summarizing a story she has told many times before, part of their local lore and history.

Cain nodded to indicate that he had understood her story before deciding to give them a warning about what is to come. "In that case, they should be fine. I will give this warning now though, over the next months and years, the monsters of the Central Continent will progress. The Legendary among them will reach level 400, while the Epic bosses that escaped the Dungeons will reach level 300 and establish their own territories. I know many will be killed by the people soon, but you should be warned that simply staying as you are won't be safe forever unless you intend to hide inside the city forever."

The new information wasn't a shock to the two elders. The seers of the Bear Kin had already predicted something similar, so they only nodded before watching Cain walk away to inspect more of the city.

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

Chapter 454 454

There was so much to do that the sheer weight of it paralyzed Cain, rendering him unable to even decide where to start. So in the end he didn't start at all.

Instead, he wandered the Ancient City aimlessly for a while before deciding that there was nothing more that needed to be done here right away and started making plans to head back to the Southern Continent to grow his strength.

The Echoes were still tending the orchard that they had started, as well as protecting refugees from the Mythical Beast attacks, so he had a place to go and a purpose there.

He was certain that there were things he could do to help here, but everywhere he went that had a Guild presence just reminded him of Misha, and his mind would get sidetracked with thoughts of how to recover her, even though he knew he wasn't strong enough.

"Moana, I would like to leave one copy of you here to watch over the city. Keep track of the Ley Line device and keep the peace inside the city. I am going out to build up my level so I don't fall behind the changes in the world." Cain informed his newest Companion, who happily nodded back at him.

One of the clones flew out of his jacket pocket where they had been napping and circled around in front of his face, giving a strange salute.

"No problem boss. I'll send you all the details if another portal opens and I'll keep the beastkin from wrecking the place while you're away." The Leviathan answered in all seriousness, giving a slightly disgusted look at the mess that the animals were making in the market area.

In the sea, there were plenty of life forms to break down waste and carcasses, but the city was enclosed, sterile, and dead. The mess that livestock and beasts of burden left lingered, and the sight upset her on a deeply spiritual level. Cain was certain that she wouldn't allow such a thing to stand for long after he left and she had full authority over the city as his adjutant.

[Attention every resident of the city. I will be away for some time, taking care of issues in other nations. I am leaving my Companion Moana in charge while I am away. Consider her words as my own and treat her well.] Cain sends a mental message all over the city, waking many people from a deep sleep and shocking others into stopping what they were doing while the oppressive force of his mind relays the words directly into their minds.

It wasn't a skill that he used very often, and with the difference in levels, even a simple set of instructions was bordering on a mental attack on most of the refugees. An Ancient's mental voice holds a strong compulsion and authority that the species they created have a hard time ignoring, so Cain had few worries about these people being mean to Moana.

Not that they could actually do much about it even if they tried. She had Mythic Quality water attacks, as well as the ability to summon [Bonded Forces] if she needed to. Even a small group of sea creatures at his level would be enough to wipe out the entire population here or save them from imminent danger, should they be attacked.

The thought of water attacks reminds Cain of the one Companion that is currently not with him, Nila. A quick thought sent out shows that she is fully aware of the situation, and that both her clones, plus Mythryll are aboard Queen Rose, and are about to dock in Port Nefheim.

That's as safe as anywhere, so Cain decides not to worry about them for now. They can enjoy their time together while he is away, plus the extra power of both clones should help the Port city's defense power.

There's also the fact that if he brings one, the others will demand that he brings them as well, so it's better for his mental health if he just leaves them in peace to defend the Guild Mascot, aka Demon Queen successor Neffie. Although at the rate she's growing up, her little sister might well take over the position soon. She's still in the toddler phase, and absolutely adorable.

Cain uses the might of his Ancient form to race through the skies towards the Southern Continent after bringing the Companions with him back into his [Merger]. The first stop will be the farm he rented, to check on the situation there, and then he will begin building up his strength.

As Cain flies, he checks the data that he has available through his system interface. The things that seemed irrelevant before, but that now might be very valuable. Things like the loot options from Mythic Creatures.

It's mostly nonsense, listings of materials and body parts that could prove valuable, but eventually, Cain finds what he is looking for.

The most intelligent of beasts with both mythic quality skills and bodies, and therefore the most difficult to fight have a chance to drop premium items, as the System calls them. In the dungeons, there were items that were beyond the boss monster's level or quality, plus things like Skill Books. The Skill Books are almost guaranteed to be Mythic quality at the highest, a creation he could make himself if he dedicated a few weeks to the study of that particular ability, but the items are often related to the power of the opponent.

To Cain's mind that means that if he can find the right target, one that is almost into the Spirit Beast rank, there is a minuscule chance that he could get a Spirit Awakened level item.

That's exactly what he needs to progress himself into the Spirit Realm when he finally reaches level 500. With his Mythic body slowly adapting to the new power level of the world, the levels aren't the most difficult part of the equation, but in order to progress, he will need an item of the next quality level, and that isn't going to be easy to come by.

Cain spent so long pondering the possibilities and looking for evidence that he was at the farm on the Southern Continent before he knew it. With the barrier shattered, and

the speed of his flight, nothing even dared to challenge him all the way here. It simply wasn't worth it for a target that was clearly leaving the area, at least not when the monsters were still trying to consolidate their own territory and adapt to the influx of new competition.

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

Chapter 455 455 Misha Wakes Up

Misha's first thought upon regaining consciousness was just how much more relaxing than expected her nap had been. With the twins beginning to move a lot more now, she had a hard time sleeping lately, and even a few hours at a time was a blessing.

But today it felt like she had gotten a full night all at once, and nowhere on her body ached or complained when she rolled onto her other side to look out the window and check the time.

"Vala, what time is it?" She asked, not quite willing to open her eyes just yet.

"It's the third hour past sunrise Miss, but Lady Vala is not here, my name is Nyarla, and I have volunteered as your nurse for the day." A gentle and pleasant voice informed her, making Misha open her eyes slowly.

The first thing she noticed was the eyes. The girl's eyes are gloss black with little gold floating specks in them, and absolutely stunning contrasted against her alabaster skin.

The second thing Misha noticed was that this girl was an Ancient. Barely a meter and a half tall, but with large pale wings, and a half dozen tentacles where each arm should be. Somehow the tentacles where her mouth should be looked charming and pleasant, whereas Cain's always looked vaguely threatening, but that could be the way they twisted together, the way that Cyrene wrung her hands when she was nervous.

"It's a pleasure to meet you Nyarla." Misha smiled, then looked past her at the ornately carved room and realized that she was not at home.

"Might I ask where I am and how I got here?"

Nyarla nodded rapidly, then waved her hand to project a three-dimensional image in the air above the bed.

"You are in the third Princess's Palace, in the west wing of the imperial compound, which sits in the center of the city of Obscurus, which is a pocket dimension hidden within the Divine Plane. It is where the surviving Ancients escaped to after the war with the Gods." The nurse informs her proudly.

None of those words helped clear up Misha's confusion at all. Well, at least none after the name of the city. From the sound of it, she is not in the same world where she was transferred, and there are actual ancients here, not just one single one remade by the System.

"And how and why was I brought here?" Misha prompts when the nurse stops talking.

"Oh, that part. I was asleep for that part, but it seems that the collective decided that your children would be in too much danger and unable to grow properly in that world, so they took action to bring you here."

So, she was abducted out of her bed? But for her own good? No, wait, this girl said that they only did it for the children. So she herself might not be safe here after all.

Nyarla frowns at Misha's changing expressions before speaking again. "It's really weird not to have a two-way mental link with you. Can I use telepathy to read your thoughts instead of waiting for you to speak?"

The question startles Misha but also makes her realize that Nyarla isn't speaking out loud, the voice is entirely in her mind since the species has no vocal cords.

"That's a bit strange to humans, but I suppose if it makes you happy it's not hurting anything." Misha allows and the tentacles on Nyarla's face make a wriggling motion that she interprets as happiness.

"Oh, that's what you were worried about. No need, the collective recognized you as the wife of the injured ancient in the ancestral world, so nobody would even dream of harming you. Unlike most species, we don't have any infighting. We do have snarky comebacks, but no physical fighting is allowed." The nurse giggles.

Misha realized right away that they had misinterpreted Cain's status and identity, so she tried to close out the thought, but wasn't fast enough to stop Nyarla from noticing.

"He wasn't injured, he is a new Ancient, created by the Laughing God himself? That is amazing. Oh, I shouldn't have thought about that, you still need your rest, but you are about to have a lot of visitors."

The girl's thoughts are a rapid stream of consciousness in Misha's mind, overwhelming her own until Nyarla suddenly stops and stares at her.

"That explains why you only have one track of thoughts, he doesn't know the spell yet, does he? I will fix that right away. If he was born an Ancient it would have come naturally, and he would have granted it to you anyhow, so I'm not breaking any rules at all, nope not me."

The light and mischievous voice entered Misha's mind seconds before a second stream of quiet conversation does, making Misha gasp at all the welcoming voices in her mind. Not one of them seems upset about her being here. Instead, the general consensus is that a pregnancy is to be celebrated.

"When was the last child born here? Everyone seems really excited to see babies?" Misha asks quietly, forgetting that anyone who cares to listen in can hear what she is saying.

"The last one? I suppose it was about eleven hundred years ago? Druv is the youngest, but most of that generation isn't fully trained and ready to have children of their own yet, so it has been a while. That's why everyone is so excited. Well, that and they thought there was another survivor, but they will be extra, extra excited to hear that the Laughing God made a new friend for us. I haven't heard about that happening ever."

Nyarla's happiness is contagious, and Misha finds herself smiling, despite the fact that she has undeniably been abducted into a different world.

"Cain, my husband, for lack of a better term, does he know, or is he freaking out about how I've been taken?" Misha asks, wondering what exactly happened.

Nyarla's tentacles pat Misha's head gently and she shakes her head. "No worries, the elders left him a message letting him know what was going on and that you were safe here."

In the second track of her consciousness, Misha can see the content of the letter as someone thinks about it and she has to stifle a laugh. No way did he take that abrupt little message well. He's likely working hard right now to find a way to break into the city and take her back, even though it seems impossible.

"Time flows a bit differently between realms, so he might be here right away, or it might be a few centuries, but you must be hungry, you slept half a day, and growing children need food. Do you know any of the celestial beasts? Do you have a favorite flavor?" The dainty Ancient asks, opening a portal to somewhere that smells like smoked meat and spices.

"I don't even know what a Celestial Beast is, but whatever that spice that smells like cinnamon and sunshine is, I wouldn't mind trying that," Misha suggests, getting a sudden craving for food that she doesn't even know the name of.

"Coming right up. I took the liberty of going through your thoughts to see the foods that you do know and like, so I can try to emulate them with the things that we have here. The ancients above Immortal Realm don't have to eat at all, they just do it because they enjoy it, so we have a really wide variety of flavors available, as well as all the things that the elders prepared once they knew that we would have children and an expectant mother coming."

Misha rolls her eyes at the overwhelming sense of motherly concern in the collective thought, realizing that most of the ancients could be compared to excited potential grandparents with unlimited resources and way too much time on their hands.

There is a brief objection to her assertion by a few of the minds, but the consensus is that she isn't wrong. Even if she isn't quite right, she definitely isn't wrong.

That is followed up by a very matronly Ancient entering the room with the two of them, looking down on Nyarla like a troublesome teenager.

"Good Morning Miss Misha. I am Eve, Elder of the Ancient Race. It is a pleasure to finally meet you, and I do hope that our customs haven't offended you. I looked in on your planet after we transferred you here, and found that things are done very oddly there. Who would have thought that a young couple alone would be expected to raise children instead of bringing young mothers to the elders until the children are old enough for school?"

Even the Elder's thoughts sound like a grandmother, giving off a sense of eternal wisdom and unfathomable experience.

"When did the Ancients start that practice?" Misha asked the elder, wondering if it is something they started to help regrow the species after the War with the Gods.

"I decided it with the first children born after the species took corporeal forms. I was far too busy for children of my own, but they're just so adorable. Who wouldn't want them around?" The ten-meter-tall monstrous-looking creature responded in a tone so happy that it was nearly impossible to be mad at her.

"And when might that have been?" Misha asks curiously.

"Let's see, it was after we became solid, but before we started on the bipedal species, after the aquatic ones, so about 60 million years ago, give or take a few eons? Time is a bit strange like that, it flows differently depending where you are, and I traveled a lot during those years, looking for materials." Eve answers and Misha can actually see the thoughts she was using for her mental math flow through the shared link.

"Questions can wait. First, it's breakfast time." Nyarla cheers, using her many tentacles to bring a feast in through the portal to the kitchen.

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

Chapter 456 456 Millions Of Peaches

When Cain arrived at the farmyard on the Southern Continent, the entire clearing was in chaos.

The first batch of new Peaches was ready from the trees. The Echoes had produced six other tree fruit varieties to sample and mix with the Peach juice base today, attempting to find the perfect flavor while maintaining the juice as a Mythic Quality recovery potion.

That was no small feat, but they had quite a few willing volunteers, as far as Cain could tell.

There was an assortment of farmers, city folk, merchants, and politicians from both the beastkin and demon species gathered on the lawn by the house, every one of them eager to help in any way they could.

"Boss, welcome back." The Echo Called Victor yelled when he sensed Cain approaching in his Ancient form.

It was a minor oversight on his part, not transforming back into a demon before getting too close to home, but there simply wasn't a good reason to keep hiding it from the locals anymore. Of course, he could hide it for quite some time if he wished, but a few had already seen through his disguises, and too much secrecy would just breed mistrust at a time when he was trying to help people with the influx of dangerous monsters.

"What's the verdict?" Cain asked as he landed on the roof of the house and released the Companions.

"The peaches are just as sour as ever, but I think we have isolated the gene that causes the regenerative effect and compounded it within the fruit. So we should be able to use even fewer to a barrel of juice than last time and still get the same effects." Victor informed him before the other Echo cut in.

"Plus, we have grown this variety of pears which is exceptionally sweet and offers a poison cleansing effect. We hope that the two don't interfere with each other, so we can use the pear juice to offset the peach juice's sourness and not have to introduce ingredients like sugar that had been making the mixture unstable."

Cain nods his agreement. Their idea seems to be a sound one.

"And what about the apple trees over there?" Vala asks, pointing near the far treeline.

"Don't mind them. Those were another experiment, and they've proven exceptionally volatile. They contain an immense amount of Ice Mana inside them, and when the skin is damaged, they release it all in one shot, like a gust of Ice Dragon breath. If we can find a way to slow the release, they might be useful, but for now, they tend to just freeze whoever picks them." The Echo informs her sadly.

"Not every experiment is a success. But, you will have it right soon." Vala attempts to cheer up the Echo, currently in a nondescript demonic form wearing a black robe to obscure the fact that they are perpetually covered in shadows.

While the others were talking, Laura snuck over to the Ice Apple tree and flew around it, inspecting the fruits from every possible angle. She didn't seem too concerned, but a Mythic Dragon of the Ice Aspect takes very little damage from Ice attacks, so she had a good reason not to be.

"I want to do an experiment too." The dragon informed them all in an eager voice, casting a series of mighty Mythic spells straight up into the sky, burning off a large portion of her mana pool.

Once she got below half capacity, Laura transformed into her shimmering Opal Prismatic Dragon form and bit down on the edge of the tree, swallowing one apple whole.

As predicted, a flood of Ice Elemental Mana poured from the fruit in her mouth, freezing the area around the tree.

But the vast majority was absorbed directly into her body, which Cain watched in real-time, using the system interface to see her Mana reserves go from half to completely filled in a single second.

"You let them grow too long. If you pick the apples while they are still little, you should be able to cut the stems and store them safely in your inventory, then chomp them for a cool and refreshing treat. Between what was wasted and what I got myself, I would guess that apple stored nearly seventy thousand mana inside it. That's way more than most Mythic Awakened could use, so it's a waste."

The dragon's conclusion left most of the onlookers stunned. Seventy thousand mana in a second? What sort of incredible potion would that make if the Echoes could juice the fruits without losing their efficiency. Even a thousand instant mana is well beyond anything that could be reliably sourced from the merchants here on the Southern Continent.

It wasn't that they couldn't use anything better. It was simply that the ingredients and recipes for such a potion didn't exist in this world.

Even after centuries of Alchemist's quests, the System had never revealed a potion that was so miraculous. The more typical ones would be akin to the Peach Juice, giving as much as a hundred mana every second for a set time. Never a thousand or more in an instant.

The Mage subclasses would kill for such a potion. Many of the subclasses had a single finishing spell, an ultimate move or nuke of sorts, that used a considerable portion of their mana pool to cast. If they could recover their full mana in an instant instead of over ten seconds, they could chain the spells together and drastically increase their combat power until they ran out of potions.

"We will have to work on the stability." Victor agrees, looking at the tree with a researcher's calculating gaze.

Money means almost nothing to the Echoes, as long as they have volunteers to test on, but the prospect of a new potion that would allow insane exploits? That's premium entertainment to break up their repetitive days of minor alterations to the orchards.

"Did the change in mana density cause any issues with your peach trees?" Cain asks, unwilling to sort through all their memories to find the answer himself.

"Not much. It increased the potions' potency, but the last batch was stable and didn't pick up any undesirable qualities." Victor shrugged, not knowing how this batch would turn out until they tried.

A volunteer picked a single peach for him, bringing it over with a sense of reverence usually reserved for precious treasures. Victor took out a small device from his pocket and held it up for Cain to see that it was a simple juicer designed for peaches. It would puree the flesh and release the juice while trapping the pit safely out of the jug.

Victor split the sample into three equal parts and placed each into a larger serving jug before signaling for a pear to be brought over.

Victor repeated the process, but with a different juicer, and the three samples were separated, only this time, one of them was put into a jug that already had peach juice in it.

Everyone observed the process carefully, using any sensory skills to see if a reaction was occurring. Still, the two only behaved as you would expect of fruit juice and mingled without any chemical or magical reactions.

"Both are Earth Element fruits, so they shouldn't have a bad reaction to each other that we would need a proper lab for, but you never know." Victor smiles, and Cain can sense his mild disappointment that nothing remarkable happened.

Water was added to the first two jugs of each fruit, first in equal parts, then at a ten parts water to one part juice ratio, and small cups were filled.

With the samples ready, the volunteers got in line, and each of them was well practiced in what was to come next. First, they cast a spell into the air, using up some of their mana, and then they carefully cut their bare skin with whatever weapon they had on hand. With the preparations done, they all took a single cup of their assigned concoction and downed it in a single gulp.

p The Echoes and a group of researchers made notes on their recovery speed, plus their facial features on drinking the potion, as well as any side effects that might have occurred.

The universal face was a puckered one, as the juice was very sour and not mixed with any form of sugar, but nobody had a problem swallowing it, which was taken as a success by the Echoes.

They had taken minimal damage and mana loss, so they all recovered in a single second, which showed the researchers that the recovery effects were still working. The capacity test would wait until later, as the Echoes decided that experimenting on those who came back from hunting missions injured was more efficient than asking a volunteer to seriously injure themselves.

The process was repeated with the pear juice, only this time, the volunteers had a mild poison cast on them. It was a slow-acting Petrification poison. Legendary in quality, but taking a whole minute to take full effect, giving them plenty of time to reverse the effects.

The spell started turning the victim to stone from their feet, making it excellent in combat, but even better for this purpose, where it wouldn't render the volunteers unable to drink the potion themselves, a vital act of consent, according to the Echoes' unique moral code.

The faces as they drank the super sweet juice were just as entertaining as the sour juice, but more importantly, the single small vial of juice at both low and high concentrations was enough to fully reverse the effects of the Legendary Poison.

"Success!" Victor called and the whole crowd cheered, knowing that the orchard had produced a new antidote that would soon prove to be essential to their survival while they were hunting the increasingly dangerous beasts.

"Now, the final test, both blended into a single concoction at maximum dilution, ten to one." The second Echo declared, and a single volunteer stepped forward, casting a spell into the air and cutting his bare leg before having the Petrification spell cast on him.

When he drank the juice, an unexpected effect began, a gentle golden glow began in his body, and he instantly recovered back to full health, with the debuff effect removed from his status.

"Interesting. The visual effect is a new one, and the test subject has no known interactions with recovery efficiency. The test is a resounding success though." Victor declares happily while making notes in his journal.

"The taste isn't bad either. The pear juice gives a smooth note to the usually overwhelming peach, and the sweetness brings it to a neutral tart flavor. Overall, I would rate it six out of ten as a breakfast drink, and ten out of ten for a potion." The tester informed the researchers that were recording the event.

Many potions taste absolutely horrible, so ten out of ten while tasting like fruit juice is perfectly reasonable for a potion. The standard isn't hard to meet. It might even be enough to make their products extra popular, especially the poison-curing ones since the usual herbs used for antidote potions taste like a mixture of licorice and vomit.

"Since the dilution of ten to one maintains sufficient effects, we will call this round of experiments complete. Bring all the day's fruits over and we will blend the potions." Victor called out, sending the workers into a frenzy, cleaning the trees of the precious Mythic Fruits in seconds.

The echoes would just use magic to regrow the fruit tomorrow for the next round of potions anyhow. At least they would this time since the tests today were a success on all fronts. If they had failed, a large portion of the orchard would be ripped up and replanted after the seeds were modified with magic.

The group knows the process well. In just under ten minutes, they filled two thousand small potion vials with the light orange liquid. They then sealed the bottles with the chemical resistant toppers and handed them out to the hunting teams, reserving half for any injuries that came back to base, or refugees in need of treatment.

This was part of the deal that the Echoes made to reduce the stress on their summons. The hunters helped out, and the echoes provided Mythic Quality potions to help keep them alive. It was a win-win situation.

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

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The other fruit options were not as beneficial to the drinker as the antidote pears, so they were separated into unmixed drinks for testing.

There were five left for the Echoes to test, each of them a Mythic fruit in its own right, just not one that would be expected in a recovery potion. There were blackberries shrouded in the same dark mist that the Echoes themselves were, which granted a hard-to-detect form of invisibility when the one who ate them was in the dark.

There were Mangoes that granted the user perfect skin, removing all scars and acne. That particular fruit was in exceptionally high demand, despite not serving any sort of combat purpose.

There was a raspberry species as well as a strawberry species that could provide an entire meal in a single bite, though the strawberries had a mild aphrodisiac effect. Those two had a number of fans among the crowd. They could be juiced, or more importantly, they could be dried and kept as part of an adventurer's trail mix.

The final one was the most amazing of the lot. The Echoes had grown Pineapples that granted a three-minute long boost to all damage modifiers. Not just physical, but magical as well. A single mouthful of the acidic potion that felt like it was burning the inside of your mouth would increase your damage output by twenty percent.

That one Cain volunteered to try himself, knowing that his Skill [Ancient Perfection] had already maximized his modifiers to at least the pinnacle of Ancient quality and that his body quality had increased again after becoming a Mythic being. The potion didn't add raw damage, like a rage potion or other similar effects, so whether it would work on him at all was questionable.

For ease of movement, and so that everyone watching could see the actual test, and not just the oversized body of an Ancient standing in the testing field, Cain shifted back to his Wrath Demon form, drawing gasps of shock from those who hadn't connected the Ancient with the demon that most of them had seen many times before, and that everyone had heard of.

First, Cain cast an arrow at the prepared target, using his lowest damage skill. He made a note of the damage done, drank the potion, and cast it again. Exactly the same result.

"The potion is ineffective if your modifiers are already at the peak of the Mythic Grade," Cain informed the research team, who stared at him in shock.

They had thought that he wanted to see the damage boost for himself, but to hear that he was at the Pinnacle of the Mythic Rank blew their minds. That meant that theoretically, he should be able to handle single combat with anything at his rank, with only experience and skill versatility determining the winner. To have a transfer like him as their leader was an honor, as well as a blessing of safety.

Most of the Mythic Awakened already looked up to the Echoes though, so the transfer who created them was bound to get their admiration, at least for his raw power.

One after another, the refugees here tested the pineapple juice, doing a before and after comparison using the data provided by their system to see how the effects were.

The result was uniform for almost all applicants. Those who were Mythic Awakened but without the modifiers to call them Mythic Quality all saw a twenty percent increase in their combat power. Those who were Mythic Quality saw ten percent, while Cain, whose modifiers were already at the Maximum for his quality saw nothing.

The same wasn't true for the Companions, whose abilities were a derivative of Cain's and therefore somewhat lower. They saw the ten percent bonus from the potion, as did the Echoes.

"That concludes today's tests. The Pineapple Express Potions will be ready in just a few minutes, so hunting teams please wait to head out." Victor called, blending the fruits and mixing them with water to extend the number of potions that could be made.

"I think I will join them today. My level is growing at a decent pace, from the summons and the adaptation to the new power level of the world, but it could be better." Cain tells the Echoes out loud for the benefit of the crowd.

In truth, what Cain is feeling is a sense of unbalance. Every level before has been forged through experience, but the levels that he is gaining only due to the mana in the world feel almost hollow and soft like he isn't making full use of the increased power yet.

The only way Cain can see to fix that is to go out and grind some levels himself, using his actual body and not relying on his summoning abilities. It's a bit ironic, given his progression path in the System, but the intense need to stab something is imprinted directly into his consciousness, somewhere in the leftover human survival instincts.

The hunters have developed a well-detailed map of the area across the surrounding hundred kilometers, the extent of their hunting range while based at the farm. It even includes the projected territories of packs, the types of monsters, and their special abilities.

There is a group of Mythic quality Golden Apes near a city to their west, near the edge of the range that catches Cain's eye. They have Lightning magic on the Mythic Level,

strong bodies, and intelligence that is at the very high end of the beasts, with decent mobility comparable to the transfers.

It has been marked as a do not enter zone, due to the number of them that have gathered there, but Cain doesn't fear numbers, he can close that gap in a second if he starts to get overwhelmed.

The first ability Cain chose to upgrade for the outing using [Versatility] is naturally [Summon Pet] The upgraded version of [Summon Lesser Golem]. The spell gives him the maximum number of additional Mythic summons for a single ability, which is hard to argue with. Since he is already in an appropriate demonic form, he will be able to use [Ancient Resistance] to triple their numbers as soon as he calls them, giving him a total of 54 summons from the Lesser Golem category of demons, but at Mythic Quality.

Even the mightiest of Golden Ape tribes shouldn't be able to stand up to that for very long.

The next ability that he wants to enhance is [Slash] from the Dark Elven fighting forms, but he finds that the entire selection of [Offensive Basics] that came in a single skill book is enhanced at once. That is perfect, now he has a wide variety of close combat attacks to work with, using his spear and scimitar.

For his third and final spot, Cain picks [Acid Rain]. That will give him a large area of attack Mythic spell, and he can use [Dominion] to increase the radius at the cost of additional mana.

"Do you have a group? I can see you intend to go hunting, and I just got here today, so I haven't had time to prove myself to the group yet to get an invitation to any of the regular parties." Cain hears a female demon ask Vala.

Looking her over, Cain understands why. She is one of the rare demonized plant monster types, not a born demon. She looks like she was once a Dryad, but now has a rather pestilent tone to her green skin, and the bark that makes up her natural armor has turned inky black. She is more armor than flesh, though with the System ranking her as Epic as well as Awakened Mythic, the flesh is certain to be tougher than any natural leather.

Cain checks her stats to see if she is actually worth bringing. If she isn't bad she can fight alongside the Companions while Cain tones his body to keep up with the rapid changes he has been undergoing.

[Name] Prana

[Class] Plague Caller

[Species] Carnivorous Treant

[Level] 310

[Awakened] Mythic

[Physique] Epic

That looks pretty respectable to Cain, and she would have been a powerhouse among the hunting teams before the change in Mana. Epic creatures are being pulled up towards level 300, so she had already exceeded the standard when the changes begin. That means she is used to her power, not new and adjusting, plus they have a collection of new and valuable potions to keep everyone safe.

"What are the specialties of a Plague Caller?" Evangeline asks, looking the demon over the same way that Cain did.

"In my case, a variety of debilitating and paralysis effects, plus my species abilities of extendable vines. Most of my skills are debuffs or control, but I have Mythic Quality [Poison Needles] for attacks that can be fired a hundred meters and are very hard to detect." Prana explains and Evangeline nods at Vala. A control type caster goes well with their group where Vala will be tanking and the rest will be further back, using their own summons to defend.

"Boss, we will need the good stuff this time though. Maybe a taste of the [Blessed Summoner]?" Nemu asks with a hopeful shine in her eyes.

Blessed Summoner is the ability Cain uses to call Mythic Quality beings, and if he uses [Ancient Wisdom] to grant it to the group, they shouldn't have any concerns about not being able to stand up for themselves. Even the two summons that each of the Companions will get should be enough to take care of whatever attacks them.

"Once we get near the location I will give you the buff." Cain agrees, causing Moana and Laura to give each other a high five.

They're a bit too excited to get an extra summoning ability, and Cain it makes Cain begin to wonder if he has actually been working them too hard.

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

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The trip to the area where the Golden Apes are reported to be staying is a quick one with Cain carrying both Prana and Nemu, the only two members of the group who

cannot fly. The treant turned demon looks to be more than a little uncomfortable with the concept, holding Cain tightly enough that even if he weren't holding her, she would be securely attached to him, but Nemu views the experience as a bonus nap.

Only seconds after liftoff she had sighed and curled up against his side, using her claws to latch onto Cain's clothing, eliminating the chance that she might accidentally slip loose while sleeping and fall from his grasp.

"Does she always sleep while flying? Like to not see the ground or something?" Prana asked, devoting herself to looking only forward.

"No, she just takes the love of sleep to an entirely new level. Like the domesticated cat, she can and will sleep almost anywhere or at any time unless she is in danger." Cain laughs, searching the ground for signs of their targets.

Their golden fur blends in surprisingly well with the fallen leaves in the bamboo forest, and they are under a kilometer away when Cain finally spots them. They are mostly just lounging around in the shade, but the crackle of lightning from the few who are playing gave them away to his finely tuned senses.

"Alright, I have activated [Ancient Wisdom]. Prana, you will have the ability to summon a mythical quality creature that you are personally familiar with for the duration of the fight. It's one of my most valuable support skills, so I would appreciate it if you kept it to yourself. Being begged for benefits gets very tiring when too many people find out at once." Cain explains, looking down at the shocked demon.

"I heard that you have a lot of hidden power, but this is really impressive. I can call almost anything. I can even call clones of the others. But I think that something immune to lightning and more vicious might be in order."

The look of intense concentration on her face makes Vala laugh, but it doesn't take long until Prana has chosen her Summon for today. A Mythic quality Thunder Dragon. They are lightning users, which isn't optimal, but they are immune to lightning as well, and vicious in close combat. Not only that, Prana can use it as a mount if she needs to get somewhere faster than her own legs can carry her.

"Let's start in the clearing there by the river, and then you can go up to the back side of that hill and start out of sight," Vala suggests, pointing to her intended target.

It's only a hundred meters from the closest of the Golden Apes, a distance they can cover in a few seconds, but the Companions don't mind. They're here for the fight, stretching their might and their bodies after a while cooped up in the Merger.

The spell isn't uncomfortable, but the lack of freedom makes them all a little stir-crazy when they're trapped for an extended period of time. Especially Laura, who almost

immediately gets bored and starts bothering the others for entertainment, knowing they can't escape when they're all in Merger.

The Golden Apes are on the intruders to their territory the moment the group lands. Vala moves forward, summoning two copies of Carnage, the Wrath Demon.

The first thing the two giant demons do is hug Vala for the present she is giving them, combat against an entire tribe of Golden Apes. The second thing they do is use their heavy bronze axes to swat away a pair of Apes intent on ruining their emotional moment.

Cain darts up into the air, intending to head for the other side of the hill, as Vala suggested when he hears a sudden cry of dismay from Prana.

"Hey, why do you guys all get two? That is so not fair."

Chuckling, Cain looked for the edge of the Golden Apes' territory so he could start with the patrols and work his way inward. The patrols are usually among the best fighters, but they are also usually alone, giving Cain the perfect opportunity to work on his combat skills.

The moment he lands, Cain draws his new spear and the Pestilent Scimitar and moves towards the nearest Golden Ape that he saw on his flight overhead.

The guard seems to be up for a good fight, forming lightning claws as soon as he sees Cain's weapons and roaring his challenge at the tribe's enemy, currently in the form of a two-and-a-half meter tall bronze-skinned demon.

Cain uses [Charge] to close the distance, the tip of his spear being blocked by a lightning claw, then hastily retracted as the Ape ducks low and swings his claws upwards, attempting to take out Cain's legs.

The claws are easily turned away by the Scimitar, and the Ape is forced to jump into the trees to dodge the next strike of the Spear, returning a split second later, claws first.

The fighting style of the Golden Apes relies heavily on their surroundings, using trees, rocks, and hills both as a defensive barrier and a platform to stage attacks from. Despite their inability to fly, the fight is almost three-dimensional in the tall trees.

The two circle each other warily for a moment, assessing their opponent's strength, and then Cain lunges past the Ape with his full strength, swinging the spear as he does and knocking the beast to the ground with the haft of the weapon.

The Ape rolls away, but Cain pursues, landing a solid hit with the Scimitar, and then another with the spear as the mighty beast struggles to defend itself.

Realizing that it is a lost cause, the Ape goes on the offensive, using ranged lightning to drive Cain back, almost forcing him to use a defensive spell to avoid injury. Of course, he would heal in a few seconds, but that isn't the point. If Cain wants to get better acquainted with his physical limits, using ranged magic and shields defeats the purpose.

While Cain prefers to spar with his first opponent, the others are out for loot. The very first Golden Ape that they took down gave Prana a tiara that granted lightning resistance as well as physical damage, and now they're motivated to see who can get the best shiny thing by the end of the battle.

They could be more brutal, using flight and area attacks to hit more targets at a time, but that wouldn't let them know who was doing better. For now, they aren't in much danger, and Evangeline is having no trouble keeping up with what little healing they do need.

Despite being the last non-Mythic Companion, she didn't bother with calling something that could assist her in her healing role, instead, she called a pair of shirtless Mythic Seraphim High Inquisitors to guard her.

Prana thought it was a bit odd since they didn't really need the extra damage and the High Inquisitors only have [Holy Light] to heal with, but the disguised Seraphim insisted that they were a defense against enemies attacking from the back, while secretly admiring the eye candy she had created.

,m Her decision soon proved to be a wise one, as one of the Golden Apes managed to escape from Vala and Carnage and leap straight at Evangeline, trying to take out both the weakest target and their healer in one shot.

The swords of the High Inquisitors appeared in their hands without warning, flashing with bright white light as they chopped the Mythic beast into three pieces with a single strike.

Even Carnage was impressed by that one. He couldn't accomplish it, but the Seraphim could at the same quality.

The secret lay in the way they attacked, using holy light concentrated on the blade, it was effectively four attacks instead of two, and the Apes were weak against Holy Light, as most beings are.

A few seconds later, Laura cheered as she tore apart an Ape herself, her shimmering dragon scales covered in slushy red blood from her half-frozen target.

"I got a shiny thing, and I'm pretty sure it's going to be enough to win today." The Opal Prismatic Dragon cheered, linking the item in party chat for the others to bask in her glorious victory.

[Pouch of Eternal Satisfaction] May be used once every 30 seconds. Reach inside to receive an Ancient Quality sweet treat that grants a random bonus for the next 30 seconds.

Prana burst into laughter at that one, seeing that it was possibly the least versatile or truly useful Ancient Quality item she had ever heard of, but when Laura reached inside with one blood-covered claw and pulled back out a smoked beast meat roast that smelled like maple syrup and fruit she began to reconsider. Perhaps that was the best possible item for the day.

"Oh, not bad. 500 mana a second for 30 seconds." Laura declared as she chewed the sweet and meaty treat. That was a truly impressive bonus that she got, along with the three kilos of tender roast meat.

The others all wondered if the size of the treat would scale to her own body size. If it did, she would be spending a lot more time in dragon form, pulling out treats before transforming back to enjoy them. No matter how much she eats, the dragon doesn't seem to put on weight though, so there wasn't much of a chance of stopping her from snacking incessantly now.

"How is the Ancient doing?" Prana asked, using her vines to bind an ape while Carnage physically rips its head off, abandoning its ax in favor of brute force.

"It looks like he's finished sparring with the first guard and has picked two of them at once for his next target," Evangeline replied, being the only one that had the luxury to investigate their mental bond.

Two on one was a much better fight for Cain. The attacks from multiple directions, coupled with excellent teamwork pushed his physical agility to its limits.

'If I keep this up, I might actually become a proper swordsman' Cain thought to himself as he sparred with the two Mythic beasts. With every passing minute, he was becoming more comfortable with the sword techniques, and increasing them to Mythic Quality didn't only improve the damage of the attacks, it also provided him with a variety of new footwork and subtle improvements to his techniques.

Those were things he could have never gained if he couldn't use [Versatility].

He also knows from experience, that using them over and over will help with muscle memory, making him a better fighter even when he isn't using the skill at a Mythic level. His defense was still a bit lacking, as he didn't upgrade the [Defense basics] skill book, but it was enough to keep them at bay while he fought, as long as he maintained an aggressive style.

A sudden side shift to spear one of his attackers led to a mid-air collision, which Cain quickly leveraged into a double kill, skewering both Golden Apes through the temples at

the same time. That made three kills, not exactly fast progress, but his combat power was growing exponentially.

"Alright, who is next?" Cain called out to the forest, receiving a chorus of roars in return.

His challenge had not gone unnoticed, and the clearing soon filled with Golden Apes from the main resting area of the tribe, dozens of them at once. The challenge and response weren't missed by the others, who simply shared a smile at hearing the boss having so much fun and kept at their attacks.

None of them, except perhaps Prana, had any fear for his safety. Not only did he have more than enough Mythic abilities in his arsenal, but he could also call a veritable army of Demons if he had to. The time for that wasn't yet though, and Cain continued to rely on his physical skills, finally using his saved status points to improve his overall status.

[Name] Cain

[Level] 380

[Class] Watcher From Beyond

[Race] Ancient

[Awakened] Mythic

[Physique] Mythic

[Stats] +510->10

[STR] 575->700

[DEX] 575->700

[CON] 575->700

[INT] 575->700

[HP] 92,000->112,000

[MP] 115,000->140,000

The effect was immediate, and the strongest of the Golden Apes, who were almost keeping up with Cain were suddenly left struggling to stay alive. They lacked the intellect to understand the reason for the enemy's sudden power up, but its effect they understood very well.

"It's good to be powerful. After all, I've got an Ancient to slap for stealing my Misha." Cain chuckled, confusing the Apes.

Even demons shouldn't look so happy while fighting, right?

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

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With dozens of opponents surrounding him, Cain could truly try out his fighting skills. Already, the combat exertion had helped him feel more natural in his advanced body, and he was likely to cause a level up soon, with all the summons from the Echoes out, and many of the Lesser Watchers joining Raid groups to help the Guild Members that they were assigned to watch over keep their regions safe.

Normally, the lower level areas wouldn't be worth much to Cain, as the difference was too much for him to gain anything, but with the Epic Quality bosses on the loose in the Central Continent and already advanced to level 300, there were plenty of targets that would still give him experience if the Lesser Watchers helped hunt them.

The Lesser Watchers on 'Pet Sitting Duty' as they called it, had noticed something strange the last few days though. With their help, the locals thoroughly cleared the area during the day, but the next morning there were monsters in the area again. Not the same as the ones that were cleared from the dungeon, but magical beasts and less intelligent fae.

The operating theory was that it was the world's attempt to stabilize itself. Too much Mana had poured into the system lately, and it couldn't be fully assimilated, so the planet was creating magical creatures to help with the excess.

The Ley Lines have always been at their peak at midnight, so that would be the logical time for the new monsters to be created, at least according to the consensus of the Lesser Watchers and the few researchers in the Guild that they had asked.

It would also explain why, like these Golden Apes that Cain had picked to fight today, there were so many more Magical Beasts in the Awakened area, when there used to be an abundance of Crazy and relatively few beasts.

Cain ducked a set of Lightning Claws that were aimed at his head and skewered the Ape on his spear before throwing it back at its pack mates. They greatly outnumbered him, but for the moment they were cautious about their attacks, realizing that this enemy was not a normal one that they could easily beat to death.

Silencing his wayward thoughts, Cain turned to face the Apes with a smile on his face, excited to see how far he could get before he had to start using his class skills.

While it had started as an exercise to tone his body, Cain realized that he could use it for an entirely different purpose. Puppet Skill optimization. The more he practiced, the more he learned about what a Puppet would need to be combat effective, and what was mostly unnecessary.

Cain still had a large number of Puppet Spots left available if he wanted to create bodies for them, and even a few Puppets with the type of skills that Cain was exercising here today would be enough to turn a battle around.

Or even if he didn't use the Puppets. If he trained an elite group of low-level fighters with Epic or higher body qualities in this sort of combat they would quickly become deadly on the battlefield. With Mythic skills, offensive power is more about your own stats than your level, since the skill itself doesn't lose anything against the higher level opponents.

Sure, the magical beasts might do ten times as much damage as they do at first, thanks to their own stats, but that's largely irrelevant as the trainees grow in power. Perhaps he could have a talk to both the Echoes and Cyrene, suggesting that each of them takes a small group to train, as a proper double-blind study?

He would just need a Mythic Combat Style to work with since the Dark Elven Blade Forms he is using needed to be upgraded to reach this level. That shouldn't be a problem. Some of the adventurers he has come across had very high-quality fighting skills, there was bound to be a Mythic Combat art among them somewhere.

The Golden Apes finally got sick of the distracted warrior in front of them and charged Cain in a group, attempting to swarm him and bury him in a pile of lightning-covered bodies. Cain's spear flashed out above his head, then spun in a small circle, knocking apes away to clear a path for Cain to jump straight up and out of the pile.

Getting above them wasn't going to put Cain in the clear though, and with a flap of his leathery bronze wings, he shifted his motion to a hover, blocking the claws of two Apes with his weapons and kicking a third in the face before the Lightning could paralyze his legs.

p While the beasts couldn't fly, they could use their Lightning skills to jump an incredible distance, while the ones on the ground worked together to create a lightning net around Cain's stationary body.

Before, he was always on the move and there was no good chance for them to trap him with a spell that took more than a half second to cast, but with him hovering, the Golden Apes were certain that they could trap this annoying demon and put an end to him.

They had waited too long though, and the others had cleared the guards along the riverside. That left the core of the tribe with their backs to the five new threats and completely focused on taking down Cain. Prana didn't hesitate, seeing what the beasts were attempting, and grabbed a few of the casters in her vines, throwing them backward for the others to fight. The distraction immediately broke the group's spell and the Lightning Net began to dissipate.

Neither even hit the ground. Moana had called a pair of fully grown Mythic Leviathan, in a form that resembled a floating blue whale with a single row of thick armored scales above its spine. At over a hundred meters long, such a thing should not be able to fly and was entirely reliant on magic to remain in the air. But floating above the group put them in the perfect position to use their signature move. [Consume] was activated by both rulers of the sea, and a black vortex formed in their mouths, sucking the involuntarily flying Apes in, where they were crushed to death by immense conflicting gravitational forces, and the remaining corpses were swallowed with a happy gurgling noise.

The shock effect was too much for the Apes, and the survivors began to flee as fast as they could, showing no concern for the territory of other beasts as they ran.

"You found us an amazing spot, Mister Cain. I don't suppose I could keep hunting with your group could I?" Prana asked politely, retracting the vines that she had extended to grab the Apes.

"It looks like you got the approval of the others easily enough, and your vines were excellent crowd control, so I don't see a reason not to let you keep coming with us." Cain agreed when he saw how enthusiastic the Companions were about her presence.

"Thank you. Laura won today's competition, nothing that we got could top that insane bag of snacks that dropped right at the start, but that doesn't mean that she will get so lucky tomorrow." The demonized Dryad declared with a smile, and Cain looked through Laura's combat log to see what she had gotten.

The [Pouch of Eternal Satisfaction] really was an amazing item. Not only for Laura but in general.

Neverending water bottles were relatively common, and could even be found dispensing common beverages like ale and mead. But a pouch with unlimited food was much better. Even the Breakfast Box that Cain got could only make a meal a day, but this bag could dispense a snack every 30 seconds.

The others had all received some decent items, but nothing on that level, so Laura was the undisputed winner of their group for the day, at least until Cain checked his own inventory.

[Homing Ring] Mythic Quality. Return the user to a specified location within 500 kilometers. The specified location must be set when the wearer is at the desired destination unless the wearer is completely familiar with the destination. 1-hour cooldown.

Cain linked the item in party chat and Prana sighed in envy. "I always thought that [I just want to go home] should be a spell I could learn, but it turns out it was an item all along."

"If you want it, you can have it. I already have a spell that can return me home in an instant. I have it set to the Central Continent where my more vulnerable Guild Members are, but I can fly back here in only a few hours, so it's not a big deal." Cain informed her, offering to trade the ring.

"I don't like owing favors, so I will trade you my drop for yours. Here, take the necklace." Prana insisted, completing the trade.

[True Love's Worth] Obsession Demon Only. Increases all spell effects damage and success rate by 50 percent when used to further the wearer's Obsession.

Now that was a good item. If he could transfer it back to Cyrene, she could make great use of it. Well, at least he hoped she could. Cain didn't actually know what the details of the Lamia's obsession were, but presumably, she was using her abilities to work towards it.

"Pleasure doing business with you. Now, how about we get back to the farm so we don't miss dinner?" Cain asks, sensing that the Echoes are overseeing a large group of people making a buffet-style meal for the gathered refugees and adventurers.

It's more of a potluck than anything else Cain could compare it to. Everyone who had ingredients put something forward, and then those who could cook best each prepared something from what ingredients they were given. Realistically it's a recipe for disaster since it almost guarantees you'll be short of an essential ingredient for any meal you want to make, but the Echoes have a good stockpile of items that were traded or donated in bulk to make up the difference.

Cain chose to sit at a table with Prana and Vala, while the others wandered off to join other groups who seemed interesting. So much has changed lately that every day's news and gossip can be completely different, a fact Cain learned firsthand when his table was joined by a pair of demons that had a proposition for him.

"You see, they're looking for protectors, like a city champion to lead the defense efforts. Lots of cities are doing the same now. So what we were thinking was that as powerful as you are, you could become the local warlord and take over the city.

It would be a win for everyone. You would get power, the scientists get volunteers, the refugees get a ready-made home to move into." The man elaborates, while Cain shakes his head.

"That sounds like a lot of work, and I've got people on two other continents to look after. I might support someone for the job if they prove worthy, but I don't have time to do it myself." Cain shrugs.

The only ones who might actually be worthy in his eyes were those strong enough to take the position but smart enough not to want it. Nobody who desires to be in politics should be allowed to be in charge. At least, that's Cain's opinion.

Other than the news of the city's search for champions, most of the news is about magical beasts that the others have seen, including a small herd of unicorns.

Many of the hunters have prepared a variety of treats for them, hoping to lure one of the benevolent beasts back with them. Their presence is said to keep away disease and bad luck, but if you attack them they will teleport away, so they can't be forcibly captured.

"I'll have the Echoes give you a few fruits from the orchard. Maybe they will like them." Cain answers Prana's pleading eyes, adding all the supposed locations for the herd to his map.

Tomorrow should be an interesting day.

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

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After an early evening nap, Cain and the Companions were planning to head out for an overnight hunting trip, hoping to catch some nocturnal beasts, and maybe stop by a Ley Line intersection at midnight and see if the new ones were appearing there, or at random like the Crazy did.

"Boss Cain, do you have room in your group still? I've got a few more friends who enjoy a good hunt, this is Levi, and that is Erin." Prana greets him as Cain heads for the edge of the evening's festivities. As far as he can tell, with the various schedules, the farm never really sleeps.

"I don't see why not. We were going to head out on foot and look for signs of nearby monsters that the patrols might have missed, so the more the merrier." Cain agrees, looking over the two new additions.

Honestly, they're not that impressive, being level 140 Lightning mages that awakened Mythic thanks to someone granting them a spellbook. But they do have Mythic Magic, and they would struggle to get into a group any other way, so he might as well help them out.

Plus, it's good to see that Prana is making friends. New people in what is essentially a fancy refugee camp often struggle with meeting new people that they can get along with. Her odd species doesn't help her either, as she can't even go to another group of demons who have shared her childhood experiences.

The Wrath Demons talk about fighting, the Succubus girls gossip about things not suitable for younger audiences, and the Plague Demons often chat about the most recent advances in medical sciences and spellcraft.

Theoretically, that's the group that Prana would belong in, but she has no interest that Cain has seen in medicine, so hanging out with the other Plague Demons would be a snooze fest.

They don't have to wander far before coming across the first target of the night, a Mythic Quality Grizzly bear with a strong Fire Magic affinity. The beast seems to have taken a particular liking to the Wrath Demon called Levi, chasing the unfortunate young man around in the dark while the rest of his party cheers him on.

"You've got this. Just a couple more lightning shots and he's going down." Prana cheers, as he fires off a wrist-thick stream of blue electricity that has almost no visible effect on the enormous beast.

"Oh, in the face was a bad idea, now he's really mad." Erin agrees, creating an energy barrier to slow the beast enough that it doesn't eat her friend.

The demon is beginning to lag now, barely keeping ahead of the bear, so the others step in to rescue him. Prana traps the beast with her vines, while Cain uses the upgraded version of [Decapitate] to remove the head from the immobilized beast.

It didn't look very injured to begin with, but that was mostly a trick of its fur. Underneath, the muscles were in bad shape, some of them cooked enough by lightning that they were starting to smell rather good, like a smoky barbecue.

"Rule number one of joining a Hunting Team. Cardio. You did alright, but if things go really wrong, you need to be able to run faster and further than your opponent." Cain informs the tired young mage with an amused smirk.

"You guys are evil. You could have helped you know?" Levi complains, making a very valid point.

"We were going to, but when it straight up ignored us all in favor of chasing you around, it became much more interesting to see if we could understand why?" Prana explains, not helping the young man's mood.

"So, what did you determine?"

"That you didn't wash your face after dinner and you've got juice from mythic fruits all over both yourself and the front of your robes." The tall and treelike Demon laughs, leaning forward to sniff at him.

"Crap, I was in a hurry and I forgot," Levi growls, pulling a wet rag from his inventory.

"Don't bother. Since you're already covered in Mythic fruit juice you get to be our bait tonight. I swear on my honor that I won't let anything hurt you. But the way that the bear reacted to your scent, I think that hunting for monsters in the dark just got an awful lot easier." Cain tells him, taking the rag away.

"You want me to risk getting eaten all night long? Hard pass."

"We can offer you the first pick of any single item that drops tonight. Think about it, all you have to do is walk along, and you can pick the best item that any of us gets." Moana suggests.

"Do you think he will go for it?" Laura whispers to the tiny Leviathan.

"86.2 percent probability that he will. 91.5 percent if we tell him what we got for drops yesterday." The Leviathan tells the dragon with a smile. Those odds are high enough that she is almost certain he will agree. She did the math twice in her head before making the offer after all.

"Fine, but if you let them gnaw on me, you had better believe that I will tell anyone who will listen how cruel you lot can be." The demon finally agrees and the two smallest members of the party exchange a high five.

"Excellent. Now, off we go, and you can hold this. Or eat it if you want." Cain offers, handing Levi a juicy, ripe peach.

He almost takes a big bite of it before remembering what it is. Not that it will attract Mythic Beasts with its juices, but the Peaches are exceptionally tart. Eating them straight is worse than eating straight lemons.

Even just holding it is enough though, and the sound of howls in the distance begins in only a few minutes. The first to their position is a pair of Purple Leopards, a personal favorite snack of Laura's that she actually transforms to fight.

She can use claws and teeth to fight as a Dragon, but Cain suspects she simply wants to claim dibs on the bodies.

Vala calls the copies of Carnage again and the two new additions freak out. Carnage is legendary for a reason, and it isn't for his pleasant disposition. Their first thought was that they were about to have their kills stolen until the demons started working with Laura to chop apart the agile giant cats into manageable bite-sized pieces.

"How did you do that? Does he owe you some sort of favor?" Levi whispers to Vala, low enough that he doesn't think the big red demons can hear him from where they're polishing their axes after the fight.

"Oh, we forgot to mention the group skill. It's one of Cain's abilities that lets everyone in the group summon a Legendary being at Mythic quality. Normally there would be a lot more summons around the group, but we got so caught up watching the bear chase you around that we totally forgot to mention it."

Vala's explanation doesn't seem to have helped at all, the man is staring at her like she just told him that 5G Cell Service was coming soon to the Awakened areas. Total confusion.

"I like these Blight Kings." Prana clarifies, summoning an emaciated form on a spectral steed. It wears a ragged black robe, and carries a vicious-looking scythe, radiating an aura of decay that would quickly sap the life of any enemy standing near it.

Vala has a similar aura, but hers sucks the life and mana to redistribute, this one does it much faster, but doesn't grant any group benefits from the enemy's deaths.

"Oh, like a powered-up version of the Warlock's Guardian Demon. I see now." Levi nods happily, not understanding just how broken the ability to grant one to every party member is.

He copies Prana, calling the exact same demon and sending it a bit ahead of the group, so the light from its ghostly mount can light up the path in front of them.

"I don't know how you all do so well in the dark. Laura, maybe since Dragons have great senses, and you too Nemu, but how were the rest of you doing so well?" Erin asks, using her succubus tail to poke Nemu and get her attention.

"Cain is an Ancient. His senses are crazy, even without using spells to enhance them. Vala has thermal vision, and Moana uses a form of Sonar. Evangeline can see just fine

in the dark as well." Nemu explains, not giving away that their one remaining Epic member is actually a Seraphim in disguise.

"We're in the forest, and despite being Demonized, I am still part Treant. I can sense anything that moves over or near the tree roots for almost a kilometer. Even squirrels and birds don't escape my notice." Prana agrees.

"And I'm a Wrath Demon. My thermal vision might not be as good as Vala's but I can see enough to not trip over big things." Levi shrugs, looking around to make sure he's not about to be gnawed on by some sneaky magical beast.

"Oh. I don't suppose anyone has a Night Vision spell, do they? I feel like an idiot now for not bringing a proper light." Erin sighs, indicating the small floating orb she has been using for light to navigate so far.

"I've got it. The night vision spell was in the early chapters of Spell Crafting." Cain laughs, casting the spell on the succubus.

Her species can see in the dark, but mostly they only see the life force of living things and rough shapes. In the city, that's enough to go by, it will let them navigate a house well enough to sneak into beds, or in a more modern civilized society, grab a midnight snack. But in the forest, all the branches and vines, plus the piles of fallen leaves are all too indistinct for her to comfortably navigate while walking without her light.

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

Chapter 461 461 Visiting New Cities

The magical peach technique, as Prana has taken to calling it, had been working especially well for the group that night, drawing attacks every few minutes, and almost all of them targeting Levi, to the point some barely fought back before being butchered.

According to Laura the best part of it was that they were in a region with mostly feline and bear-based magical creatures, ones that were on the highest end of her taste to difficulty scale. Particularly the Purple Leopards.

p By dawn, they had taken over two dozen of the creatures and still, they could hear the howling of the cats in the distance.

"Don't you think that there are just a few too many of them tonight? I know you have a theory that they increase every night at midnight, but most groups only manage to find one or two a night. We fought over thirty. Even if we drew everything close enough to scent that peach dripping down Levi's arm, there shouldn't be that many Mythic Beasts in the area." Prana pointed out.

"That's true. Though we are further out than most of the hunting groups go, maybe the game has just been scared off by the strength of the farm, so hunting is slim in the areas that we patrol? If we were only seeing the nightly increases and not any sort of animals trying to enter the area it would make sense that our numbers were so much lower." Erin suggested, tapping her chin with the tip of her tail as she sank into deep thought.

That was actually a good point. If they had truly cleared every natural target from the area, then they would only be seeing the new arrivals when the hunting parties went out, and anywhere else they went would have a huge increase in monster density.

The more concerning implication was that anywhere not near a city, or near a city that didn't clear their surroundings would be dozens of times more dangerous than hanging around the farm. That was definitely something that they should warn the others about before more groups started wandering in search of prey to keep the group fed and trained.

"There's a city just a few kilometers from here, why don't we ask them?" Levi suggests, taking a bite out of the now mostly smushed Peach in his hand.

He had taken a single scratch in the last attack and had decided to slowly eat the sour, but incredibly effective fruit in retaliation. If he could eat it all before they noticed, he wouldn't have to be bait anymore. Of course, that didn't account for the fact that he had the juice splattered all over him at this point, but it was better than nothing.

"Alright, let's go meet new people and see how they're doing. We might even get some news about the prevalence of the call for Champions that we can share with the group. I hear a lot of them are training hard to win a city's selection and take up a salaried position for life." Cain agrees, making Prana laugh.

"Who wouldn't want it though? It's a good job, great pay, recognition and it's a field we're already trained in." The demon points out, her more humanoid right hand waving to emphasize her points, with the green skin shining in the morning light.

The yowling of big cats only got louder as they got closer to the city though, and it was giving Cain the impression that the place was under siege by Mythic Beasts.

When they got to the clearing around the city walls, that fear was confirmed. There was an orchard with magical fruit, used to boost the power and levels of the city guard, that was planted near the wall. The Leopards were intent on getting to it and were putting in

work to try to get past the defenders and into the city. A quick count showed over a hundred of them in total, and they seemed to be winning.

Despite Mythic spells and mana totems to keep their reserves full, the guards and adventurers were having a tough time of it, being snagged in powerful jaws and pulled down one by one to be eaten by the mob.

Since he was already in a form that would work for [Ancient Resistance] Cain called a full set of Lamia Scourge Casters, increased to Mythic Quality by [Versatility]. Fifty Four Lamia appeared in the clearing, nearly giving the new members a heart attack before Cain could even signal the attack.

"Lamia, forward and clear out those cats. The highest kill count gets group headpats." Cain called, knowing just the best way to motivate his summons.

The Lamia loved physical contact. Ordering them to fight would make them fight without holding back, but for a prize, they would take extra initiative and stretch their combat capability to its maximum. It was one of the peculiar things about summoning that Cain had learned as he leveled up, that Absolute Obedience was not actually the best that the summons could do. At least not the more intelligent ones.

The cats smelled the new attackers instantly when they appeared, thanks to Cain's attack coming from upwind, and the back half of the group turned to face the new threat, thinking that they were here to steal the prize that the pack had worked so hard to get.

They had the guards very nearly on the retreat now, and they weren't about to give up the fruits of their labor.

Cain activated [Superior Mental Domination] and looked into the Leopards' rather simplistic thoughts for an answer as to why they would launch an attack on a city like this. They had never done it before, even the Crazy rarely launched an attack on this scale.

What he found was a desire to survive. Everything around them was increasing in power so fast that they were afraid of being overtaken. Therefore, anything that could give them an edge was essential to survival. If the fruits could give them a few extra levels, and bring them a little bit above the competition, their pack could live on for a few more days and drive interlopers from their territory.

The new arrivals had enraged them. They didn't know where all these beasts had been before, but they were not willing to share their territory with so many beasts that weren't even part of their pack.

The Lamia's magical blades, now enhanced to the same level as the Leopards, flashed through the sky in brutal arcs of shining gold, creating a glowing effect in the morning mist like dawn had come from two directions at once. Then the blades reached their

targets and the golden glow was soaked in the red blood of the big cats, turning angry howls into pained hisses and the wheezing rattle of magical beasts taking their last breath.

The sudden change in balance did not escape the notice of those who were attacking the walls, and the cats quickly broke off and ran for the forests, saving as many of their pack as they could. Being a bit stronger was meaningless to them if they didn't have enough numbers to protect their homes anymore.

While the cats fled and the guards on the wall stared in shock an intense discussion was brewing among the Lamia. They had been promised pats, but they only got one attack each. How could they tell who won? A single attack couldn't take out a Purple Leopard, so the dozen or so that they killed were all a group effort. But since it was a group effort, that meant that they all got the reward, right?

With that in mind, the Lamia swarmed the group, making Cain and Prana both laugh, since they were the first to understand what was happening. They reached down to give the snake-bodied summons as much attention as they wanted, and slowly a cheer went up from the walls, realizing that they had been rescued by this odd group of wandering demons.

"Welcome to M City heroes. You came at just the right time to save lives, even though you didn't have to. Might I ask, to what do we owe the pleasure of your company?" A loud voice from the wall calls down to the group, causing the Lamia to turn their way in annoyance at being interrupted.

"I am Cain, from a farm well to the northwest of here. We extended our hunting region for the evening to test a theory on the increase of Magical Beasts and heard the commotion." Cain explains, giving the summons one last tickle before dismissing them.

The Lesser Golems don't remember things from one summoning to the other, but Cain did consider that they might with their quality increased, so him having kept his word might be valuable in the next battle.

"In that case, please do come in for breakfast on me. I have a proposition for your group." The mayor smiles at them from his spot on the city walls.

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

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Cain led the group to the front gates, which were hastily opened to allow their arrival, and got his first look at the inside of M City. It was a simple place, full of wooden structures covered in clay plaster and painted in a variety of neutral colors. Despite being in one of the most dangerous places on the planet, the city really reminded him of Beginner's Valley. Poor, basic and bland were the best ways to describe the city. If you ignored the current condition of the place that is.

The place was an absolute disaster zone. Every house looked run down, there were malnourished refugees everywhere and the city now smelled like fresh blood on top of unwashed bodies, not a pleasant combination.

"It looks like you have had a hard time of things since the change in the Mana levels," Cain says to the Mayor, a middle-aged Magic-type demon, with red feathered wings, who looks more than a little bit burned out.

"You have no idea. The next city to our East fell to a flight of Chimera the day of the change, and we were flooded. M City was just a trading outpost, they had ten times the citizens that we did, on top of which now none of the merchant wagons are traveling, so we haven't had any new supplies of food." The demon sighed. They really have had the worst of luck with this natural disaster.

"You haven't sent out hunting parties? We're on a farm, so there is food, but most of the nutrition comes from Magical Beasts." Cain asks, a bit confused at the situation.

"We had thirty awakened fighters this morning, including the refugees. Assuming that no more of them die from injuries, we should have twenty-two now. If we sent any of them out and they found a safer spot, they likely wouldn't come back, so nobody was willing to suggest hunting parties." The mayor sighs

"Plus, it's magical beast's meat, only the desperately poor would hunt them for food." one of the guards points out.

"You haven't tried it, have you? Here, take a bite." Laura reluctantly offers the guard a piece of her jerky.

"What's that made from? It's incredible, and the level of mana in it is nearly as good as a lesser potion." The guard exclaims, his eyes opening wide at the taste of the meat.

"That's Purple Leopard. There are dozens of them dead around the city right now, if you collect them to make a huge pot of meaty stew for the people here. I don't know what you have for vegetables though." Cain informs him and the man thinks for a second before answering.

"Not much. The gardens have been looted dry already, and the only druid we had left the day after the change, annoyed with all the people bothering him."

That's not surprising, most druids are reclusive and don't like to live in the city to begin with. If hundreds of people suddenly wanted to talk to him when the trading wagons didn't show up, he probably fled at the first opportunity.

"I have some druidic magic, as a Treant. Perhaps I could help?" Prana suggested, pulling a handful of small potatoes from her inventory.

That's not even enough for her own breakfast, but with Druidic magic, she could turn that into a fully grown potato patch in under a minute. The druid class isn't easy to get, or every farmer would want to have one in the family, so in a situation like this, she's making a great case for herself to be their champion. All she needs is just a bit more power and she would be a ringer for the job.

"Outside the walls isn't really safe, so do you have a large empty garden that I could work with?" Prana asks hopefully, gesturing around the town.

"We certainly do. Guards, go collect all those corpses, then skin and butcher them. Once you're done, store them in your inventory. We will be living off that meat for the next few days. Now, dear guests, if you will follow me, the former residence of the local druid has a garden over two acres in size." The mayor rambles out a set of directions while walking quickly towards an enormous redwood tree.

"I like his style. He built right into a living redwood tree." Prana declares with a smile, but the Mayor coughs uncomfortably.

"He actually grew the tree around a small cabin before the city walls were built. During the Great War, he was a hermit that lived on the edge of town, and over time, the city simply grew around him until he couldn't take it anymore. The influx of requests for his time was simply the last straw for him, not the entire cause of him leaving." The Mayor explained.

The garden was in incredible shape, though devoid of plant life at the moment, and the Mayor stationed guards on the streets around the residence to keep hungry or curious locals from interfering with what was coming next.

Prana carefully cut the small potatoes in half, then buried them in the soil before stopping. "Um, does anyone have water magic? Mine only creates a clear poison, and while I can eat what grows in that, it would kill everyone else."

"I've got an endless water bottle." One of the guards suggests, before Moana points at herself, offended.

"Hello, Leviathan here. Of course, I've got water magic. Though letting the locals help would be best. Why don't we send someone to look for a water mage?"

One of the guards runs off and returns a few minutes later with a small child in his arms, drawing confused looks from everyone gathered.

"Hey, don't look at me like that. I've been taking her out hunting to build her level. Nana here is a proper level sixty-five water mage." The proud father insists, then sets the little girl down so she can help out where needed.

"Alright sweetie, what I need you to do is make it rain all over the garden while I make the plants grow. Can you do that for me?" Prana asks gently and the little girl gives her a huge smile missing three front teeth.

"Yep yep. I can make amazing rain pretty lady." Nana giggles, giving a twirl as if that helps prove her point.

"Alright, let's see that rain," Prana tells her, and a gentle drizzle begins to fall over the garden and a section of the surrounding city.

"A bit heavier. I'm going to grow these plants very fast, and they will need all the water they can get." The demonized Treant insists as green leafy stems begin to appear above the ground, spreading all over the garden in seconds.

The rain turns to a full on downpour, which is sucked up by the growing plants in an instant. They grow into large bushes, then small white flowers open and Prana signals for the rain to stop.

"Now I just need to do the last little bit, and revitalize the soil, and we're all done." She declares as the soil dries up and the leaves begin to turn brown on the plants.

"Perfect. Now, grab an Earth Mage, or some workers and dig them up. No, on second thought, I'll use my vines. It's better if random people stay out of the garden." hundreds of small vines extend from her hands into the ground, pulling up plants laden with heavy root clusters of potatoes.

They have all grown attached to each other, since the Treant's magic grew the garden from only a handful of separate plants, and they come up relatively easy, with her vines shaking the excess dirt from the tubers before pulling them free into a huge pile and returning the rest to the garden, where her magic turns them to compost in seconds and the vines till the soil to mix the nutrients back in.

"I'm not as good as a real druid, the ground will take a bit of time to recover, but I should be able to grow a garden every month," Prana informs the Mayor proudly.

She might not be the strongest combatant, since she focuses on control skills, but her extra benefits would do a lot for this city, and Prana sees it as a golden opportunity to become the local Guardian.

Cain too sees it as a great benefit. Prana is a good person, and having good people in charge nearby would really help not only keep the farm safe but keep things from getting out of hand on a large scale.

"Would you like to run for Guardian Miss Prana? They are holding the selection next week, and the others are all boring warriors." Nana, the small water mage asks, making her father blush with embarrassment.

"I am certainly considering it. You all seem like decent people, but first, let's get that stew started. There are a lot of hungry people in town, and we've got fresh meat and potatoes."

Most of the Potatoes are moved to an underground cellar on the property, clearly designed by a druid, as they have storage magic on them to prevent rot, and the cellar itself is enough to provision the city for months. The shelves are bare though, and look hastily cleared, so either the Druid himself cleared them, or the residents and refugees grabbed everything they could.

If that was the case though, they shouldn't look so hungry. Unless a few were hoarding their gains from the rest.

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

Chapter 463 463 Helping Out

The village turns out to have a very helpful Witch Coven on the south side of town, who volunteers their massive cauldrons for the Soup Kitchen effort, promising that they have been thoroughly cleaned since the last potion-making effort.

The city isn't exactly large, only about five thousand people, but by rough estimate, they will need three hundred gallons of soup to feed that many.

"We need every large cauldron and oversized soup pot to the old Druid's tree as soon as possible." The mayor calls out, using a spell to amplify his voice.

Many adventuring groups carry a ten-gallon pot with them, so there are a number of them in town, as well as the ones owned by the restaurants. In theory, every ten-gallon pot will serve a hundred or more, and portions of magical beast meat are very filling, so they will need even less, with a single bowl a day being more than enough energy to keep most transfers going if the soup is heavy on meat.

The call also brings dozens of chefs, who get to work chopping the three hundred kilo bodies of the Purple Leopards into small pieces, as well as slicing potatoes. It's a huge amount of work to cook for an entire army, or city as the case is today, but these are all professionals who have the experience with serving large numbers to get it done.

It's not practical to bring the entire city here, so once the stews are prepped the restaurants will bring the pots back to their business to cook and serve them. The news is spreading fast through the city, along with a message from the guards to find everyone who isn't capable of making it to one of the distribution sites and ensure that they get fed.

Nobody knows how long it will be until things start getting back to normal, but setting up soup kitchens has made both Prana and the Mayor very popular people today, much to the dismay of the other candidates for Guardian. Their best bet now is to emphasize the fact that the Guardian needs to protect the city as well, and focus on their combat powers.

"I will tell the Echoes that we are staying here for a few days, so you can get settled in and make a proper bid for Guardian. I think I can create a spell that will help you win as well, I just need a bit of time, since I still haven't finished my training in Spell Crafting." Cain tells Prana as the last of the pots, the enormous cauldrons of the witches' coven, go out to be cooked and served.

Those two cauldrons make up a third of the city's total, being over fifty gallons each, so the coven house is about to become a very, very popular place for the day. Like the Druid, the Coven isn't usually big on visitors, but they have seen the chance to rehabilitate their public image from sketchy potion makers to misunderstood local alchemists.

Before today, most of their potions were exported, since the locals had such a low opinion of the coven. But now, they're hoping that at least the local hunters will buy from them until the trade routes are open again.

The witches have a plan for that though. While they were helping get the stew ready, Prana mentioned the number of hunters at the farm, and how they are building up new ones to help out. The witches make transport bags that can hold multiple items, or at least they can if they have the materials. If they can convince the hunters from Cain's farm to stop in and make deliveries for pay, they can bring back the trade routes in only a few days' time, for a small upcharge of the final sale price, but without the farmers and crafters needing to travel.

It's not a terrible idea, and the hunters are often out for multiple days. Hunting until their inventory is full and then coming back home to relax a while is the sort of lifestyle most of them enjoy and the one they were living before things changed.

It has led to a large tent city springing up around the farm since it's not worth the trouble to build houses for everyone who is in and out, but it's a good system overall. Plus, coming back only when they're out of the special potions and their inventory is full means fewer days of experiments. They haven't been seriously injured yet, but some of the concoctions that the Echoes have come up with were clearly designed by a species with no taste buds.

That style of travel is also how the farm has learned so much about the cities that have fallen to the beasts. The hunters either tried to stop in and saw the destruction for themselves, or the refugees made it to the farm if the city was one of the closer ones.

A representative of the witches stayed behind after everything else was done, so she could talk to Cain about her plan. It is clear that despite his casual attitude, he is the one officially in charge of the farm. It will also give them a chance to meet this new candidate for Guardian, and they have high hopes for her since the others have proven to be lacking in the eyes of the witches.

"Let's retire to the Druid's house for the evening. We can chat and I can work on the gift I am making for Prana." Cain declares, leading the group inside while the Mayor and his guards say their goodbyes to the Companions.

The soup is served, and there is nothing left to steal here, so they don't need the guards anymore. Not that they actually needed them in the first place, with Cain's ability to summon so many Mythic Grade Demons.

Once they all get sat down, Cain announces his plan. "I'm going to modify a vine whip spell so that Prana here can have a Mythic Attack Magic. She's already adept in vine usage and can coat them in poisons for paralysis and damage, so having more lethal vines as the base should make her both great at crowd control and solid for area attacks."

"You can just do that?" Prana asks, confused.

"In a certain way, yes. If you just needed an Ancient Quality Spell Book, it would be no big deal to simply write one based on the ones I already know. But to get one that's just right and Mythic Quality will take some more effort." Cain explains.

To grant her a Mythic ability, he will need to use [Modify]. But in order for it to be just right, he will need to use Spell Crafting and learn it himself first. Unless he uses a vine attack that is already Mythic instead. She does have a variety of spells that enhance it, so that is also a possibility. It would still need [Modify] though since he doesn't have the skills to write a Mythic book with inscription.

Cain opens his collection of summons within his interface and searches for Mythic quality vine-type attacks. There are a few among the Demons, and a variety of tentacle attacks that might work like vines for a treat.

"Prana, do you have a moment to do an experiment? I know a few good tentacle attacks that might work like vines for a Treant." Cain suggests, making everyone look at him strangely.

"What? Tentacles are useful." His response brings a round of laughter to the room, each of them imagining a different reason why he learned a variety of uses for tentacles. Especially the witches, who don't know he is an Ancient, who has natural tentacles of his own.

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

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Cain led Prana outside so he could experiment with various spells and see what worked best for her. Since they're still in a group, he can simply share it with her and see what she prefers.

"Alright, the first spell for today's test will be [Crushing Tentacles]. I'm hoping that you can use them as vines and control them freely." Cain demonstrates and a dozen long Tentacles extend from his arm and wriggle around the area, looking for targets and waiting for orders.

He can control them, but not precisely enough to write with them or perform other such delicate tasks.

"Those aren't bad. More like octopus Tentacles, but with beaks inside the suckers." Prana says, grabbing one to admire the design.

Most spells that a Treant casts are modified to match its body, a peculiarity of the species. Cain makes it the group ability and Prana immediately activates them. The spell creates tentacles identical to Cain's on the first try, but black and rough-surfaced like the bark portion of Prana's body.

"Oh, you can use it on the ground as an area effect. That's much better." The demonized Treant declares, her face lighting up with happiness.

She casts the spell again and steps into the Area of Effect, causing all the Tentacles to become vines with sharp barbs. From the look of it, she isn't having any trouble controlling them. She has them do a little dance, pick up and use rakes to smooth out the garden.

"Honestly, I don't think we can do any better than this. They're a Mythic attack ability, right? Well, I suppose they are also a crowd control ability, but they look like they do a lot of damage." Prana asks.

"Yes, they can crush or tear apart a group of Mythic Beasts in a very short time." Cain agrees, nodding his head.

"Then why did you summon so many Lamia?" The representative from the witches asks curiously.

"Because they're cute. He won't admit it, but he likes warm cuddly things like Lamia and beastkin." Moana informs the witch in a conspiratorial whisper that everyone in the room can hear.

"Fifty Lamia also does more damage than one [Crushing Tentacles] spell." Cain defends his decision, but Moana waves it off as making excuses.

"I'll take this one if you can grant it to me. Can you write Mythic Spellbooks or something?" Prana asks and the witch almost swallows her tongue in shock at the idea. Even she, who lived long before the Great War, has never heard of an inscriptionist that could write Mythic Books.

"No, I have a special ability that can grant a person a once-in-a-lifetime chance to get an upgraded skill. Many use it for an advanced class, some use it to awaken, or to gain a system interface in the first place. But for you, it could give you the chance to be a Guardian. Plus I'll be able to tweak your physical abilities and appearance a little while I'm at it." Cain answers and the demonized Treant sinks deep into thought.

"Can you make me cuter? The plague skin isn't exactly an endearing feature when I'm trying to get a date." Prana asks, and the witch nods her head in agreement.

The old woman has multiple bumps and deformities on her face, possibly from potion-making failures that left curses that can't easily be broken.

"I could make you a great many things, but it's probably best if you stay as some sort of a demonized Treant, or it might mess up your Class abilities." Cain agrees.

"Then, how about that pale violet skin that the Succubus have?" She suggests, pointing at Erin, who matches the light purple shade exactly.

"Violet with black bark would be amazing. And some big ol.." Levi only gets halfway through the sentence when a vine smacks him in the side of his head, knocking him directly to the ground and knocking the wind out of him.

"I'm just saying, wouldn't it be nice?" He continues from his spot in the dirt, dodging her next vine attack with great difficulty.

Looking into her mind with [Superior Mental Domination] Cain can see exactly the body she had in mind, and Levi was actually right, her vision of herself is decidedly voluptuous. But the proud Treant would never admit to such a thing.

She is also imagining a much more human form than her current one. She's already close to the point that she would be called a Dryad by most though. A few more changes toward the humanoid would definitely change her race. She might still be able to keep her class though, Cain will just have to verify before she finalizes anything.

"Alright, I can do that. I have a skill that will make you more like what you are imagining in your mind, but if it changes you to a Dryad, or interferes with your class, do not accept the changes, or it will be permanent and it could leave your power level crippled." Cain cautions her.

"Demonized Dryads can be Plague Casters too, so I think I should be safe. The tentacles might not become vines as a Dryad, but they also might. Either way, I think they would still be strong enough to get the job done." Prana shrugs, more concerned with no longer having this sickly green pallor.

It isn't natural to her, it came with being a Plague Caster, and she isn't happy about it. It has been nearly impossible to get a date when everyone thinks that they might catch something just from touching her. The skin isn't contagious though, at least not if she doesn't want it to be.

"Okay then, let's head to the bedroom. Sorry, Levi, no peeking while the Treant gets changed." Cain teases, making the girls give the mage a dirty look.

They retreat into the single bedroom of the cabin that the redwood tree has overgrown, and Cain closes the shutters on the single window. "It's best if you unequip everything so that you can see exactly what you're going to look like as we go. There is a large mirror over there on the wall, so you can watch the progress and tell me if you want anything changed."

Even with everything unequipped, the appearance of a treant doesn't change much, unlike the Dryad she is most likely about to become.

Cain starts slowly, changing her skin tone to Succubus violet, then tweaking her bark to be a deep black version of the smoother Sakura tree, giving her body a more lithe and less armored look. Then he tweaks the branches of her hair to have Sakura blossoms instead of the plague-dripping leaves. Finally, he alters her form to be more humanoid, with one slender trunk-like leg and one elfin one, long pointed ears, and fully black eyes. Then her hands become a bit more slender and graceful, but still covered in the bark of her natural armor with long fingers ending in pointed branch claws that are articulated like fingers, but with an extra joint.

The next stage is to increase the durability of every part of her skin, and the density of her muscles. It's not an easy task since she's already Epic, but Cain is pretty sure he managed to increase her stats by at least a little bit. She should also be more agile in this form than she was in the other, with much more flexibility.

For the final steps, he gives her a good bit more backside than she had, since before her torso was more of a tree trunk, and then enhances her chest until the Demon begins to blush slightly.

"Is that what you had in mind?" Cain asks with a smile.

"It's exactly what I had in mind. How could you know? Are you psychic? You are, aren't you? How much did you see?" Prana asks accusingly.

"I only looked for the essentials, what you wanted to look like, and nothing more." Cain declares, pretending to be offended by her lack of trust.

"But more importantly, did you get any notifications about your class?" He asks, stopping the [Modify] so that any notifications that she might get from the bodily changes would come up.

"There's a notification about my modifiers increasing, and it says that one of my Class Spells has been altered from [Toxic Aura] to [Hypnotizing Aura]. The new one looks pretty good though, it will confuse and distract enemies within ten meters, with a chance to fully bewitch them and make them fight on my side. It's not as damaging as the other, but really useful." Prana informs him with a smile.

"Alright then, the last bit is the easiest," Cain tells her, using Modify to make a few final adjustments, smoothing a few rough spots on her skin and bark that he missed, and granting her the [Crushing Tentacles] spell.

"Oh, there it is, I can see that I have a new Mythic Spell. And it says I have a new class option available. Plague Caster is only a first advancement class after all. The new spell must have unlocked a specialty class." Prana cheers, loud enough that those outside the room can hear.

"Can we see now?" Levi calls through the door hopefully.

"Two more minutes. We've got to have her looking her best before the big reveal." Cain calls back and winks at Prana.

"Looks like you've got an admirer. But you should likely put your gear back on since in this form your bark doesn't cover all the essential bits." Cain whispers.

Prana hurries to get dressed, gaining a slinky black and pink dress that looks like it is made of black leaves with Sakura blossoms growing from them. Her feet stay bare,

despite equipping shoes, and Prana lifts her humanoid leg to see that the bottom of the foot is covered in hard and durable bark, making shoes unnecessary in most situations.

"Alright, class options, class options. There we are. The new option is [Lost Forest Guardian]. There are extra skills for long-ranged casting while in the forest, mind control, and a Class Skill of [Misdirecting Mist] that confuses targets, making them get lost and rapidly draining their mana without damaging them. It has a radius of up to my level in meters, so I could cover a whole section of forest with it.

That's not bad at all, if they don't take damage they might even end up at zero mana before they notice, and then it would be too late to even try to escape."

It's an insidious sort of class, as suited to a Demonic Dryad, as the system interface says her species is now. Just walking into her forest would be enough to put you under deadly attack, and get you lost in a seemingly endless mist.

Prana finishes her class change and smiles at Cain. "I have no idea how I can pay you back for this, but I swear one day I will."

The mischievous smirk on his face gives her a bad feeling, but what he says is: "If you really want to pay me back, join my Guild. We're always looking for good members with great credentials."

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

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Cain sends the Guild request, and Prana accepts it in an instant, receiving a round of welcomes tagged as being from all over the world. Mostly the Central Continent though.

"Now, let's go out there and show off your new look. I'm certain that the others will be impressed, you have amazing taste after all." Cain declares, opening the door and leading Prana out into the main room while she answers some of the Guild messages.

"So you poached her as one of your own, did you? Not that I think the Mayor will mind. Just having such a capable Guardian will be more than enough for him." The old witch says, looking over Prana's new form.

"Oh man, are you trying to kill me here? That is hot." Levi says, giving Cain two thumbs up, and taking another of Prana's vines to the head.

Only this time, the vine isn't rough and black, but smooth and glossy black, with cruelly barbed violet pincers. At first, Cain thought they were spikes, but once the vine extended they separated like a beak and snapped at the hapless Wrath Demon.

"What else does this class offer for skills?" Cain asks, trying to distract himself so he doesn't laugh and remind Prana that she's intending to punish Levi for his comments.

"I've got the Guild Skill, but I'm not sure what it does. And then I've got the points to pretty much fill out this class tree. It's all forest-related skills though. Better plant growth, eternal darkness, misdirection in the woods, toxic flowers, and carnivorous trees. You know, the normal sort of thing." Normal was of course a relative term. After all, most of the people around here wouldn't find a class that can create a haunted forest with carnivorous trees at all normal.

"Combine that with your Mythic Tentacles and you shouldn't have any sort of problem dealing with enemies in the woods around the city." Cain agrees, and Prana smiles at him, not realizing how absolutely heart-rendingly innocent and kind Cain made her smile look in this form since she had looked away from the mirror before he made the final tweaks and gave her the [Crushing Tentacles] Skill.

"You are actually an evil eldritch being of some sort aren't you? Forget being a small city Guardian, that face could conquer nations." Levi sighed, staring up at Prana from the floor.

"My face? What did you do to my face?" Prana asked, turning to look at the mirror in the bedroom again, and smiling when she saw her own reflection.

"Hey, did you put makeup on me? I don't remember the black eye shadow or the nail polish from before?" Prana asked as she came back out to the living room.

"I think they're a visual side effect of your aura skill like the poisoned skin was before," Cain suggested, looking her over for other signs of changes from what he had created. The rest looks the same, it's just the eye shadow and the pink nail polish that she gained when she changed classes.

They might even be a visual effect of her gauntlets and her helmet for all that Cain knows, but she can explore that later. It's not like she's going to be changing classes again for a while.

,m "I should report back to the Coven. they will want to know all about the events here today, especially the appearance change. I'm sure you understand Mr. Cain, the appearance thing is going to cause an uproar among the witches. They will surely offer you a wide variety of benefits if you can help them break the curses on their bodies." The old witch smiles, showing a collection of rotted and missing teeth.

"I could also just call a Record Keeper and ask them to break the curses, they're really good at it, and they work based entirely on favors," Cain suggested, but the witch made a warding symbol with her hands as if he had suggested something awful.

"I would rather owe a favor to an Ancient than a Record Keeper. At least with an Ancient, you can guess what they're going to ask for." The old woman informed him as if it was the wisdom of the ages.

"I'll keep that in mind. I used to be a Flesh Crafter, so I have the ability to cause a number of appearance changes if your coven sisters should need them while I'm here. We're planning to stay until the Guardian election anyhow, so we can cheer Prana on."

The new violet skin tone shows a very lovely shade of blush when Prana is embarrassed, unlike her old green tone, which never really changed much. Teasing her got a lot more fun after her appearance changed thanks to that one simple fact.

Cain wasn't the only one that noticed. Almost all of the companions love playing pranks and teasing, so a new friend who blushes easily was noticed by everyone. Fortunately, they do know how to keep their teasing somewhat under control, so Cain doesn't have to worry about them making Prana hate them all.

After the witch excused herself for the night, everyone else started making arrangements for the evening. There was only one small bedroom here, so it clearly wasn't suitable for everyone. Instead, Nemu went looking for a suitable hotel nearby.

There were a number of them in town, currently all but empty thanks to the lack of travelers, so she picked the closest one to the giant redwood tree and rented out the entire place. It's not like money was important to her, and the Innkeeper surely would appreciate it.

To say the demon who ran the Inn was shocked to see them would be an understatement. Though he hadn't gone personally to pick up the ingredients for the soup, since his wife volunteered in his stead, he was still well aware of who this group was once he saw Cain and Vala, the two very distinctive demons.

There should have been a plague Treant with them though, but the lovely Dryad who accompanied them was certainly no loss.

"If you come down first thing in the morning, I will have food ready. I saved some potatoes from the stew, and I have chickens here in the yard for eggs, so I will make a nice quiche." He informed the city's saviors, handing them the master key so they could pick any rooms that they wanted.

"We appreciate it. Here, take these vegetables, and add them to breakfast. I'm an actual transfer, and in my previous life, there was a custom in hard times that a traveler

donates something to the pot for their meals." Levi explains, passing over a few items from his inventory.

"Thank you, I will do my very best." The man bowed politely as the group left to find a bed for the evening.

"So are we sending armed hunters as merchants, or should we assign them to guard merchants before the witches do it for us?" Vala asked once they got upstairs to the Royal Suite, as the sign on the door called the three-bedroom unit that took up half of the top floor.

"We will send hunters from the farm to the various cities. Soon enough the guards will start escorting farmers and groups again in the regions where the farms aren't overrun, so it will likely only be a stopgap measure for a month or two. Maybe we should have the tailors at the farm make them some large packs, like the ones that the Tea merchants used? Transfers are strong, they can fill them with anything they want and still make good time, plus some extra spending money." Cain suggested.

"There are stronger farmers too, but looking around here, none of them are left. I think it was just the fact that the Echoes hunted the area around the farm clean that our region is doing so well." Erin pointed out, tapping her tail on the table to emphasize her point.

"So what you're saying is that we need to expand our hunting grounds far beyond sustenance and safety levels and begin a mythical beast butchering business. Maybe with an enormous smoker, and honey glaze. A nice barbecue sauce..." Laura's voice trails off as her mind turns to food.

"Well, not in so many words, but that's not a bad idea. If they're going to be going between cities anyhow, we could have them hunt extra and sell off the Mythical Beast Meat. It's nutritious and it looks like there is more than enough supply, even after we eliminate the species that don't taste very good." Erin agreed.

"Let's talk to the witches again tomorrow. They seem to be on the same track, but changing Prana got them all sidetracked today. Tomorrow we can talk it over and get things started."

With that, everyone split up to pick a bedroom, with Levi being relegated to one of his own while the others shared since Cain was going to be up all night studying Spell Crafting. A day or two without sleep wasn't a big deal, especially after all those days of whole night naps, when his body really only needed a few hours of meditation.

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

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Finding the witches the next day was an easy task. They were waiting in the dining room for Cain and his companions to come down. They weren't alone though. The Mayor, the Captain of the Guard, as well as the three other candidates for City Champion were all present in the hotel.

"Don't let the pressure get to you." Cain joked with Prana, who gave him a wink.

Now that she had gotten a not-so-little benefit from him, Prana didn't feel at all disadvantaged against the combat-focused candidates for Champion. Not only could she keep up with them in combat now, but she also had so much more than them to offer, as she demonstrated yesterday.

"Good morning everyone. As you might have guessed, in light of yesterday's events, we have chosen to move forward with the selection of City Champion. There are a number of magical beasts near the walls again, and we are asking the candidates to each take care of one wall worth of opponents. This shouldn't be a problem for any of you here, but the formality must be observed so that the residents of the city see that you can in fact protect them.

You have all traveled to the city for the same reason, to apply as Champion, so we are under no illusions that the defeated candidates will stay, but we will offer you some city benefits for your consideration. As the coven pointed out, we are in desperate need of merchants, so if you would choose to take on that role, we can cut the city tax in half on anything you sell here. That's a hefty profit for any merchant, and hopefully enough that we can encourage you to help keep our city supplied now that the nearby farms have been destroyed."

The candidates all nod in acceptance at the Mayor's speech and grab a slice of the breakfast quiche to take with them to the city walls for the competition.

Prana was assigned to the East wall so that those who were furthest from the Redwood Tree could also see her fight. They missed most of the battle yesterday due to the distance between them and the attack, but today there are a dozen creatures approaching this wall as well.

Unfortunately for Prana, these are an enhanced insect variety that the Echoes have already ruled out as mostly inedible, but they are still good for making armor out of.

She waves to the crowd as she climbs the stairs up to the battlements, accepting the thanks of the citizens who visited the soup kitchens last night, and then summons a mighty Forest Dragon to join her in combat, using the Guild Skill, which is currently set

to grant a Mythic Summon, helping the Guild members through the planet's power transition.

[World Event: Gain Title Guardian] Reward: Grants a situational bonus of 30 percent reduced casting cost while inside the City that granted the Title.

The notification came up not only in Prana's interface but in the other candidates as well. The System has finally acknowledged the imbalance and has stepped in with a quest to encourage the best among the System users to step up and help their fellow sentient beings.

They didn't know it yet, but a few other groups who had moved faster had already seen this notice over the past few days, including the Guild Members who were in Long Fang Valley and deciding who should be their official representative to keep the valley safe.

The reward wasn't the same for everyone, in fact, some got much better rewards than others. The other two competitors against Prana were both offered area damage effects to help them clear larger numbers of monsters, while her abilities were already capable, so the Laughing God's Quest offered her reduced casting cost.

It applies anytime she is in the city, so if she wins the competition, she will also be able to more easily create food crops and other conveniences for her people.

Prana likes the sound of that. Even if she was an outcast in the past, these could be Her People, to take care of and watch over.

Prana cast the [Crushing Tentacles] three times, covering the majority of the area in sharp barbed vines that happily tore apart the flesh of the monsters as they crushed their bodies. Then the Forest Dragon swept down from above, withering them with its breath while Prana waited for her Mana to refill a little. As an Epic Quality Demon, she has the mana pool of a Dungeon boss, but casting four Mythic spells in short order still drained quite a bit of her capacity.

For Prana, this battle was a simple waiting game. She could just periodically channel mana to keep the vines active since the monstrous insects lacked the ability to break free for long enough to approach the walls, as well as lacking the area damage effects to eliminate either her or the vines.

Slowly the insects were torn apart, while Prana carefully controlled the vines to not damage the valuable top armor shells. Though they might not get a meal out of these, they would still get a few sets of armor for the guards.

The moment she decided that the area was safe, Prana hopped down to begin collecting the loot, then caught a ride back up to the top of the wall on the back of the Forest Dragon.

From the envious looks she was getting, the Dragon was still more popular than she was. That wasn't really surprising though, Mythic Dragons are always an eye-catching sight.

"It looks like we will have to approach the others about becoming merchants. You are a lock to win this competition." The old witch who had previously been watching from further down the wall congratulated the Demon Dryad once everything was finished, sneaking up and giving the startled Prana a surprisingly strong hug.

"I do hope so, you all seem so nice that I would hate to have to leave and look for another place to settle down." Prana smiled at the wizened woman while wondering how long she was going to be hugged.

"What was your plan for merchants?" Cain asked, distracting the witch when he saw Prana had become uncomfortable.

"Oh, we make storage bags in the Coven. They're not the most amazing ones ever, but they should carry as much as a small wagon. We were going to offer better than wholesale price to anyone who would use our branded bags and make regular loops between us and the other Covens. Between us, we have access to everything we might need, so it would be a win for everyone." The old lady informed him, finally releasing Prana.

"My group of hunters is only a few cities over, and I made it here in a day while hunting beasts. If any of them want a little side gig to go with their hunting I will send them your way. They can bring a large amount of Mythic Beast Meat that they have hunted on the way here as well." Cain offered and the old woman's eyes lit up in joy.

"Excellent, excellent. If they come straight to us, that nasty Merchant's Association can't come back and cut us out either. I'll show them for calling my potions second rate." The witch muttered and Cain sighed at the way her outburst ruined the image she was trying to create.

"I'm pretty sure that was supposed to be an inside thought." Moana pointed out, unwilling to let the witch off so easily after her slip up.

"Oh, drat. You see, the potions are high quality, but they are witch potions and not Mage-created potions, so they tend to smell a little different and sometimes have a mild side effect. The main function is impeccable though. I guarantee it." She hastily explained, holding out a vial of potion for Cain to inspect.

It was a mana regeneration potion. 2 Percent per second for 30 seconds. Very nearly a Legendary grade item in Cain's estimation, and it likely needed Legendary grade or higher ingredients to make it. The only real way to tell if there would be side effects would be to drink it though, and Cain had no need for a mana potion at the moment.

"That is an impressive potion for sure. Not many mages can make a mana recovery potion that high quality, especially a long-duration one. The recovery over time potions have always proven to be more valuable in battle since they keep up the effect instead of leaving you scrambling the next time you get a bit low." Cain agreed with the witch's estimation of her skill.

"I like you, young man. But I've also got a shameless request for you personally. I heard about the assistance you gave our leafy protector over there, and I was hoping that you could do a little something with my appearance. Something a little less bog monster and more elven?"

Does the old witch want to be an Elf? That's not impossible, or even all that uncommon. Cain had thought she might want to be a beauty of the species she started life as, and she's too tall to have been one of the Elves of this world, whose females rarely make it over 1.5 meters tall.

"Come see me later and we can work something out." Cain agrees, seeing that the Mayor is headed their way with the other two contestants in tow. If they saw what the people here saw, this should be a fairly short deliberation.

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

Chapter 467 467 Guardian Guild

The Mayor stepped up onto the wall to address the assembled crowd with a polite political smile. One designed to ingratiate him to everyone he met and cover his true feelings. A well-practiced mask that every Mayor knows well.

"Excellent work everyone. I must say, you all did an excellent job showing M City that you are worthy Guardians. Unfortunately, only one of you can win here, but we can give the others a glowing recommendation should they wish to assist another city in the Region.

All three candidates are on the very powerful side of Mythic Awakening, and each showed a variety of unique talents of their own.

With that said, the most impressive certainly had to be the Forest Dragon and the ease with which Miss Prana was able to control the battlefield. During an attack, with the aid of the city guard, the council feels that her particular skill set is best suited to the role."

The Mayor's impromptu speech was heard by hundreds of onlookers, who all gave a mighty roar of appreciation for their new champion.

After hearing about the combat style of the Demon Dryad, neither of the other contestants had any complaints about the decision. With large area crowd control, a Mythic Dragon, and the ability to grow food, she really was an amazing choice for City Guardian.

Not many classes could develop the skills necessary to fill every role, but hers did, so they were willing to concede the loss and take the referral to complete the World Wide Quest in a smaller village.

The benefits might not be as great, but the title would grant them power and a chance at future exclusive quests that the System sometimes gives to title holders. Plus, living in a smaller village isn't always a bad thing.

"What is the first thing I should do?" Prana whispers to Cain, seeing the civilian population staring at her, waiting for an acceptance speech.

"Thank them and ban the incense. I don't know if you were at the farm for the tests, but the pheromones in the incense are weaker than the monsters attacking, so it's only working to lure them in." Cain reminds her, too softly for those around to hear.

"Thank you for the warm welcome everyone!

For those that don't know, my name is Prana, and I specialize in a combination of Poisons and Nature Magic. It is an honor to be chosen to represent M City as its Champion and I will do my best to keep everyone safe.

To that end, the repellant incense will be prohibited within the city limits. The pheromones that it contains are from a creature that is now weaker than the Mythic Beasts attacking the cities, so it serves as a lure instead, drawing them in large numbers to attack and try to take the territory from what they believe to be an inferior beast."

Prana's revelation brings responses ranging from shock to horror among the crowd, but a number of the Hunters look curious. If the incense really does attract the monsters, doesn't that mean they can use it as bait, burning it in the woods to draw them into a trap?

That would revolutionize their hunting techniques and help them quickly clear the area.

"Will there be more food?" One of the elderly beastkin asks, his round ears pressed to his head in shame.

"Yes, even after the trade caravans start again, we will continue the soup kitchen. We lost a lot of young folk and providers lately, and our people need help. I don't yet know what the final solution will be, but the city will help everyone who needs it." The mayor confirms, after looking to Prana and the Witches for confirmation.

The abundance of elderly and orphans are a problem that a lot of cities have now. Even if the attacks didn't overrun the guards, there were a lot of casualties, and the hunters that were away from the cities when the vortexes collapsed had it even worse.

Cain was under no illusions that he could do much to change things on a grand scale, but he could help people that he liked to complete the Laughing God's special quest and take the title of Champion.

Which raised the question, 'who is filling that role in the unawakened areas?' It would have to be someone either awakened or over level 300, so they could challenge the Epic beasts.

The Eastern Continent might also be in trouble, since the strongest of their monsters were already often over level 300, and they would have only improved.

He hadn't seen much for Guild messages from Port Nefheim though and surely there would have been some indication of trouble if they couldn't handle the attacks.

Cain didn't actually need to be worrying about Port Nefheim, since Neffie and the Lesser Watchers had a plan. The World Quest had been generous to Neffie, granting her a Mythic Barrier for the Port City and they had been making excellent use of it.

The barrier only kept out enemies, so when the first few freshly upgraded Mythic Beasts attacked, they set their defensive lines just in front of the barrier and then retreated when attacked, letting the attackers slam into the barrier before being viciously counterattacked by the Lesser Watchers and finished by Neffie and her forces.

In this way, they got a number of Mythic items and even a [Mythic Transformation] Skillbook Neffie claimed for herself.

It would increase her body quality to Mythic for a short time, but simply knowing it also granted her the status of Mythic Awakened, with the damage reduction buff to match.

Now she could lead her forces from the front lines with little fear unless an awakened beast led the forces. Even then, her transformation would upgrade the close combat attacks of whatever class she was mimicking into Mythic attacks, as well as granting an increase in her spell damage.

The last item on her to-do list was to upgrade her class, but the options she had so far were not satisfactory. Nothing less than unique and amazing would be enough to satisfy the young Demon Queen. The combination of her young age and her ridiculously overpowered role models had given Neffie an extremely high standard for her own future advancements.

Tonight, she had a meeting scheduled with the Lesser Watchers to experiment with [Modify] and see if she could get a class option worthy of her noble self.

She had even made a small shrine to the Old Gods of Creation next to the docks in the Port for extra luck. She knew the Laughing God ruled the System, but the others must have some sort of input over the development of the world. Even if they didn't, she wasn't going to risk offending them by leaving them out.

As the old saying goes: Shiny things come to those who cheat.

Wait, no, that's not quite right.

As night fell, both Prana and Neffie were very busy. Prana was meeting the people of M City and organizing the garden at the Redwood tree, while Neffie was deep in discussion with the Lesser Watchers, who had turned to Cain for a third opinion.

Knowing that Neffie doesn't have the words subtle or understated in her vocabulary, they were going to have to go overboard with a skill to satisfy their most beloved and spoiled Guild Member.

When she became Port Nefheim's Guardian, the System gave her a citywide barrier ability. Cain's best idea is to supplement that with the party-wide spell [Shared Resilience] that would grant everyone in her raid party her best damage reduction ability.

In the awakened areas, the spell is pointless, everyone has the same ability as their best form of damage reduction, but in Port Nefheim or the Central Continent, an awakened fighter could make excellent use of it.

After cautioning Neffie not to finalize it before checking her class options, the Lesser Watcher granted her the spell and the little Demon got a big smile on her face.

Her system interface had a very promising message for her:

[Requirements met: 2 Mythic Area Defense Spells, Title: Guardian, Species: Demon Queen] hidden class unlocked.

Neffie opened her class change menu and looked at her hopefully amazing and unique new class option.

[Demonic Overlord]

[Overlord's Authority] None may question the might of an Overlord in their own territory. So long as the Overlord has more than fifty followers or subjects and is in their home territory, all damage taken by the overlord and their followers within (Overlord's Level) meters of the Overlord is reduced an additional 25 percent, and all attack abilities used by the Overlord are activated at the quality level of their most powerful defensive ability.

The Class Skill alone is enough to sell Neffie on this new class. Overlord sounds like it outranks Queen for sure, so she will be the Overlord of Port Nefheim.

The rest of the skill tree is just uninteresting nonsense about creating protective statues and traps and stuff to defend her castle. Sure, it's going to be great for defending the city, but better than being able to trick her mom into calling her Overlord Neffie? That's simply impossible.

Neffie finalized the [Shared Resilience] skill and selected her new class, coming back to reality to find that both her parents as well as the Captain of her guard have joined her and the Watchers in the private room where they were holding the meeting.

"Commander Neffie. We have a situation, the Beasts have attacked again." The Captain began, before being cut off by Neffie's cheer.

"That is perfect timing. I needed to test out my new abilities anyhow. Follow me dear subjects and I will show you the might of Overlord Neffie... owowow, Mom, let go of my ear."

"Overlord who did you say, young lady? Take every battle seriously or I'll ground you with no trips to the candy shop for a week." Lickity declared, dragging her daughter out of the room by one fluffy ear while the Lesser Watchers and the Captain of the guard tried not to laugh.

"We didn't get to congratulate her on the new area buffs." The captain sighed, following the pair out of the room and towards the edge of the city.

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

Chapter 468 468

Under the influence of the Echoes, the hunting patterns were changed from simply defending the farm region to traveling between cities. Their first destination was naturally M City, to clear the roads and to congratulate Prana on becoming a City Guardian.

The Echoes had informed them of the deal with the witches to provide them with special storage bags that would let them transport goods between Covens with ease, but the biggest selling point for them was finally having a proper market for the food grown near the farm they were staying at.

Those local farmers had also had a tough go of it since a number of their customers had been overrun and the guard escorts had stopped. Without that level of safety, many of them didn't dare to travel to town. But now, the hunters had offered to do the traveling for them, for only a small discount.

The agreement they came to was that the hunters would pay the farmers in advance for the goods, then they would become the merchants selling it. But they wouldn't need to set up market stalls and wait for days to sell everything. Instead, they could leverage the deal with the witches and have them sell the goods locally, after buying them from the hunters.

It would naturally drive up the price of goods in the city a little, having an extra middleman, but not by as much as unscrupulous merchants were already marking up many products.

"Welcome to M City, friends." Prana welcomed the first group to arrive the next day.

A dozen of them had traveled together, getting a feel for the route between cities and the monsters that frequented the areas near the road. These hunters had already worked together for years, and they had their own business plan. They brought wagons to load up the corpses of the Mythic Beasts since even the meat would sell now that most of the livestock was gone.

Selling meat in bulk, along with the valuable parts of the Mythic creatures that were used for crafting would bring them an extra bit of profit, and they could trade the food that they bought from the farmers as they went.

But once they saw Prana with a Darklight Host Guild tag, they changed their goals to something much loftier.

"Congratulations on your victory. It looks like you've got it good here." They replied, stepping away from the loaded wagons with a smile.

"How did you convince the big boss to make you a Guild member?" One of them asked quietly, not wanting to give any other adventurers in the area the same idea they had just formed.

"I agreed to help him out when I became Guardian, and he gave me some bonuses, including the spell needed to secure my victory," Prana whispered back with a wink.

That solved it then. They just had to get into the big boss's good books and he would help them become Guardians in exchange for loyalty. A loyalty that wouldn't cost them anything since their loyalties already lay with the people of the farm and the community they were forming. One or two of their group gaining a position as Guardians would be perfect, and it would give them an extra advantage when selling their goods. Better than the Adventurer's Association, which was pretty much in shambles at this point.

p It had become too inflexible to deal with the changes, so once the Hunters no longer needed to take missions against the Crazy and the trade lines between cities that kept their shelves stocked suddenly stopped, the hapless leadership proved unable to get things set right again.

If they had been even halfway competent, this simple plan would have come from the Association and not from some random researcher in the woods.

"How is the Adventurer's Association doing here?" One of the Hunters asked, wondering if they could add trade between branches to their profits.

"Closed and empty. When the first of the nearby cities fell they took every Adventurer who would follow them and left for the bigger cities south of here, where they would have safety in numbers." The Mayor interjected, walking up to greet the visitors.

"Did that happen a lot?" Prana asked, just now realizing that the ones she would have normally sold the goods these hunters were carrying to were nowhere to be found.

"I heard that the Association put out a Quest to recover all the materials and workers back to their central headquarters, so I'm guessing they're empty pretty much everywhere.

Moana had floated over to investigate the smell of fresh meat and heard the last part entirely by coincidence.

[Hey boss, I think someone else had your idea. They gathered all the Adventurer's Association members and gear together in one city to solidify their power base.] The Leviathan in its Mermaid-like infant form explained.

Once she reached a certain point of power she would evolve, much like a tadpole becoming a frog, and take on an enormous Whale body that the world would recognize as a Leviathan, but that time was a ways off for the newly hatched body that Moana was in.

[More for us then. Let's start looking for good people, and we can get them settled in as Guardians of the region so that the refugees can have more safe and stable places to go.] Cain decided.

The farm could only hold so many people, and there were a lot of them there already, mostly on the more powerful side as well. Looking at M City, Cain could already see how the powerful gathering together was going to cause long-term issues, but if they could make an alliance between Guardians they could keep things safe enough to begin getting back to normal.

The World Quest would really help out on that end. Who would want a thankless job like Guardian if it didn't come with great rewards? Adding in Guild Membership and the promise of a backup army should they run into trouble would help.

The most important part would be to find the right people, ones that are loyal and kind, and then boost them up to the point where they were capable, instead of just picking the strongest.

[Prana, do you have any recommendations for other Guardians? I want to set up some more in the region, good people who will help rebuild.] Cain sent a private message to his newest Guild Member.

[These hunters are decent people, but my vote is for Gerald, the Combat Squirrel. He's a little guy, about 1.3 meters tall, but he's really agile and a stealth class. But he grew up on a farm not far away that was overrun by Crazy a while before the change. He desperately wants to be a hero, and I think he would be excellent at the job.]

A tiny squirrel who dreams of being a hero? That could be a fun mission.

[Do we know where he wants to protect? Or is it just a dream?] Cain responded a few seconds later.

[The village closest to the Farm had taken him in, so I think he would want to be there if he could. Right now he should be at the daily juice testing. He never misses out on the chance of a daily buff before he heads out into the woods and circles the village looking for threats.]

[Excellent, I will look him up when I get back. First, Moana heard these hunters saying they wanted to go for City Guardian too, so I'm going to vet them on the way to the next stop.] Cain informs her, and Prana does her best not to let on to the people she's talking to that their lives might undergo a very drastic change over the next few days.

Keeping it to herself was hard though, and she kept shooting them nervous glances all through the meeting with the Witch Coven, detailing the locations of the other Covens and who to contact to trade the goods. The only thing that kept her from just blurting out the truth was the constant interruptions as people came to thank her.

Since nobody said anything to the contrary, the city just assumed that their new Guardian had arranged for this caravan to come and relieve their suffering. They might have only brought a half dozen wagons, and not even particularly big ones, but it totaled up to over three tons of food products, enough to last the city a few days, and they promised there would be regular wagons coming later, to be sold in the city's market by vendors from the Witches Coven.

The thought of the gnarled old witches touching their food bothered more than a few of them, but they were willing to put that aside if the Coven was going to take over for the farmers who usually ran the markets.

Things almost seemed peaceful in the city, with a few market stalls finally open again, and a variety of foods, crafting materials, and items crafted on the farm up for sale. The Ice Wool blankets were a particular hit. The village near the farm had a number of Elite quality magical sheep, and one of the tailors on the farm had purchased a load of wool to make flat sheets that gave off a mild chill. In the heat of the Southern Continent, these thin blankets were the height of luxury, and sold for very high prices, despite their relatively common production.

The calm didn't extend as far as the Inn though, where the Witches had finally cornered Cain about his promise to help them with their appearance issues before he left.

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

Chapter 469 469 The Beautiful People

"Alright, calm down, it's not a big deal for me to alter your appearances. There is no need to panic." Cain tried to calm down the witches that had assembled inside the Inn's dining room.

"If it was no big deal we would already have done it ourselves." The wizened old Matriarch of the Coven countered, the pustules on her face pulsing as she waved her hand in frustration.

"Let's save some time then. Name a species." Cain announced, making the old woman give him a sneaky smile.

"Squirrel Kin." She answered without hesitation, trying to poke Cain into action.

The room was suddenly filled with a fleshy sound that made everyone present think that Cain had slapped the old woman for daring to rush him, but when the old woman lowered her hood and placed her hand to her face what was revealed was not a horrific bruise, but a pre-teen Squirrel Kin girl with brown bushy hair that had a pair of white stripes running through it starting at her ears.

"That's one, who is next? Name your Species." Cain announced while the matriarch was still in shock from the sudden transformation.

"Dark Elf!" One of the others exclaimed and the sound happened again.

Normally the process was silent and painless, but Cain was annoyed by the volume and insistence of the witches, so he was doing it in an instant, simply picking a species and letting the System randomize their appearance. Normally this was what would happen before he began altering them to their final form if he was changing their species, but to Cain's surprise, it actually turned out fairly decently without his intervention.

The second of the witches looked at her new form and laughed. At 165cm tall, she was big for a Dark Elf, and with an equally prodigious chest and hips to match. She was going to say something about the appearance, but the others had already lined up to get a new appearance. It wasn't quite what she had in mind, but she was reasonably certain that a little time exercising could take care of these extra thick thighs.

One after another, Cain altered the witches, with the ones who were out on errands joining the back of the line as those who were already transformed took their places.

There were only a little over twenty members of the Coven, so even one transformation a minute wasn't going to take Cain long to finish, only a little longer than it took him to finish his breakfast in fact. But there were faces at the back of the line now that definitely weren't witches. Not only did they not have the gnarled face from casting curses and making potions, but they weren't even wearing the Coven's signature robes.

The witches themselves appeared to be finished and Cain looked down at the one-armed urchin in front of him. The boy was one of the local vagrants, not an orphan or homeless, but crippled and suffering life with useless parents who preferred theft to work. Moana had seen the city guard haul all three of them away last night after they were caught trying to steal from Prana's newly refurbished garden.

"Scylla." The boy said in his very best falsetto, trying to blend in with the witches in front of him using a filthy blanket to emulate their black robes.

Cain thought about telling him off since this was a deal he had worked with the witches in exchange for their assistance. But why not have a little fun? At worst, the Coven could hold it against the boy and ask him to pay off the debt for the transformation by doing legitimate work.

[I want a pet octopus.] Moana suggested, spreading evil thoughts into Cain's mind.

[No, we have enough pets and members of our party already. A baby Scylla would just get in the way.] Cain answered after considering her idea.

[Please?] The Leviathan tried one more time.

[You can't keep it. Play with it until we go and then find it a new home.] Cain agreed and the form of the young demon disappeared into a pile of blankets.

With a cheer from Moana, a jet of water shot out, picking up the tiny form of the baby demon, with a human upper body and an Octopus' eight tentacles for legs.

"You're not going to leave him like that are you?" One of the witches laughed, seeing Moana rubbing her face against the shocked demon.

"I don't see any good reason why not. Just look at it. How long has it been since you saw something that cute?" Cain replied with a wicked smile, before turning to the others in the group.

They also weren't witches but had the same idea as the first boy. Most of them scattered, but one old woman came forward, hobbling along with the help of her walker.

"Carnage Please." The old woman, who Cain could see was a lesser Demon of the Wrath variety asked politely.

Everyone in the room stared at her in shock. Does the old woman want to become a mighty demonic warrior?

"Done and done." Cain declared, shifting her form to the childhood phase of Carnage.

It would take too much work to actually make her into a Legendary demon since she was currently at normal quality and not even an Epic demon. Though that was to be expected given her deteriorating physical condition. Most Epic Demons live for many centuries before becoming elderly, much less that decrepit.

In the form of a 190cm tall adolescent girl with deep red skin and wings, showing powerful muscles to the world, since the gown she was previously in wasn't an equipped item, she made an impressive sight to the world.

The old demon turned to each side, admiring her new form for a moment before one of the witches tapped her on the arm, handing her a piece of cloth.

"Please equip this. It's just too embarrassing to see you strutting around naked, Elder Gwar." The witch informed her softly.

The demon was about to correct her, saying that she doesn't have a System, but then realized that she could now see the interface for herself. Tears of happiness rolled down her face as she hugged the nearest witch, who was still trying to get her to put clothes on, but she stopped herself short when she realized she no longer knew who she was hugging. She didn't recognize the new appearances, so it was like being in a room full of strangers, or a costume party.

"Um, thanks. I think if I, Ah there it is." The demon declared proudly as she equipped the robe, which became a toga on her new body.

"Hey, did you know that with a System you can just look at people and see their names? How useful is that? Wait, have you all been doing that all along to greet people so you don't have to remember them? That is so unfair." The old woman, better known as Elder Gwar, called out at very nearly a shout, not used to the powerful voice of her new form.

The voice of the adolescent version of Carnage was a low-pitched growl, but somehow still gave off a hint of femininity that the adult male version was lacking. Cain didn't know if there were actually other members of the species before today, but the system had no problem changing the old woman, so it certainly was possible that they did exist.

"I hope you didn't want to change for immediate vengeance. You're Epic Quality now, but you're only level 1 and I'm guessing your body is the equivalent of about fourteen years old." Cain laughed as the old woman flexed her wings and posed like a bodybuilder.

Despite the obvious youth, her arms were bigger than Cain's in his current adult Wrath Demon form, and every muscle rippled with restrained power, just waiting for the demon to grow up so it could be unleashed in the form of a Quality upgrade. She should naturally move from Epic to Legendary in her early adulthood with proper training, so her progression shouldn't be a problem.

The increased power of the world would even make it easy, pulling her first towards level 300 as an Epic Demon, then towards 400 as a Legendary one.

The real question would be if that affected the ability to improve classes. Once you got past the first advancement, simply going up in level was far from enough to get a new class. You might be offered a side grade to a more versatile class, but a true second advancement class needed a variety of other learned skills to acquire. If you didn't get them before reaching the level cap of 200, where you would run out of skills to assign points to, it was possible that the System would penalize you for being slow to adapt.

Many transfers who had leveled out of their class had failed to get the second advancement class they wanted, even after fulfilling all the same qualifications that others had when they advanced, so Cain was certain that there was more to it than simply having the appropriate skills.

"Since that's everyone, let's have a meal and get to know each other better. I'd offer to adjust your forms a little, but frankly, I enjoyed randomizing you all way too much to mess it up after the fact."

Cain's blunt admission startled the witches, but amusement soon overtook the shock.

'He is an Ancient after all.' They thought with a mix of amusement and frustration, looking over their new bodies.

Prana came in once she had finished her morning meetings, to see how Cain was doing. She had seen a few of the transformed witches already, and the sight shocked her. Especially the thick-thighed Dark Elf. Who would ask for that form in the first place? But listening to the group chat Prana realized that they didn't all get a careful consideration that she did, of a perfect match to the ideal body in her mind.

They were still the best-looking Coven that she had ever heard of though.

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

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"If we're all done here, I should get back to the farm. You said the boy Gerald wanted to become the defender of the local village, so I will talk to him when I get back, and then I have to look for more suitable candidates to run for Guardian in the other cities in the region.

If they succeed, you will have friends in high places, so you can get what you need. No, on second thought, I'm going to ask to buy the farm from the old man I'm renting it from. Then I can make it a Guild House and you will be able to access the Guild Bank. We have locations on two other continents, so you should be able to get anything you need from the Guild, and you can just pay the crafters." Cain informed Prana as he sent a mental message to the Companions to meet him at the Inn and get ready to leave.

There were already Hunters arriving with their morning catch, having hurried here from the farm to meet with the witches. They seemed a little reluctant to believe that these were the infamous coven of questionable potion makers though. Everyone on the Southern Continent knew what the curses and potions did to a Witch's body over time, and these young women looked nothing at all like Witches. Did they perhaps get an illusion spell that would hide their true appearance?

What nobody other than the Witches themselves knew was that the side effects weren't innate to the Class. It was simply that at lower levels they didn't have a 100 percent success rate, so the creation and spell casting often backfired on them, leading to the mutations. Now that they were well-trained elders of the Coven, they would have far fewer incidents, and they could maintain these appearances for decades before beginning to show signs of disfigurement again.

Those who were less active, running the business side of things and casting fewer spells, might not ever return to something resembling their original appearance.

"Duke Cain agreed to make us beautiful in exchange for our assistance. We have a collection of storage bags to distribute, with one caveat. There are two types of bags. One with the mark of the Witches on them, to save you space in your inventory so you can carry as much as a cart without using up your storage, and a second sealed one. We won't send those out often, but they are to go directly to the destination Coven without being tampered with. We will pay you a flat fee to carry them, but be warned, the contents will be volatile. If they are opened prematurely, we won't be responsible for any damages that might occur."

That sounded quite fair to the hunters. Like a messenger carrying a sealed letter, opening your delivery was strictly against the rules. As long as the Covens paid there was no downside, plus they got the big storage bags to carry their trade goods.

"Agreed, where do we sign up?" The leader of the group declared, waving to Prana and Cain as they headed towards the gate.

"So what's the grand plan? If you are going to bring Guardians and merchants under your control, are you trying to become King of the Southern Continent?" Prana asks quietly once they reach an open area outside the city gates.

"Oh no, that is way too much work. You should see how tired King James of Skyview is all the time. My plan is to become the power in the background. Like the multinational corporations from my past life that can do anything they like with just their power and influence." Cain informs her with a wink, leaving the Demon Dryad a bit confused.

"I have no idea what you're talking about, but I think I get the concept. You don't want to be in charge, you want to have enough power that you don't have to be, right?" That's not far off from the truth, so Cain just gave her a wink and grabbed Nemu into his arms.

"We will be flying back to the farm now, you know how to get ahold of me if it's an emergency."

Cain led the group for a much more leisurely flight this time, passing over the main roads between cities to sweep for more dangerous monsters or larger groups that might mess with the merchant Hunters as they were trying to build the trust of the people.

For centuries, the farmers had brought goods directly to the cities, with the assistance of the Guard patrols. Having the process switched up was going to be a big adjustment for people. Even a new server at their favorite restaurant was a big adjustment for some, and this was the equivalent of every shop in town having either new management or all new staff.

The city closest to the farm was the third that they passed over that morning and the only one that was still looking to be in good shape. The patrols didn't go out as far anymore, certainly not to the village near where Cain stayed, which was formerly the end of their route and a multiple-day journey. Now, they were only going to the first few

farming villages daily, making sure they were alright and surviving off what they had to offer.

The variety in the market was way down, but unlike the others that had lost a lot of their farms, the hunting activities of the refugees at the farm had kept the villages on that side of the city completely intact. With the villages intact, fewer hunters fled, more quests got filled, and some semblance of order was maintained, keeping the nearby villages on the other sides of town safe as well.

They were still looking for a Guardian though, and the city guards seemed more than a little disappointed that Cain wasn't intending to take up the post. The offer to personally vet and assist a candidate went over incredibly well though. Cain's local fame might be limited, but after his few exploits in the area and the farm full of refugees, he was well known to the guards at the very least.

The Echoes had warned the people at the farm about the Guardian recruitment before Cain arrived, and the hopefuls were busy helping out and showing off their capabilities. The sight was a bit comical, trying to get attention without looking like they were arrogant or needy made them look a bit silly, but the Echoes already knew all the gossip and had a few people in mind.

Cain would, of course, be vetting them based on two important categories. Personality and fluffiness. No, that was Laura sticking thoughts in his mind. Personality and versatility. Fighting wasn't the only thing that a Guardian needed to do, just one of the most important ones. Once Cain brought them into the Guild, they would gain some versatility, but being able to do something beyond fighting was essential.

It didn't matter if it was politics, like the Crusaders that couldn't be lied to, healing, crafting, agriculture, just something to add value to their position in the city.

[Boss, we have gathered Gerald, the Squirrel Kin who wanted to guard the village, as well as Larry and Moe who we think might be good as Guardians.] Victor the Echo informed Cain once the boss had managed to get through the initial crowd of well-wishers welcoming him home.

[Bring them all to the house and we can chat.] Cain informs the Echo, then settles in on the couch in the small living room of the farmhouse to wait for his guests.

"Welcome everyone, I am sure you can guess why I have brought you here. Each of you has been reported to have a specialty skillset that would make you a good candidate for Guardian. But more importantly, each of you has been reported to be a good person, worthy of being entrusted with the position. To me, that is the most important part, as I am trying to build a network of Guardians who are willing to not just work to protect their cities but work together to make the whole region safer and keep the cities residents in a decent quality of life.

That will be the hard part, due to the number of refugees, including those freed from the vortexes. This is why being versatile has become so important.

Sneaky Squirrel has been doing an excellent job of keeping the area around the farm safe, so I'm willing to help him out a little with an upgrade using my skills. Larry and Moe, you're both Epic Demons already, and quite powerful, but I'm told you lack a little something to help you stand out. Why don't you take a moment and think about what might be best for you personally while I talk to Gerald?"

Cain's proposition was more than they could have hoped for. The echoes have been telling them stories of all the things that the Darklight Host has done on the other continents, and the prospect is very appealing to them all. Becoming a Guild Member is practically the same as gaining a Noble Title to the residents of the farm after interacting with the Echoes for so long, and they haven't even been introduced to the "Outreach Training" that Cyrene has introduced to the Central Continent.

If they knew the exact extent that the adherents of Cyrene's training would go to in order to defend the Guild, they might be concerned, but the way the Echoes tell the story, they are more like a militant group of Good Samaritans, selflessly helping others.

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

Chapter 471 471 The Tower Of Pain

While Cain was studying his Spell Crafting that night, he found the most curious of bookmarks. Between two pages, securely tucked in there was a single page of thin rice paper with handwritten notes on it.

The spell that it was tucked into was one to create Training Dummies, the sort that the Central Continent uses to train newbies, but much higher quality than any that Cain has seen before.

[What is this crap? Even for a beginner, this is too basic, isn't it? I have created a much better version by following the advice of Karl our beloved Master and the God of Magic. Instead of some stupid dummy, I would make a tower of trials. The process is the same, you only need to bind the training targets inside a tower and add the separate space enchantment to create the levels.

What a bunch of simpletons, do they really think the students are this dense?]

That's where the rant leaves off, but on the other side of the translucent sheet, there is a detailed description of how to create the Tower of Trials, as the student called it. There is even the diagram for the separate space enchantment, with a note that it's possible that a Biologist might be reading this and wouldn't have taken enchanting yet.

Cain counts himself as more on the Biologist side of the equation, and he certainly hasn't taken the Ancient's full course on Enchanting, so he puts his mind into memorizing the separate space enchantment.

By morning, he is pretty sure that he understands how it works, and he is getting eager to try out this new spell. But where should he build an enormous tower? In order to hold all the inscriptions, it will need to be over twenty meters tall, and the Separate Space enchantment can only enhance an area's actual space by a few hundred times, so it will have to be a pretty big building to give the challengers enough room to fight freely and not feel like they are trapped in an arena.

With some consideration, the answer is clearly Long Fang Valley. There are a lot of people there who need the levels, unlike here where they will get them much faster hunting Mythic beasts. Even if they are brand new to their system, with a Mythic attack ability and a group, they will race through the levels fighting beasts with so much power.

The Echoes have things pretty well in hand here, they even picked out the contestants for the City Guardian trials for Cain to review, so they can be trusted to complete the task. He doesn't even have to motivate them, they did that themselves with the promise of new types of crops to hybridize once more cities fall under their influence.

Cain needs to be the one to add the Guild Member, but he can do that from a message without ever actually seeing them. Therefore, the Echoes will be his proxies for the Central Continent until he can return.

Building the tower likely won't take too much time if he uses summons to build the actual structure, but there is a lot of trouble on the continent, and Neffie is too busy at home to go help Aggramor with his civic issues. He has the city itself under control, and repairs have started, but not having his successor in town has made a lot of the demons nervous about the future, should he somehow be killed.

Much more powerful beings have been reported lately, Awakened Monsters that have made their way from the oceans and the other continents. The Central Continent has never faced that before, and the few awakened among the Demons, with the aid of the Darklight Host, who can summon Mythic beings with the current setting of the Guild Skill, isn't enough to calm all their fears.

[You could always make two. One for us, one for Uncle Aggie.] Moana jokes, using Neffie's nickname for the Demon King.

[They'd likely make better use of it anyhow since so many of them are already high in physical quality and modifiers.] Vala agreed, thinking of a pure white spire stuck smack dab in the middle of the black stone Demon Capital.

It would be magnificently tacky, standing out like a sore thumb among the uniform surroundings. It would be a glorious practical joke. Maybe he does need to make them a tower of trials.

But before they go, Cain needs to find the owner of the farm. Now that the barriers around the awakened zone are gone, there is no good reason not to have a Guild House right here in the middle of nowhere. The buildings are large enough, or at least the modified barn that makes up the majority of the indoor housing and experimental animal holding area is, so it shouldn't be a problem.

Asking around briefly, Cain found that he was even here at the farm right now, trying to convince the Echoes to give him a few cuttings of the Peach trees to plant at his own house in town.

"Welcome back, Duke Cain. I think I know what you're going to ask, the Echoes have been hinting at it for a while now, so it's no big surprise. I'll give it to you for one Platinum bar and two cuttings from the peach tree." The old farmer informed Cain with a smile on his face.

Not only could he get enough cash to safely retire, but he would also get a chance to grow the peach trees himself, which would make for an exceptional amount of side income selling the juice if he wanted.

Assuming he could manage to grow them without the intense amount of magical manipulation that the Echoes put into their cultivation. Mythic fruits didn't just grow anywhere without any outside assistance after all.

"You've got yourself a deal. You might need some luck getting the cuttings to grow anywhere that isn't as saturated in mana as this farm is right now, but I will gladly give you them as payment." Cain agreed easily.

The old man even had the paperwork ready to be signed, and a few minutes later Cain was ready to expand the Darklight Host's official sphere of influence.

[New Guild House Added]

[Name New Guild House?] Y/N

No, definitely not. Cain knew he was terrible at naming things, so the name could wait for later, once the others had a chance to brainstorm something better than he could come up with. Delegating responsibility for the parts you don't like to do is the very best part of being a leader after all.

In anticipation of being accepted into the Tortuga group of international destinations, the Guild had made a spare pair of Intercontinental Travel Circles, so Cain borrowed one from the Guild Bank and looked around the yard.

This place is so busy that there really isn't a very good spot to set up a circle, but it shouldn't be too hard to set somewhere aside. The far side of the main house looked fairly promising. It's out of the way now, since the crowd has long since outgrown the ability to actually stable animals in the small three-stall shelter. If Cain removes that and installs a platform it would make for a good spot to transfer in and out.

"Attention everyone. As the farm is now an official Guild House, I will be linking it to our other facilities. That means we need a platform and I'm taking volunteers to design and build something worthy of the Southern Continent." Cain yelled to get everyone's attention, unknowingly using his mental voice as well to make the shout just as loud at the edge of the farm as it was right next to him.

"Bloody hell that's loud. I'm an architect and I'm willing to make up a great design for the platform. We might not be a walled city, but the Darklight Farm is a proper force to be reckoned with these days." A large Youkai with a fox mask on under a hooded robe and seven fluffy white tails declared proudly.

"Then I will help build it." A few Earth Mages stepped forward to catch everyone's attention.

"We will plant a proper flower garden around it. The Southern Continent has a wide variety of plants nobody else will have seen before." One elderly beastkin druid declared on behalf of the group that spent their days helping the Echoes develop the farm's crops.

"I'll leave you to it then. But since this is now a permanent location, I will be doing some upgrades."

Cain called a group of Mythic Earth Elementals, upgraded from lesser quality with [Versatility], and ordered them to start building a collection of river stone buildings with slate shake roofs. One combined living room and kitchen with two bedrooms, every unit was identical, and they made three dozen at a time until they had over two hundred units, enough to cover everyone who lived in the tents near the farm full time.

"There's nothing in them, but the wet season is coming, and they will be much dryer than the tents," Cain informed the shocked crowd.

It wasn't the act of generosity that startled them, Cain was well known for random acts of generosity. No, what shocked them was that he had the ability to make them hundreds of houses in ten minutes and they had been living in tents for months. Was it possible that nobody had ever asked him to upgrade the lodging, thinking that it might

be asking too much and make him angry? If that was the case, they all felt just a bit sheepish at their reluctance to ask something that he clearly viewed as no big deal.

Even if he hadn't bought the farm if he could assemble them that fast, he could level them just as quickly. They weren't enchanted for defense or anything, so realistically any adult in camp could likely kick one to the ground in a few seconds.

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

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The engineers and Earth Mages were quickly embroiled in a heated discussion about what the transport landing pad should look like. The problem stemmed from the fact that they came from a half dozen different species, with very different design preferences.

Cain wished he had a design book from the ancients to go by and settle the argument, but hunting for the elusive librarian would have to wait until he finished the more important tasks. Like drinking peach juice and watching a seven-tailed fox youkai threaten to suffocate a bat-type beastkin to death with tail fluff.

The bat was much smaller than the fox, only 1.45 meters or so tall, but he had an overbearing sort of presence caused by his level of confidence that made him seem bigger than he was. It wasn't enough to match up to the Fox Youkai, but from a distance the matchup seemed more like an adult scolding a child, where it was more like a pair of rival coworkers bickering about a shared project when you were close enough to hear it.

They obviously knew each other fairly well, as they insulted each other's families by their first names, but neither was willing to back down on their point. The bat wanted a taller central gazebo over the portal for flying species to roost in once they had arrived, while the youkai insisted he was an idiot and that large species arriving would just crash into it.

"How about rests in the surrounding structure that the druids want to build a lattice on to display their flowers? That way the fliers can land and the tall species won't hit their head?" Cain finally called over, interrupting everyone's morning entertainment.

That they could agree on, since it solved both problems, but it only changed the argument into what such a structure should look like.

This construction project clearly wasn't going to be done in a day, but the walkway to the main fairgrounds, also known as the west pasture, was already under construction, with markers indicating where they intended to line it with various colors and scents of

flowers, as well as a variety of trees, placed and pruned to provide both shade and sunlight, depending on the time of day and where you were standing on the path.

It was genius really. Some parts of the road would be lit and some would be shaded every hour between sunrise and sunset, with magical plants that released scents at different times of day constantly changing the appearance and fragrance as time progressed.

"Plant people really are better at getting along than dirt people." One of the druids joked, drawing the ire of the Earth Mages, who were still arguing over the design of the platform.

The basis was the same black and white parquet floor that the other two guild-run intercontinental circles had, but for the pride of the awakened area, they wanted something much grander, even if right next to it was a small and rustic farmhouse with faded paint.

Of course, upgrading the farmhouse itself was part of many of the plans, but the architect was doing a fairly good job of keeping them on track and focused on the task at hand.

"What theme does the Eastern Continent platform have? The Long Fang Valley one was open into a garden of edible plants, right?" The fox youkai asked.

"That's right. The Eastern Continent platform opens to the training grounds for the dinosaur cavalry, so it is military and dinosaur themed." Cain explained, sending the youkai a mental image of the platform at Port Nefheim.

"Dinosaur Cavalry? I need to see that. Finish up the work you idiots, we have places to be." Someone from the crowd shouted, making the druids laugh.

Neffie wasn't the only one that thought they were an amazing idea, and dozens of people from the farm were excited to see what a cavalry unit riding summoned dinosaurs might look like. Few of them had ever seen the giant lizards in person, so this was a unique experience for them.

p The final design was one of friendship, as they called it. The pillars were filled with carvings of magical beasts as well as the Demons, Youkai, and beastkin that made up the local population. Not in combat as they were in life, but coexisting in peace, as everyone wished was actually possible.

The top ring made a three-quarter circle around the platform, with a flat top and carvings on the bottom that bat-like species could hang from. It was elegant in its simplicity, but the carvings were amazing, using Mythic Skills to make them ultra-realistic.

It didn't take long to build, and Cain placed the circle, linking it to the other Guild locations in Port Nefheim and Long Fang Valley. He could have flown there and back in the time this argument took, but the show was too fun to watch for Cain to want to leave before the platform was built.

"Alright, I will be back in a week or two. Everyone behave and give me a call if you need assistance getting ready for a Guardian selection. Good luck to you all, and remember I will reward everyone who upholds our good name in the trials, so don't think that playing dirty to win will get you anywhere." Cain announced once the circle was active.

"Wait, first tell us where the dinosaurs are!" One of the nearby fighters called, not knowing the name of the location on the Eastern Continent to transfer to it.

"Oh, the Eastern Continent location is Port Nefheim, under the jurisdiction of our favorite young Guild Member Nefertiti, better known as Neffie. Her parents should be there as well to keep her out of trouble, just tell them I sent you to visit and they will take care of you."

A small group gives Cain a thumbs up and he leads the Companions through the portal, stepping out into the middle of the garden in Long Fang Valley.

The Manor House is much more lively than Cain remembers it being, full of people in black and white tabards, as well as a market square that now reaches all the way to the gates from the small square in the city center that is almost half a mile away.

There aren't enough people living here to sustain a market like this or weren't the last time Cain was here, so the size is pretty startling, but the reverent bows and kneeling from the people in black and white tabards are much more disconcerting.

Some of them are Guild Members, but most of them just seem to be followers or hang around sorts, without the identification badges that the Guild Members carry. Looking them over, Cain decides that Cyrene must have given the same tabards as uniforms to Guild employees. He saw the notifications that they had bought out a lot of businesses all over the continent, which meant that there would be a lot of employees under their care now.

Maybe this was some sort of employee gathering. There were hundreds of people in the tabards here, and well over five thousand more people scattered throughout the city.

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

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From the hill that the Manor sits on Cain could see that there was an enormous tent city in the empty fields on the far side of the manor, in what used to be an empty valley. That would explain a lot of the people. The Guild must have taken in even more refugees here than he did at the farm. If things are that bad in Skyview, Cain would have expected King James to contact him, but even the Puppet that Cain left as a defense minister in his place didn't mention anything out of the ordinary after the initial cleanup of the dungeons.

Sensing her location, Cain found that she was still 'alive' and well inside the castle, as was Lieutenant Gwen's clone, still disguised as a cute pet fox.

She gives off a sense of mischief, and Cain senses that she has been discretely assassinating a lot of threats to the young King without him noticing anything. These days it can be written off to an escaped monster fairly easily, and things are chaotic enough that very few would ask any questions. That also puts the King at risk, but with Gwen and the other summoned Lieutenants sharing Cain's level, he's got a pretty reliable guardian.

Cain is deep in his mental conversation with Gwen when a fleshy object slams into him and then wraps tight around his torso.

"You're back! It's been so long that I almost thought you forgot about us." Cyrene complained with tears in her eyes.

"I was just trying to get things settled in the Southern Continent. We have a guild house there now, and the Awakened area barriers are gone, so there's a chance that the Mythic creatures will start spreading out sooner or later." Cain explains, petting her head to calm the white-scaled Lamia down.

"You will be proud, we have used up over half the Guild roster spots, but we now have locations set up all over the continent. A lot of the former city-states collapsed though. They had multiple dungeons around them, and the residents that were ejected were all insane and outclassed the population in both numbers and levels. Skyview is good, though many of the Dutchies are in bad shape still and there are monsters in every wilderness area. Nyanko is good as well, as we have a strong presence there, and your change to the Guild Skill let us deal with anything that came out.

Mythic Forest Dragons have become our signature summon somehow since they can both wither enemies and heal allies really well. Plus they're big and friendly enough to carry the Guild Members around. Pretty much everyone uses them now, even though it annoys Su to no end. She was the first and views the others as copies, which makes the fact that they are mythic while she's not extra annoying to her."

When Cyrene stops to take a breath Cain sticks a Mythic Peach in her mouth, gaining a moment of peace and at the same time informing her of the latest development on the farm that he wanted to talk to her about.

"Gah, so sour, but that effect is amazing. Do you just eat a whole one every time, or can you ration them by slices?" Cyrene asked after swallowing the fruit whole, due to her lack of teeth and hinged jaw hidden by the human appearance of her face.

"We've got a lot to talk about. But inside, not out here in the open." Cain informed her, heading back to the house with his favorite belt firmly attached.

Back in the conference rooms inside the Eastern Wing of the Manor, Cain laid out his plan to build an enormous tower of trials in town, acknowledging that he would have to change the location since there was a refugee camp on the site he originally planned to use.

"So let me get this straight, you can build us a tower, that will train everyone who enters it, all the way up to your current power level? And it will work over and over, just off the ambient mana in the air?" Cyrene asked, rubbing up against Cain's hand when the patting slowed down.

"Pretty much, though we will likely have to top off the mana for now, since the level here isn't as high as it is likely to need once people start getting more powerful. I will build in some extra mana totem inscriptions to gather as much as I can though." Cain confirms with a smile.

"That is genius. We were starting to get too far behind now that there are no more dungeons to go to and level up. Ironically, the better of a job we do of clearing out the monsters, the further behind we have been getting, especially on the east side of the continent, where they have had to ask the Lesser Watchers to send summons with them to deal with Epic monsters.

,m They do it, but they're really condescending about it like they're humoring children." Cyrene is full-on pouting at the memory now, and Cain does his best not to laugh.

The Companions aren't quick enough to catch themselves though, and Cyrene notices right away.

"What? They're really mean about it. They don't even pat my head right, they do it like I'm a toddler." She grumbles.

"Oh, you didn't know. The Lesser Watchers are basically pet sitters. The Ancients who made the spell viewed all the lesser species as children and pets, so that's how the Lesser Watchers behave. I'll bet they even bring people food and water if they look parched or hungry don't they ?" Vala laughed, not holding back to spare Cyrene's feelings at all.

"It's not like that, they just like cooking and... dammit, you're right. They treat us all like pets. They even ring a bell to call us in for dinner when it's ready." Her revelation doesn't seem to have made the Lamia any happier about the situation though.

"They're nice to the Dragons though." Su laughed, coming into the room.

"Boss Kone said that Cyrene was in here, but she didn't mention that you were back Guild Master. It's good to see you again." The summoned companion of the Beast Lord Kone welcomed Cain home.

"What did you need? I was just explaining my plan for a training tower if you wanted to join in." Cain asked with a smile for the tiny green dryad form that the dragon preferred.

"Dinner is ready in five minutes. If you're not there on time the Watcher will come looking for you again. He says you work too much and don't eat regularly enough. According to him, it's bad for your health." Su smirks.

"I'm a Lamia, we only need to eat one big meal a month. He's going to make me fat, feeding me three times a day." Cyrene complained but looked resigned to going to dinner anyhow.

"By the way, what have you been doing since the change boss? You're almost level 400 now." Cyrene asked as Cain and the companions stood up to go to the dining hall.

The Lesser Watcher obviously knows that he is here, so there is no worry about not having a place at the table. The question is what the Lesser Watcher made, since Cain doesn't have great cooking skills without merging with something that can actually cook.

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

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"I'm pretty sure today is something in your honor. Now that you set up the Guild House in the Southern Continent, he can trade items with the Echoes, so there were a bunch of items that I didn't recognize in the kitchen when I passed by." Su shrugged, taking Cain's hand to lead him into the other room.

"Welcome Back Guild Master."

"Welcome home Sir."

"Greetings Master Cain."

Everyone they passed took a moment to welcome Cain back, and he marveled at the loyalty that Cyrene and the others had managed to instill in these new recruits. Most of them had never even met him, but still, they recognized him on sight and greeted him so politely. That level of loyalty was uncommon anywhere, much less among a Guild in this world, where everyone was usually drawn together by common interest and nothing more.

"How is the outreach work going? I heard that we have people stationed everywhere, but isn't that stretching things a bit too thin? It's all well and good to help out, but if the members are overworked they'll just burn out and won't be able to help anyone." Cain pointed out to Cyrene as he entered the dining room.

"You will see soon." She answered cryptically, not detaching herself from his waist and only unwrapping enough that she could drape over the arm of the chair next to him and access her own place.

The chair he chose was a throne of sorts that was here before he even bought the manor, but it looked disused. It was clean, but there weren't any of the usual signs of wear and the cushion had fluffed back up from disuse.

Cyrene took the seat to his right, while the Companions arranged themselves on either side of the table, directly across from their clones, leaving the seat to his left empty. Normally that would be Misha's seat, and it seemed that everyone was holding her place to wait for her to be returned.

This was part of the reason Cain had spent so long away, the memory alone was enough to frustrate him, and there was still nothing he could do about it. He didn't even know how to access the world that she had been taken to.

"Greetings everyone, we have a special meal tonight. Mythic Purple Leopard pan fried in Mystic Cow butter with shallots and carrots, plus an assortment of sides and a glass of Mythic Peach punch." The Lesser Watcher announced while the Puppets from the Manor brought in the dishes.

'Maybe they're not cooking, just arranging the meals, since there are puppets here with proper chef's skills.' Cain realized as the fragrant scent of fried Leopard reached his nose.

The scent was like nothing else that the others in the room had ever experienced, making mouths water at every seat as the plates were placed down.

"If everyone on the Southern Continent eats like this, I am totally moving." Kone sighed, sniffing at her dinner while she waited for everyone to be served.

"Strangely enough, almost none of them had tried eating the Mystic Beast meat. They would collect the parts that could be used as materials and then leave the rest of the

corpse behind. It was Laura who first discovered how tasty this species was." Cain commended the Opal Prismatic Dragon, who was in her pixie-sized form, standing next to her plate.

"Less talking more eating." The dragon complained as the last of the plates were placed.

"Not yet, little dragon. Let us put out the juice first. It's a special blend by the Echoes. It's watered down a hundred to one, so the effects should be very mild, but it's a blend of the Peach, Pear, and Mango juices from the Guild's farm.

For those who don't know yet, don't get any ideas of looting them, the fruits are mythic quality and strictly regulated for their medicinal uses, which are vital to the well-being of the hunters protecting the awakened area from Mythic beasts." That calmed the room down a lot, but they are still eyeing the fragrant glasses of juice in anticipation.

"May the blessings of the gods be upon the Darklight Host and the Immortal Guild Master Cain." Cyrene intoned once the meal was served, causing Cain to give her a look of confusion.

"Amen." Everyone else in the room responded, and the Companions gave Cain a wink.

'That's definitely pushing the boundaries of Cult.' Cain thought, but she did invoke the blessings of the old gods, so maybe it was more like saying grace. That's not really a custom in this world, but it's likely that most of the transfers were familiar with the practice.

Even at a hundred to one dilution, the juice healed small wounds over the course of the meal and the mango juice in the mix cured the few cases of acne that were visible and faded mild scarring.

"This juice is incredible. I don't care how much this stuff costs, we need to market it. The sales would be incredible just for the skin care properties alone." One of the wolf kin ladies present at the table laughed, staring at her juice.

"My fur is so smooth now." The more bestial lady beside her agreed, running a delicate hand over the fur on her arm.

"The Mangoes are popular, but in lower demand than the other ingredients, so I think we might be able to get some to market. It will be pretty limited though." Cain agrees, making all the guests present cheer.

[They're so easy to please.] The copy of Nemu that was with him on the Southern Continent laughed, sipping her juice as she watched the room.

She didn't seem worried about a threat, to Cain it felt more like her thoughts were on an epic ballad. Maybe she was making up a new song, like the one that she shared with the little dancing girl a few weeks back. That was a more rowdy drinking song and not an original, but it was definitely an epic experience, just after she advanced. Being on the farm, she hasn't had much need to use her new singing skills.

"Once I finish with the tower, someone please get ahold of King James and arrange for a visit. I think bringing the Royals here for a party would help calm the tension in the region." Cain announced, startling everyone who wasn't aware of his plans.

"Tower? What tower do you mean?"

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

Chapter 475 475 Raising The Tower

Explaining to the dinner party about the Tower of Trials led to starting work on it the very same evening, shifting to an Elemental form and calling for as many Earth-type Golems as he and the two Lesser Watchers could manage.

A section of the valley was cleared of growth, making a circle a quarter of a kilometer in diameter. At first, Cain thought that might be a little excessive, but the more he thought of it, the better it seemed. If the spell can expand the area a thousand times, this would be a two hundred and fifty kilometer area trial area. That would let the spell give them multiple targets and room to move.

How could he call it a proper trial tower if you just walked in and the target was right in front of you? That would be incredibly lame and it would favor the melee combatants too much. At this size, the targets could hide, ambush, and attack from range as much as they wanted.

Each floor was only fifteen meters tall, but once expanded inside the tower it would be more than enough room for even Laura to fly around.

The final design called for no fewer than fifty floors, making the tower a monstrosity of construction, very nearly a mountain in its own right. There would be no mistaking that something magnificent and unusual had been created here.

Once the structure was up, and the [Separate Space] enchantments were finished, work began on empowering all the defensive runes to protect the building and the people inside it. Nobody could be killed inside the tower. Instead, they would be protected by a

Mythic Barrier and cleared of all negative status effects before being sent back to the ground floor if they got to 5 HP.

Once everything in the sheet Cain found was finished he looked over the work and decided that it still needed a little something to make it more fun. The tower was designed to just train students, so that's all it was, an enormous training dummy. But in this world, it was a work of art far beyond anyone else's capability.

"It needs rewards. Should we set up something?" Cyrene asked, circling around Cain's waist so that she was in front of him instead of watching from over his shoulder.

"That's it. I will set a quest. The tower is finished now and goes up in difficulty on every level. The bottom floor is a gathering floor, but the next will start at the user's level, then go up by two levels every floor until the monsters are a hundred levels above your current strength, up to level 400, which is as strong as I could make them.

I think I will set a quest in the Guild's name to conquer the tower with a reward for every level finished. Even a few gold coins would be enough I think, and then the system should give them some experience."

Cain felt a wave of pleasure and amusement that clearly wasn't his own pass through his mind as he spoke those words and he wondered if it was too late to take them back.

'Forget it, the tower won't let them die. Even if the tower trolls them to insanity, they won't die inside.' Cain thought, then opened the Guild interface to set the quest for the tower.

"What are the levels? Are there fun ones?" Kone asked, looking up at the artificial mountain made of black and white stone.

The structure itself was solid black stone, engraved with layers of runes and spells, but the statues decorating it all up its height were made of white marble and solid gold for contrast. Simplicity is overrated, if Cain was making a Mythic tower, he wanted people to write Myths about it.

"There is a quest to conquer it out now. The levels are randomized by the quest, but each one will be two levels stronger than the last. The further up you go the better the reward." Cain explained, proud of his creation.

"Can I be the first to try to prove my worth?" Larkin asked. He was clearly speaking to Cain, but he was still giving a worshipping look to Kone.

Clearly, the boy was fully house-trained at this point. She was the only thing he thought about all day long. If Misha was here, Cain suspected that the look he was giving Kone wouldn't bother him so much, but as things stood, jealousy was getting the better of him.

"Go, try hard, and make your lover proud," Cain told him with a wink and Larkin scurried off towards the open gates that marked the only entrance to the building.

As soon as Larkin activated the quest, the tower revealed a spell interaction that Cain hadn't expected. One set of statues eyes on the second floor lit up with a pale purple light, a reflection of the Arcane element magic that protected those inside the tower. Defensive spells often have visual effects, but Cain had thought they wouldn't be able to see the ones from the tower since they were engraved on the inside.

A few minutes later, the lights shifted to the third floor, then the fourth. They slowly made it all the way to the tenth floor before there was a pop of magic, familiar to Cain as the noise made as a portal opened, and Larkin was unceremoniously deposited on the floor by the entrance.

The Crusader was battered, bruised and his sword was nearly broken, showing cracks all down the length, and he looked up at Kone with tears in his eyes.

"That spell is evil, pure evil. You beat me so badly." He whined.

"Come again?" Kone asked, not understanding what he meant.

"On the tenth floor, there was only one enemy. You. The copy of you beat me within an inch of my life then ordered Su to bite my head off." Larkin complained, finally recovering enough mana to cast a healing spell on himself and repair the worst of the damage.

He had a point, there were teeth marks on his neck, and the clone of Su clearly intended to bite his head off, even though the real one was giving a disgusted look at the thought. She much preferred a vegetarian diet. Unwashed Larkin was no great delicacy in her eyes.

"I should probably add a healing totem spell to the main floor to go with the mana collection and recovery enchantments." Cain mused as the transfers who came to watch the first test of the tower stared at Larkin in a mixture of amusement and shock.

"It seems to be a great training device though. How much experience did you get Larkin?" Kone asked with a smirk.

"4 percent of a level." He answered with a sigh. It was indeed a good amount of experience, but that only meant that he was likely going to have to go in there again and relive the trauma of having a dragon bite his head off again.

"How many can it hold?" Someone in the crowd asked eagerly, looking at the now dim eyes of the statue that previously showed Larkin's level.

"If I counted correctly, we should be able to have one hundred contestants at a time inside the tower. It will stop letting people access the Separate Spaces once the spell is at capacity." Cain shrugged and the crowd surged towards the gate, wanting to experience this tower for themselves.

"You're sure they won't die, right?" Cyrene whispered in Cain's ear.

"Not even if they want to." He confirmed, giving the Lamia a vague sense of unease. What would happen if someone got a Dark Elf level or something similar and got captured? Would they simply be stuck in the tower until someone released them?

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

Chapter 476 476

Once Larkin was determined to be distinctly not dead, dozens of intrepid souls raced into the tower to try their luck. The quest reward from the Guild wasn't much, but the System side of the prize offered a progressively better bonus for every ten levels completed inside the tower.

To complete even the first ten, you had to be able to fight monsters twenty levels above your own, which was no small thing to most classes. That wasn't going to stop the residents of Long Fang Valley, though, especially the Bear Kin.

When they got the news that they could fight through monsters up to a hundred levels above their own anytime they wanted, their first response was to ask for time off from work. Even among the non-combat classes, the bears were almost all battle maniacs.

Most of the others knew about their personalities already, and that was a large part of the reason that they rushed inside the moment it was declared properly operational. If they didn't they would have to fight the bears for space.

One after another, the eyes of the statues lit up, moving up the tower as the contestants proved their worth. Well, mostly. More than a few were ejected after only a few levels. They either weren't well suited for combat, or they got a particularly poor matchup and were eliminated.

"That's totally wrong, I swear I can do better, it's just those stupid Lamia. No offense Miss Cyrene." One of the warriors who got ejected on the first floor of the trial complained.

"Dude, how is it even possible to do that badly? One of the Bear Kin who was waiting in line asked, trying to prepare himself for the trial.

"There were like twenty Lamia Scourge Casters in the first level. By the time I found the first of them, they had surrounded me and then they all cast their blades at me. I could only block or dodge so many and the next thing I knew, I was on the ground floor bleeding." He explained, giving the tower an angry glare.

"At least you only got scourge blades. On level 9 I got a level 134 version of the Port Nefheim Cavalry dinosaurs and I spent the next five minutes running away before being eaten." A young Bear Kin laughed, having enjoyed himself despite the situation. It's not often you get into a fistfight with dinosaurs on the Central Continent after all.

"Once you're finished and healed, please make way for the next group. I don't want to have to put visitation limits on the Tower the very first day." Cain called, seeing more and more people lingering around and impeding people from entering.

A few hours in one of the local heroes finally got off work and came to try his luck at the Tower.

"En, it's good to see you. I thought you were living in Port Nefheim?" Cain asked when he saw the huge and plump black-furred Bearkin Monster Hunter.

"I am, but the others made this sound so fun that I couldn't resist. I hear it can go up to level 400, and that there is more than one enemy per level?" Po asked eagerly, the golden fur on her face contrasting against the black of the rest of her fur, and the black leather armor she was wearing.

"That's right. You might have to wait a while if nobody is willing to give up their spot in line though. The tower has been pretty popular for the opening day since we told people they won't die inside." Cain laughed at the nearly three-meter-tall woman's enthusiasm.

"You can have my spot En!" One of the bears near the front calls. He is black and white, like Po the Remembrancer is and doesn't look like much of a fighter. In contrast, the huge and grizzled Monster Hunter makes him look like a little kid, despite the fact he's still over two meters tall.

"Thanks. Let's see if I can set a new record. I've been working hard and I'm up to level 230 now." En declares with pride.

That's a lot stronger than the locals, and an excellent test of the Tower's power scaling. It has already proven to have some idiosyncracies, where multiple lower-level monsters who work well together have been able to easily defeat many powerful applicants. En doesn't look worried though, and she has the experience to back up her confidence.

Before she came to Port Nefheim with her friend Po, she had spent a long time in the forests hunting dinosaurs and other monsters alone, using mostly her own body as her weapon.

The whole line stopped when she entered so that everyone could watch her progress and not have to find out secondhand where the mighty warrior was tripped up.

"There's a new light here. That must be En." A voice called from just the other side of the doors, almost out of sight from where Cain and the Companions were standing.

Those who weren't in line all shifted over to watch the lights progress up the tower. The first few trials only lasted a few seconds each, making Cain sure it was in fact her lights. That was a great oversight on his part. He had no way to watch from the outside or to track the progress of the fighters that were inside. Thinking about it, he likely could have added the functions, but it didn't occur to him and he would have to tear down the tower and start over to do it now.

The mystery was part of the experience now, he decided, watching the lights reach the tenth level and hold there for a few minutes while the mighty bear fought.

According to those who exited, the moment you finished a fight you would be moved to the next floor. Whether you got a break or not was entirely up to the opponent on the next floor. Because of that, dragging out a fight to catch your breath was widely considered a valid tactic to push further up the tower instead of running out of mana and exhausting yourself with continual battles.

Some of the earliest to enter were annoyed that they didn't think of it, but most of the fights seemed to end up with a hard counter, also known as a brutal beating by an enemy that they were poorly equipped to fight.

En was now fifteen levels up, so she would be fighting level 260 opponents, and the progress up the tower had slowed to a crawl. The inside of the tower was large, but most of the time the fight started with both parties just outside engagement range. Cain thought En must have been either reaching the end of her stamina, or the extent of her capabilities.

The fifteenth finally fell, and then after only a minute or so on the sixteenth floor, En reappeared, scorched and bleeding, but laughing.

"What did you find on the sixteenth floor?" One of the younger Bear Kin asked his idol, who had progressed further than anyone else in the trial.

"Combat Bunnies," En informed him seriously.

"Bunnies? You got beat up by Bunnies?" The statement simply refused to process in his mind.

"Combat Bunnies. Wearing priest robes and wielding martial arts reinforced with Lightning Magic." En confirmed.

"Hey, I know them. They work for Duke Chen." Cyrene laughed, making everyone turn to look at her.

"What? They might be Bunnies, but they are scary." The Lamia shrugged, squeezing Cain's waist as a signal to get him to back her up.

"Duke Chen trains them very well. Don't look down on the Bunnies just because they're usually peaceful." Cain agreed, fixing Cyrene's braid while the Bears begged En for a play-by-play of her trial in the tower.

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

Chapter 477 477 Cyrene's Trial

"Do you mind if I try? I'm not the greatest of combat types, but with my visions, I'm not too bad." Cyrene asked Cain hopefully, still wrapped around his waist.

"You do have a bunch of fire elemental magic and better combat sense than almost anyone but En, so I think you should be fine to go fight. Just be careful, I know that the contents of the tower can be particularly tricky and I don't want you dropping out early because of a careless mistake." Cain told her with a sly wink, making everyone around her chuckle.

To the people here, Cyrene was well known for her level-headed decisions, using her visions to assist her decision-making where the Guild was expecting trouble as well as a way to predict where the best rewards might be.

But Cain knew better. Cyrene was actually horribly insecure and desperate for affirmation, so she did her very best at all times so that she wouldn't let down the people around her. Telling her to focus wasn't a sign that he viewed her as absent-minded, Cain was actually worried that she would try too hard and make simple mistakes that led to her being eliminated.

Instead of unwrapping herself, Cyrene tugged Cain forward for a moment, then realized what she was doing. "Sorry, it's just so comfortable here that my body didn't want to move there for a moment."

Before the onlookers could realize what she meant, the Lamia was slithering away at a running pace, bypassing the line to take up the next spot in line to enter. Like they did with En, everyone simply waited until she had begun her trial so the bystanders could see which one was her statue.

But this time, they didn't wait and watch. Cyrene wasn't a combat class, so she was unlikely to set any new records. In the minds of the Bear Kin that meant that they could find out how she had performed once their own runs were finished.

The first floor that Cyrene found herself on was a reproduction of a destroyed village, with small green creatures running around. At first, she thought they were Goblins, but they were too short for even the Green Goblin species, who were smaller than their Red kin. Then she finally got a good view of one and the System identified it as a form of Lesser Murlock.

That definitely sounded less dangerous than a Goblin, so she carefully slid forward until she had a decent view of the area. There were five of them in total, and her first instinct was to use the Guild Skill and call for Summons to wipe them out.

[Guild Skills Unavailable in the Tower] was the message when she tried.

"Well then, I'll have to get my hands dirty." She whispered to herself and fired a barrage of [Flame Arrows] into the group.

Cyrene had pretty decent spell power, but a single [Flame Arrow] each wasn't going to take down monsters her own level. The arrows were merely baiting them forward for the easiest way her visions had shown her to win this fight. [Flame Wall] had a much shorter range, but covered a significant amount of ground, so once the small creatures were in range, Cyrene unleashed the trap and roasted them all alive.

"Oh, man those smell good." She whispered, moving forward to attempt to grab one, but just then the setting changed and she was on a new level.

"The Master is too cruel. Filling the air with the smell of roast meat, but letting the tower move you out before it can be eaten." Cyrene sighed as a vision of the next battle flashed in her head.

Things were going fairly smoothly for Cyrene thanks to her visions until she reached the eighth floor. The setting was a cavern with no exits, and there were eight very large Fire Golems here. The only real attacks Cyrene had were Fire based, to which they were completely immune.

She focused on her visions, trying to make a strategy, but every idea she had just led to an even more brutal death. Who cares if she would be ejected at 5HP if they were going to peel her skin off her while she was alive?

"Can I forfeit? That looks like a really, really bad way to die." Cyrene asked nobody in particular.

[Forfeit now to collect your reward?] Y/N

The system message gave her a great sense of relief.

"Yes, so much yes," Cyrene answered, then found herself standing on the main floor of the tower.

[Quest Completed: Challenge the Tower] Reward granted 5 Gold Coins, 2 percent of the current level in experience.

[Achievement Unlocked: Know Your Place] As the first to quit the trial before being forcibly ejected due to your own stupidity, a special reward has been prepared.

'Well, that's just a little bit rude. Was the System always like that?' Cyrene wondered. If Cain had seen the message he would have known right away that it was a personal reward from the Laughing God for doing the thing that he had been hoping all along someone would try. But Cyrene herself hadn't previously had any such personal interaction.

[Reward Granted: Variable Spell of Elemental Bolt] Mythic rank ranged magical attack that can create a 10cm ball of energy from any elemental variety.

[Awakening: Mythic] Completed

[Modifiers Adjusted]

[New Defensive Ability Gained]

"Master Cain, Master Cain, I got an amazing reward!" Cyrene shouted as she raced out of the tower and back around Cain's waist in an instant.

"You got faster. Very nice." Cain congratulated her, noticing from her status that she was now Mythic Awakened, so her increase in speed was likely just a side effect of whatever the real reward was.

"No, not that. I got Mythic attack magic that can switch between elements. My last level was Fire Elementals, and I could only use fire magic, so I ran away and it gave me the spell as the reward." she explained, releasing first ice and then lightning balls straight up into the air as an explanation.

"You got a Mythic spell from level 8 of the tower? How is that fair? I got a pack of Epic grade Ramen Noodles." One of the Guild Members complained, drawing the attention of many others.

"Did you say Epic Grade noodles? How much?"

"Whatever he is offering I will pay you more!"

Just like that, the new spell that Cyrene received was overshadowed by the prospect of Epic Grade Noodles. There was at least a good excuse for that at least, since Epic food items like that usually refreshed on a daily cooldown timer and weren't single-use, so whoever got them could enjoy the meal every day. It made them both somewhat useless in everyday life, and incredibly valuable at the same time.

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

Chapter 478 478

"We should call the other Dukes and King James over to come to see the tower. Arrange a banquet for tomorrow night and I will take care of the party favors." Cain's instructions shocked Svetlana, who had only just come over to see what the commotion around the tower was all about.

"No problem boss. Should we send mounts for the Dukes? The areas between cities still aren't all that safe with the remainder of the dungeon residents wandering about. From here to the Capital is fine, both the Guild and the City Guard under Duke Archibald are patrolling the main roads, but the Dukes in outlying areas might not be comfortable traveling, and the Circles have been on lockdown since the Dungeons broke. Inside the dungeons that weren't monsters, a lot of the residents might have been crazy, but they still remembered how to use them." The Fox Kin Commander who served as the manager of the Long Fang Valley region suggested, her fluffy white tails flicking in annoyance as she thought of all the work she still had to do today.

"I will unlock our circle to visitors from every Duke and expected foreign visitor's personal residence. Tell them that if they travel from home they will be able to come here directly." Cain informed her and the Commander breathed a sigh of relief. That decision would save her so many headaches with nobles who wanted security for the journey.

"Will there be punch? The news of the miraculous Mythic fruit juice that heals blemishes and improves the skin has spread all over the continent already." Svetlana asked, making notes of who should be invited.

"Yeah, since we only serve it as half a wine glass each, it goes a long way. Call for friendly leaders from other regions of the continent as well. Maybe Lancelot from Landis, and someone from the Yellow Tusk Clan. Do we know any elves? The former

Landis Prince Sven should still be on the contact list if they want to attend as well. The wider the range of people we can bring, the better it will be for Guild relations." Cain added and the Commander sighed, adding more names.

"I know it's a hassle, but it's best not to snub anyone. I will talk to the outreach workers and have them arrange for a few more influential people to be brought as well. The Guild has a pretty solid place on the Continent, but a Training Tower and a new Mythic drink would make us the talk of every city on the Central Continent." Cyrene added, before starting to send her own messages to help out Svetlana.

"Get a shipment of meat from the Southern Continent as well. A side dish of Mythic Monster Meat will really cement into everyone's mind that we could crush them without much effort if they complained." Kone added, but the look in her eyes suggested that she was more interested in the meat than politics.

"That's fine, we have hunters going out every day, so there is no shortage. I don't know how things are here, but on the Southern Continent there are Mythic Monsters appearing every night at midnight when the magical power of the planet peaks."

Cain's words shocked those around him. If even one of them appeared here, it would be an absolute disaster, but the Southern Continent hunted them on a daily basis.

"Magical creatures appear here daily as well, but they usually flee from the valley right away if they appear here. The presence of powerful transfers is enough to drive them away. Other regions aren't as lucky, that's why so many of us have come to Long Fang Valley." A man in pale blue armor answers from his spot in line to try the tower.

"How far away did you come from?" Cain asked, not recognizing the man's armor as a nation's pattern and seeing that he didn't have a Guild tag.

"Not too far, my clan were nomads in the Steppes, but we lost most of our numbers due to disease. I made my way from Niman Territory a few years back and settled about three days' walk down the road. The territory there was under the jurisdiction of a rather kind Baron, but he fell when the dungeons opened. His manor was built with a dungeon in the yard, and it was full of very angry Fae." The warrior explained.

That would be enough to wipe out most families. With a dungeon only steps away from his home, they would have appeared all through the house and surrounding area the moment the spell was broken by whatever the Gnomes were trying to do on the Western Continent. They simply didn't stand a chance unless they were ready for battle, but as Cain recalled, it would have been the middle of the night here, so they were probably in bed.

"How bad are the outlying regions of Skyview? Should I expect a request to send forces to help with the stability?" Cain asked, and the man nodded for Cyrene to answer.

"We already did. The initial wave of monsters has been mostly dealt with, and there are a pair of Outreach workers in the area looking after the farmers that stayed, but the village there was annihilated and most of the crops were destroyed, so a lot of people left." Cyrene shrugged.

That was the story of a hundred different locations, and the duty of two hundred Guild Members at the moment. Until the Skyview army could increase its numbers again, the smaller villages would have to fend for themselves with whatever help they could find, the cities were doing all they could to keep order and deal with the refugees.

"Fair enough. We only have so many people under our direct command, and King James should be doing what he can. Ultimately it's not our duty, just a moral obligation." Cain agreed, and all the nearby black and white tabard-wearing followers and members of the Darklight Host nodded along. That is what they expected of the mighty Guild Master Cain. Even though he didn't know any of the villagers who were affected and his own lands were safe, he was still willing to push his people to do the right thing.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

Chapter 479 479

Preparing for a city-wide feast and festival was practically the local specialty of Long Fang Valley. They threw massive parties and festivals for a dozen holidays a year, plus every time the Duke had a function going on, so the announcement was no shock to anyone in the area, only a pleasant surprise.

The response to the news of the training tower had been overwhelmingly positive, and even the Royal Family of the Serrah Woods, as requested by Prince Sven, had agreed to send a small delegation directly to the Manor to partake in the festivities.

They didn't care about the fancy meats, being vegetarian. Still, the prospect of a Mythic fruit juice that Cain promised could hold up even to the refined taste of the Elven Forest Teas was enough to drag the homebodies of the Royal Family halfway across the continent for an evening of entertainment.

The Serrah Woods was one of the few places where the Darklight Host didn't have a presence on the Central Continent. They weren't big on visitors and didn't need outside help, as there weren't many dungeons in the area, and they had them sealed inside magical protective barriers at all times. For two hundred years, people called them paranoid, but on that one fateful day, they were finally proven to be prophetic geniuses.

The monsters were ejected but trapped in the barriers and eliminated by a force that the Elves could guarantee did not allow for any of the insane former dungeon residents to escape.

They also had magical beasts appearing regularly, but being as in tune with nature as they were, the elves and the Fae that lived alongside them mostly either ignored them or tamed them as pets, only eliminating the ones that were needlessly violent.

The first guest to arrive was King James, who had a spa day with his harem scheduled at Long Fang Manor anyhow, using the half-day process as an excuse to hide from everyone for the morning. He still took care of business, but only allowed a select few to contact him, reducing his personal stress levels.

"Greetings Your Highness, and the Royal Princess Consorts." Cain welcomed them warmly, greeting them at the transport gate, where they all stopped to stare at the imposing sight of the Tower of Trials.

"Impressive. That's just, wow. How high of a level can use it as a training location?" King James stammered, noticing the long line of transfers still waiting for a turn even this early in the morning.

"It can create targets up to level 400 and Mythic Awakened. Beyond that is out of its current power level, but as I get stronger I could likely make a better one somewhere." Cain responded happily, admiring his newest creation just as intensely as the King was.

"Will that even be necessary here? I mean, will the wild monsters here get that strong?" King James whispered nervously.

"It will cover Legendary monsters, which you might see a very few of, but I don't think that Mythic Beasts will be appearing here, the mana density is still much lower here than on the Southern Continent where they are already appearing every morning. But don't worry about that for now. Enjoy your morning and I will arrange you a special lunch before the rest of the dignitaries arrive."

Cain planned to give them all a glass of straight Mango Juice, which would give James and his entire harem absolutely perfect skin and hair. Just a little bonus for an old friend. The rest of the lunchtime meal was more in the nature of using him as a culinary experiment guinea pig. The special treats had been taste tested by the Puppets and some Guild Members, but Cain couldn't guarantee that they would all be suited to the tastes of the various dignitaries around the continent.

So, since James had nobles of no fewer than four species with him, he was the perfect sample group to try new things that would be mass-produced at a later date.

He wasn't the only one to arrive early. Morgan of the Yellow Tusk Clan came only a few minutes after him, announcing that she was here alone today since her husband was sulking and everyone else was busy dealing with the new hunting grounds.

Her hair had been braided into rows and had purple streaks dyed in it, emulating the style of Maggie, the Orcish Lieutenant at Blood Sands Castle. The change in style made her look even more imposing than usual, though still much different than the Lieutenant since Morgan's skin tone was much darker. An Orc's green skin tone naturally darkened with exposure to the sun, where the Lieutenant's healed back to the same shade it was the day they were summoned.

"It's good to see you again. If you want to take a go at the tower before the rest arrive, I'm sure nobody will get too mad about letting you cut into the line." Cain barely had time to suggest the idea before the big orcish woman clapped him on the back and dragged him towards the tower.

This was what she came here for. The Clan had found a large group of Epic wild Boars that had just recently appeared, but Morgan was nearly level 250 now, and the beasts had appeared at level 180. They were slowly climbing in power as the days passed, but she was still more than their match, so she came to see what the mighty Guild Master of the Darklight Host had come up with for entertainment.

He had been a force of nature in combat the last time she met him, and from what she had heard he was only getting better, so she had high hopes that this tower would be worth the effort.

"How do we set the difficulty?" She asked eagerly as they got close to the tower entrance.

"It does it automatically. It will start at your level and then go up after every victory. If you can hold out, you will be able to face targets up to three hundred and fifty. It shouldn't give you awakened targets unless you are awakened yourself though. At least, I don't think it will." Cain answered since he couldn't really guarantee what would appear now that the System was in charge of creating the levels. He only set the base spell and left it to randomize within the parameters, which is under the purview of the Laughing God.

Morgan only smiled and waved to the bear kin that was next in line, handing him a piece of Boar Jerky for his patience as she entered.

Everyone knew to expect dignitaries all day long, so an Orc suddenly appearing wasn't a shock to them, even if they found her level of bloodlust impressive.

Morgan took almost two hours to appear again, battered and bruised, with her armor in tatters.

"That was almost better than sex. You should make more of these so I don't have to go so far to find a proper fight." She laughed, changing from her armor into a casual outfit suitable for the evening's festivities.

"Maybe some other time, but you are welcome to visit whenever you like. How did you do?" Cyrene answered on Cain's behalf, looking up at the tower since she didn't see Morgan's lights. They must have appeared on the other side of the building.

"Not too badly. I made it to the fourteenth floor and got into an amazing battle with a group of dragons. Unfortunately, my last sword broke and I didn't win, but it was incredible."

After having said that much, there was no way that the bears were going to let her go without telling her story. If the two species had one thing in common, it was definitely their love for tales of epic battles.

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

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The damage to weapons and armor might have been an oversight on Cain's part, but if the contestants were going to go all out like that, it would be great for business here in the valley. They only had a few weapons and armor vendors right now, but they could have a considerable amount of inventory sent over whenever they wanted from the other crafters' locations.

Cain sent for a replacement armor set for Morgan on his tab, and they headed back to the Manor, frequently stopping to talk to the various friendly people along the way.

Morgan was not interested in a trip to the spa, so instead, they sat in the garden and chatted about the recent changes on the east side of the Central Continent. At the same time, the Puppets brought them experimental recipes to sample. The Orcs were doing well, the Landis Kingdom not as much, but well enough that it was at least not in danger of failing right away.

The only real issue was the desert, where nobody had control to begin with, and the spine of mountains that ran down the center of the continent. Unfortunately, the mountains were too rugged to support much of a population, so there weren't enough residents to clear any considerable size of daily spawn. Still, they seemed to generate

as many monsters daily as any other region, with a heavy preponderance towards earth element sorts.

Slowly the rest of the guests filtered in, each of them stopping in shock at the sight of the Tower in the distance, dominating the skyline in front of them when they came through the travel circle. At first, they thought such a thing might be common on the Southern Continent, where they had heard stories of Mythic Creatures and incredibly powerful transfers, but Cain assured them that the continents weren't all that different in practice. The houses were still similar, and the domestic staff might murder you in your sleep if you suggested that they would have to clean such a monstrosity on a regular basis.

The delegation from Landis, led by Lancelot and accompanied by the Guild Member Carlos, who was currently living in the capital of Landis was the most enthusiastic about coming to train. There was an inordinate number of monsters appearing in their area like the random appearances were in favor of avoiding the Orcs entirely. The fault actually lay in the density of small Ley Lines that interconnected along that section of the shoreline, making the region around the Capital the most likely area to receive new arrivals every night, but Cain decided to keep that information to himself.

If they knew and panicked, they might leave the region entirely, which would let the monsters build up and just make more trouble for everyone else.

Earl Rhick Jaymz brought a number of Dragon Riders from the Northern Continent with him to see what all the fuss was about. They were all over level 400, with some reaching 500 already, so the tower itself didn't impress them too much, but the concept behind it did. It would be amazing for training soldiers before they were awakened, and the requirements to pass the Dragon Rider initiation were incredibly difficult, so the more actual battle experience the youths could get without dying the better their chance of impressing one of the semi-domesticated Dragons that they signed contracts with.

Their mounts weren't summoned, they were personally raised by the Dragon Riders. But they were still Dragons, and if you couldn't impress them they would just eat you for the insult of suggesting you should ride on top of them.

Laura particularly emphasized with that sentiment and spent many hours of the afternoon chatting with the mounts about the hardships of working with other species. Cain rarely rode on her, since he mostly summoned other beings and she remained in her Pixie form unless she needed to fight as a Dragon, but that didn't do much to slow her stream of complaints, it just toned them down a little.

The largest of the mounts, a powerful Red Dragon thought it was particularly amusing when she complained about her snacks being requisitioned for others.

"If we can get the dignitaries to the main dining hall, the kitchen has a special treat for everyone," Svetlana called out once everything was ready, gathering all the visitors who

had scattered through the city to get a better understanding of what was working here in Skyview, or at least the Long Fang Valley.

What followed was possibly the most eclectic gathering of political leaders that the Central Continent had ever seen. A Fae Queen and a Dragon debated the merits of honey versus fruit-based sweets, while a Bear Kin Clan Chieftan and an Orc Princess sparred with chopsticks for the last bit of sweet and sour Mystic Flying Boar. An Elven Princess and her Fox Kin husband did their best to convince a Kitsune assassin to come home with them as a pet, while an Ancient and a Demon King discussed infrastructure plans.

In the end, much was decided, but none of it was as important as the decision to build a second Training Tower in the Demon Capital.

Their higher physical grades would let them progress very rapidly in this environment, and so they needed a constantly evolving physical challenge to keep their senses tuned to the maximum and hone their combat skills.

The city itself had been heavily damaged during the Dungeon incident, but it was well on the way to being repaired, with more than a few now vacant spaces belonging to now deceased family lines. The Guild's Forge was still intact and operational, having been fiercely defended by the best geared of the city's defenders, but there was nowhere near it to build such a large tower.

Instead, they would be building a much smaller tower, still fifty stories tall, but with a footprint only a hundred meters around. That would still give more than enough room inside, once the [Separate Space] enchantment activated, and fit in a single city block, like the other high-rise towers of the Demon City.

Construction of the new landmark was scheduled to start in three months, once things had begun to settle and everyone had spare time for new projects, which would also give Cain a chance to increase his level, making the building more useful to high-ranked demons. A win-win cooperation between the Darklight Host and the Demon Kingdom.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

- Chapter 481 481 Darklight Ascendant

Chapter 481 481 Darklight Ascendant

The banquet marked a turning point for the Darklight Host as a continent-wide organization. Even though the System limited the actual number of Guild Members, the good words spoken about them by the various Nations' Leaders made them popular with the commoners everywhere.

They already had a strong presence in many of these places, but the Serrah Woods, where they previously didn't have any influence, had invited Kone and some of the Druids there to set up a small camp and offer their services to those helping the forests and dealing with the newly spawned monsters that didn't believe in peaceful coexistence.

Seemingly overnight, having a Darklight Host outpost in your town became a sign of political influence and trustworthiness. The outposts could call on forces strong enough to level a small nation in minutes, and they sold everything you could imagine but refused to undercut local merchants.

That fair trade policy only made them more popular and avoided disastrous trade wars between regions. They also bought many products at wholesale prices, which helped small producers who had been muscled out of their local market.

Their competition wasn't happy, but what could they do? The Darklight Host wasn't selling goods any cheaper than they were, and no merchant group had the might to run them out of town.

Plus, the Demon in charge of negotiations was merciless. A fact that one city-state which chose to attack their emissaries and killed a guild member learned the hard way.

The entire city of Knox now technically belonged to the Darklight Host, since they killed every serving noble in the city-state, and the survivors of their families signed over the deeds to their land in exchange for their lives. But the Outreach Workers, as they called themselves, simply allowed the successors to continue business as usual on behalf of the Guild. The only real change was that a Guild official would approve their budget and collect taxes on their behalf, effective immediately.

The commoners viewed it as a win for them since the Darklight Host had very benevolent rules on worker treatment and taxation. The heirs of the nobles were just glad to be alive after their parents insulted such a powerful force.

Cain lay in bed, entangled with Cyrene and Nemu while Svetlana related all the latest information to him. It wasn't that he couldn't get out of bed, but that he couldn't do it without hurting someone, and Cyrene simply wasn't waking up.

Sure, they had only been in bed a few hours, but that was enough for Cain and Nemu didn't need sleep at all. The Lamia on the other hand needed a full night, and she was a restless sleeper, which led to their current entanglement.

Slowly Nemu made her way out of the pile with the assistance of Svetlana and headed for breakfast while waving back at Cain in amusement.

"I'll bring something to eat up for you. The snake has been lonely with both you and Misha away, we should let her sleep a little longer. " The Felian companion whispered as she left.

Feeling the empty space, Cyrene snuggled tighter around Cain and sighed in happiness.

Looking down at her happily sleeping form, Cain decided that he had been neglecting his faithful followers a little too much. He hadn't even been back to visit most of the Guild Houses on the Central Continent in ages, he just left it all to his subordinates. If nobody ever actually saw the Guild Master, how long would it be before they decided that he needed to be replaced?

Cain had seen Guild Wars of succession before, and they weren't pretty. If at all possible, he hoped to save the Darklight Host from that fate, even though they now outnumbered any other guild he had seen by quite a large margin.

The Lieutenants and Svetlana had said that Cyrene was doing a great job of keeping everyone focused and loyal to the guild and that the Guild Skill that relied on him being Guild Master was powerful enough that very few would even think of betraying him, but still, it wasn't good to let people feel neglected.

The smell of food was enough to drag Cyrene out of her deep sleep, despite still being exhausted from yesterday's excitement, but not enough to convince her to let go of Cain and get out of bed. Instead, the Puppet from the kitchen left breakfast on the bed for them while Cain tidied up Cyrene's appearance and got her ready for the day.

"I wonder if this is what it's like to have kids? Wake them up, do their hair, get them dressed, wipe pancake syrup from their faces." Cain mused out loud.

"I'm not that helpless," Cyrene complained, then abruptly stopped when Cain wiped the pancake syrup from her face.

"Oh, that part was a hint. But still, I can take care of myself."

Cain just smiled and tied her hair up into an intricate braid after slipping a dress that the puppets had left on the nightstand over her head.

"Of course, you're not helpless. You're a Mythic Awakened demon. But you still like it when someone cuddles and pampers you."

"Cuddles are not age dependent. But could you use the white ribbons in my hair? I think they would look good with this dress." Cyrene pouted, while Cain adjusted his work.

"Why don't we take a little tour around the other Guild Houses and then I can show you around the farm on the Southern Continent? There are a few more potential Guild Members that have trials for City Guardian positions this week and I should be there to congratulate them." Cain suggested.

"I can come with you? Like everywhere, and all the time? That would be amazing." Cyrene cheered, wrapping Cain up in a full-body hug after untangling herself from her haphazard sleeping position.

"I think your body is growing up as well. Your scales are getting even smoother, and I can sense power collecting in the red designs." Cain ran his hands over them to show what he meant. Before her scales were a bit rough, making it easier to grab onto things, now only the belly was, and the top side was getting slippery and smooth.

"That's new. I don't think that was happening yesterday. Do you think it could have to do with the awakening? I heard that a lot of demons progress in quality as they advance their skills or levels. Could I be changing into a ranked demon now that I have an awakened skill and better stats?"

"That's possible. I could modify you a little and make sure, but I've already done it once and I wouldn't want to accidentally undo anything that I did the first time." Cain told her, wondering what exactly the advancement requirements were for Demons.

"There's lots of time to figure it out though. Now, let's finish our food so we can go visit everyone."

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

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With a full stomach, Cain and Cyrene decided to start at the beginning, with the Guild Houses in the Beginner's Valley. Cain hadn't seen Char or Elmira in ages, and they both spent all their time in the Beginner's Valley, only rarely coming out for functions. They didn't even make it to the big international gathering, using the excuse that they had already planned a function with the younger members.

Instead of giving them a warning that they could use to make other plans, Cain simply decided to show up with Cyrene and see how things were going. The first stop will be in Sunnybrook, at the ladies' preferred Guild House in the forest city.

The sight that greets him there is not what he was expecting though. The moment he stepped out of the travel circle, Cain was swarmed by children. Over a dozen of them, all apparently under the age of ten, in their species development scale, heard the circle activate and came to see who the visitor was.

"Look, look it's the Guild Master! He's bigger than I thought he was. Hey Guild Master, do all humans get that big?" An elven boy, who according to his status sheet was a level 12 Mage and a Guild Member, asked Cain, before noticing Cyrene wrapped around his waist.

"Miss Cyrene, it's good to see you again. We have been practicing the books you left behind last time. We've got them all memorized now, we just need to get a little bigger and we will be the very best outreach workers ever." The boy tells her proudly, not waiting for Cain to answer the first round of questions.

"What's all this noise? You're supposed to be doing schoolwork." Char's voice comes from upstairs, followed by the sound of her footsteps.

"But Mom, we wanna talk to the Guildmaster," Cain calls in a fake childish voice.

"Very funny, now you little... Oh, Guild Master Cain, welcome. I didn't know you were coming." Char greets him with a smile that lets Cain know right away that she's hiding something.

"This is an interesting little daycare you have going on. All Guild Members as well, I see." Cain smiles, knowing that the Shaman has always wanted more kids of her own to replace the ones she lost when she lost her last life and got transferred here.

"We were the city's orphans that nobody else wanted and Miss Char took us all in as her own." One of the little Elven girls informs Cain.

She looks to be about five years old, which should be fairly accurate, it's at about age eight when the Elves start slowing down in their maturation, and in their late teens when it practically stops. She's far from the only one in that age range, so Char has secured herself children to raise for at least the next two decades. But, Cain is willing to overlook her oddities, since she did turn out quite a few capable Guild Members so far.

"Is Elmira here? I brought some sweets for her to try." Cain asked with a smile.

"Oh, she will love you forever for that. She should be right upstairs, resting in the sunlight. She took the kids through the market earlier to gather supplies, so she's pretty exhausted." Char says with a wink, then turns a motherly glare at the kids who are still watching their conversation instead of doing their schoolwork.

"I will be down again to check on you, so don't think you can slack just because we have a visitor," Char informs the kids, who rush back to their seats.

"You have them pretty well trained," Cyrene says, looking at how hard they're working once reprimanded.

"Not as well as hoped, but kids will be kids. There are rewards for doing well on their schoolwork, so they don't slack too much though. A few days back we all went to see the new play at the theater, that's why I couldn't come to the big Guild gathering. It was one night only, and they had been looking forward to it for weeks." Char explained.

"That's fair. Now, where is my favorite Pixie?" Cain asked as Elmira came rushing through the house to land in his pocket.

"How was the Southern Continent? Did you bring back good stuff? I was going to go see you, but it's not safe out there, and there was nobody else going." Elmira greeted him, entirely overlooking the fact that the Travel Circle would have brought her directly to the Long Fang Valley Manor.

Or maybe she's just become so obsessed with safety that being outdoors in an unfamiliar area is more of a risk than she's willing to take.

"I brought back lots of good stuff. Including mythic quality sweet juices and some new snacks." Cain's answer is almost enough to draw her immediately out of his pocket, but Elmira managed to resist the temptation to beg for an entire six seconds while he brought a small glass of juice out of his inventory.

"Oh that's good, not too sweet, not too tart and it works as a potion. You should tell everyone about this stuff." Elmira sighed, sipping at the mixture of Peach and Pear juice, heavily diluted for drinking.

The only truly important part of this visit is finding out how the Beginner's Valley is doing. Outside, the monsters have started rapidly leveling up, but here in the Valley, there is no chance that the locals could deal with a single level 200 Elite rank monster, much less an Epic grade former dungeon boss.

From the conversations that Cain can hear the kids having while they're supposed to be studying, it sounds like the Dungeons in the valley didn't collapse though.

"How is the situation in the valley?" Cain asks the Pixie, whose paranoia should make her a good judge of changing danger levels.

"The same as always. The barrier stopped the spell from collapsing, and everything stabilized by the end of the day. There were some people that went missing inside unstable dungeons, but other than that, it's all business as usual in the valley. The monsters outside can't get in if they're over level 100, and with Montauk right there to guard the valley, they don't even bunch up at the gate anymore. The hunters from the exit city cleared them all out for rewards." Elmira explained while Char nodded her agreement.

"That's the best news we could have hoped for. I thought they might have needed to send Guild Members to protect the cities like they did so many other places, but if the valley is safe, then I am content to leave things as they are. The kids that level up here can move on to the other Guild Houses once they reach the first advancement, and then they can help with the outreach work."

Cyrene giggles a little at Cain's mention of Outreach Work, since he is the only one that doesn't know that he has been framed as the object of their devotion, the Immortal Guild Master and Guiding force of the Darklight Host.

Everyone here is fully devoted to Cyrene's vision though, so they aren't going to say anything about it that might cause trouble or upset the Guild Master.

"Why don't we take a walk through the city and then we can go check on the situation in Graska? I'm sure the old dwarves would be very happy to see you again, and the staff there misses you." Char deflected the topic away from talk of the Guild's work and on to topics that weren't as serious.

The children were only half the reason she stayed here in the valley since children are born everywhere. The rest of the reason Char stayed is because of the laid-back atmosphere. Sure, the people are mostly very poor, but the greed and backstabbing of her previous life didn't make it here. There is no political intrigue anymore, just everyday people living everyday lives in the last protected area of the planet.

They didn't get far before things got strange though. High-level transfers give off a sense of danger simply due to their immense power difference with the population here. Cain had progressed past level 400 with the help of the world's mana increase, and to most of these transfers in the mana-starved Beginner's Valley, his very presence felt like an existential threat, a smaller version of the aura he constantly kept turned off when he was in Ancient form.

"You know what, I'm going to make this a quick visit to the dwarves, and then I'm off to Assah to go visit Earl Rhickjaymz." Cain decided, not wanting to frighten the elves of Sunnybrook anymore. This might be where he came into the world, but it wasn't his home anymore. He had changed far too much to come back now.

The reception in Graska was a much warmer one. Unlike the sensitive Elves, the Dwarves were happy to ignore the sense of danger and come to drink with an old friend. The pub had plenty of Ale, and Cain had plenty of stories, what more could a Dwarf ask for?

By the time they had finished catching up on the basics, the sun had gone down and come up again, leaving piles of dwarves passed out all over the tavern and only a weary-eyed Gramps to listen to Cain's stories of Mythic Beasts and cities of Demons on the Southern Continent.

"Come back and see us again. We'll keep a spot open for you." The old Dwarf told him as Cain stood up to leave, wrapping the unconscious Cyrene around himself.

It was a pleasant bit of Nostalgia, and Cyrene had never been to Graska before or enjoyed the wonders of Dwarven Ale. In only an hour or two, she would be awake again and learn the most valuable lesson about drinking with dwarves. To always have a cure potion handy for the morning after.

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

Chapter 483 483 Northern Embargo

Cyrene's Lamia body was woefully unprepared for the vagaries of a Dwarven Ale hangover. She rarely drank before meeting Cain, since drunk and blind was a horrible combination when you just wanted to go home, and afterward, she was so busy with everything that a night off to drink never really crossed her mind.

"Master Cain, save me." Cyrene moaned the moment that the light from the hallway reached her sensitive eyes.

"Open wide, drink the juice and you will feel much better," Cain said softly since her head was right next to his own.

Once everyone passed out, he moved them both to the Guild Master's room in the Graska Guild house, with its Arabian Harem theme and walls covered in silks. Seeing Cyrene's condition though, Cain regretted not fully closing the door and making it fully dark in here.

"How about a quick soak in the hot tub? There's one here in the room and I can close the door on the way there."

Cyrene was in no condition to move, so Cain simply slung her around his neck a few times like an elaborate necklace and moved to the door, closing it firmly and letting the enchanted lights in the room give it the faintest of a glow. That was more than enough light for both of them since they both had night vision, so Cain unequipped his gear and settled deep into the tub, soaking Cyrene, but keeping her head above water.

"Oh, that's extra warm. Why don't we have this in every bedroom?" Cyrene asked, slithering off of Cain to rest her whole body in the hot water.

"For one, it's large, for two, the condensation would be a nightmare almost anywhere else, and for three, there's already a bathtub that most people use." Cain pointed out as Cyrene settled her head against his chest and relaxed in the water.

Cyrene was deep in thought, and only half awake, so Cain held her head above the water for the next few minutes, enjoying the force of the jets against tired muscles. Eventually, something seemed to register in Cyrene's brain though, and her body tensed as she got a rather suspicious smile on her face.

"Okay, we can start getting up now. If we stay any longer I'll never want to get out." She finally sighed, wrapping herself around Cain's waist in her usual position.

They were both still dripping water when Cain stood up beside the tub and equipped his favorite black suit, leaving Cyrene to pick a black dress with gold embroidery to match him. They were going to visit Assah today, and she wanted to look her best. Earl RhickJaymz might not visit as regularly as King James does, but both were well known in Long Fang Valley, and she didn't want to give him a bad impression of her the first time she visited his home with Cain.

The Guild House in Assah was the quietest of all the houses on a normal day. The only ones that really came here were the members that wanted something from the library or to hang out with the dragons.

Cain and Cyrene said hello to the staff at the Guild House and spent a few minutes talking with the Outreach Workers that were stationed in Assah. According to what they had heard, today, the Earl's dragons were both out of town, as well as a large part of the Dragon Rider force that came from the Northern Continent to help secure the city and keep it a free port.

RhickJaymz himself was in town though, and he had a meeting with the Wave Riders about an attempt to blockade trade between the Central Continent and the Northern. The number of attacks had been increasing, and the ocean-faring Dark Elves were planning a counterattack using the Port of Assah as a staging point to reload their weapons and provisions.

"Duke Cain, you should get in on this. It seems that your ship has become involved as well." The Earl called out when the secretary informed him that Cain and Cyrene had arrived at the Manor house where he did most of his business. Most cities would have a proper city hall, but Assah had the Manor and the Library. Between the two, they were enough for every bit of official business that needed to be done.

Cain knew the feeling very well. The Manor in Long Fang Valley was the main hub for business dealings, while the Administrator's office downtown was mostly there so that Svetlana could escape from the noise and chaos of the main house to actually get her work done.

"Someone was foolish enough to attack Queen Rose? I hope Nila left enough pieces of them to identify the culprit?" Cain asked and the Wave Riders smiled.

"She did. She even left one alive and brought him to us so that we could have a good long talk about the proprieties of attacking Pirates." The aged Elven Captain informed him.

"As long as Nila and Mythryll are fine, I'll let you take care of it. But if it's going to drag more of my Guild into a mess, I'll take care of it right away." Cain shrugged.

"I don't think they'll dare attack that particular ship again, but the blockade is still being a pain in everyone's necks, the way they are messing with the trade routes. From what we can tell, they're from the Western Continent and working with the Frost Giants. The survivor that Nila brought us was a half-ogre, half-human hybrid. Uncommon and not very bright, they're only found on the Western Continent. We got the name of the ogre's boss, but it wasn't anyone we recognized." The Captain sighed and then pointed at the spots on the map where attacks have taken place.

"From what we can tell, they are circling the main trade routes and trying to cut off the North from supplies, so we suspect that they will be sending attacks from the coast towards the Northern Continent soon. Something strange has been going on since the Gnomes caused all that chaos. We have spies on the continent, and they haven't seen anything too outrageous, but the movement of the Frost Giants suggests that they're getting ready to do something big."

Earl RhichJaymz cuts in at that point. "A full-on attack isn't good for anyone, not even the Frost Giants, but that's never stopped them in the past. What we're hoping to do now is to build up the supplies of the Northern Tribes so that they will be ready to repel the invaders, should they show up before summer comes. The Frost Giants always attack in the winter months, the cold gives them an advantage in battle."

That makes sense, Frost Giants and cold climates are natural allies. The summers on the Northern Continent aren't that warm though, so Cain wouldn't rule out them attacking at any time of the year. The real question is why now? The Western Continent must be getting an influx of monsters the same as the other Continents, so why would they be starting a war of expansion now?

Unless they're getting something so bad that they aren't expanding but fleeing.

"What if they're fleeing from something that has recently come to the Continent? There are a lot of Mythic Awakened monsters on the Southern Continent, and the Western Continent was supposed to be at or slightly above their power level the last I heard. Maybe they have had a few Spirit Beasts spawn near them that they couldn't kill?" Cain asked.

"That's a possibility. We don't have any proof, but we also don't have any proof that it didn't happen. If they're being chased off their home Continent though, things are really going to take a turn for the worst everywhere else. Spirit Beasts aren't going to stay put just because of a little water, so once they've hunted the area clear they will move somewhere that's better suited to their temperament and settle in for the long term." A human emissary that Cain doesn't recognize points out.

Cain gently pets Cyrene's head while he thinks and the Wave Riders have finally realized that she is a living demon. Their looks aren't negative though, if anything they're highly intrigued by the fashion statement.

"Say, are you wearing a living Lamia as a belt?" The oldest among the Wave Riders asks him.

"More of a cummerbund. My pants have a belt to hold them up, she keeps my shirt in place." Cain corrects him, making the elves break out in laughter.

,m "You see human, that's what true power looks like. Not bullying or wars. With enough power, you can wear intelligent species as fashion accessories and keep them as pets and nobody will try to stop you." The old elf teased the emissary.

"That war wasn't our fault and you know it. We were set up." He grumbled, annoyed that the long-lived elf had brought up the past again.

When the war between his kingdom and the Wave Riders ended he was just a little boy. It was his father and grandfather's generation that thought they could force the nomadic Pirates to work under their banner, allowing the human kingdom to keep all the spoils for themselves. It hadn't ended well for them.

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

Chapter 484 484

After talking with the group that was gathered at RhickJaymz's office for a while, Cain finally agreed to help them out a little. The attacks had been along the section of the northern continent closest to the Western Continent, so he was going to fly over and check out the region.

He had never been to the Northern Continent before and knew next to nothing about it except that it was somewhere around the Eastern Continent in power, except for the crater in the center which was an awakened area. Well, that and the winters were cold, but the weather hardly counts as essential information about a Continent.

There was only one thing left to do before leaving, and that was to find some winter wear or a warmth spell for Cyrene. Lamia aren't cold-blooded, but they are very sensitive to the cold, with a lot of normally uncovered flesh showing. Since there isn't anything covering the snake portion of their bodies, they can get cold very quickly, so between the high altitude flight and the colder temperatures of the Northern Continent, Cyrene was going to need something, and Cain thought it would be best if she could cast it herself, just in case.

While Cain thought he activated [Warming Hug] a very simple skill that he had gotten mostly for the amusement factor, but one that proved exceptionally useful for everyday situations, since it made hugs extra comfortable.

Cain thought through a number of protection spells that he had seen, then the perfect one occurred to him. [Air Armor] wasn't a particularly powerful armor spell, but it deflected wind and maintained air temperature around the user. Both he and Cyrene could benefit from having that skill, even if he himself didn't really get cold.

"Can I borrow a room? I need to make a couple of books really quickly, to deal with the temperatures on the Northern Continent." Cain asked RhickJaymz, who pointed across the hall towards an empty room.

"That one should do. The desk isn't a big one, so the space should be enough for you to work." The Earl replied, then turned back to the conversation with the Dragon riders about what they were going to collectively do about the issue.

The Dragon Rider faction was most likely much more powerful than whoever was messing with trade right now, but their numbers weren't really high. Dealing with troublemakers that were hiding somewhere on the high seas was going to be a serious issue for them. There might only be one Cain, but the Laughing God favored him in strange ways, so he was fairly sure that if he just hung around the ocean for a while some idiot would attack him.

It worked pretty much every time before after all.

Every time Cain created a spellbook the process intrigued Cyrene. The Inscription skill wasn't a skill that she had, but watching it done, with the mystic letters appearing on the pages as the process completed, and then the magical binding that appeared around the book if you were successful was just such an amazing sight that she couldn't get enough of it.

For this book, the runes on the page appeared as a grayish blue color of ink as Cain worked, carefully scribing through one book according to the information in his memory. Of course, she didn't know that Cain cheated when he did all his inscriptions and merged with something that had the skill he wanted, so he could see all the runes he needed to write, instead of having to memorize them, but the process was no less awesome to the Lamia.

The first book is finished and an almost white leather cover appears over the thin book. It's only a soft leather cover, indicating that the book is D ranked, as opposed to F rank which would have a paper cover, or C rank which would be a hardcover book with very little embellishment.

"I could have used [Spell Crafting] and made a fancier spell, but this one should be more than enough to keep us warm while we explore the Northern Continent," Cain explained as he started on the process of the second book, handing the first one to Cyrene.

She is still holding the book, watching him work when the second one is completed and Cain flicks her forehead to get her to focus.

"You need to learn the book in order to use the spell. Pretty much all spell casting classes can use these ones, so it shouldn't be an issue for you." Cain told her, and Cyrene quickly learned the skill to avoid having her forehead flicked again.

With the essentials complete, Cain said his goodbyes to the Earl and the Dragon Riders and stepped outside onto the terrace. Flying over in Ancient form would be the fastest way, and Cyrene is already wrapped around him, so Cain decided not to summon anything.

"Prepare to relax your wrap. I'm going to transform." Cain informed her, shifting to his Ancient form for the first time in a long while.

It had gotten bigger, and somehow more wriggly. The tentacles on his face were no longer short like a mustache but hung down to the middle of his chest in a very wizardly tentacle beard. The form was also now twenty meters tall, with a wingspan of over fifty meters, enough to intimidate even a Mythic Dragon.

"I like the improvement, Master. You look much more intimidating in this form, and you don't even have your aura activated." Cyrene congratulated him, and Cain used his facial tentacles to pat her head.

Unlike the ones on his arm, they didn't have any suckers or biting beaks on them, they were just for wrapping things up to guide them to his mouth, or apparently for patting his pets.

Cain realized he had made a miscalculation when he took off. This wasn't the Southern Continent which had long-lived species and good history books, Ancients were a horrific fairytale here on the Central Continent, and he had just transformed in the middle of town.

,m He would have to apologize later.

As they raced over the open ocean, Cain went over the description of the attackers in his mind. Their ship colors and sails weren't uniform, so he couldn't go by that, but the fact that they would have some form of Giants on them would be a good clue. Unfortunately, there were still legitimate trading vessels from the Western Continent that would have Giant species on them, so he couldn't just sink every suspicious vessel that he came across or he would make the problem worse.

As sunset approached Cain saw the distinctive black sails and red hulls of a Wave Rider raiding team on the horizon. They should have information for him if he could manage to talk to them without them attacking.

Then he saw a lucky sight, one Pink hull in the mix. It had black sails up as it traveled with the fleet, but Cain's keen eyesight saw a very familiar Elf on deck. That was Nila, aboard Queen Rose.

She has obviously seen the enormous flying tentacle monster, so when Cain sees her she is waving happily and calling something to the crew, possibly telling them to get out of the way so he can land.

There's really not enough room for his expanded form on the deck of the ship though, so Cain calls for a full-grown Leviathan like Moana prefers to use, and lands on it before transforming into the Wave Rider Captain form that he had used before.

The flying whale is a welcome sight among the fleet, and now quite a few of the other ships' crews are waving at him as the Leviathan brings him over close to Queen Rose.

[There you go boss.] The summoned Leviathan's voice sounds in his mind, a deep baritone that echoes in his thoughts.

[Thanks. You can hang around if you want, visit the Elves, maybe find a nice annoying raiding ship to eat.] Cain suggests.

[Have you ever eaten a ship? They're crunchy and tasteless. The best choice is to use [Consume] on them and then just inhale the leftovers after the vortex crushes them to dust.] He complains, sending Cain a mental image of crunching on flavorless wood that reminds him of unflavored and unsalted potato chips.

"Good to see you again. The evil twin and Mythryll are sleeping down below, but they will be up in a few minutes." Nila greets him, while the Puppet crew gives Cain a bow as they go about their work.

"No need to rush them. Tell me all you know about these annoyances that have been blockading the Northern Continent. RhickJaymz and the Dragon Riders asked me to look into it. I was flying to the coast when I saw the flotilla and thought I would come to get some decent answers."

Nila nods in understanding and brings out a small map, holding it down on the deck between the benches to move it out of the wind so she can show Cain where they have been finding the attackers.

"So far, the only hostile ones have been ships with Giants on them, at least those are the only ones hostile to the Wave Riders, but a few coastal cities have reported problems with human vessels as well. It's hard to tell what is new and what is leftover from the changes in power level and people trying to fill the voids left after city Champions fell. Speaking of which, the Wave Riders have a modified version of the world quest to obtain an Admiral title for becoming the Guardian of a group of ships. Some of them will definitely want to talk to you about that when we get to the floating city."

The floating city is the home of the Wave Riders, a mysterious hidden city on the open ocean that very few have seen and lived to tell others about. To be welcomed there is an honor for Cain, especially if they have Frost Giant Vodka.

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

Chapter 485 485 Floating City

According to Nila they still had a few days until they reached the floating city for the big meeting about the hassles that the shipments going to the Northern Continent were facing. The Wave Riders were highly annoyed after a series of attacks on them, and the leadership decided that the Giants had forgotten the value of showing respect for the Wave Riders. That was an oversight that they simply couldn't tolerate, the safe and secure transport of the goods they produced and pilfered required that people remember who they were dealing with. If one started to openly disrespect them without retaliation, others would as well.

The response was going to be predictably bloody and swiftly executed. All that was left was to discuss the exact details. Because she was Mythic Quality with a number of useful skills for rapid transportation, Nila played a central role in their plan to launch the attack, bringing a spearhead of ships with her through the void to launch the attack from the back lines when they finally found the enemy's true identity and home base.

There was even more good news for Cain today as well. More than one of the ships in the fleet had the potion best known as Frost Giant Vodka and they were willing to trade some to him for a reasonable price, owing to the cooperation of his Companion in their missions.

Many of the Captains were eager to greet Cain, and most had at least heard of him before, so a large party was thrown in honor of his visit. Not that the Wave Rider Captains needed much of a reason to throw a party, but today they had one. Cain brought out the Mythic Fruit Juice, and they brought out the Frost Giant Vodka, making it an even trade in the minds of the Wave Riders.

"Do you think that the Giants have decided to expand beyond just the Western Continent?" Cain asked the man drinking next to him while they listened to a group talk about their adventures with an overly powerful sea monster.

"It doesn't seem all that unlikely. Their numbers have been going up, and nobody really knows what happened after the Gnomes went crazy. I heard that the short fellows managed to throw the majority of their population through a dimensional portal the day that everything started to change. Without the Gnomes around to remind them of the dangers, those overgrown morons are capable of almost anything." The old elf grumbled.

"So the Gnomes were working with the Giants? I don't know much about the Western Continent." Cain asked.

"Yes and no. The continent is one big country, ruled by a council. They agreed that all decisions needed to be one vote short of anonymous. If everyone else agrees, the last one to vote must vote against it, and the one that voted no must plan for the opposite outcome. If more than one votes against it, the measure fails. That way they kept things running smoothly after the war. But most of the giant species lack common sense and have a lot of pent-up aggression. Without the Gnomes and their technology, the council will be unbalanced." The Captain explained, enlightening Cain on how things were done in the most mysterious of regions.

"That actually sounds like it would work fairly well. How do the Wave Riders do it?"

"Oh, we have the most simple system of all. If the Elders can't decide, like they couldn't decide what to do about this issue, they call a council of Captains. Either we agree, or we fight our differences out with no magic. Afterward, we drink and argue again until an agreement is reached." The Elf laughed, his ash black ears twitching in time with his laughter.

"It's a great system. It can take some time though, so I hope you weren't in a really big hurry." One of the other Captains interjected, and Cain just shrugged.

Nila answered for him before Cain could come up with anything to say. "As long as there aren't any big attacks coming towards the coast I don't see any rush, but if the coastal cities spot an attacking flotilla then he will have to head out to keep his word to the Dragon Riders."

The Wave Riders were big on honor and keeping promises that had been made, so they fully understood that condition. Plus, they were also worried about the coastal cities on the Northern Continent, so having someone volunteer to go intercept attackers during the Council of Captains made their life a lot easier.

The next day passed without incident, other than a lot of hungover Elves and one terrified pack of level 105 Giant Squid who fled in terror from the mere sight of Leviathan hovering over the ocean.

It was almost dark again when they caught sight of the Floating City. Cain had heard that it was made out of ships tied together, but from the sight, that was just the Wave Riders being incredibly humble.

It was no smaller than many castles, with hundreds of ships docked around its perimeter. Leviathan had swum down beneath the city to see if the Elves were lying, but it really did float. There were over a hundred meters of the city below the water, and an enchanted hull to keep the sheer weight from collapsing the city in on itself, but it did indeed float.

Being so large, with ballast at the bottom, the city looked like an island, stationary in the water while the waves crashed against it. A true marvel of magical engineering the likes of which Cain had never even considered.

Above the water, the structures were mostly made of very lightweight alloys, enchanted for rust prevention when necessary, and painted a wide variety of colors to suit the tastes of the Elven residents. Towards the center, the city was built up higher, reinforcing the impression that this was in fact a mountainous island and not an enormous seafaring vessel topped with a polished black castle.

At first, Cain wondered about the design choices, since the elevated structure would leave a large amount of internal space that was never exposed to sunlight. Then it finally dawned on him. Despite their affinity for the sea, these are still Dark Elves. The underground caverns are their natural habitat, of course the inner buildings would be comfortable for them.

"Hold at the back. Since Queen Rose isn't officially a Wave Rider vessel it will be docked outside of another vessel that will serve as the host, guaranteeing your good behavior while you are in the Floating City." The old Captain that Cain was drinking with last night explains to him as he maneuvers his own vessel away to take his dock.

There seems to be some elaborate ranking system that determines who goes where, and the vessels are now scattering, moving from their random spot in the convoy towards their designated spot around the city. Cain also notices he won't be the only one docked outside the main ring, tied bow to stern with another vessel, there are a few more in sight docked the same way, all wearing the colors of major merchant groups.

"I don't think I've ever heard of the city accepting this many visitors in a decade, much less all at once." Nila laughed as she pointed to where a group of Wood Elves from the Eastern Continent was gawking at the city's structure.

For them, this place must be a nightmare. They thrive in living environments and sunlight. Most of this city has neither.

"Checking out the hippies?" The Wave Rider assigned to be their Pilot for the docking process laughs, giving Cain a sly wink.

"Hippie chicks get freaky. You should give it a try yourself." Cain teases the young man, who blushes a light shade of purple, with the red blood flooding his gray-blue-tanned face.

"The berth assignment is in, head for dock seventeen on the South Side of the city." He manages to stammer out a few seconds later, making Nila shake her head at how easily flustered he is.

"You know, if you can't even take teasing from Cain, you'll be eaten alive by a proper crew. They are merciless once they learn your weakness. You blush like that in front of a Captain like Druze and he will taunt you until you're living in a tree house with a dozen little hippie children." Cain's Companion half-jokes.

Only half-jokes, because the Captain might push him that far just for the entertainment value of seeing him embarrassed, but a dozen elven children would take nearly a century to make, and he would certainly get bored of the game by then even if the boy was still fun to tease.

Their dock is behind a longer than usual Wave Rider vessel, though it is still three-masted and fairly narrow for fast travel through the water. The dock is also further from the docks around it by a few meters more than usual and Cain wonders if it's a place of honor, or if it's a cargo dock, where they would expect larger, more heavily laden vessels to be tied up instead of the sleek warships that they are best known for.

Cain gave Nila a questioning look to get his answer but she didn't know, so he turned to their Pilot.

"So, which one is it? A flagship berth or a Cargo Dock?" Cain asked and the intent to lie was clearly visible on the boy's face for a moment before he realized it would be pointless.

"It's a Cargo dock. But it's not an insult, they put you closest to the hotel and tavern district, so you can settle in without having to cross the whole city." The boy's hurried speech showed Cain that he truly meant what he said, and feared reprisal, so he gave the Pilot the gentlest look he could before whistling to the ship in front of them to catch the mooring lines so that he could tie off to them and head into the city.

"I appreciate it, friend. Here, split this flagon of Mythic Fruit Juice with your crew." Cain told the Captain, hopping aboard.

The Wave Rider looked confused for a second, wondering why only Wave Riders were on a pink ship and tied off in the second row. Then he saw Mythryll and recalled all the gossip about a Summoned pair of Wave Rider twins taking a Hippy Elf as a bride, which meant that the unknown man must be Cain, the Ancient.

A quick scan with his interface confirmed his suspicions and the Captain gladly took the flagon of potion.

"I'll remember your kindness, friend. The others had great things to say about your Southern Continent Juices."

That was likely because Cain mixed a bit of aphrodisiac strawberry juice into the mix for the party, but hey, whatever wins over the hearts and minds of his allies.

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

Chapter 486 486

Stepping into the Floating City felt a lot like Tortuga on steroids. Tortuga was an open port known for fencing Pirated goods, the Floating City was nothing but Pirates. Their entire culture was piracy and blockade running, even the shops near the wharf front all specialized in either food or tools to help in robbing other ships.

There are already rooms booked for them at one of the hotels near the waterfront, and their Pilot is escorting them through the maze of the Floating City, so Cain simply enjoys the views and attempts to understand what this strange feeling that the city gives off is.

It's very familiar but so foreign to the ocean environment that he is having trouble placing it. Or more like it's a blend of two things that never belonged together but somehow just fit.

The route led them through a section of the underground city so they could more easily move up a few levels, and that's when it became clear to Cain. It's not one feeling but two. One is the sense of open ocean and water magic that he usually feels from the Captains and other powerful Wave Riders, the other is the Spider Goddess' favor.

Despite moving to the open ocean, their goddess is still watching over them at all times, keeping their city safe. The presence is much stronger here than it was in Muzz, which

was abandoned, and Cain could almost hear her voice in his head with the intensity of the sensation of being watched over.

Cain spotted a food stall just past the exit back to open air that was selling Takoyaki, so he moved up ahead of the Pilot, nodding towards his destination. The vendor was happy to plate up five orders for the group while the others caught up to Cain's rapid movement, having prepared in advance for the influx of visitors that were expected today.

"Hey, how did you do that?" The pilot whispered when they caught up, then continued when he saw that Cain thought he was an idiot and didn't understand what he meant.

"The arches that mark the entrances to the underground are protected by the Spider Goddess, you can't pass through unless you're a Dark Elf. That's why I'm here, to let you all through the doorways." He hurried to explain.

While Cain was in the body of a Wave Rider, such a simple thing wouldn't fool a living Goddess, but Cain recalled that she had once offered him a blessing, but never explained what it was about.

"It's all good. I asked her and she said it was fine." Cain shrugged, while both the Guide and the street vendor almost choked on their tongues.

Nobody speaks to the Goddess, the Wave Riders fear her more than they revere her, so the only ones that would go looking for her are the desperate and the priestesses. For someone to just casually contact her to get through a warded door was nearly unthinkable.

"They can't tell that you're messing with them," Nila whispered, just loud enough for the others to hear.

"If you tell them it ruins the fun. But rest assured, she wouldn't let me cause trouble for her chosen people. Even if you're a bit saltier than the regular variety." Cain joked, then noticed that the Pilot actually offered a silent prayer.

'Poor fellow must be really frustrated if he's actually begging her for mercy already.' Nila thought, watching his antics.

With their snacks in hand, the Pilot led them to the front doors of a rather nondescript hotel. If Cain didn't read the writing on the door, he would have thought it was just an ordinary apartment building just like a hundred others that they had walked by. Part of the problem was that everything in the city was so colorful that it was almost impossible to stand out from the crowd. Even if the proprietor had painted it neon pink, it wouldn't have been particularly noticeable.

"Here you are. Hotel Rose, your accommodations for your stay. There will be an escort here in the morning to bring you to the meeting of Captains and anywhere else you need to go today. Normally I would say stay in for your safety, but today I will say, just do whatever you want as long as it doesn't bother anyone." The Pilot informed them before turning and walking away.

"I think we were too mean to him. He looked pretty stressed." Cain told Nila, who was still watching him go.

"He's just a kid, he needed the learning experience before someone was actually hard on him. I think you hurt his pride by walking through the archway and ordering food in Dark Elven though. If I had done it, he might have taken it as a kindness." Nila pointed out.

There are a lot of subtle rules and rankings within the Wave Rider society that Cain doesn't really understand, so it wouldn't surprise him at all if he had accidentally hurt someone's feelings or stepped out of line. Nila could cover some of the situations for him, but her knowledge was more general, provided by the System when she was summoned, so she could play the part of a Wave Rider. The interpersonal relations between actual living people relied on her having met them previously to this, or she could only guess at their spot in the hierarchy.

"We can ask the guide tomorrow, they might tell us more about the way things are supposed to be done in the city. I'm sure you're going to ask for the Wave Rider's help with the mission that the Dragon Riders gave to you, so it will save time if we don't offend them first." Mythryll suggested.

"You have a point, the more Captains we can get on our side the better. We're likely all on the same page anyhow, dealing with the blockades and random attacks, so it shouldn't be too hard unless someone's feelings get hurt." Cain agreed.

"And if that does happen?" Nila asked.

"Giant tentacle monster and start spanking them like misbehaving children until they agree with me." Cain joked and even Mythryll could feel the dark shadow that passed over the room, giving off a vibe of discontent.

"Alright, maybe not so much spanking. But maybe a strongly worded complaint and an attempt to reason with them before we go off and do our own thing. I don't think it will come to that though, we've already got friends among the Captains, so we should get some support to work with them."

Cain's speech seemed to have settled the angry spirit in the room and Mythryll sighed. "You have no idea how strange it is to have the Spider Goddess' presence so strong around me. It's like I can hear her trying to convert me to one of her followers."

That was one of the many reasons that forest elves stayed away from their Dark Kin, the Spider Goddess was very enthusiastic about her recruitment efforts and would promise them many wonderful things if they would join her faction.

Cain never did find out how she was related to the Laughing God, though he had heard that she arrived at some point later than the old Gods and the Ancients. Asking about the back story of the Dark Elves goddess wasn't easy though. It was taboo among the other elves, most species didn't know much about her, and the Dark Elves themselves weren't willing to share.

Cain noticed a dusty statue of her on the top shelf of the bookcase in the corner of their room and gave it a quick polish before setting it back in its place overlooking the room, but turned slightly away from the bed.

"Is that some superstition from your old life?" Mythryll asked, not sure what Cain was doing.

"Nope, just saying hello, and turning her so she isn't looking directly at the bed. I'm not sure who did that, but it's a bit kinky for my tastes."

Mythryll was tired of Cain teasing her with half answers, so she turned to Nila for the rest, only to see that the Spider statue's eyes were glowing and it had turned to look at them. Mythryll hoped that maybe she could put it in a box until she checked out or something because that statue was just as creepy as the shadow that spread over the room earlier.

"Let's go down for dinner. If the food in the hotel isn't great we can wander the district. I saw quite a few restaurants in the area." One of the Nila clones suggested, pulling Mythryll out of the room with a glance at the statue. She had noticed her beloved looking at it, but there didn't seem to be anything wrong with it as far as she could tell.

"Just let me change. We're here for a political meeting and that calls for a full formal outfit." Cain declared, changing outfits to match the Wave Rider Captains, with the sleeves rolled up to show off his tattoos before styling the short hair of his current Dark Elven form.

"Do you want an adjustment? I can make you blend in better with an illusion?" Cain asked Mythryll, but Nila declined on her behalf.

"No, I like her this way. Let's just go eat you fashionista."

Mythryll couldn't hide the laughter at that, and she was still in tears when the first round of drinks was served in the hotel tavern. The liquor was high quality, and the food that followed soon after was better than expected of the rather plain hotel that Cain was beginning to suspect was chosen only to match the name of their ship, not due to any other nonsense reason that the Pilot had fed them on the way here.

"Everyone has an early morning tomorrow, so I'm closing up early. If you need anything, just holler down at me and I'll hear you." The innkeeper informed them as they made their way back up to the room.

"I'm sure we will be fine. Will I see you tomorrow at the meetings?" Cain asked.

"Most likely. I don't know where they'll have you seated, but I'll be there somewhere." The elf told them, then returned to the back room to finish up the cleaning.

If even the innkeepers were going, the Council of Captains must involve much more of society than just the Captains. Wave Rider society valued sailing skills above most things, and the representatives that they sent to land-based duties were usually very low on the societal ladder, so Cain suspected that the innkeepers inside the floating city were in the same situation.

But again, he had missed his chance to ask proper questions, leaving them to go into tomorrow's meetings mostly blind.

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

Chapter 487 487 Meeting The Captains

Breakfast was served before dawn the next morning, giving the Captains time to eat and assemble at the meeting hall one hour after first light, as was the Floating City's tradition. Cain's guide for the day arrived just before the meal was served to inform them of all of the schedules and make sure they arrived on time since she had been informed that there was a chance he would be asked to speak before the council.

They had just begun eating, with Cain cutting up bits of pancake to feed Cyrene when he noticed that the Guide really wanted to say something.

"Go ahead then. There's no point in keeping secrets, I could read your mind if I wanted to." Cain pointed out, causing every Wave Rider in the room to give him a shocked look.

That was simply an unfair advantage in negotiations. If they could know what the enemy was thinking, how much better could they do? What new bargains could they make instead of resorting to violence? An ally who could read minds was an incredible asset.

"Um, is she your daughter? The juvenile Lamia?" The guide stammered, making Cain and Nila laugh.

"No, but sometimes it's like that. She's actually the daughter of a Noble from Skyview that I helped out some time ago. She had never seen a large part of the world, so we are traveling together on this journey." Cain explained.

"I just thought that you know, since you cut her food and feed her, that she was your daughter. I was going to comment on how adorable it is that you take such good care of her." The elf was blushing bright purple now, and a number of the guests in the restaurant were hiding laughter.

Cain took a moment to pat Cyrene's head and feed her another bite of fruit. "A Lamia doesn't have teeth you see, so they can't chew. Everything they eat needs to be bite-sized. Since she's wrapped around me, it's easier for me to just cut everything."

"Waia, it's best not to try to understand the mind of an Eldritch being. That's a sure path to madness." One of the guests tells Cain's guide with a smile at Cyrene.

"You will need to set her on her own chair for the meeting though, there is a rule in the council chambers about sharing a seat." The same man informed Cain.

"I'm sure there are many more things that I don't know about the Council rules, but can anyone here think of an obvious one that I might run into today?" Cain asked.

"Don't speak unless directly addressed, don't touch anyone else unless restraining them, don't leave your seat. Let's see, what else. No sharing seats was covered, don't mention the Goddess unless you're speaking directly about her, no insulting other ships unless you want to fight an honor duel. Does anyone else have anything?" Waia said, checking off the items on her fingers.

"No food or drink in the council room. You must wear boots or go barefoot. No covering your face or hands. It's considered polite but not actually a rule to roll up your sleeves." One of the others pointed out a few things the Wave Riders viewed as extremely obvious.

"What's the sleeves thing about?" Cyrene asked, not understanding.

"Most experienced sailors have a number of tattoos and scars on their arms. It helps identify each other and helps to reveal anyone who is trying to fake their identity with a facial illusion." Waia explained.

Cain dismissed the gloves that he customarily wore and rolled up the sleeves of his black shirt, showing off the mass of tattoos that appeared when he shifted forms to a Wave Rider. Like the ones in his human form, they shift around daily, but as a Wave Rider, there were a few that were more constant. A tattoo of a rose on his right forearm, and a black and white shield crest on the top of his hand, that Cain assumed was meant to represent the Guild.

"Since you're a shapeshifter, I'm sure the gesture doesn't mean as much, but it will help you fit in with the crowd, even if you insist on wearing centuries-old formal wear." The man who gave the advice laughed.

"I thought it would be a bit odd to look like every other Wave Rider Captain when I'm not actually a Wave Rider, but it would also be strange to show up as a random species, and showing up as an Ancient would be a whole other problem." Cain smiled, making the sailors laugh.

"Wouldn't it be fun though?" The Elf laughed, mischief sparkling in his eyes.

"They will all know who you are no matter what you look like, so you might as well be comfortable. Just remember, Cyrene has to travel on her own today, no wrapping her around your waist as an accessory until after the meetings." Waia declared, getting to her feet as the first light of morning shone through the hotel windows.

That seemed to be everyone's signal to finish up their meal. Plates were cleared and flagons of tea finished quickly, to be stacked in the kitchen to soak while everyone was at the meeting.

The whole Floating City basically shut down for these events, which only happened every few years and often lasted less than a week. Nobody wanted to miss out on knowing firsthand what was so important that all the Captains needed to come back to help make the decision.

When they stepped out, there were six middle-aged Elves waiting on them, and the patrons of the Inn. Each of them was a Captain of their own vessel, and they intended to go to the meeting together but weren't all assigned to the same hotel.

"During the Council of Captains, everyone is introduced by their ship's name. It's like a title for Wave Riders, and if you don't have one, you don't have the right to speak. Some of the names are fleet names, for the truly successful who have multiple Captains under their faction, but those are mostly old Council Members, so they will be seated in the middle anyhow and you won't have to interact with them much other than to answer questions if they ask them." The guide informed Cain as they walked.

"The ship names also often sound alike, but try not to mess them up, because the Captains get really upset. Nobody remembers them all though, so you will notice that speaking without directly addressing others is pretty common. Naming a dozen ships to say who all you mean would burn up all the time you've been given to answer." One of the Captains added.

So there was a time limit per speaker, which was also valuable information. Cain didn't know how long, but it would be easy enough to guess, even if it wasn't specified.

"It's so strange moving across this metal grate," Cyrene muttered as they moved. Unlike a ground-based city, this one had multiple levels, and the roads were metal mesh. It let dirt and such fall through the road, but it also saved a lot of weight up high on the floating city, helping to keep it stable.

"It tickles a little on the bare feet, but you have to be careful not to get a toe caught in the holes. That's why most of us wear boots to the meeting, but I guess that's not an option for Lamia." Waia shrugged.

"Well, I usually just wrap around Cain when we're together, so I kind of forgot what it was like to experience new textures under my scales," Cyrene told her sheepishly, making the other Captains burst into laughter.

"Elder Nema is like that. But she's missing both legs, so she has a servant to carry her these days. I don't think I've ever seen her go anywhere on her own, even though she could use air magic to make herself float." Waia explained the source of the Captain's mirth.

That made sense, but Cain could fix her up in a few seconds if she wanted. He might have to make the offer later if he gets a chance to build some goodwill with the Wave Riders. They might not have the open spaces to pull a lot of them into the Guild, but if he can get a few Captains on board with joining them it would be a great victory.

They wouldn't have to stop being Wave Riders or betray their Clan, so there was no real loss to them. But they would gain the summons from the Guild skills and a Guild Tag that would give them priority access to a handful of locations. Though that number might be expanding rapidly these days, as the Guild gains more influence all over the Central Continent.

Along the way, they met a great number of new people, many of whom already knew Nila from her honeymoon adventure with Mythryll. They had visited dozens of new cities, trading small amounts of valuable items to help keep the Guild Bank from overfilling, and had made quite a name for Queen Rose as a trading ship.

They even got to see Elder Nema, though only from a distance, as her escort was carrying her into the meeting hall.

"See how pompous it looks, having someone carry you? A lot of Captains thought it was a great show of power, that's why the rules against carrying people or having them sit in your lap have been made." Waia explained.

That's right, Cain realized. Having a Lamia in his lap that he fed snacks to could easily be misconstrued as some sort of Demon harem flex, not exactly an appropriate action for what was theoretically a meeting of equals. Yes, some were more equal than others, but from what he could gather, each Captain's voice counted equally in the final vote.

Only the Captains though, nobody else had the right to vote, their opinions were deemed to have been presented through the Captains, so in a way that made them a lot like Senators, only instead of representing regions, they represented ships of the fleet. Though they might also represent regions since they all had different trading routes so their opinions represented what was best for the routes that they ran.

Politics always made Cain's head hurt, and he was glad he didn't need to do things like this every day. But dealing with the issue of Giants raiding the Northern Continent needed a group effort, so there was no ducking out of this responsibility.

Seven Elders of the Wave Rider Clan entered as a group, with Elder Nema actually using her wind magic to float herself to her chair since her escort wasn't allowed to carry her inside the building or accompany her to the round table in the center of the room where the Elders sat, facing outwards to look at the assembly.

It was a rather unique setup, and Cain saw that the platform that their torus-shaped table was placed on could be turned so that the one being addressed or speaking could face whatever direction they wanted to, while the others simply swiveled their chair to face the desired direction.

"Everyone Shut Up. The Council of Captains begins now." A booming voice declared from the Elder's table and the room went silent. It was time to get down to business.

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

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"We all know why we are here, the Giants have gotten a bit too arrogant, and they are interfering with our business and causing trouble on our Oceans. The question is what we are going to do about it. The first Speaker will be Elder Druzzat. He has news about the leader of the Giant's idiocy, obtained by his spy network." The lead Elder declared.

The lack of formality and fake politeness was a refreshing change from what Cain knew of politics. It was the first time Cain had ever heard a politician tell the room to shut up, that was for sure.

Elder Druzzat stood from his chair in the circle to address the gathering while looking down at the notes in front of him.

"From what my spies have been able to gather, the force we deal with comes from four cities along the coast. They allied under a leader called Drakon. Unfortunately, I couldn't

get any solid information on him, but the rumors on the Western Continent say he had set his eyes on the Northern continent in a bid to expand his power base.

The giants following him believe that they are inherently superior to the humans of the Northern Continent, which makes the humans an easy target. But that's about all we know so far.

Either they don't know much, or this Drakon has enough power to keep the usually stupid and open-mouthed giants from bragging."

That's a lot more than Cain knew a few minutes ago. A strong giant organizing his Kin is not new, but expanding beyond the continent is. That makes Cain think this leader might be more intelligent than average, making him more ambitious.

One after another, the Captains give reports about attacks and the state of trade along the coast. The situation seems pretty dismal right now, the Giants might be dumb, but they are powerful and resistant to magic.

It doesn't help that they don't know the end goal. The giants must realize they can't take on the Dragons, but they're attacking all along the Dragon Riders' borders anyhow.

"Captain Cain, you look enlightened. Care to share with the rest of us?" One of the Elders calls the moment Cain's face shows signs of his realization.

"Of course Elder. I believe this Drakon might be a powerful new transfer. He doesn't understand the power balance or the Alliances. He is attacking what looks like the weakest targets near his borders without fear of retaliation.

That tells me that either he thinks he can handle anything that we throw at him, or he has no idea what's coming for him." Cain speaks clearly so the entire assembly can hear.

With the change in the world, it is possible a new transfer shot up in power without learning much about the world and began feeling invincible.

Many ideas are shared around the room before another Captain stands to speak. "What are the chances that the System granted him a spell or item above Mythic Rank? If he is Spirit Awakened it would explain a feeling of invincibility."

That portion of the Western Continent wasn't an awakened area before, so it would have put anyone who received it way above their peers.

"I wonder where he might have gotten the idea that the truly powerful could take over an entire continent?" One of the Elders asked in a snarky tone, clearly meaning Cain, but not facing his way.

"Could they actually be trying to build a rival faction of giants to match up against the Darklight Host? Could they even cooperate long enough for that to work?" The woman behind Cain mumbles to herself.

Is not exactly impossible. But most of the power that the Guild has now is due to their outreach work, bringing people to their side without a Guild tag. Trying to do that with brute force would be much harder.

Even if they tried to rule through terror and force they would quickly run out of muscle. There must be more to the Giants' plan than simply overpowering an entire continent.

"If he was inspired by the Central Continent, shouldn't there be something to link all his forces together? Some sort of marker, or uniform?" One of the Captains asks brashly, ignoring the Only Speak when spoken to rule.

"That would make our lives easier, but so far we haven't found any sign of it. Perhaps it's only the leaders of a squad that are officially allied with him, so we haven't been able to link the clues yet?" An elder suggests.

A lot of the voices in the room seem to think that this is the likely truth, but the question of what to do about it becomes the sticking point.

The Wave Riders are in no position to attack the Western Continent the way that Drakon's forces are attacking the Northern one, so that is out. The Council that supposedly rules the Western Continent is overlooking the issue, for now, so they're unlikely to be any help, but to attack all the ships that are causing trouble would invariably cause a lot of lost lives, which the long-lived Elves hold very precious.

Their own lives at least.

"What if we formed a group to go scout the Western Continent shoreline and see what we could learn about the Global Quest? The status of their Guardians might tell us something about what is going on." The head Elder, who never did give his name since everyone here should already have known it, suggested.

Saying no to his suggestions in this audience wasn't easy. He had the lead position because of the great amount of respect that he had earned from his peers, plus his idea was a practical one.

Those who were previously doing business with the area volunteered to go and investigate the status of the cities along the coast, which were a bit more multi-species than most of the continent. While they were gone, the rest of the Council of Captains would come up with contingency plans based on what the spies found out.

The most obvious question was what to do in the event of a full-scale war. The Giants weren't great swimmers, so the thought of simply drowning them by sinking their ships was one of the first ideas put forward, but that was only a tactic and not a strategy.

Every Captain was familiar with a different region of the world, though they all shared some basic knowledge, so the meeting turned into sector-by-sector details of deployments after a war against the forces of Drakon had been called.

That wouldn't be a short conversation, but the meeting broke up at twilight, set to convene again in the morning at first light. Cain now understood why these events often took weeks to complete. It simply took that long to plan the strategy. Maybe he could convince the Elders to break up into study groups, each of them taking a region of the sea so that they could make a half dozen regional plans at the same time, saving a week of preliminary meetings before the final consultation on the overall strategy.

The Wave Riders have been doing things this way since long before the Transfers began arriving, so the ideas that were brought from other worlds never modernized their political process.

"Nila, could you put that idea forward for me? If I do it, many will see it as meddling, but if you do it they just might accept it." Cain suggested as they ate a late dinner, knowing that she had heard his thoughts.

"What idea? If I put it forward, it might go even more smoothly." One of the Captains in the restaurant suggested.

Cain elaborated his plan to split the war zone into six sections for the six Elders other than the leader or mediator, and have them each come up with a plan for their zone with the Captains that were more familiar with it, and then after that, they could bring everyone back together and combine them into one overall strategy, should it come to war.

"That could work. Each of the Elders is normally in charge of activities in a section of the world, it wouldn't be a big change to reduce the scale. I think the Captains would agree by vote." The man at the next table agreed.

The others who were listening in thought about the same way, a week shorter meeting was in everyone's favor, and this was still their way of doing things, but more efficient.

"Alright, I hold the highest honors in the room, so I will present it by special request first thing in the morning. I can ask for a vote of the Elders, and if they agree it will be a vote of the Captains to make the change for this part of the meeting." An older Captain in the back stood up with the help of his first mate.

Looking at him, he wasn't far off from being an Elder himself, only there were no positions currently open on the Council. If he held as much influence among the others

as he did in this room, the thoughtful Captain might actually make everyone's lives a bit easier.

With that decided and the meal finished, everyone headed for their rooms, while Cain sent a thought to the Puppets left back on the ship to make sure that everything was good. Half of them were cleaning Queen Rose, while the other half were playing cards with the junior hands left behind to guard the ship they were tied off to.

Nothing wrong with that, though Cain did wonder where the Puppets got the money to go gambling. There were a lot of things he would have to ask Nila and Mythryll about their honeymoon adventures at sea.

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

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The next morning is much more organized. Everyone knows their spots, and who was sitting near them yesterday, so they naturally gather in groups to enter the meeting hall at first light. Today the Elders are already assembled, the meeting won't be waiting on them, only the official start of the meeting.

There is a series of windows high up the spire atop the building, with mirrors next to them. When the sun enters the window and shines on the mirror, illuminating the Council table, the meeting begins. When the sun leaves the mirrors for the final time, the meeting is over, and it is officially dark out.

It's not that they don't have clocks, but according to Waia they got annoyed at an argument about the actual time at some point in the past and ended up altering the building to have a built-in official timekeeper.

"The sun has reached the table and the meeting is in session. Are there any urgent requests before we begin?" The lead Elder asks, not really expecting a response.

"I have a request for the Council's consideration. In the name of efficiency and cooperation, I would request that the planning for the war zones be split into six sections, headed by six elders with one left to mediate the process. Once each region has reached a plan, I would ask that the Elders present it on behalf of their region to be discussed by the Council as a whole." The old Captain announces, startling everyone.

It has been a long time since someone announced urgent business before the Elders, normally all requests would wait until the first chance to speak instead. But today they can see the logic in doing it before any business got started so that if it was approved it wouldn't waste anyone's time.

"Elders, what do we think of this proposal?" The leader asked, thinking deeply about the idea and who should mediate.

"I approve." The Elders all speak the same words one after another, giving approval to the idea.

"And who should mediate?" The leader asked, already having a person in mind, but being bound by formality to let the others speak first.

"I will. The Floating City is my assigned watch, as well as the spies, so it is only right that the Elders that lead the fleets on the seas should lead the war planning as well." Elder Druzzat announced.

That didn't bring up any objections from the Elders, so the leader put it to a vote.

"Rise now if you're against the plan and not too cowardly to speak." He called into the room, making Cain hide his laughter. He might have forgotten to ask who this old man was, but he sure was amusing.

Cain took a moment to look through the thoughts around him, finding that the leader was Elder Rasoi, who was traditionally in charge of the ships attempting to cross the danger zone to reach the Southern Continent. It was a role always given to the leader since the volume of ships was the lowest, and the leader was also in charge of disputes between Captains and Elders that couldn't be resolved without intervention.

Only a handful of Captains stood up, and Cain could sense that they all had a slightly different plan on how to do this, mostly involving putting themselves in a position of authority. The others seemed to understand that though, and after a few seconds when it became clear that the vote had passed they sat down again without a word said in either direction.

"You need a third of the room to put forward any alternate proposals," Waia whispered to Cain, who nodded his thanks.

This was something like a supermajority, Cain decided. If the idea was popular enough then there was no point in listening to dozens of other ideas. If it was good, but not great, then they would go through all the alternatives even if it passed.

They were just about to begin the assignment of territories when a Guard came running in with a scroll in his hand, headed straight for the leader. He didn't hand him the scroll,

he whispered the message directly to him, so the actual scroll must be a symbolic relic of a time before the system.

"We have received a message from the Northern Continent. An attacking fleet has been spotted near the Northern City of Argenta. Who will stand up to defend them?" The leader asked.

Cain stood up, along with Nila, and they were joined by a few other Captains who had major dealings with the city.

"Good. The fleet will set out at once. Honor to you." Elder Rasoi dismissed them.

All of the Captains that were going, as well as their crews, jogged over to where Nila was headed for the doors, getting ready for their own planning meeting.

"There wasn't any detail of enemy strength other than thirty ships of the Giant fleet. We should have enough men here if they're not all Captained by an Awakened transfer." One of the Captains nodded happily, having been informed by text message of the details.

"If it's thirty ships, we should have no problem even if they all are. I can summon a great number of powerful defenders from the sea. We will see how the Giants deal with the Kraken from the Southern Seas." Cain agreed, jogging along beside the others.

"I can open up a large enough field to fast-travel all the ships to the final destination, it is somewhere I've been before," Nila informed the group, preparing the spell as they ran.

"Wait, I may have a better way," Cain announced, calling one clone of Moana to him.

"Moana, I can see in Nila's memory that the docks at Argenta have an offshore travel circle that Nila is familiar with. Can you open a portal to the marked location or is it out of range?" Cain asked so the others could hear.

"Since it is marked with a circle, I can target it without issues, where should I open the portal?" Moana asked, confirming her ability to control space well enough for the task at hand.

"Offshore, near Queen Rose. But it can wait until everyone is assembled near us." Cain informs her.

The Floating City doesn't have a travel circle anywhere in or near it, since it changes locations constantly, and the travel circles that ships can use to instantly move between ports have an immense energy cost and must be inscribed on the sea floor.

Many of the major coastal cities have them, the problem is that almost nobody can use them without the assistance of a large group of spellcasters. They're more of a relic of the prewar era than a functional utility for many cities at this point.

"Gather on us then, and I will have the portal opened. We will be at Argenta within the hour to begin the defense efforts. Queen Rose will spearhead, surrounded by my summons, and everyone else can fall in behind in a wide formation to turn your main guns on the enemy." Cain announced, and the other Captains gave him a nod of agreement before breaking off to board their own ships.

There are no amateur crews in the Wave Rider fleet, so the flotilla is assembled in under two minutes, all with full sails up and ready for war. The crews are already loading the Cannons in preparation and the Wave Rider Shamans are ready with the movement spells, in case the city is already under attack when they arrive.

"Moana, one Portal please, facing the open ocean. If the enemy isn't in sight we will send out scouts." Cain called over the sound of the wind, and a fifty-meter wide portal opened in front of them.

There would be no need to search for the enemy, they could already see the Giants in combat with the ships of the Argenta defense fleet.

"Full speed ahead, run out the Guns, and get ready for summons," Nila called, having battled more than a few times during her journeys.

As soon as they passed through the Portal, the Puppets brought the spells up for maximum speed, and both clones of Nila summoned an army of Water Fae. They now appeared at Legendary, since they got two ranks of increase from Cain's skills over their base Greater Summon Power level, but Cain was quick with a small army of Hammerhead Sharks, upgraded to Mythic using [Versatility].

Sixteen Fae plus thirty-six Sharks, which were each as large as the ships they were to be attacking would be enough to save the defense fleet for sure. The problem was that there was no way to warn them that the Wave Riders had sent out the Ocean Monsters. The best he could do was remind the summons that the defenders weren't enemies, even if they did attack them.

Even with the combination of wind and water magic that the Wave Riders were using, the monsters were much faster than the ships, quickly leaving them behind as the Wave Riders black sails filled the water near the docks, and headed out to the open ocean.

The Giants were not as brave as expected, and the moment the reinforcements arrived they hoisted sails and began to run.

"Summons, don't let them get away, but do let them get beyond the horizon before you eat them," Cain instructed, knowing the sharks would happily oblige.

If they were eaten by ocean monsters after they thought they escaped, then their messages back to their boss wouldn't give away the strength of the force that was sent to deal with them. With a bit more luck, they should be able to complete the same ambush a few more times before the fleets loyal to this Drakon fellow caught on.

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

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The sail back to Argenta was a short one, and the fleet was in high spirits. Not only would they get credit from the Floating City for going to help, they didn't actually need to do anything but show up and scare away the attackers, who were much closer than originally anticipated.

Normally the defense fleets should have detected the problem at least a day or two out, or even a trading vessel should have spotted them, but for some reason, these ones had slipped by until they were detected by the forces on shore.

That was something that they would have to look into before they left the city, along with anything else that the locals might know about the giants' ambitions and the capabilities that they showed against the local fleet.

Something about this attack felt very off to Cain like it was a simple distraction from something much more important that was going to be happening somewhere else.

Once the Captains had gathered near the pier, Cain informed them all of his thoughts. "I think the real target is somewhere else, and they were hoping to pull strong forces away from there by sending a weaker fleet here. The way they immediately ran before even testing us gives me a bad feeling." Cain informed the others.

"Me too. I've got my crew asking all up and down the coast to see what might be happening." One of the Captains agreed while everyone waited on the news to make their next move.

"I've found it. A hundred knots offshore of the northwestern corner of the Central Continent. A trading ship headed to Assah saw a giant fleet and asked me to inquire about protection for his ships." One of the deckhand Elves calls out.

"Nila, if you could do the honors this time. We don't have an exact destination, but you will be the fastest way to get there from here." Cain called out, and all the ships got ready to set sail again.

Nila's fast travel was more like the Dark Phoenix, moving through the shadows between realities, but it was incredibly quick, and this part of the Northern Continent was quite close to the Central Continent, as far as ocean crossings went. They should be able to reach the last known location within a day.

One man was sent to inform the harbor master of the additional attack and add him as a friend on his list so that they could directly contact the patrol fleet if the Giants came back again. He was not very confident that they wouldn't come back as soon as the Elves left, but Cain's summons assured him that they had eaten everything that moved from the ships, and some of the things that didn't.

Racing through the ocean felt like they were on a wild goose chase, just reacting to the news. But what else could they do? They didn't know what the enemy was after and they didn't have a report of their total strength yet. The best they could hope for until they did know more was just to prevent any major attacks.

They had sailed through the rest of the day and most of the night when the next update came to them.

[Boss, there is a fleet of Frost Giants, with dozens of awakened warriors among them, headed for the Northern edge of the Demon Kingdom. Uncle Aggie wants me to come and play, can you convince my mom?] Neffie asked Cain through private message.

[Do you seriously think I could convince your mom to let you go to battle on a different Continent? You're dreaming little Demon Queen. But I have a deal for you. Tell Aggramor that I will come there myself to help out and then we both can tell you all about it. We will have to hold a full Guild meeting about this soon, if they're attacking the Central Continent.] Cain replied, certain that the little demon wouldn't be happy, but also certain that it would cause a neverending nightmare with Lickity if he did encourage her to go.

"You are no fun at all. I never get to do anything.] Neffie pouted, hoping to change his mind.

[You have an entire city to defend and Dinosaur Cavalry. How could you call that never doing anything fun?] Cain asked her, thinking she was being dramatic.

[But they don't attack at night and it has been like five hours since dinner and there's nothing to do.] Neffie complained.

There it was, it is the middle of the night on the shores of the Eastern Continent and she is bored.

[Meditate and try to sleep a little. Since the attacks almost never happen at night, you should sleep while they're not happening so that you are rested and ready when they do.] Cain suggested, knowing she was going to be mentally insulting him for even suggesting it.

[Or maybe talk to your dad about a midnight snack. I'll bet he has hidden cookies that you can have while you wait for me and Aggramor to finish up.] Cain added, throwing Cixelcid under the bus.

He would get over it. Nighttime snack requests were just a run-of-the-mill part of being a parent after all. It was certainly better than having to go to battle in the middle of the night anyhow.

[They had better be the good shortbread cookies.] Neffie agreed, going to look for her dad, who was securely tucked into bed at this time of night.

"Boss, I can sense awakened life forms ahead. Nila, turn to port fifteen degrees and we should run right into them." Moana called out, unable to see much in the dark, but Leviathans never navigated by sight anyhow. Mana sensing and echolocation were much more effective.

They dropped out of Nila's fast travel spell just after the glow of fires along the shore drew their attention. The Giants had made land and were attacking, while the Demon Army was doing its best to hold them off until more awakened fighters could be brought to the shores to assist them.

"I will transform and go fight on land with my summons. The awakened Giants should come to me. You take out the fleet and the weaker ones." Were Cain's final words before he leaped into the air and transformed into his full twenty-meter tall Ancient form and raced to shore. He had never seen a proper Frost Giant in person, this was a prime opportunity to add them to his collection.

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

Chapter 491 491

The Frost Giant army was an impressive one. But their ships weren't ships, as Cain knew them. The Frost Giants used wind and ice magic to create a flat sheet of ice on the ocean's surface and propel huge sleds across them. Only the lesser species did something as mundane as floating in the water.

They didn't miss Cain's approach, and they were definitely not impressed with the field of tentacles that began his attack, even before his feet hit the ground in between them and the demon army, challenging them to charge him.

They might only be skilled in a few forms of elemental magic, but the Awakened Frost Giants quickly destroyed the field of Tentacles and raised their weapons, screaming a war cry towards the defenders on shore.

[Kneel Worms] Cain mentally shouted back at them, adding a heavy dose of [Mental Domination] to his command and unleashing his [Existential Dread] Aura.

The weaker of the giants dropped to their knees before a counterspell was used to free them from the command, but the stronger ones resisted it and immediately charged Cain.

Cain sent out the [Crushing Tentacles] from his arm this time instead of in a field, grabbing Giants with enough force to break bones and throwing them back into their own ranks before he cast a series of Mythic Fireballs in their direction. Ice should be weak against fire, so it seemed like the best course of attack.

As if the fire were a signal, the Wave Rider fleet attacked, crushing the sleds and melting the ice that the Frost Giant reserves were still standing on. The water underneath was shallow enough that they could stand, but the insult was felt deeply by the proud species.

"Drakon will rule the world." The leader of the raiding force yelled his battle cry, leading the way towards Cain with the Awakened fighters, while the rest made their way toward the demon army as he had hoped.

The demons were more than capable of taking care of themselves, so as long as he dealt with the Awakened threats, they would be happy to deal with the rest.

Predictably, Carnage himself, the real one, not the clones that Cain and the Echoes often used, led the charge into the Frost Giants, swinging his flaming Ax above his head in glee. Cain decided that the Legendary Demon needed an upgrade these days. A Mythic attack would do him a world of good, along with the clones of him of course.

Cain took out his spear in his right hand which wasn't currently made of tentacles, ready to face the leader of the Frost Giants, who carried two small frost-covered axes. A sweep of the spear knocked aside the first attacks and Cain wrapped a tentacle from the [Crushing Tentacles] Spell around his neck, squeezing the life out of him for half a second before the other blade cut him free again.

The two enormous figures traded blow after blow, looking for a good opening to take advantage of their opponent.

For a moment, the Frost Giant leader thought that he had it when Cain tripped and fell backward, but hurled himself to the side at the last second as Cain opened his wings to prevent his fall and unleashed a barrage of fireballs.

"Tricky old Ancient. But you're still weak. I will end you before you recover the power that your kin had before they fled. Don't bother fleeing here, I will hunt you to the end of your life." The leader declared in a coarse version of the Elven tongue.

Cain didn't speak Frost Giant, so the Elven was a small blessing. Though, come to think of it, the System might have translated for him either way. It was considerate like that, and rarely let you be insulted in ignorance.

"What's got you frost worms all worked up? Did you forget your place? Why don't you just stay where you were put?" Cain taunted back, digging for answers to the reason for these attacks.

"The Frost Giants have the power now. The Champion Drakon has arisen from the Gnomes' folly and now nothing can stand between us and world domination." The leader declared with absolute certainty.

So one of them really did get something that let them believe he was invincible. Frost Giants respected size and power before all else, so once they found him, this Drakon shouldn't be hard to identify.

"Once I'm done with you, I will go play with your little upstart leader. Enjoy your life while it lasts." Cain sneered, using a Mythic [Meteor] spell to rain flaming rocks down all around himself and the giant leader, who roared in agony as they seared his flesh.

Cain took advantage and thrust out with his spear, adding to the wounds on the pale blue skin. None of that was enough to stop the enraged Giant though, he simply went berserk, chopping at Cain and even managing to cut one of his real tentacles off.

His regeneration regrew it in only a few seconds, but Cain hadn't felt pain like that in a long time.

"Enough playing around. Time to die." Cain decided, calling three dozen Mythic Fire Elementals to his side and ordering them to burn the giants out of existence.

The giants who were watching the duel between leaders were ready in an instant, and fog filled the air as frost met fire in a hissing and crackling exchange.

Then Cain used his last two Mythic Summons to call Forest Dragons to the battle, letting their corrosive breath tear the flesh from the Frost Giants for the destructive fire of the Elementals to enter.

The pain was more than the leader could take, and he faltered for an instant, allowing Cain to engulf him in a Mythic [Fireball] and wrap him in [Crushing Tentacles]. The roar of rage turned to a wheeze as the fire burnt his throat and then a rattling moan as the mighty Frost Giant died.

With the extra damage done by Cain's summons, the Frost Giants didn't stand a chance. They were being slaughtered even before Cain used [Dominion] to extend the range of [Crushing Tentacles] to engulf the entire battlefield, at the cost of over thirty thousand mana.

With the giants all immobilized, the battle only lasted a few more seconds, leaving the beach littered with corpses while the ruins of the Frost Giant fleet burned at sea.

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

Chapter 492 492 Deal With The Demons

With the battle over, Cain turned to inspect the state of the Demon armies. Since he had taken care of the greatest threats they hadn't taken as serious of damage as they were expecting, leaving them mostly intact and ready to start cleaning up the beach before the bodies began to rot.

Frost Giants have been frozen their entire lives, if they were exposed to warm air after death they would rapidly decay, and from what the demons had heard the smell was terrible.

The healers had already started resurrecting as many of the fallen demons as they could, while Cain didn't have much to do. If the demons were running short on time, he could assist with the resurrections, but they had proper professionals for that, so they could take care of their own for the most part.

"Excellent timing. Thank you for the save today." King Aggramor greeted Cain, coming forward from the rear ranks of his army. He had been rallying as many troops as he could while also dealing with today's spawned monsters, so he had only now arrived on the scene.

"You're going to need a bard to make a proper story for Neffie. I don't have Nemu with me, and she is pretty upset that we didn't let her come here and play with the Frost Giants. Her power level is a lot lower outside of Port Nefheim, and her mother would

never allow her to come here to battle anyhow, so I brought the army that I had available." Cain explained, indicating the Wave Riders on the horizon.

"It's been a long time since the Elves showed up to help out the Demons, even if they are the Dark Elves. I will have to send a proper gift of gratitude." King Aggramor said in a formal tone he wasn't hearing. This was King Aggramor, leader of the Demons, not Uncle Aggie, doting adoptive Uncle of Neffie. He couldn't be quite as casual in front of his army as he was in private.

"I have more propositions for you if we have a moment to talk," Cain suggested, looking towards the village that the army was defending.

"Call the sailors to shore, the army will be having a victory feast, and it's not complete without every fighter present," Aggramor said with a curt nod of his head, turning back towards the city.

[Nila, bring everyone to shore, the demons are holding a victory feast and everyone is invited.]

[Got it, boss. I'll bring them in right away and we will wait for you and the King to finish whatever you have planned for the Demons.] She sent back, and Cain saw the sails of the ships raise enough to gently propel them to shore without the effort of bringing all the spells online.

Cain made his way after King Aggramor, finding him inside a community hall that had a collection of tables set up inside. From the look of it, this was the Demon's war room, where the four separate sects of Demons worked out the war plans. They work together in battle, but they don't do well with taking orders from the other types of demons, so they set up four different areas for their strategists, with one commander organizing them all.

Today that was supposed to be King Aggramor if the throne at the end of the room is any indication of what occurred before Cain arrived.

"I dismissed everyone else, there's no need for all the formality now," Aggramor informed Cain when he walked in.

"Thanks for that, I'm terrible with court etiquette. I'll start with the essentials, I would like to advance a few of your top demons to Awakened so that you have a proper chance to fight back against invasions from the other Continents. They all have awakened areas on them, so the Central Continent won't be safe from invasion for long now that the barriers that kept the Awakened beasts contained are broken. Both the monsters and those that hunt them will start expanding sooner or later, so it's best if you are ready.

Plus, Demons have a particular advantage. Once they awaken there is a good chance that their body will adapt as well, making them not only Mythic Awakened but Mythic Quality, which increases their modifiers by a huge margin."

From the look on Aggramor's face, this was going to be a very easy negotiation. He didn't seem to have any sort of objection at all, but he had a calculating look like he wanted to ask for something else as well.

"I don't suppose that we could get more towers built around the Continent, could we? The one in Long Fang Valley and the one in my capital are both already overcrowded with adventurers going there to try for the special rewards that they are known to give out. Talk of how Lady Cyrene was rewarded with a Mythic spell inside of the tower in Long Fang Valley spread everywhere in only a few days thanks to the Guild Members, and now there is no end to the demand. Everyone is willing to give it a try just on the thousandth of a percent chance that they will be the next to get an awakened reward." Aggramor explains.

That's actually not a bad idea. Cain wanted the one in Long Fang Valley to be a landmark item, but smaller towers, like the one he made for the demons, could be placed almost anywhere, and both the Echoes and the Lesser Watchers could make them.

They could also staff them, making sure that there wasn't much trouble outside of them due to the visitors. He would have to suggest it later, and they could build one everywhere that he had Lesser Watchers stationed.

The only issue was the slow progression of Cain's own levels. The towers couldn't make opponents stronger than he was, the spell design didn't allow for it. Since it was originally a training device spell that a student modified, it was supposed to be built by the instructors, not the students, so the level would never be an issue.

"I will talk to my people and I will see what we can accomplish." Cain agreed.

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

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"But, back to the first topic, about giving some gifts to your Demons." Cain continued with an eager smile, making Aggramor chuckle.

"I don't see any reason why not. Who should we call in first? Most of my unique named generals are here right now."

Cain thought about it for a second. "Start with Carnage, Oath Breaker, and the Record Keeper." Cain decided.

Both Cain and his summons used all three on a regular basis, and he could summon and merge with them all using [Versatility] to improve the summons to Mythic so he could just grant them the spells directly with [Modify]. After that their bodies should adapt on their own, hopefully.

Predictably, the first one to arrive was Carnage, followed by Oath Breaker, who gave Cain a very strange look when he saw him.

"You, I see you in my nightmares all the time, what have you been doing to my mind?" Oath Breaker asked, pointing at Cain.

Cain had no idea what the Legendary Demon was talking about. He summoned the Epic version of his species all the time, but rarely did he call on the Legendary leader of the Oath Breakers himself. Or was that herself? Given the strange form, it was a bit hard to tell.

"I don't know what you mean. What sort of dreams?"

The demon began to detail various battles that Cain had fought while merging with or summoning Oath Breakers, and enlightenment began to come to the former Puppet Master.

"I don't suppose that you share a mental link with your subordinates, do you? Can you hear their thoughts or see what they see?" Cain asked and the demon nodded.

Cain called the clones of Oath Breaker and Carnage into [Merger] with him.

"And when I do this, what happens?" He asked.

"It's like I can see through your eyes, but it's dreamy like I'm asleep or trapped." The demon told him, confused.

"It's a skill of mine, bringing my summons into my body to strengthen myself. I don't do it as much anymore, since my stat modifiers are maxed out, but I used to do it for every battle, and I still do it for a while when I need a spell." Cain explained.

[It's been a while since I've been here. How many fun things have I missed? I know you missed my advice.] The Oath Breaker in his merger whispered to Cain.

"There it is again. So annoying." The demon muttered, and Cain released the Merger. He could use the skill well enough with the demon standing beside him now that his skills from the Puppet Master and Flesh Crafter class had been maxed out.

"Look, it's me, but kinda ugly? What happened to your face?" The summoned Oath Breaker asked.

"You insolent little shit, I will rip you apart." The real version snarled.

"Both of you behave. We are here to improve the Army's skills, and we don't have a lot of time to waste, the army will be expecting us back out soon." Aggramor ordered and all the demons in the room bowed.

Cain noticed that the Oath Breaker did take out a mirror to check its face though, causing the summon to chuckle.

"I'll call on you for a chat later, but first, we need to get the living version back on track," Cain whispered to his summoned Oath Breaker, which nodded sadly as Cain granted the living version [Shadow Blades], the Mythic version of its racial innate ability.

"Oh, that is nice, do me next, do me next." Carnage asked, giving Cain a pleading look that reminded him a lot of Neffie.

Maybe Carnage wasn't a violent person by nature, he might just really, really like combat and the name was only a byproduct of his constant need to battle to keep from being bored.

Cain upgraded his innate ability to [Lava Quake] which would coat its arms and body in Mythic fire and cause any strike that hit the ground to cause trails of Lava to spread out from the impact site.

"This is amazing. Mythic Lava and I can already feel my body getting stronger. I'm going to go try this in the woods, Okay? Thanks bye." Carnage was out the door before anyone could say a word to him, and Cain shared an amused look with King Aggramor.

"Are you sure you're not related to him? There is a strong hint of Neffie in that boy." Cain suggested, and a whistling laugh came from behind him where Record Keeper had just entered the building.

"Who gave Carnage a new toy? He's waving that flaming Ax around like a maniac and running through the woods?" The bird-headed and winged demon asked.

"That would be my fault, and I'm going to give you a gift too. Mythic [Balance]." Cain explained.

"You know, I'm almost insulted that it took you this long after giving it to your baby momma to get around to giving it to the real me. Very thoughtless, it's like I don't even deserve the spell to add to my records." The demon complained, but Cain granted him the spell anyhow.

"Oh, that's good stuff." Record Keeper sighed, sitting down on the floor and beginning to meditate. Cain always thought the Record Keeper was just a species name, but it seemed that he really did keep a record of every spell that he came across. A demonic Librarian of sorts.

"Well, that went better than expected. Why don't we go out and join the party, now that we have the basics covered? If you see any others that you wish to bless, you are of course welcome to it. I can't imagine that any of them would complain." Aggramor smiled, patting Cain on the shoulder and then patting Cyrene's head.

"She's getting better and better at the belt thing. I almost forgot she was there, and I can see her right in front of me." Oath Breaker smiled, using all six of his arms to pat the Lamia.

"I was a bit busy with the planning for all the extra towers. Everyone has an idea for where they should be and what they should look like, so someone needed to organize it all, and the Lesser Watchers nominated me." Cyrene explained.

"Why would they pick you though?" Record Keeper asked without opening its eyes.

"Because they're Pet Sitters and she is his personal Pet." Oath Breaker said, deadpan and Cyrene shrugged. It was as good of an explanation as any, and the Lesser Watchers hadn't offered one at all, only informed her that it was her task now.

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

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As it turned out, demons are actually lousy at keeping secrets from each other. Most of the army knew that Cain had been blessing some of them with Mythic abilities and that he was likely to do it a few more times even before he left the meeting hall.

Some of that, or most of that, was probably due to Carnage running around with his new flaming Ax, but the news still spread faster than Cain was expecting.

The beaches seemed to have been mostly cleaned up already, thanks to the combined efforts of the Demon army, and the Wave Riders had joined them for the party. Large

bonfires were already burning all around the army's camp and Cain could smell food cooking from every direction. As he knew well, it takes a lot to feed an army, so he would have some time to be sociable before food distracted everyone.

"Duke Cain, it's a pleasure to meet you. I am Gilberaat, from the Northern Steppes. Your battle today was magnificent, on par with the mighty King Aggramor himself." A Magic-type demon, wearing the insignia of a Lieutenant and the son of a lesser noble simpered the moment Cain came near him.

"I'm glad you were impressed. Combat with magic is all about versatility." Cain responded, knowing most of them wouldn't get the veiled reference to his own area effect skill

It was possible that Record Keeper, who was walking behind him, carefully examining Cyrene's scales, did understand the reference, but with the beaked head Cain couldn't assign any emotions to its facial expressions, they were just too unfamiliar.

Passing through the Magic Clan wasn't too bad though, other than a few who were clearly begging for favors, most were more interested in his rumored Spell Crafting abilities. It was a skill that the legendary Record Keeper supposedly had, but the demon either couldn't or wouldn't teach it to them. Cain had merged with the demon many times before though, and what it had wasn't Spell Crafting, but a type of mimicry, that let it learn and use spells it saw enough times. Record Keeper couldn't create new magic on its own.

The Wrath Demons were much more energetic, making Cain wish he had brought Vala here with him. Everything was a physical contest with them, even their disputes were solved with physical contests. Arm wrestling was a popular pastime, and Vala was very good at it, but they also had everything from duels to three-legged races going on.

Unlike the Magic aspect group, the Wrath Demons weren't nearly as segregated. Members of both the obsession and the Plague demons were there cheering them on and sometimes partaking in the games. If he had to categorize them, the Wrath Demons were actually the fun cousins of the family.

Near the edge of the Wrath Demons group, playing with some sort of diseased-looking housecat, sat a Legendary Plague Mother, a demon that could summon a wide variety of lesser Plague Demons. Cain didn't see the Plague Lord here, and with his size, he would be impossible to miss. This Plague Mother seemed to be the most powerful here other than the named trio, very close to pushing through to Mythic Quality on her own.

Her next species skill should be a Mythic Version of her [Plague Family] summoning skill. That seems like a skill he would enjoy using on a regular basis, so Cain merges with a clone of her, upgraded to Mythic, and walks over to say hello to the Plague Mother.

If you ignore the rotten smell, the Plague Kitten she has is actually pretty cute. Or maybe the smell is her, but either way it's bad. The emaciated demon looked up at him when Cain crouched in front of her, her dehydrated form showing the outline of her bones under ragged and leathery skin.

p "Good morning?" She asked as if she wasn't sure of his intentions or even the time of day.

"Would you like a new spell to bring different children into the world?" Cain asked, following the directions of the clone of hers that he was merged with.

"New children? After a thousand years? That would be incredible." She nodded happily, and Cain could hear the dry joints in her neck creak.

Cain used [Modify] to grant her the new spell and a soft gray glow slowly surrounded her body. That hadn't happened before, as far as Cain remembered, so maybe she was activating the spell.

The glow faded after only a few seconds, but when it did her status upgraded from Legendary Quality, Mythic Awakened to just plain Mythic Quality. The aura of power that she was suddenly giving off brought many interested demons over to see what the fuss was. Plague Mother wasn't paying them any attention though, focusing on something internally.

Her species could only summon specific demons, but the way she was focusing, it was possible that they could influence them, or make a one-time choice when they reached Mythic Rank. When she finished, the Plague Mother was in a much better mood and stood up to join the party, still carrying her kitten. Her appearance had subtly changed, still emaciated, but now looking somehow hollow, as if pure power had replaced the missing muscle mass and made the flesh hanging loosely over her bones instead of looking so tightly mummified.

"Well, can we see the new spell? I've never seen a Mythic Plague Mother." One of the plague demons asked and the woman smiled, handing Cain her kitten.

"Of course, darling. But just a little bit, we wouldn't want to make things crowded now would we?"

Her magic swirled in the air and three demons appeared in front of her. A legendary Blighted Paladin, and enormous Plague Lord at Epic Quality, his bloated body nearly blocking out the fire nearby, and a small mummy in a goth loli dress carrying a short sword.

She was a pestilent zombie, whose every hit spread [Pestilence] to her target. While she wasn't the strongest of summons, that damage ability was the same one that Cain

and Vala used before she reached Mythic Rank and it upgraded. It spread incredibly fast and was very difficult to cleanse.

The mummy girl had long black hair and was mostly wrapped in cloth under her dress, but one red eye was visible and glowed happily at the attention she was getting.

"Harmffo" [Hello] The zombie mumbled, waving at everyone around her and the Plague Mother made a wheezing noise that Cain interpreted as joy before picking her up to give her a hug.

The Plague Lord looked a little upset at that. He was her child too, but he got too big to properly hug, she could only grab an arm and hug a little piece of him. The Blighted Paladin was of course, above such lowbrow things as hugs from his Plague Mother. Or at least he pretended to be so he could uphold his public image.

The little zombie was making grabby hands at the kitten, so Cain passed it back and the three took a seat near the fire so that the others could see them properly and come to talk.

"That was pretty impressive. Not only did you cure her boredom and depression, but you also gave the army an incredible combat asset." King Aggramor said, winking at Cain after he finished congratulating his newest Mythic asset.

"It was my pleasure. She looks much happier now that she has a little zombie to cuddle. I think that should be enough for the first string of assault forces, and my people will start on the additional towers in just a few days, once Cyrene here has finished with the planning stages. If the Gods deem them worthy you should get at least one or two more awakened Demons to join you, and after that, we will have to see how things progress between the continents. Keeping everyone contained to their home Continent doesn't really seem realistic anymore, it's too easy for the Awakened to travel." Cain told the Demon King, who was trying not to be distracted by the repeated booming noise of Carnage playing with his Ax on the beach.

Upgrading the Wrath Demon was both the best and worst idea of the day. He was going to be a monster in combat now, but he sure was loud and he didn't give a damn who complained unless it was the King himself.

The lesser Demons were starting to come around with food and drinks now, competing with each other to see who would be the first to bring a dish to Cain and King Aggramor, but being repeatedly defeated by the ranks of demons between them and the kitchen.

Every time their tray was emptied, they had to return to the kitchen for another and try again. It had become a game among the Demon Army a long time ago because they knew that the higher-ranked Demons would simply go to the kitchen and get what they wanted when they were hungry. Only the drink trays weren't completely cleared so the dignitaries always had a beverage available.

"I suppose we should eat. Plague Mother, would you like anything?" Cain asked, and the demon looked down at her little summon, asking something.

"We're good with just drinks today. But thank you for the offer." Plague Mother answered with a polite bow, and Cain turned to head for the kitchen.

They had enough food here to feed twice the numbers that Cain could see, but with Gluttony obsession demons and some of the very large species, it would likely all be finished by morning. The Wave Riders were having a grand time drinking and dancing, but Cain was in a lazy mood, sitting down against a tree at the edge of the village and watching the dancing while drinking the Demon Kingdom's black rum and chatting with the constant visitors that came to make his acquaintance.

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Chapter 495 495 Gifts For Aggie

The party finally wound down as the sun came up, and the Wave Riders headed back for their ships to sleep it off in the relative cool of the wooden ships near the water line. The water off the shore was warm here, but they were towards the northern edge of the Central Continent, and the current here wasn't quite as bathtub comfortable to swim in as the one that passed by Skyview. It was a lot more comfortable to sleep near though, lowering the temperature in the ships just enough to be comfortable.

Like Cain, the Demon King didn't need a lot of sleep, only a few hours would do, so he was up and about before lunch, while Cain was lounging on the deck of Queen Rose, enjoying the sun.

The King and his father had both complained about the lack of some of the old bloodlines that their Royal Family's power was inherited from, and King Aggramor was a huge fan of children, as evidenced by all the times he ditched work to go play with Neffie, so Cain had an idea to keep him occupied, as well as helping the Demon Kingdom in the near future.

Leaving the ship and flying to shore in his Demon Progenitor form, Cain quickly caught the King's attention and gestured to the meeting hall, where they went to talk privately yesterday.

Aggramor met him there in only a few seconds, unsure what the Ancient was up to, but worried that they had received more news of attacks on the Central or Northern

coastlines and had to leave immediately. If possible, he was hoping to at least keep this small fleet of Wave Riders nearby for a day or two until he could be sure that his own kingdom was fairly safe.

Attacking him didn't make any sense, his was one of the strongest Kingdoms along the coast, so King Aggramor suspected that whoever this Drakon was he didn't know a single thing about Central Continent politics, only that they weren't supposed to have any awakened fighters here.

The overconfidence was mostly justified, but King Aggramor did have allies on the Eastern Continent who could send him platoons of awakened soldiers in a real emergency, which only proved the enemy's incompetence in his mind.

"I know I gifted the army some fighting strength last night, but I had a special gift for you as well. I was going to do it earlier, but everything got chaotic. So I will do it now and hopefully, it works out for you." Cain said as soon as he entered the room, leaving the Demon King wondering what he was talking about.

Cain didn't wait for him to understand, he simply started creating puppets. Ten identical little Demons, each of them very closely resembling Vala, with smooth white skin too bright to be a human flesh tone, and long black hair. They all had small black wings on their backs, short black horns, and cute red sundresses.

Then Cain added the essentials, increased stats, and modifiers, ending with the [Leeching Aura] That all Blood Dancers should have to mark them as Mythic members of their species.

These were not from a small species, instead, Cain had created them in bodies about five years of age, so that the effects of the world's Mana on their Mythic bodies would level them up as they matured. When Cain released Puppets to their own devices, they would always start at level 1, but with any special skills that Cain had imbued into them.

"Ladies, meet Demon King Aggramor, or Uncle Aggie, as most of the young ladies call him. He is going to take care of you and teach you everything you need to know to be a proper Demon Princess." Cain explained to the little girls while Aggramor stared at him in shock.

"He's kind of cute without his transformation, are you sure he's old enough to be called uncle?" One of the girls asked, her Mythic magical resistance allowing her to see through the spell Aggramor used to disguise himself since he wasn't using a physical transformation.

"I have been King for hundreds of years already, so I suppose I'm old enough to be called Uncle." King Aggramor agreed.

"At hundreds shouldn't you be a grandpa?" Another girl asked.

"No, his father is still alive, so he is Grandpa. I'm sure he will be very excited to meet you all. He knew your ancestors when they were still around, so make sure to ask him to tell you all about it." Cain instructed his petite charges.

"Got it, boss." They answered in unison.

"Now, is there anything else I should be teaching you before you go? You should naturally get classes of your own, but maybe we should vary them up a little. Who wants to be a mage?" Cain's question just got him a bunch of dismissive looks.

p "Fine, who wants to be a Magical Warrior, and who wants to be a War Cleric? Clerics to my right, Warriors to my left." Cain sighed, wondering if the species ever actually had mages, given the love for combat that earned their species its name.

Eight of the ten went to the warrior side and Cain looked to the remaining two. "You're first since it's a smaller group. Each of you will get two skills, healing, and combat."

Carnage had his own fighting style as a skill, but that wasn't well suited to Clerics. Then Cain thought about it a bit more. For Wrath Demons, maybe two-handed Axes could replace staves? It might be just the thing for a Blood Dancer Cleric.

Cain granted each of them the [Carnage War Dance], as the system called the style, and then [Balance] The healing and damage ability that originally belonged to Record Keeper. That should hopefully make them all clerics when they were freed and gained a System interface of their own.

"Next up is the group of warriors. Do you want to be agile warriors or tanky warriors?" Cain asked, getting the same dismissive look as if he had asked a pointless question. The answer was clearly both, he could sense it in their minds.

"Alright, let's see what I can do for you then." Cain agreed. If he gave them [Bulwark] to create a magical shield in front of themselves and their nearby allies, and then added the [Dark Elven Offensive Techniques] and the [Carnage War Dance] that should make them both agile and tanky in combat.

Hopefully. Cain hadn't actually seen the extent of Carnage's fighting style, but he knew it was effective both barehanded and with a two-handed ax.

"Now, I think I've given you ladies all you will need to get you started. The Demon Kingdom will help you level up. There is a Tower in the Capital where you can go and fight to improve your skills, and you will naturally grow very quickly, so do your best so you can attract a good mate and live a happy life together, killing enemies and whatever else it is that Blood Dancers like to do for fun." Cain told them with a smile and the girls smirked back at him.

"Understood. We will be looking forward to getting to try out the tower. But is it actually tough enough to be a challenge?" They asked in unison.

"It's made to my specifications, and it should be good to level 400, so you won't get tired of it until you're almost fully grown." That was enough to assure them that their childhood with someone who wasn't their Master would be a pleasant experience. Even as children, the Wrath Demons like the Blood Dancers tended to be very bloodthirsty.

Cain freed them all, and the girls looked around in confusion, trying to adapt to the sudden change in their knowledge and power levels.

"This is where your bodies are at without me empowering them. You are currently level one, but you will grow quickly. Within a few years you should be almost adults, so make the best of your childhood. And one more thing, don't forget to have King Aggramor take you for Ice Cream, I have it on the good word of your Cousin Neffie that he knows the very best spot."

The man in question was still in shock. Cain had just brought back the basis of the Royal Family right in front of him, but as children, for him to raise and spoil, and he didn't know exactly what to say in this situation.

"So, Uncle Aggie, about that Ice Cream. Is it here, or will we have to wait and go somewhere else? Where is here anyways, Boss Cain never covered that. Do you live in a Castle, like a real castle with a dungeon? Is it huge and imposing and dripping with the blood of your enemies? Do you think I would look cute in a white dress instead of a red one? Can we have armor now, and maybe a sword too?" The girls asked all at once, snapping the Demon King from his stupor.

"Yes, I live in a castle, the ice cream is there, it rained yesterday, so likely no dripping blood, white cleric dresses are always cute and the armory is back at the Castle but will have to wait until you finish your Class setup." King Aggramor answered, used to Neffie grilling him in this manner.

"The System did it automatically, we didn't get options. The two of us are Priestesses of the War God, while the others are all Blood Dancer Vanguard." One of the Clerics explained.

"You will have to name them or ask your wife to do it. I didn't think of any in advance. Or they can pick one on their own if they like, but if he lets you pick, you need to make it short and easy to pronounce ladies, no getting dramatic and trying to put titles in your name." Cain instructed.

More than a few looked dispirited at that news, and Aggramor decided that he would have to pick names for them if he didn't want them to be ridiculous and embarrassing for the girls later in life.

"I have no idea how to thank you, but I will take good care of the girls and make sure they grow up into model citizens of the Demon Kingdom and do their species and the War Goddess proud," Aggramor told Cain while looking over his diminutive charges.

"Now, how about we go to the Castle to get you all a change of clothes and some ice cream? When you're all dressed the same I can't tell who is who." Aggramor suggested.

"And some weapons, you can't forget the weapons. Preferably a nice Ax, with a serrated edge." One of the clerics suggested.

Giving them Carnage's battle style was the right call, Cain decided. He would have to inform the big demon before he left because he wouldn't want to miss out on a chance to train his tiny proteges.

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

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With his ten new charges in tow, King Aggramor excused himself back to the Captial. He had a lot to do, getting them settled in, giving them names, calming them down, stopping them from rushing to the tower the moment they saw it in the distance. The little things new Demon parents go through when Cain is involved.

A few demons who didn't need much sleep saw him leave, but only one of them was of interest to Cain today.

"Hey Carnage, have I got a surprise for you." He called out, flying over to the large red demon, who was polishing the claws at the tips of his wings.

"If it's not killing, I'm not interested." Carnage answered, shoohing the flying nuisance away.

"Even if I made ten new Blood Dancers and gave them your combat style to play with while they fight their way up from level one?" Cain asked.

"Okay, I am listening. But why would they be level one Demons? You're a level 400 Mythic being." Carnage asked.

"They're not a summoned creature, I created them and then released them to King Aggramor to raise up and rebuild the Blood Dancer bloodline. They're actual demon

children, who know nothing at all of this world and could use a properly wrathful influence, who understands the combat style I granted them." Cain's speech seemed to be having some effect on the big demon, so he continued with the final blow he was certain would send Carnage back to the Capital, looking for the children.

"The first thing they asked for was a two-handed ax with a serrated edge." At Cain's words, Carnage got a sweet look on his face and placed both hands over his heart.

"Oh, those precious darlings. A serrated Ax isn't easy to use, I will have to go and train them myself. They were with the King, you said?"

Cain nodded. "They were when they left. He was going to get them weapons and ice cream."

Carnage flew off the moment he had his confirmation, disappearing through the travel circle in an instant while the rest of the camp was slowly starting to wake up and shake off their night of revelry.

[Any word on more attacks?] Cain asked Nila, knowing at least one clone of her would be awake.

[Nothing yet. I think they might be taking a few days to regroup and plan after their attack on the Demons failed. It will have given them the impression that their intelligence on the Central Continent is incorrect.] Nila suggested.

[Keep in contact then. I'm sure they have at least one more force on the way somewhere, we just need to find out where they are headed.] Cain informed her, then took a good look around the Demon army again.

They had plenty of numbers and were well-trained. They also didn't seem to lack anything, except their King and one Commander, so they should be fine for now. The presence of all the Demon Generals was less for organization purposes and more for the absolute power that they brought to the battlefield.

Plague Mother seemed to be in an exceptionally good mood this morning, feeding her summoned mummy fruit juice and bouncing it on her knee while the Plague Lord gave the little mummy an envious look, cursing his huge body.

The Plague Lord was currently engaged in a game of Go with the Blighted Paladin, who was much better at the game than he was, controlling almost the entire board, while the big demon made random guesses as to where he should place his piece next. Both nodded politely when Cain approached, using the motion to alert their Plague Mother to visitors.

"Good morning. I just thought I should let you know that the King and Carnage have headed back to the Capital. I created some new Blood Dancer children for them, so

they might be busy for a while, and Record Keeper seems to be missing at the moment, or at least invisible, so I wanted to let you know that the Wave Riders are just waiting on news from the coasts before we head out to deal with more of the Giants." Cain greeted the wizened plague demon.

"That is fine, I won't have any problem keeping this mob in line if we are attacked again. Record Keeper is searching the coastline for anything we might have missed, but he talked to some allies last night and learned that the attacks don't usually have more than one awakened fighter in them. We just got lucky, or unlucky as the case may be. The next one in our territory shouldn't be as bad."

Her smile set Cain at ease, assured that she did in fact have the skills to deal with large numbers of demons from multiple factions. With her here and Record Keeper on patrol, they shouldn't have too many issues if Cain was called away, so he gave her a polite nod and headed back to Queen Rose to see what was for breakfast. It would be a few hours until Cyrene was up, but Cain was sure the smell of food would help motivate her to get going this afternoon.

By the time Cain had breakfast finished, a very groggy Cyrene had joined him. It wasn't the smell of food that dragged her out of bed though, she had finally noticed that she was alone in the hammock and went looking for Cain. Now securely back around his waist, they were enjoying a bowl of oatmeal and fruit while they waited for news from the Wave Riders.

It might be news about the war plans, or news about the Giants being sighted on an attack approach towards another city, but so far neither bit of news had come to them.

It was a case of hurry up and wait. All they could do was stand by until something happened.

"The Lesser Watchers have started on the towers in Blood Sands Castle, the Beginner's Valley, Port Nefheim, and Landis City. They want to know if they should split up and put them in more places, or if they should stay near the towers and supervise?" Cyrene asked, knowing it would only take them a few days to get the buildings assembled and ready to go, using the smaller footprint of the one in the Demon Capital.

"Give them my apologies for putting them on babysitting duty. I need someone to make sure there isn't any trouble, and the Guild Members might not be enough without them. Plus, the others will want to head inside themselves and see what they can get." Cain told her, finally noticing that Cyrene was still in her nightgown.

"Want to take a quick nap while we wait? I had a few things to do this morning." Cain asked, standing to carry the sleepy Lamia to a hammock after he dropped the breakfast dishes in the sink to deal with in a few minutes.

"Mhmm, naps are good." Cyrene agreed, already half asleep again. Cain was going to have to do something about her attachment issues, she could barely sleep alone, but this world was desperately short on therapists.

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

Chapter 497 497 Neffie's New Toy

When Neffie got out of bed that morning the Port city was much more lively than usual. That was actually an accomplishment, because, between the ships, the vendor stalls, and the training of the Dino Cavalry, the Port City was very rarely ever quiet.

Equipping her favorite frilly dress with a shiny golden breastplate for armor and matching boots, the young Demon Queen rushed to the balcony to see what was going on outside. If it wasn't important and just loud, she would go down to breakfast first, but she was not at all willing to miss out on anything that might be new and fun.

Whatever the Lesser Watchers were doing, it seemed to qualify. Both of her Dad's Lieutenants were outside supervising and keeping people away from a construction site so that the summons could work.

Neffie didn't recall hearing about it, much less approving any sort of construction today. Sure, technically her parents signed off on most of the details, but still, they should tell her if a giant tower was going to be built right next to the fields. The thing was like a lighthouse, tall and slender, made of the local gray stone, but highly detailed with carvings up the sides.

It was only half built so far, and it looked like the Watchers were leading the assembly process. That wasn't like them, they usually lived up to their name and only watched whatever she wanted to do, intervening only when they thought she might get hurt.

Did that mean it was a present for her? Or maybe Uncle Cain got a present for the entire city? Neffie was pretty sure she hadn't annoyed the Watchers enough that they were planning on locking her in a tower like some fairytale princess.

Well, fairly sure.

With both of them using all their summons to build and enchant a single building it was going up very fast. It almost looked like they had practiced that before. Was this a slender version of the awesome tower she had heard that Guild Master Cain had built in Long Fang Valley? There were rumors that it was actually a Mythic relic and not a

natural building, so Neffie hadn't expected to see another like it anywhere else, but this one looked just like the one her Bear Kin friend En had told her about, only not as wide.

Everyone else had gathered by the foot of the building, trying to get details from the Watchers about what they were building, but the two elusive Ancients had informed them that it was a surprise and that they would be informed once it was complete. Only her dad seemed to know what was going on, judging by the smile on his face.

If it was enough to make Cixelcid smile before his second cup of morning coffee it must be a good thing, Neffie decided, before running downstairs to go see it up close. The closest exit was past the kitchen so Neffie grabbed a breakfast sandwich in each hand from the trays that were being assembled by the Puppet chef and ran towards where her dad was standing in front of the crowd to keep them under control.

"Morning Dad, I brought you a sandwich." Neffie greeted him, offering him one of the two that she grabbed while trying to stuff the other into her mouth whole.

"Eat slowly so you don't choke. They still need to finish the enchantments after the building is up, so it's going to be a few hours yet." Cixelcid instructed his overly excitable daughter.

Watching her grow up was a lot of fun, but she simply grew up too fast. Neffie was a running terror for Lickity, her mother, but the other two children were growing at much more normal rates, only about twice and three times the rate of a regular human child, respectively.

That was normal for Demon children and slower than some species, but Neffie's growth was entirely unprecedented. It had slowed down some once her body got near the size of an eight-year-old though, much to Lickity's relief. If she had been full grown, people would have taken her much more seriously, despite being only a year old. Being child sized helped remind everyone that her ideas might not be fully thought out or logical.

"Is it really what I think it is?" Neffie whispered into Cixelcid's ear after climbing into his arms to get close enough.

The big vampire just nodded, looking at the construction site in awe as the Elementals that were doing the actual construction started on the parapets and carved gargoyles that would top the tower.

The watchers were there, as well as Cixelcid and his whole family, the founding family of Port Nefheim, as far as the residents were concerned, though Cain built a large part of the initial city.

Below them were carvings of the Dino Cavalry in battle, ringing the upper floor of the tower, above rows and rows of statues.

This tower had more elves and Bunny Kin than most of the towers did in the statues, as well as a few random ones that were thrown in to see if anyone noticed. Most of the early Guild Members were represented, possibly all of them, if there were some that Neffie hadn't found yet. Even the pixie Elmira was there, sitting on the shoulder of a statue carved directly above the door.

At first, Neffie thought that was Laura in Pixie form, but she was pictured in dragon form not far away, and Neffie didn't see any other duplicated statues.

The residents of Port Nefheim slowly fell silent, taking in the building as the Elementals moved away and gave a clear view of the structure while the Enchanters worked to reinforce it and add enchantments.

This new tower had one feature that the original did not. Everyone who entered would be granted a number, that would appear on the back of their hand. It would also appear on the statue outside, letting everyone know who was doing well if you could get them to admit to their number that was.

The rest of the structure was deemed sufficient, except the healing spells for the main floor that were upgraded, and the training spells had been altered so that they could be updated as Cain and the Watchers gained more and more power. Cain's body was still adapting to being Mythic in this new high mana environment, so his level was slowly growing higher every day, even without factoring in all the extra experience he was getting from his Summons activities.

There was a discussion growing in the crowd as the finishing touches were put on the building, and Cixelcid called the leaders of the conversation forward, so he could join them without having to move away from the tower.

"Ah, young Miss Neffie, Commander Cid, it's good to see you again. We were discussing the formalities of using the tower. The Good Book that Miss Cyrene sent out said that we should strive to do good work and help the community with everything that we do, but what does the tower need? Should we set up a group to keep it clean? Does it need mana to function? We hope you can tell us." The Dockmaster asked politely.

"That's a fine question, but only the Watchers know that for now. This is all being done on Guild Master Cain's orders." Cid shrugged, waiting to catch one of the ancient's attention.

They had a while to wait since the enchanting needed the actual intervention of the Watchers or an additional Mythic Summon. They had advanced to level 425 over the last week, and the amount of Mana needed to activate the higher level spells was now over a hundred and thirty thousand, nearly the entire Mana Pool of both Watchers combined. They had called a number of Arcane Elementals to help with the work, at Mythic Quality, but it was still slow going since they all had to wait for mana to recover after every group of activations.

Finally, they were done and the tower glowed with a soft purple light before fading back to plain gray stone. It wasn't flashy, but very detailed, blending in well with the rest of the city's structures. From a distance, you really could mistake it for a lighthouse. Neffie intended to ask the Watchers to add a light to the top later, so it could serve the dual purpose of guiding ships and warning them of land from a further distance than the city lights were visible.

[We know you all have questions. Our Master has instructed that these towers be built at every stronghold of the Darklight Host, for the betterment of the population. They are self-sustaining and self-cleaning, so there is no need to do anything but train and improve yourselves.

We have spoken with the Lamia, Cyrene, and she asks only that you do what you know is right, and not price gouge or hoard resources gained from the Quests in the tower. If you don't need them or can't use them, sell them at a fair price or give them to those you favor. The Laughing God has favored this tower, as well as the others with a perpetual quest to complete the levels.

A reward may be gained once a day for challenging the tower, and we are informed that the reward will increase for beating your previous record.

The challenge in the tower will start with enemies at your level and increase in difficulty as you go. There is no advantage to hollow levels here, you will be tested against those at your own level, so the highest accomplishments are the most outstanding of contestants. The current record of the Long Fang Valley Tower is level twenty of fifty. We wish you all the best of luck in your endeavors.

Please enter in a single file, and the tower can accept up to fifty challenges at one time.]

The declaration of the Watchers sent a surge of joy through the crowd. They had all heard about the other tower, though they mostly hadn't gone to see it yet. If they could do just as well here at home, it was even better, because they could just challenge once daily after their shifts at work, gaining power every day, even if there were no attacks, or they had a non-combat job.

The first one to the tower door was Cid, carrying Neffie, who took a large silver vase from her inventory and set it by the door. Many of the locals liked to donate to things that were provided for free by the city, to the point that they hadn't actually needed to collect any taxes, other than the port fee for visiting merchants. They would want to do the same here, so the sturdy metal jar that was nearly as tall as she was would make a perfect collection jar.

The Watchers had split up now, one heading into the city, doing his usual rounds, while the other stood by the door of the tower, using his presence to keep order.

Each contestant dropped a few coins into the jar as they entered, and everyone that left came out with a smile on their face, encouraging, even more, to wait in line to see what it was going to be like.

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

Chapter 498 498

Neffie had been afraid that she would be forced to explore this place with her Dad since she had entered in his arms, but the moment they entered the tower, she got her own number, number two, and an individual quest. As soon as she accepted, she found herself alone in open grassland, with the sound of Hyenas barking in the distance.

"Is this the first trial? They're not big on warnings or preparation time, are they? I guess they wanted it to have maximum reality." Neffie muttered to herself as she heard the Hyenas getting closer.

With her new class of Demonic Overlord, all her skills cast at the strength of her best defensive skill while in her own territory, which the tower conveniently was, making this possibly the greatest present she had ever received.

Since it appeared that the monsters were going to be attacking suddenly in here, Neffie decided that she would Mimic Vala, who was the strongest physical combatant she knew, as a preventative measure against getting jumped.

Taking out her sword and shield, Neffie braced herself for the arrival of the Hyenas. The first one came flying at her, leaping from a full-out run and Neffie smoothly removed its head with a [Slice]. That spread [Pestilence] into the crowd while Neffie knocked the still-flying body away with her shield.

With all the grace she had mastered through her combat training and the dance classes with her mom, Neffie tore into her enemies, making short work of Magical Beasts at her own level.

"Being Vala is fun. But she needs more ranged abilities." Neffie muttered to herself as the floor changed and she was set upon by a group of Naga Wave Casters.

She actually had to chase these ones, since they kept trying to get the range to cast. Neffie wasn't used to flying in Vala's body, and she was a bit awkward at it, making the chase more difficult than would normally be necessary.

"Wait, I'm an idiot. Vala has summons too. Oath Breaker, I require assistance." Neffie narrated her actions as she called for the eight Bonded Forces summons, which appeared at Mythic Quality thanks to her status as Overlord.

"How may we help, my Queen?" Oath Breaker asked when they appeared. The Demons were all excited to see what she would do since Neffie hadn't summoned them before.

"Will you please kill those danged Naga? They keep running away and it is becoming more than a little bit annoying." Neffie pouted.

"It would be our pleasure." They agreed, before vanishing and reappearing beside the Naga. Within the span of a single second, Naga Blood was flying in every direction while Neffie cheered.

"Yes, this is the life. Stupid Naga." She cheered as the scenery changed again, leaving her and the summons standing in an empty ballroom.

Cain made a tower full of challenges for us to play in. Or, he ordered his Watchers to do it, so pretty much the same thing. We just need to find the enemies and kill them until the scenery changes." Neffie instructed while looking around for a clue as to what the challenge here was.

That tactic worked amazingly until the eleventh floor when she appeared in an open field with five Dragons flying above her. Oath Breaker could do many things, but the demon couldn't fly.

"Sorry guys, but it is time for a change. Record Keeper, you're up." Neffie switched her summons with a smirk, unlike the Oath Breakers, these ones were very good at flying.

But the dragon that it cloned was Laura, and Laura was never known for fighting fair. The Dragons all tried to freeze her at the same time before the Demons could get their bearings and begin to act.

They responded quickly, freeing Neffie and attacking the Dragons, but they were injured too, and not heavily Armored in a way that could resist the claws of the shimmering Opal Prismatic Dragons.

Neffie and her forces were defeated before she could mount a proper defense, and the little Demon Queen realized that Laura was a better fighter than Neffie had given her credit for.

When she left the tower with a huge smile on her face, shifting back into her own form, her dad and most of the off-duty guards were waiting for her, eagerly anticipating her results.

"Well, how did it go? What took you out?" Cixelcid asked, picking Neffie up into his arms.

Five copies of Laura. I was mimicking Vala, and they ate my demons way too fast." She explained, her fluffy white ears twitching with annoyance just thinking about it.

"Every battle is a learning experience. Think about what you could have done better, and then apply that the next time you are in a similar situation." Cid told her with a smile.

Neffie was excited to fight, while her dad was excited to see her lose and have to learn to adapt and strategize on the fly. The tower wasn't just a test of skill, it was an incredible teaching resource of the sort that Cixelcid had been lacking to keep his overly ambitious daughter's ego in check.

"Did you get anything good from the Quest?" The city guard captain asked while Neffie tried to come up with a way she could have won that fight. She still hadn't completed the Quest, so Neffie quickly checked her interface and selected to retrieve her random daily quest reward.

A white, stuffed dragon plushie appeared beside her, which Cid quickly caught. It was cute, fluffy, and looked just like Laura, but Neffie glared at it like the stuffed animal had insulted her honor.

Then she grabbed the toy, snuggling her face into the soft fur and letting out a sigh of contentment.

The onlookers hid their smiles and went to line up for their turn in the tower, leaving Neffie to be carried back into the house for breakfast.

All over the Central Continent, similar scenes were occurring as the towers were finished and the Watchers organized the first day of visitors.

,m Most of the time they changed appearances to blend in with the locals, but they quickly found that a pair of full-grown Ancients at the door of the tower was much more effective at keeping people from misbehaving. That also gave them back their Tentacles, so they could easily grab people at a distance to sort and organize them.

Plenty of transfers were upset about being manhandled like that, but there wasn't much they could do about it. Even if they didn't care about the tower, none of them could challenge the Watchers, so they had to just put up with whatever they decided to do.

Once they saw the rewards, including the experience earned during the trials, the animosity towards the Watchers' heavy-handed behavior quickly evaporated. Most transfers didn't realize or didn't believe, that the Quest was a daily reward, making it infinitely more valuable than a one-shot event.

The residents of the Long Fang Valley had learned that the rewards granted by subsequent attempts weren't as good unless you improved your previous best, but it still gave bonus experience and sometimes items.

The loot wasn't as reliable as the dungeons were, but it was better matched to you personally and you didn't have to argue with group members about who got what share, a source of great relief to many transfers who mostly adventured with random groups they met outside dungeons.

Even the pure healing classes got something to challenge their skill set. It was more in the nature of a workout though. If the system determined that they had very low combat ability and high healing, it would reverse the scenarios and have the applicant heal a copy of random challengers while they were attacked.

Avoiding being killed was part of the challenge, as well as keeping your ally alive while they killed the attackers, and the further up the tower you went, the harder the System made it to do both of those things at once.

Unlike many others who simply got overwhelmed, the healers were usually exhausted by the time they left the tower.

The consensus among the defeated clerics was that the tower was biased against healers. They insisted that they got only the most incompetent allies, but more than a few warriors thought the bias might be personal. They too had been mocked by the System inside the tower and cruelly beaten by enemies that were a hard counter for their class.

While most of the Continent was becoming accustomed to the presence of the training towers, in the Demon Kings castle, Chaos reigned. The tiny Blood Dancers had every bit of self-confidence and arrogance that the Demons with Ancient blood were famous for, and they had made it their personal mission to "liven up the place".

The guards thought they knew what to expect since they had dealt with Neffie. But as it turns out, ten sisters were exponentially more trouble than ten individuals. They gathered, they plotted and they coordinated with each other. You didn't have to deal with the intelligence of one child ten times, but all ten of them all the time.

Just a few minutes before King Aggramor finished his daily meetings with the Nobles they had managed to help some of their group escape the castle grounds entirely. One of the particularly ornery nobles had told them that little girls should be seen and not heard, and they didn't take it well.

They had infiltrated his house and set a curse that would cause bagpipes to play whenever someone entered or left a room. At the time when the King left his throne room, none of the Royal Guards had yet managed to find the core of the spell so they could disable it.

Where the girls got the curse from was secondary, the sound of bagpipes could be heard for blocks around the unfortunate Noble's manor, and the combination of Staff and Royal Guard searching for the source was only making things worse.

In the end, it took an order from King Aggramor to get them to admit that they had layered the curse on the Hell Hound that guarded the property. He had spells on him already, that were intended to alert the owner of the property to trespassers, so nobody had noticed the one extra spell.

"Brat Pack, assemble." The former King called, drawing all the young Blood Dancers to the living room near their quarters in the castle.

"I have been fully appraised of your latest effort and I must say I am disappointed. I will give you a solid B for creativity, and barely a D for execution. Revenge should not involve outsiders, a tarnished reputation is impossible to repair. Plus, every time someone passed through a doorway? Far too predictable and easy to circumvent. I expected better of you all.

I want full-page apology letters and individual two-thousand-word reports on how your plan could have been improved, following the guidelines for discrete revenge that I have given you. No sweets or desserts until both punishments are done.

Dismissed."

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

Chapter 499 499 Giant's Lament

Drakon was a Frost Giant Sub Chieftain. Or now a Chieftain, since his boss went with those foolish Gnomes to watch their northern cousins show off their newest inventions.

The Gnomes held the event once every five years, showcasing their ingenuity and advancements, but something had gone horribly wrong this time. Those pompous pests had somehow opened a portal to the fire elemental plane and burned everyone attending the event to death. Even the mighty Frost Giant Chieftains weren't safe from the raging inferno.

Being the second in command for each tribe, who normally took care of the tribe while the leader was away, Drakon was left to clean up the mess and appoint his own successor. He was a strong Giant, over a century old and truly Mythic, both awakening and in the body. His tribe fell in line with minimal smashing once they realized the big

boss was really gone and that he wasn't trying to usurp the old Giant's position, so Drakon was free to take revenge that very same day.

He had started with the Gnomes that were left behind in his village, the unwanted ones who couldn't get a ride to the Northern Continent. Their species had betrayed the Giants, and the punishment for betrayal was enslavement. Death was too good for traitors. The giants ordered them to toil in the fields and the mines along with working in the shops for no pay, doing all the things his tribe didn't want to do.

In reality, the only thing that changed was the pay, these Gnomes were already working the crappiest jobs in society, or they would have been invited by their neighbors to accompany them to the technology festival.

For many, it was actually an improvement. Giants didn't really understand Gnomish food portions, so they simply gave them a quarter ration a day, feeling justified, since these were slaves and traitors. Only, a quarter of a giant's ration a day was enough to feed a family of gnomes quite well. The food might not be of the highest quality, but for the abused and mistreated apprentices, sanitation workers, and deep-pit miners, it was better than they were used to.

Drakon had searched an entire quarter of the Western Continent for Gnomes, taking weaker tribes under his banner, now that the strong leaders that had allowed them to remain independent were all dead.

But someone was hiding the little traitors. Where he found Gnomish cities, they were all but empty. Farms were mostly abandoned, leaving only one or two farmhands to mind them.

The slaves he captured insisted that the others had all gone to the Northern Continent and had died in an accident, but Drakon was no fool. How would they allow themselves to be killed while they assassinated all the leaders of the Frost Giants?

Clearly, someone was hiding the traitors, and if he didn't find them on the Northern Continent, he would scour the other continents bare until he found all the traitors and made sure they were properly punished.

His Ice Elemental had detected large amounts of Fire Element on the Central Continent, so Drakon had thought the Gnomes might be hiding there. But when he arrived all he found was an army of demons. It was their hellfire that the Elemental had found, and in their rage, his scouts attacked the insipid creatures, thinking that if they were dead they couldn't mess with the search for the Gnomes anymore.

The Demons had backup though, in the form of an Ancient. How long that evil species had been back for was of no consequence, but if the Ancients were siding with the Demons, Drakon would leave them for last, after he had built his power up as high as it could go.

Drakon was certain that he was the strongest being on the planet at the moment, with the Spirit Quality armor that he got from the Guardian Quest. With that mighty armor on, nothing could hurt him, he was the hero that the Frost Giants and all their underlings could rely on to hold them up if they were attacked.

This wasn't his week though. As soon as they were out of his aura range, the Lesser Giants reverted to pure stupidity, and randomly attacked everything they came across, thinking that it might be hiding Gnomes. Even the Elven ships had been attacked, and Drakon had specifically told them that the Blue Elves on boats didn't get work with the tiny traitors.

The green ones in the trees might though. You never could trust creatures that climbed trees, every Frost Giant knew that.

Drakon was working out a scouting grid when news came in from a scout group that went much further around the coast of the Northern Continent, towards the Central Continent. They had found Gnomes. Three of them were locked inside a warehouse in a port city.

The Ettins on the patrol team wanted to eat them, but they knew that the big boss would smash their heads in if they killed the slaves before they could suffer, so they had them tied up and they were heading back to the Western Continent.

The humans in the city had been very helpful. They had a Mage with them who was extra smart, and he asked the humans where to find Gnomes instead of attacking. The humans just told them, they didn't even have to fight, just walk over and grab them. It was an incredibly bright plan, and the Ettin Mage was certain that big boss Drakon would reward them well when they returned.

Drakon could only sigh at their idiocy. They didn't even check the rest of the city for Gnomes. If there were three, there were bound to be more of them hiding, that's why he sent a raiding party, not to grab the first ones they saw and head home for dinner.

But three was more than zero, and they were the first ones to find the Gnomes' hiding places, so they would get a reward, and then Drakon would send along a proper raiding force to search the area for the rest of the little traitors.

Occasionally missing content, please report errors in time.

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

Chapter 500 500 Side Story Misha And Nyarla

Tine in the city of Obscurus, home to the remainder of the Ancients, moved very differently to time in the Mortal Plane, where Cain was attempting to mitigate the damage from the Gnomes' folly.

Misha had just begun her fourth morning here and was eagerly awaiting Miss Nyarla to return with her breakfast. Breakfast in bed was an Ancient tradition, her volunteer guide and nurse had insisted. They were always happy to see children, so the Elder Council doted on the pregnant Ancients well beyond any sense of rationality.

"Misha, darling, I have the most amazing surprise for you this morning. The Elders have finally finished their discussion on whether to add you to the Mind Link Spell. If you agree you will be able to hear us all in your mind the way we hear each other. But they also agreed that you will be able to block the link, in case it gets too overwhelming.

We've never added a human before, but hundreds of voices in your head at once might get overwhelming. To us, it's not a problem to sort them all and ignore the ones we don't care about, like GusGus, but for a Human, it might be an issue." The Ancient, now in the form of an Elven woman in a Maid's outfit, so her scale matched with Misha, smiled at the annoyed response to her words since most of the species was listening in while they talked.

Misha was a sort of celebrity here, since she was the first pregnancy in a long time, and was from the homeworld.

"Alright, I'm a bit worried about being overwhelmed though. You all have some weird communal thing going on that I don't really understand." Misha told the excitable Ancient before opening the lids on her breakfast.

"Why do you ignore GusGus though?" Misha asked as she inhaled the heavenly scent of ambrosia-topped waffles.

"Are you familiar with the Divine Nectar theory?" A voice asked from outside the door, and an incorporeal Arcane Elemental entered the room before turning into an Elf that matched Nyarla, right down to the Maid costume.

"Divine Nectar? That is supposed to be the perfect food, right?" Misha asked and the new Ancient nodded.

"Yes, getting the perfect balance of nutrition and energy was easy, but there should be a perfect combination of taste and texture that appeals to every single member of a species. That is the Divine Nectar." The Ancient nodded.

"And GusGus here has spent the last 876 years trying to find it. He is currently convinced that it is a form of spongy and moist cake, and not a liquid at all, but the only way to know for sure if he has created it is to have every single member of the species

sample it. If they all agree that it is the greatest thing they have ever sampled, he has succeeded." Nyarla clarified, for Misha's sake.

"I should only need to sample Ancients though since we know how the Dragons tastebuds work, and we created most of the others, so we have full data on them as well." GusGus smiled at Misha, who was now looking at him with a gaze of longing.

"The perfect food is a cake? How close are you? Can I try your current sample?" Misha asked, not stopping with the meal she was already on.

It might be breakfast, but there was always room for a slice of cake or two.

"I think I am very close, and cake refers more to the shape than the composition, but I will gladly give you a sample during lunch. The guidelines produced for healthy human pregnancies indicate that correct nutrition levels are essential to physical well-being, so overfeeding has been strictly prohibited." GusGus agreed and Nyarla nodded.

"But I get snacks all the time. How is this different?" Misha asked, looking forward to the perfect cake.

"The level of calories and nutrients in the sample is quite high, and your body is still processing the food you have already eaten, which would interfere with the proper digestion of the sample and totally ruin the experiment."

Of course, it's an experiment. Everything is an experiment for the Ancients. Their entire existence is one big experiment at this point, constantly monitoring each other for changes and influences and collecting data in case they need it for something later.

"What brought you here anyhow? You're not usually one for babies or pregnancies." Nyarla asked out loud for Misha's sake.

"If you had been paying attention, you would know that I won the chance to cast the [Mind Link] Spell on Misha here if she agreed. Since she didn't say no, I'm here waiting for her to finish eating so that I can get to work. Though come to think of it, there is a chance that this spell might induce nausea in humans isn't there? Maybe we should wait a few hours, just in case.

Do you like board games? I have a fine collection of them with me." The foodie Ancient suggested, not in any sort of a hurry to finish the day's tasks.

When you live forever, and you're hiding from a Pantheon of angry Gods, you don't really get out and do things much. A few hours is more like a blink of an eye to most of the Ancients.

Their primary form of entertainment was casting viewing spells to watch other realms go through the trials and tribulations of life. Having Misha here, in the middle of pregnancy

was not only a great gift to their species, but to their species' boredom. If it wasn't for Nyarla chasing them away, Misha would have seen dozens of visitors a day, each of them with new and interesting stories to tell the human since she was the only one in the entire realm that hadn't heard them before.

"Sure, we have some time to kill. Anything but Monopoly, that game is evil." Misha agreed and the Ancient pulled out a small box.

"This, my young friend, will be a real treat. Have you ever played the Ancients' game of life before? It is much more fun than the original."

The board was a three-dimensional space, and from what Misha could see, their pieces were actually alive. Or at least enchanted to look like tiny living things.

"Now, to cast that spell on you, so you can join the mind link and learn the rules," Nyarla told her with a smile, obviously a fan of this game, and eager to see how Misha did at it.

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